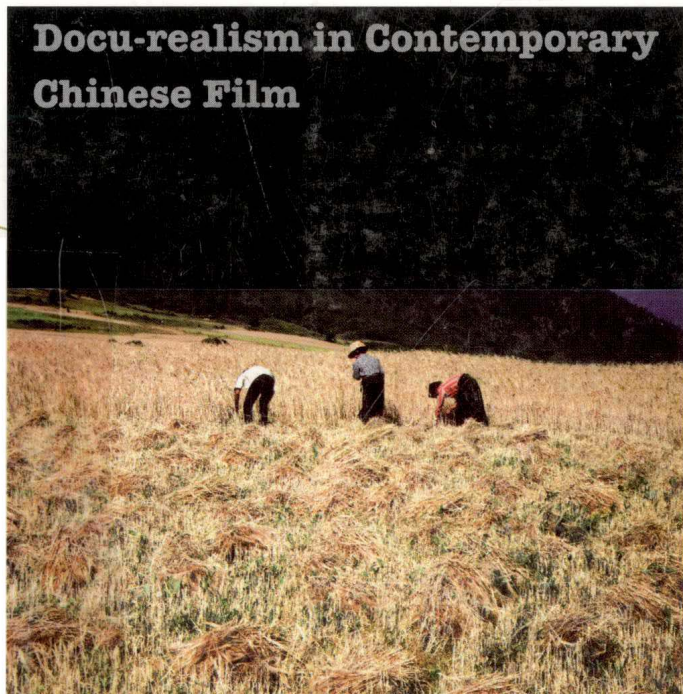


姜 丰·著

Feng Jiang Dolby

中国当代电影中的 纪实现实主义

**Docu-realism in Contemporary
Chinese Film**



復旦大學出版社

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Preface

I declare that this dissertation

(1) is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration;

(2) is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at any other university; and that no part of it has already been or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification;

(3) does not exceed the prescribed limit of 80,000 words.

I have used *hanyu pinyin* for all Chinese names and phrases throughout the dissertation, except for names of characters as they appear in the film's English subtitles. The *hanyu pinyin* and the original Chinese characters are listed in the "Glossary of Chinese Terms" for cross-reference.

All translations of quoted Chinese texts are mine unless otherwise stated.

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It has been for me a long, bittersweet journey to pursue the Ph D degree. The four years in Cambridge, undoubtedly, will be the most cherished time in my life. Looking back, I owe so much to so many people, without whom I could not have completed this dissertation.

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I would also like to thank my friend Cheng Qingsong, who generously introduced many filmmakers to me. Interviews with the filmmakers are an important and integral component of this dissertation, which aims to define a new genre in Chinese films. This dissertation would be less valuable without the first-hand material that Cheng Qingsong helped obtain. I am also deeply grateful to the Chinese filmmakers whom I interviewed including Wang Chao, Jia Zhangke, Zhang Ming, Lu Xuechang, Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaoshuai. It was their brilliant art that inspired me to explore this topic with endless passion and enthusiasm.

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enriched and broadened my thinking.

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Finally, I want to thank my parents for giving me so much and my husband, who has been understanding and supportive; without his love and encouragement, I would not have been brave enough to face all the challenges and overcome the frustration, anxieties, and pains I encountered during my pursuit of the Ph D. I dedicate this dissertation to our twins, who were conceived while it was in progress and will shortly come into the world.

Dissertation Summary

Docu-realism in Contemporary Chinese Film

This dissertation concerns a group of young Chinese filmmakers, some of whom are referred to as the “Sixth Generation”, who have made films outside the state-run filmmaking system since the 1990s. Their strikingly innovative works have increasingly attracted attention both inside and outside China. In fact, this film practice, arising from a new film aesthetics, has formed a new film genre: docu-realism, a term I coin to refer to the new genre in contemporary Chinese fiction films. It is a type of fiction film that for the most part employs documentary mechanisms and adopts documentary aesthetics. The main task of this dissertation is to define “docu-realism” as a new film genre.

This dissertation consists of five chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One, the introduction to the dissertation, sets up the theoretical foundation and critical strategies for the definition of docu-realism. Chapter Two, which is the core of the whole dissertation, accomplishes the most essential task of the dissertation — unfolding the definition of docu-realism. Firstly, docu-realism is the product of the social-economic-cultural reality in China since the 1990s, and in some senses this makes it a counterpart to Italian Neo-realism. Secondly, the

philosophical foundation of docu-realism is to emphasize and value the redemption of physical reality, in ways consistent with the theories of Bazin and Kracauer. Thirdly, nostalgia, featuring a popular perspective and a narrative with documentary style form, is the fundamental aesthetic characteristic of docu-realism.

I further exemplify my definition of docu-realism with a range of films examined from various perspectives in the following three chapters, which are focused respectively on Zhang Yuan, Jia Zhangke and a group of filmmakers including Wang Xiaoshuai, Lu Xuechang, Wang Chao and Zhang Ming. The conclusion argues that docu-realism is a significant step in the signification of realism in Chinese film.

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Chapter One Introduction

A series of striking innovations in Chinese film starting in the 1990s, arising from a new film aesthetics, have increasingly attracted attention both inside and outside China. In particular, a group of young filmmakers who make films independently, outside the state-run filmmaking system, are coming to the fore, and their works are becoming more widely known.^① As Tony Rayns notes, these innovations include the documentary, street realism, improvisation, formal fracture and the ontology of the image, which, arguably, subvert traditional methods and orthodox notions concerning filmmaking that have dominated the Chinese film industry since 1949. Most of the innovations appeared in the 1990s in Chinese mainland had previously appeared in France from 1959 to 1960, in Germany during the early 1970s, in China's Taiwan area in the 1980s, and in Korea in the 1990s.^②

① As Chen Mo and Xiao Zhiwei summarized, the scholarly attention to the new filmmaking practice appeared as early as 1991 and has gone through three phases in China. For the critical reviews from China, see Chen and Xiao's "Chinese Underground Films: Critical Views from China", in Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang eds. *From Underground to Independent*, pp. 145 - 147.

② See Tony Rayns, "Prologue", in Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou, *Wo de sheyingji bu sahuang* (*My Camera Does Not Lie*), pp. 6 - 7.

This comparison suggests that the transformations in Chinese film practice constitute the emergence of a new film genre, which is of comparable significance to these earlier movements.

Critics and academics have discussed at some length the precise name that should be given to the new cinematic movement, using various labels such as “the Sixth Generation”, “Post-Fifth Generation”, “New-born Generation” (*xinshengdai*), “Underground Film” (*dixia dianying*) and “Independent Film” (*duli dianying*) to refer to these young filmmakers and their films. The disagreements regarding nomenclature have focused on *generation*, an obscure and unhelpful category, and thus reached a discursive impasse. Current studies on the intricate and complicated newly emerging cinematic phenomena have mainly focused on description of the filmmakers’ personal background and experiences, rather than exploring the profound aesthetic connotations of their works.^① As a result, the identification of both a new genre and a cinematic movement remains contested and uncertain.

The arrival of a number of films that are different from all existing Chinese films suggests that a new film genre is emerging. The foundation underlying this new film genre is a philosophy of realism

① In addition to a series of articles, the following books are relatively influential texts on this subject. Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou’s *Wo de sheyingji bu sahuang* (*My Camera Does Not Lie*) published in 2002 includes the biographies of eight filmmakers, interviews with them and the introductions to and comments on their main works. Cheng Qingsong’s book *Kan de jian de yingxiang* (*The Visible Images*) published in 2004 consists mainly of his comments on Chinese films, although his writings are not confined to so-called New-born Generation film. Chen Xihe and Shi Chuan eds. *Duoyuan yujing zhong de xinshengdai dianying* (*Newborn Generation Films in Multiple Context*), one of the results of the film symposium held in Shanghai 2002, is the book that addresses the most extensive issues on this topic and has yet to be surpassed in China, although it is not a very systemic and deep study as a whole. The newest and most influential English language studies on this topic are Paul G. Pickowicz and Zhang Yingjin eds. *From Underground to Independent* (2006) and Zhang Zhen ed. *The Urban Generation* (2007).

that is very different from the clichéd “realism” in Chinese film history. This dissertation attempts to define the new film genre in terms of history, philosophy, and aesthetics, rather than seeing it as purely a *generation* in terms of period. In this dissertation, my first concern is to show how a new film genre has come into being in China; my second concern is to explore definitions of the new genre.

In the introductory chapter, I will first raise the core issues of the dissertation: the presence of a new film genre in China, and the manner in which it might be defined. I will then produce an account of the features of Chinese film in order to establish parameters for the definition of the new genre; lastly, I will establish my theoretical foundations and critical strategies. Chapter Two, the core of this dissertation, will accomplish the most essential task of the dissertation — defining docu-realism in terms of history, philosophy, and aesthetics. I will further exemplify my definition of docu-realism by discussing a range of films from various perspectives in the following three chapters.

It should be noticed that docu-realism is an emerging cinematic genre accompanied by an important film movement, and there is thus a range of identifiable docu-realist filmmakers as well as those with docu-realist tendencies who have been influenced by them. Hence, a number of films can be employed to exemplify docu-realism, and it is precisely because docu-realism is not an individual or single director's preference that the new cinematic tendency in China can be called a new genre. However, because of space restrictions, I can only choose a limited number of docu-realist directors and their films to develop my argument here. My criteria for choosing a director and his films are: first, to what a degree the director is a docu-realist, which can be judged from his films as a whole as well as his personal aesthetic conceptions; second, how influential a director or a film has been, especially in promoting docu-realism as a new genre as well as a movement.

1. New Chinese Film:

The Inadequacy of Labels in Describing the New Film Practices in China

In the late 1990s, a number of filmmakers including Zhang Yuan, Wang Xiaoshuai, Lou Ye, Lu Xuechang, Hu Xueyang, Liu Bingjian, Tang Dalian, Li Jixian, Guan Hu, Li Xin, Wang Qian'an, Zhang Yang, Shi Runjiu, Jia Zhangke, Zhu Wen, and Wang Guangli started to come to public attention. As most of them had graduated from Beijing Film Academy or from Central Drama Academy in 1989 or slightly later, and because they shared common concerns, critics saw them as a group. ① 1989 was the starting point for a new Chinese film practice, which later developed into a fully-fledged film movement.

Naming a new genre is clearly important in the process of its recognition. Critic Shi Chuan has noted that "the authority of collective titles such as 'generation' makes appellation a strategy for the survival and development of a new group, allowing a group without a name to join the mainstream and thus make cultural affiliations." ② However, as is the case with any new genre, the new name is usually retrospectively applied by critics following the emergence of a group of films; critics do not create a new name and then have filmmakers produce films under the label they have invented. As Pickowicz points out, "individual underground works have received some critical attention

① See Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou, "He dianying yiqi kuanghuan: xin dianying 1989-2002", in *Wo de sheyingji bu sahuang* (*My Camera Does Not Lie*), pp.383-397.

② Shi Chuan, "Daiqun mingming yu daiqun yuma" (Generational Collective Naming and Generational Collective Encoding), in Chen Xihe and Shi Chuan eds. *Duoyuan yujing zhong de xinshengdai dianying* (*New-born Generation Films in Multiple Context*), p.236.

outside China, but there have been few attempts to evaluate the genre as it has taken shape over the entire ten-year period.”^① In other words, naming any theoretical framework normally follow, rather than preempt, aesthetic practice. Actually, the title of the book “from underground to independent” is precisely a proof of the instability and controversy which exist over naming the new film genre, as the authors of the book prefer to use different labels to refer to this group of filmmakers and the film phenomenon, and none of them is convincing enough to overwhelm the others. On the other hand, the title might refer to the journey the genre has taken from being in the beginning “underground” to now being seen as “independent”.

Although many of the above-mentioned filmmakers produce very different films, and deny that they belong to a group, they objectively still share many commonalities, and thus they are often referred to collectively. However, the variety of labels used to describe this group until now have largely proved unsatisfactory.

1.1 The Sixth Generation

As already noted, these young filmmakers were mostly born in the 1960s and graduated from Beijing Film Academy in 1989 and thus the description “the Sixth Generation” is used, in a narrow sense, to refer to them. Hu Xueyang, at the inauguration of his first film *A Lady Left Behind* (Liushou nüshi), announced that “the classmates of the five classes graduating in 1989 are the sixth generation of Chinese film workers.”^② Li Xin, one of the classmates, initially coined the concept of the Sixth Generation in 1993, in contrast to the Fifth Generation,

① Paul G. Pickowicz, “Social and Political Dynamics of Underground Filmmaking in China”, in *From Underground to Independent*, p.2.

② Han Wei and Chen Xiaoyun, “Xianfeng diliudai” (“Avant-garde the Sixth Generation”), in *Xin Zhongguo dianying shihua* (*The History of New Chinese Cinema*), p.90.

which included Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang, Zhang Junzhao, Wu Ziniu and Zhou Xiaowen, all of whom graduated from Beijing Film Academy in 1982.^① However, in a broader sense, the Sixth Generation also includes filmmakers who graduated two years later such as Jia Zhangke and Wang Chao, as well as young filmmakers of a similar age who graduated from Central Drama Academy such as Zhang Yang, Shi Runjiu, Jin Chen and Jiang Wen. Generally speaking, the Sixth Generation refers to a group of young film directors who were born in the 1960s and received systematic academic film training in the late 1980s.

As critic Chen Mo argues, “the Fifth Generation refers to the students who were the first generation enrolled in Beijing Film Academy after the Cultural Revolution; this definition is truly correct, but this is simply a summary of fact. A more profound definition is that the Fifth Generation were the generation who grew up during the Cultural Revolution, and most of them, including Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou were high school students of ‘the three graduating classes’ [of 1966, 1967 and 1968] (lao san jie).”^② This suggests the Fifth Generation has a close spiritual connection with the Cultural Revolution, due to their experiences, even though the Cultural Revolution is not often a topic in their films directly. Dai Jinhua illuminates the different attitudes towards the Cultural Revolution between the Fifth Generation and the Fourth Generation of Chinese filmmakers:

① For the discussion of the Fifth Generation, see the mclc website bibliography on film at <http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/filmbib.htm>, and “The Emperor and the Assassin” at <http://www.sonypictures.com/classics/emperorandassassin/index.html>, the official site of Chen Kaige’s film, with synopsis, historical background, production notes, character guide, cast & credits, biographies, and stills & clips.

② Chen Mo, “Jingshen Kaige: shiren yu shaonian” (“Spiritual Kaige: Poet and Youngster”), in *Chen Kaige dianying lun (On Chen Kaige’s Films)*, p. 4. “Lao san jie” refers to the school graduates of 1966, 1967 and 1968 who were unable to proceed to university.

The focal point of articulation between Chinese film art and Chinese social life in the 1980s did not rest on economic / productive or reproductive reality, rather it lay in the recollection of a shared nightmare and a common psychological referent: the historical reality and representation of the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”. In the Fourth Generation art, the Cultural Revolution appears absent in its presence. These artists directly confronted the ten-year Cultural Revolution during the first period of their works (1979 – 1981), but they held a rather fixed psychological approach, adopting an imploring posture of grieving, outworn humanism, to represent the era’s “inexorable doom” as if it were a classical romantic tragedy of youth. As they were direct participants in the Cultural Revolution, their object was to cleanse the blood from those unintentionally murderous gangs, using the passion of individual life history and the tears of youthful tragedy. They draw on conventional notions of humanity, human nature, civility, and barbarism to dispel but also to expound on the uniqueness of this phantasmic historical disaster.

In the Fifth Generation art, however, the Cultural Revolution is ubiquitously absent. Until the 1980s, the Fifth Generation avoided this topic entirely; however, their films inevitably came to reflect the fact that they (not the Fourth Generation) are the Cultural Revolution’s spiritual offspring.^①

Although the above statement aims to compare the Fourth Generation and the Fifth Generation, it also provides us with a reference point for understanding the definition of the Sixth Generation. The

① Dai Jinhua, “Severed Bridge: the Art of the Son’s Generation”, in *Cinema and Desire*, pp. 13 – 14.