

Jing Li

The Representation of Rural Christianity in the Films of Gan Xiao'er

Abstract

The religious dimension of Chinese cinema is, it has been observed, a “triple lacuna” in contemporary scholarship: in research on religion in China, in research on Chinese cinema, and in interdisciplinary research on film and religion. From 2002 to 2012, independent filmmaker Gan Xiao'er directed three low-budget features that portrayed rural Christianity in China, a subject almost entirely absent from both Chinese mainstream media and independent films. In this article, I analyze Gan's films by locating them in their social, political, and religious contexts, by comparing them with other Chinese films, and by linking them to the tradition of Western films that portray spirituality. I observe a progression in themes and style from Gan's first feature, *山清水秀* (THE ONLY SONS, CN 2002), to his third, *在期待之中* (WAITING FOR GOD, CN 2012). I seek to show that Gan developed a restrained directorial style in order to connect with the spirituality of Chinese peasants. Although he had to grope in the dark on many aspects, his engagement with Christian themes has greatly expanded the narrative space of Chinese cinema.

Keywords

Christianity, Chinese Cinema, Gan Xiao'er, Chinese Peasants

Biography

Jing Li is a PhD candidate in cultural studies at Stony Brook University. Her research focuses on the representation of rural China in Chinese cinema. Specifically, her dissertation, entitled *Filming Villages: The Representation of Rural China in Chinese Independent Cinema since 2000*, examines how independent cinema opens up an aesthetic space to village experience and helps us to explore the issues of rural culture. Prior to her doctoral training in the U.S., she received her MA degree in Art Theory at Nanjing University and worked as an editor for the publishing press and art museum in Shanghai, China.

There are 80 million Christians in China, where are they in Chinese cinema?
—Gan Xiao'er, 2015

The epigraph for this article, a question posed by Chinese independent-filmmaker Gan Xiao'er, highlights three themes: Christianity in China, Chinese cinema, and the intersection of the two. Christianity has a long history in China that can be traced back more than a millennium,¹ and Chinese cinema has existed for more than 100 years. The times they have intersected, however, can be counted on one's fingers. To address the paucity of cinematic representations of Chinese Christians, between 2002 and 2012 Gan directed three low-budget independent features that portray rural Chinese Christianity, a topic almost entirely absent from both Chinese mainstream media and independent feature films.

Before I delve into Gan's background and the aims of current research on Chinese film and religion, a brief overview of Christianity in China will be helpful. According to historian Lian Xi, the journey taken by Chinese Christianity started in 635 CE, but it was not until the first Opium War (1839–1842) that Christian evangelism began to be officially tolerated and Western missionaries were granted broad access to the Middle Kingdom.² From 1860 to 1949, Christianity in China experienced times of popularity and growth, but it also faced political and social challenges.³ Soon after China entered the communist era, in 1949, all Western missionaries were expelled,⁴ and the Chinese Protestant church began to move toward “self-government, self-support, and self-propagation”(自治, 自养, 自传).⁵ Political persecution and fierce restrictions on religious activity drove Christianity underground during the 1960s and 1970s.

Since the opening of China in 1979, Christianity has grown at a staggering speed.⁶ In 2018, official data suggested the number of Christian believers in China, both Catholic and Protestant, was about 44 million.⁷ However, this figure includes only believers who attend officially approved churches. Ad-

1 Lian 2010, 3.

2 Lian 2010, 3–6.

3 Lutz 2001, 184–189.

4 Stark/Wang 2015.

5 Lian 2010, 197.

6 Lian 2010, 205; Aikman 2003, 7.

7 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 4 March 2018, 中國保障宗教信仰自由的政策和實踐》白皮書 (White Paper on Policies and Practices for Ensuring Freedom of Religious Belief in China), <http://tinyurl.com/4xetjbt> [accessed 30 March 2023].

ditional Christians attend the unofficial and unregistered gatherings called “house churches” (家庭教會). Such churches are the target of discrimination and persecution and are typically secretive about their membership and operations. Consequently, how many Christians there are in China cannot be stated with any certainty – in recent years, wildly divergent figures have been published, ranging from 80 million to 230 million.⁸

Born in a village in Henan province, where more than 15 percent of the population is Christian,⁹ Gan grew up in a family in which both parents were devout Christians. He attended the Beijing Film Academy, graduating in 1998, and now teaches at South China Normal University in Guangzhou. Born in 1970, he is of the same generation as Jia Zhangke.¹⁰ While he acknowledges that Jia is one of few Chinese directors who can probe the spiritual world of Chinese people, he is still unsatisfied, “because these films are replete with stories about relationships among people [...] but none about humanity’s relationship with deity”.¹¹ He has observed precisely that absence is prevalent in Chinese films, noting, “The problem is not whether the film involves faith or religious elements, but that it is completely unaware of the absence of man’s relationship with god. This god, for different individuals, can be Jehovah, Allah, or an impersonalized absolute thing, such as heaven, earth and the universe.”¹² For Gan himself, this god is the Christian Trinity, which exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In 2000, Gan created the Seventh Seal Film Workshop with his friends in Guangzhou, paying tribute to his religion¹³ and to the Swedish director

8 Hattaway 2021, 309.

9 According to Paul Hattaway, Henan province, home to more than 17 million Christians, which is the largest number in any province, has seen both the most powerful Christian revival and the most intense religious persecution in China (Hattaway 2021, 305).

10 Jia Zhangke (b. 1970) is regarded as one of the leading filmmakers of China’s “Sixth Generation”, which includes Zhang Yuan (b. 1963), Lou Ye (b. 1965), Wang Xiaoshuai (b. 1966), and Guan Hu (b. 1968). Coming from a small provincial town in Shanxi province, Jia is widely known for his portrayal of a raw underlying reality that is “repressed both by officially sanctioned media representations and by mainstream entertainment cinema” (McGrath 2007, 85). Influenced by the traditions of neorealist and documentary expression, Jia uses non-professional actors, local dialects, long shots, and other non-fiction techniques to depict his subjects with minimal distortion. Since his first feature film, *XIAO WU* (CN 1997), Jia’s works have attracted substantial scholarly attention; see, for example, M. Berry 2009 and C. Berry 2008.

11 Gan 2007a, 83–84.

12 Gan 2007a, 84.

13 It can easily be recognized from Gan’s own descriptions and films that he is a Protestant.

Ingmar Bergman.¹⁴ Gan intended to direct seven feature films, forming a set of “Seven Seals”,¹⁵ all dealing with the spiritual life of Chinese people. He stated that these films “are not to spread the Gospel, but to depict the state of the Gospel in China. [I intend to] use feature films to do what documentaries do, i. e. these feature films will function like documentary, recording the spiritual life of Chinese people and the status of Christianity in China.”¹⁶ Gan’s personal religiosity ensures that his films are noticeably different from those of other independent filmmakers.

In line with Gan’s own inquiry in the epigraph, Hong Kong scholar Yam Chi-Keung has remarked that the religious dimension of Chinese cinema is a “triple lacuna” in contemporary scholarship on religion in China, on Chinese cinema, and on the interdisciplinary study of film and religion.¹⁷ Some scholars suggest the explanation lies in the lack of religious content in contemporary Chinese films.¹⁸ Yam argues that the lack of research reflects the lack of experts who can work with religion and Chinese films. He has made pioneering efforts to address this problem. In “Contemporary Christianity and the Religiosity of Popular Chinese Cinema”, published in 2013, Yam explored religious sensibilities in Chinese popular cinema and compared them to the representation of Chinese Christians in Gan’s *舉自塵土* (RAISED FROM DUST, CN 2007). In the same year, Lai Yung-Hang wrote a master’s thesis on Gan’s three features, exploring their generation of a particular religious approach in cultural critique, with reference to both Western cultural theories and Chinese feminist studies. Albeit wide-ranging, the thesis is short on detailed analysis of the films’ aesthetic style and the link to other cultural texts that have inspired Gan. Lastly, an essay contributed by New York-based scholar

14 Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007), Swedish screenwriter and film and theater director. Throughout his life, Bergman made dozens of films that grappled with religion, such as *THE SEVENTH SEAL* (SE 1957) and *THE VIRGIN SPRING* (SE 1960). After his “Trilogy of Faith” – *THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY* (SE 1961), *WINTER LIGHT* (SE 1962), and *THE SILENCE* (SE 1963), Bergman shifted his focus from questioning God’s existence to a dystopic world of humanity abandoned by God. Articles on Bergman authored by Gan Xiao’er include Gan 2002 and Gan 2007a; he has also taught an undergraduate course on Bergman’s films.

15 In the Bible, the opening of the seven seals (Revelation 6 and 8) marks the beginning of God’s judgement in the end-times. In naming his film series “Seven Seals”, Gan indicates that he regards his filmmaking not only as a personal ministry but also as a process of his own life being judged by God.

16 Gan 2015, 16.

17 Yam 2013, 91.

18 Mitchell/Plate 2007, 71–72.

Angela Zito to the collection *DV-Made China* (2015), discusses the “aesthetic particulars”¹⁹ of *RAISED FROM DUST* and its accompanying documentary, 教堂電影院 (CHURCH CINEMA, CN 2008), focusing on how Gan successfully challenges the boundary between documentary and fiction narratives.

The richness of Gan’s films still leaves much for us to explore. In what follows, I integrate formal and narrative analysis of Gan’s three feature films by situating them in social, political, and religious contexts, comparing them to other Chinese independent films, and linking them to the tradition of Western films that portray spirituality. I contend that from his first feature, 山清水秀 (THE ONLY SONS, CN 2002), via *RAISED FROM DUST* (2007), and on to his third feature, 在期待之中 (WAITING FOR GOD, CN 2012), there is a progression in theme and style. In terms of theme, while in the first of these features Gan is beginning to deal with religion, the second and third dive more deeply into the details of religious experience, documenting and criticizing Christianity in rural China. In terms of style, Gan continues along the line of post-socialist realism²⁰ but differentiates himself by striving to represent the interiority of characters, for example through the use of silence, flashbacks, monochrome, and surreal elements. From the first to the third, the films become increasingly internalized, with increasingly fewer social issues involved.

Redeemed from Suffering in a Post-Socialist Village

THE ONLY SONS, Gan’s debut feature, is about poverty and spiritual salvation in a farming village in Guangdong. It was shot on miniDV, and most of the crew were Gan’s students. This story about peasants was inspired by a news report that appeared in the *Southern Weekly* (南方週末).²¹ Its Chinese title translates literally as “Green Hills and Clear Waters”. The scenery is picturesque, poetic, and peaceful, but the people are extremely poor and are experiencing violent changes in their lives.

19 Zito 2015, 237.

20 When analyzing the independent cinema of Jia Zhangke, McGrath gives an overview of the indigenous movement of post-socialist realism in China, defining it as “a realism of the postsocialist condition” (McGrath 2007, 83). Unlike socialist realism, which claims to “show an ideological truth that underlies apparent reality”, post-socialist realism “seeks to reveal a raw, underlying reality by stripping away the ideological representations that distort it” (84).

21 Gan 2008.

The beginning sequences relate that the male protagonist, Ah Shui, is the backbone of his family and must support his younger brother, Ah Chong, and sister, Ah Mei, since their parents died early. He sells his blood but still cannot pay off Ah Mei's tuition. Ah Chong is sentenced to death for the double crime of breaking out of prison and robbery. In order to save Ah Chong's life, they need 20,000 yuan to bribe the judge. Ah Shui and his wife, Qiu Yue, decide to sell their not-yet-born baby and to rent Qiu Yue's womb for a year to a business owner from the city. They would then have sufficient money to save Ah Chong from the death penalty. Tragically, not long after they send off the baby, a prison guard informs them that Ah Chong has been executed. The stony-faced prison guard is accompanied by a man from the Municipal People's Hospital who asks Ah Shui if he would like to sell his brother's organs, telling him in a disinterested and unsympathetic tone that the hospital is offering 2,000 yuan for a cornea, 3,000 for a kidney, 2,000 for a heart, and 3,000 for a spinal cord, and so on. This brutal plot element about organ harvesting,²² a topic almost never seen on the big screen in China, is presented in this film without any fanfare.

In front of the prison guard and hospital representative (two members of the state apparatus), Ah Shui silently endures the double loss of his brother and his son. We only hear a little cry when he burns paper on his brother's grave. Neither by farming nor by selling blood was Ah Shui able to afford his sister's school tuition or save his brother from the death penalty, let alone raise his son and give his wife a complete home. In the end, he contracts AIDS as a result of selling his blood.²³ His condition deteriorates so fast that he is left only able to lie on his bed waiting to die. Qiu Yue drowns herself in despair. It seems that all suffering is concentrated within this film; Cui Zi'en comments, "The Chinese countryside in *THE ONLY SONS* may be crueler than any ordeal (考驗) in the Old Testament era."²⁴ Whether by selling blood or children or by renting out a womb, the body has become the last available tool for peasants like Ah Shui to use to earn a livelihood.

22 Organ transplants have become a lucrative industry in China. In 1984, China permitted the use of organs from executed criminals, with the operations to be kept strictly confidential. It claims the practice ended in 2015; see Elliott 2019.

23 The increasing commodification of blood during the late 1980s and 1990s led to the rapid growth of HIV infection rates among rural villages in Henan province, as Gan, a Henan native, would have known. In the early 2000s, at the time the film was made, the government still sought to keep the issue of AIDS hidden from the public.

24 Cui 2022. Cui, Zi'en (b. 1958) is a film director, producer, scholar, screenwriter, outspoken LGBT activist, and associate professor at Beijing Film Academy. Cui was born into a Catholic family. Christianity functions as a cultural reference in his queer cinema.

As in the film, in reality too local governmental officials not only refuse to take responsibility for the catastrophic spread of HIV, but also punish Chinese HIV activists and health professionals who have struggled to bring the epidemic to international attention.²⁵ The situation for peasants infected with AIDS as a result of selling blood is also portrayed in independent documentaries such as *好死不如赖活著* (TO LIVE IS BETTER THAN TO DIE, Chen Weijun, CN 2003), *中原紀事* (EPIC OF THE CENTRAL PLAINS, Ai Xiaoming and Hu Jie, CN 2006), and *喜梅* (STAY HOME, Ai Weiwei, CN 2013). While the first gives a harrowing depiction of the Ma family's life over the course of a year in a small village after infection with AIDS, the latter two portray AIDS villages not as isolated places of private suffering but as connected spaces for political mobilization.

By contrast, however, in his feature film *Gan Xiao'er* uses the character of Ah Shui to highlight neither suffering through illness nor the fight for political rights, but rather to express the spiritual needs of a suffering peasant. Gan responds to the suffering "by suggesting the possibility of redemption".²⁶ Christian elements appear as early as the very beginning of the film, in the form of a solo flute playing *Amazing Grace*. During the film, a missionary preaches twice in the village. After discovering that Ah Shui is infected with HIV, the villagers shy away from him, and the government is always absent. Only the missionary couple come, to say their prayers, and they adopt his returned son (the baby is brought back by the police near the end of the film, and an official ceremony is held at the village square to praise "the true love between the police and the people"). Throughout Ah Shui's life, all he has experienced, like many other peasants, is indifference and ruthlessness from the government and discrimination and ridicule from society.²⁷ The idea that God loves him unconditionally therefore sounds novel to Ah Shui and gives him spiritual solace in the final moments of his life. When death

25 Watts 2003.

26 Lai 2013, 50.

27 Peasants like Ah Shui are not only discriminated against structurally but also ridiculed by their peers. As the countryside has become a wasteland in which young people can no longer imagine a future, many of them look for alternatives. Ah Mei drops out of school and goes to work with her classmate Ah Fang in Shenzhen. Ah Fang's revealing clothing and vulgar language tell that they have actually become prostitutes. Even so, Ah Shui, who remained in the village, is ridiculed by Ah Fang as a good-for-nothing loser because he is so poor. For young villagers like Ah Fang, this village with its pastoral scenery is simply "barren hills and turbulent rivers" (窮山惡水), and it is better to be like Ah Chong and "rob the bank and kill the people" than to stay in the village.

comes, Ah Shui calmly accepts final consolation from the preacher. Instead of leaving the world with deep regrets, Ah Shui raises his head to receive the prayer, as if filled with the preacher's words. He is able to let go of the toil and worries of this world and move closer to consummation. As the inverse of Ah Shui's sin and pain, the preacher epitomizes grace and relief.

Despite all the suffering, the director's way of telling is slow and calm. Gan's film language makes *THE ONLY SONS* a thought-provoking movie, rather than a tearful tragedy. In interviews Gan has expressed his distrust of the dramatic treatment of emotions: "I have always believed in implicit handling and dreaded the moment of emotional apex, and the moment when the truth comes to light. It's not that I dare not face the so-called 'bleak life', but I don't trust that kind of treatment."²⁸ As a result, cinematic means of expressing emotion – camera movements, close-up shots, the music score, the dialogue, for example – are all reduced to a minimum in this film.

Throughout the film, the camera is mostly fixed, and the shots are long distance. Except for the fast-panning scene with Qiu Yue's suicide, *THE ONLY SONS* is basically composed of static long shots. Gan abandons the advantages of DV's lightness, handling all motions by remaining motionless. With regard to the use of camera in this film, film director Cui Zi'en insightfully commented,

The camera lies in the position of an "angel", caring but not pushing, comforting but not sentimental. It maintains the speed and distance between God and man, love and being loved, keeps the position of watching rather than standing by, and does not encourage the characters to give full vent to the tragedy and tragic scenes. It goes through the test of suffering together with the characters, endures without trembling or collapse. The reason why Gan Xiao'er's camera doesn't move is here.²⁹

In an interview Gan confirmed his preference for a static camera: "I think camera movement needs strong reasons. Otherwise, just leave it there and don't move. This is also a question of sensibility regarding film language."³⁰ That preference extends to his subsequent films.

28 Zhang 2003. I thank Gan Xiao'er for providing me with this source.

29 Cui 2022.

30 Huang 2003. I thank Gan Xiao'er for providing me with this source.



Fig. 1: In a long shot, the camera captures the parents Ah Shui and Qiu Yue accompanying the departing purchasers of their child. *THE ONLY SONS* (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2002), 01:18:58.



Fig. 2: From a distance the viewer sees the parents take leave of their child and the buyers. *THE ONLY SONS* (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2002), 01:20:00.

While a long shot is often used to create a relaxing, poetic feeling and a close-up shot to create a shocking, striking effect, in some key sequences in the family's demise, the more intense the emotional pain, the farther away the camera. For example, when the baby is taken away, Ah Shui and Qiu Yue follow the buyers. A long shot depicts this scene as if it is a common event, simply hosts seeing their guests out (figs. 1 and 2). Qiu Yue neither cries nor acts hysterically. Her sad face appears behind the bushes for only a moment, and then it disappears. There is little rendering or camera movement. The rhythm is slow, and the soundstage is clean. The camera calmly outlines the characters' actions. No matter how important the scene or

how emotionally turbulent it is, there is always silence – even if the audience’s heart has already been filled with cries. Where this film marks the beginning of Gan’s introduction of Christian discourse into the spiritual world of Chinese peasants, in his next, he dives into the life of rural Christians in more detail.

Documenting Christian Life

Five years after *THE ONLY SONS, RAISED FROM DUST*, produced by Zhang Xianmin³¹ and written and directed by Gan Xiao’er, provided an unprecedented intimate portrait of the lives of Christians in rural China. It is an underground film, made without permits from the Central Film Bureau, and was shot in the director’s home village in Henan.

One of China’s most populous provinces, Henan “has the largest number of Christians and is the center of the greatest and most sustained revival of Christianity, which has lasted more than 30 years”.³² The majority of believers come from farming backgrounds, are poor, and have received little education – Xiaoli, the female protagonist in *RAISED FROM DUST*, played by Hu Shuli, is one of them. She is a dedicated housewife and devout member of a local church. Her husband, Xiaolin, is hospitalized with silicosis, a respiratory illness caused by poor mining conditions. The incurable and chronic disease has placed a serious financial burden on their household. Xiaoli is urged by the hospital staff to pay her husband’s medical bills and by the teachers to pay her daughter’s tuition.

In his director’s statement, Gan notes, “This feature film plays a strong documentary role, recording the life of Chinese peasants today and the spiritual life of Chinese rural Christians.”³³ With this goal in mind, he shot this fiction feature “deliberately in an improvised documentary style, sweeping up commentary on details of Christian life”.³⁴ Except for the heroine and Zhang Xianmin, who has the role of her paralyzed, bed-bound husband, all the characters are played by non-professional actors. Many villagers even

31 Zhang Xianmin is a professor in the Literature Department of Beijing Film Academy, an independent film critic and curator. Before *RAISED FROM DUST*, he also acted in *RAIN CLOUDS OVER WUSHAN* (Zhang Ming, CN 1996) and *SUMMER PALACE* (Lou Ye, CN 2006).

32 Hattaway 2009, 1.

33 Gan 2007b.

34 Zito 2015, 244.

Fig. 3: Xiaoli rides her tricycle, entering the village. RAISED FROM DUST (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2007), 00:05:00.



Fig. 4: Xiaoli rides her tricycle through the village. RAISED FROM DUST (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2007), 00:05:39.



keep their real names in the film and act out their actual lives. Moreover, Gan continues his preference for a static camera, combining long takes with deep-focus cinematography. With these choices Gan is following the line of the post-socialist realism found in China in the early 1990s in both documentaries and fiction films.³⁵

In the beginning sequences, two shots with deep-space composition show Xiaoli riding her tricycle in the village, giving the viewer a first impression of how an ordinary village in rural Henan looks (figs. 3 and 4). After finishing her morning work, Xiaoli rides to the church. Before going into the sanctuary for prayer, she first enters a shabby kitchen, located on the edge of the church yard, to wash and dust herself down. A 1-minute-long sequence records the micro-actions of Xiaoli's daily life (figs. 5 and 6).

Likewise, long takes are used twice in depicting Xiaoli having dinner with her daughter, Shengyue. The first lasts 2 minutes and 30 seconds – we see mother and daughter cooperate well as they prepare the meal. Before they start eating, Shengyue sings an English song, giving thanks for the meal. The

35 McGrath 2007, 82.



Fig. 5: Xiaoli in the shabby kitchen at the church. RAISED FROM DUST (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2007), 00:07:27.



Fig. 6: Xiaoli washes in the kitchen before entering the sanctuary. RAISED FROM DUST (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2007), 00:07:59.

second long take of a dining scene, lasting 1 minute and 12 seconds, is at the end of the film and basically repeats the procedure. These minutiae of daily practices do little to develop the narrative, but they provide a sense of realism, creating a space for the viewer to observe the daily life of Xiaoli and her daughter and to meditate on their relationship with their circumstances.

In addition, the film provides much detailed information about the church community, both visually and verbally. The external signs of the Sinicization of Christianity, such as the uniform attire of the choir (to symbolize the elite soldiers of Jesus Christ), the cross baton (a stick with a cross at the top), and the decorations in the church hall,³⁶ give an indigenous texture to the depiction of the rural Protestant community through social and historical cues.

36 From its appearance, the church Xiaoli attends is evidently one of the officially accepted state-sanctioned Three-Self Protestant Churches (三自教會). Three-Self Churches are all organized according to the guidelines prescribed by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and China Christian Council (CCC), and their pastors are selected and approved according to these standards before being ordained. TSPM was established in the 1950s to ensure that all the activities of China's officially approved Protestant churches conformed to the Communist Party's political and social objectives. CCC, the only Protestant Chinese

Before a choir practice, the camera uses a take that is 1 minute and 28 seconds long to record the female conductor's prayer:

Our Father in heaven, please be gracious to China our country. Be gracious to those who are in charge of this nation. Because the Lord told us that blessed is the nation which fears the Lord, blessed is the people who fears the Lord. Please bless our China's leaders. Please bless them with wisdom and insight. Let them lead us by Your will to a more prosperous and powerful China. Amen!

The macroscopic perspective and the concern for the state, nation, and politics seem out of step with the status of rural women. As Gan comments, "Speaking not what peasants 'should' say is a phenomenon of Christianity in China."³⁷ When they are asked to pray for teacher Du's son, a brother tells the child's mother, "Just believe in Jesus. If anything comes up, just call Jesus. Jesus' telephone is never engaged nor does it charge you a cent. The line is always open. Whether it's morning or evening, Jesus will put you through at any time!" His way of speaking is very different from that of non-believers, who often intersperse vulgar words. When analyzing the rhetorical use of local languages in recent Chinese underground and independent films, Jin Liu observed that underprivileged and marginalized groups in these films "remain silent most of the time. When they do speak, the dialogue is usually laconic."³⁸ However, this is not the case for these peasant Christians. They are not aphasic, but instead have their own system of discourse, with unique grammar, vocabulary, authority and a distinctive regional color.

Yet the protagonist Xiaoli has only a few lines. She seldom expresses herself to others and never mentions to others the difficulties facing her family. Even though her husband is very sick and not doing well at all, Xiaoli, when ever asked, always describes her husband's condition as "fine" (中). She is calm and reserved, choosing to absorb all the stress and take the entire burden on herself. Her silence means that we have no access to her inner being, to how she processes what she is going through, for example, or how she negotiates with God about her husband's death.

organization permitted by the Party to function openly, was formed in 1980 to cooperate with and assist TSPM in carrying out various ministries related to Christianity in China.

37 Zhang 2003.

38 Liu 2006, 190.

This arrangement has been designed by Gan deliberately. He intentionally lets the supporting characters provide all the information, while the protagonist does not have many words.³⁹ For him, silence is better than speech. In an article commemorating Ingmar Bergman, Gan emphasizes the importance of sound and identifies his main difference from Jia Zhangke:

I want to get rid of those unnecessary sounds. I will not be like Jia Zhangke, who almost endlessly loves and devours all reasonable aural resources such as radio, television, video studios, karaoke, tractors, factories, crowd, etc. [...] The soundscape is the most important thing for the atmosphere of a film, and I hope this one is adequately simple and pure.⁴⁰

The use of sound is an evident feature of almost all of Jia's films⁴¹. Some of his films are titled with the names of popular songs, chosen because they capture the spirit of the times.⁴² But some of the best directors in history, including Robert Bresson, Yasujiro Ozu, and Ingmar Bergman, have placed silence in their films. For them, "silence is both aural and visual – not merely the absence of talk but the presentation of persons who fill our imaginations with what they are not saying".⁴³ In other words, silence gives audiences opportunity to think about what they are viewing and imprint their own interpretations onto the image. Bergman, a director with great influence on Gan, often responds to questions about spirituality, faith, and mortality with lengthened moments of poignant silence, used to an extreme in *TYSTNADEN* (*THE SILENCE*, SE 1963). Hungering to find a way to represent spirituality, Gan similarly intentionally uses silence in creating some of his films' most profound moments.

In *RAISED FROM DUST*, the noiseless nothingness begins in the long first sequence. Except for the occasional train whistle in the distance, ambient

39 Gan 2007a, 83.

40 Gan 2007a, 83.

41 Speaking about Jia's *STILL LIFE* (CN 2006), Chinese film critic Li Tuo gave high praise to Jia's use of sound: "Perhaps Jia Zhangke's deployment of sound elements has formed a sound aesthetics in his movies, through which he effectively emphasizes the tension that exists in the filmic world he constructs. And this tension runs through every scene and detail in his films, forming a prominent feature of Jia Zhangke's realism" (Jia 2020).

42 Mello 2019.

43 Cardullo 2002, 473.

noise is kept to a minimum throughout the movie. The first noticeable use of silence in the midst of the film is when Xiaoli accompanies and attends to her husband, Xiaolin, in the hospital at night. Xiaolin suddenly becomes short of breath. Xiaoli is at a loss what to do, then runs to the doctor. The whole take lasts 2 minutes and 40 seconds, and the camera keeps still outside the window, watching closely what is happening inside. During the first two minutes, we principally hear Xiaolin's heavy gasping. The static long take forces us to endure the anguished breathing, just as if we were standing in front of the hospital bed, so that we feel his struggle. "Such a shot would have been unthinkable in the context of Mao-era socialist realism, which both moves the plot along much more efficiently and emphasizes clear acts of heroism or villainy, not brute struggles for existence", Jason McGrath proposes.⁴⁴ In fact, Gan himself commented that "his [Zhang Xianmin's] gasping that rips through the air is the best performance in the film".⁴⁵

Another active use of silence happens in the sequence in which Xiaoli chooses to end treatment for her husband. After Xiaoli makes the decision, the medical staff remove Xiaolin's ventilator and help Xiaoli move him to the tricycle. As she sets off to bring her dying husband home, the soundstage immediately changes from heavy breathing to silence. The silent image slowly transitions from the barren land to the green fields, then close-up shots show Xiaoli smiling happily on the back seat of a bicycle, with a flower on her hair, while Xiaolin is riding in front. We cannot hear their laughter or conversation, but this flashback tells us they once had time together that was happy and easy. At the darkest moment of the film, the director chooses to shift the viewer's attention, to elaborate on Xiaoli's inner activity by portraying bright memories. As cultural critic Rey Chow points out,

In the context of modern Chinese culture, cinematic flashbacks have provided one of the most productive methods for elaborating women's psychic interiority [...] Flashbacks allow for a specific kind of cognitive and epistemic shift, whereby the world becomes comprehensible not so much through direct sensory-motor movements as through temporally mediated events such as memories, retellings, and juxtapositions of disparate images.⁴⁶

44 McGrath 2022, 271.

45 Gan 2022.

46 Chow 2007, 91.

When the sound of the wheels drags us back to reality, the color returns to the yellow of dust. This 1 minute and 15 seconds silent flashback underscores the cruelty of reality and Xiaoli's heavy heart in this moment.

While in *RAISED FROM DUST* the church appears to be a source of hope and comfort for Xiaoli, in *WAITING FOR GOD* Christianity is a source of perplexity and vexation for the female protagonist, Xiaoyang. In 2012 Gan made this third feature film to express his observations and critique of rural Christianity.

Criticizing Christianity

The title of Gan's third film is derived from the book *Waiting for God* (1950) by French philosopher Simone Weil, one of Gan's spiritual mentors. Weil's hesitation concerning baptism and her reticence about entering fully into formal relations with the Catholic Church inspired Gan. Weil seeks direct contact with God as an individual and fears that the church as a social structure might negatively influence her through dubious collective emotions. Similarly, Gan also does not like "the sense of coercion" (脅迫感) in Christianity: "Weil's thinking on religion makes me reflect on my own relationship with religion. Individuals are easily coerced in a powerful religion, and it is necessary to keep a certain distance from it and soberly watch it."⁴⁷

In his director's statement, Gan called this film "Diary of a Chinese Female Country Pastor", referring to Robert Bresson's 1951 classic film *DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST*⁴⁸. Like Bresson's masterpiece, *WAITING FOR GOD* is a black-and-white film that eliminates the interference of noise and variegated colors and highlights the mental state of the protagonist.

The film starts with morning prayer in a village church, led by a young woman, Xiaoyang. After the morning prayer, Xiaoyang and other believers write their Christian names on a blackboard. A sister named Miriam invites Xiaoyang to her house during the day, to pray together and cast out demons. The next sequence has Xiaoyang coming to a temple where her newlywed husband, Guo Ling, is making woodcut tablets. They have just registered their marriage, but because Guo has not fully converted to

47 Tan 2019.

48 The director's statement is unpublished and was provided to the author by the director.

the Lord, their wedding ceremony cannot be held in the church. Xiaoyang has been waiting for her husband's baptism. Coming to Miriam's house, Xiaoyang encounters a "sermon". A 2-minute-long take records their conversation:

MIRIAM: Xiaoyang, I don't know if I should tell you ...

XIAOYANG: Tell me.

MIRIAM: God pardon us. How desolate is our church now! You're God's maid, you should lead all the folks in our church to God. You should do what is right. On some things, don't be too weak. Is Guo Ling still carving idols? The idols he carved – do you know how many people have been misled, and how many souls have been lost! The Bible said, "The devil, walks about, seeking whom he may devour." If God blames us, can you accept the responsibility?

XIAOYANG: God has already been blaming me.

MIRIAM: God will chasten you, I fear! Without Guo Ling's conversion, your marriage cannot be held in the sanctuary. And God will not recognize it!

After this conversation, Xiaoyang walks outside, showing symptoms of morning sickness. Miriam quickly catches up and asks, "Are you pregnant?", then passes judgement: "It's promiscuity [淫亂]!" Miriam's accusation in the name of the Lord leaves Xiaoyang unhappy and burdened.⁴⁹

Leaving Miriam's house, Xiaoyang refuses to ride with Guo Ling, who has come to pick her up. She is walking alone on a path through the field with a grave expression, and finally stops by a tree and weeps. A medium shot cuts to a Buddhist nun who is passing by. The nun's eyes are full of compassion. After the nun leaves, Xiaoyang calms down and begins to pray. This meeting contrasts with the previous one not only in narrative but also in style. The meeting with her Christian sister has distressed Xiaoyang, while the meeting with a Buddhist nun soothes her. The former takes place in a dimly lit room, the latter on a brightly lit country road. In terms of composition,

49 This plot parallels the biblical account of the character Miriam. Miriam rose up against her brother, Moses, because she did not like that he had married a foreigner; she also began to find his leadership objectionable and to doubt that God had chosen him to be the leader of the Israelites (Numbers 12:1). Thus, the name *Miriam* came to connote rebellion and bitterness. In this film, Miriam questions Xiaoyang's leadership because she has married a non-believer.



Fig. 7: Miriam, in the center of the frame, chides Xiaoyang, who is at its edge. WAITING FOR GOD (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2012), 00:11:58.



Fig. 8: On a country road, Xiaoyang and the Buddhist nun meet each other as equals. WAITING FOR GOD (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2012), 00:20:36.

when Xiaoyang is talking to Miriam, she seems pushed to a corner in the frame (fig. 7), whereas in her meeting with the nun, the two figures are in a symmetrical position on the screen (fig. 8). This brief encounter suggests Gan's openness to comparative religion and his interest in interreligious dialogue.

The next sequence is of Xiaoyang coming to the town church to visit Pastor Wang. The choir of the village church has just been established, and Xiaoyang plans to invite her high school classmate Xu Feng to be the music teacher. Pastor Wang readily agrees with Xiaoyang at first, but on hearing Xu is not a Christian, he immediately refuses: "The church choir is the chosen people by Christ. How can a non-Christian lead the chosen people of Jehovah?" and rebukes Xiaoyang: "Muddleheaded!" (fig. 9) As Pastor Wang leaves to answer the phone, a 45-seconds-long take shows Xiaoyang lingering in the lobby as if digesting what the pastor has said. Then it cuts to Xiaoyang walking out of the sanctuary. A reverse shot shows us what she is viewing: a man is creating a mural of the magi worshipping Jesus. As the camera pans slowly from right to left to scan the mural from Xiaoyang's point of view, the film transitions from monochrome to color, creating the

Fig. 9: Standing in the sanctuary, Pastor Wang rebukes Xiaoyang. WAITING FOR GOD (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2012), 00:24:58.



Fig. 10: Framing hierarchies: Pastor Wang is in the center of the frame while Xiaoyang, who is reading the Bible, is to one side. WAITING FOR GOD (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2012), 00:32:22.



only colorful part of the film. In the Bible, the magi ignored the views of the laymen, coming to Jerusalem from the East and offering the baby Jesus gold, frankincense, and myrrh as gifts (Matthew 2:11). At the end of this film, Gan creates a scene corresponding to this story and brings forth the theme of the film.

Pastor Wang comes to talk with Xiaoyang. When he says, “The true core of our faith is the word ‘Love’”, Xiaoyang opens herself to seek the pastor’s guidance, “Guo Ling hasn’t repented and is still carving idols, and we cannot hold the wedding in the church.” Wang: “Of course!” Xiaoyang: “But, I can’t let go of this love.” The pastor asks her to read a passage from 2 Corinthians: “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? [...] Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” (6:14–15 NIV). The “love” mentioned by the pastor is limited to believers. Similar to the dialogue between Xiaoyang and Miriam, in her dialogue with Pastor Wang, the two are also in an asymmetrical position: the pastor occupies the center of the frame, while Xiaoyang is relegated to the left side, indicating the oppressive nature of dogmatism (fig. 10).

Afterwards, Pastor Wang walks Xiaoyang to the door of the church. When Xiaoyang asks when her salary will be paid, Wang expresses his admiration for the salaries of the clergy in Wenzhou church: “In Wenzhou, civil servants on earth get 5,000 yuan per month, civil servants of heaven get 6,000,⁵⁰ just more than the ones on earth! When Elder Luo in Wenzhou preaches, he travels by air, with a laptop, and lives in star-rated hotels! How he glorifies God!” While they are talking, the nun appears again. She greets Pastor Wang. It turns out that both are members of the district’s Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which suggests they are close to the government and that Pastor Wang is leading a Three-Self church.

When the nun walks away, Pastor Wang looks at her back and says to Xiaoyang, “You see: she is young, female, with a master’s degree. Very promising! Alas, what a pity that she didn’t find the real God!” Whether in his envy of the high salaries of Wenzhou church or his comments on the nun, the standards used by Pastor Wang to evaluate people do not appear to be much different from the secular world, other than that he uses God to justify his envy and pride. His dogmatism and materialism can easily be detected from his speech. All these details demonstrate the director’s criticism of the status quo of some rural churches: as Gan has commented, “There is faith, but there is neither hope nor love.”⁵¹

On her way back to the village, Xiaoyang meets three preachers, who are walking from the East and are going to preach in villages in the West. The preachers stop to greet Xiaoyang and notice that the cross in Xiaoyang’s hand is twinkling like a star. They care about the baby in her womb. When they learn that Xiaoyang’s husband has not been baptized, the elder says, “Oh, what good homework God has given you! You must be kind to him and let him feel God’s love” (fig. 12). The elder also suggests that after Guo Ling is baptized, he could be given the Christian name *Joseph*.⁵² The blessings from the three preachers relieve Xiaoyang greatly. This scene parallels the colorful mural depicting the three wise men visiting Jesus. To symbolize Xiaoyang’s similarity to Mary, Gan not only inserts a visual hint in previous scenes (fig. 11), but also employs a surreal device: Xiaoyang’s belly grows quickly

50 The economic resources for preachers in Three-Self Churches include government subsidies, believers’ offerings, family support, income from preaching and writing, and assistance from evangelical institutions, see Yao 2018.

51 Gan 2015, 17.

52 In the Bible (Luke 2:48), Joseph, the husband of Mary, is identified as the father of Jesus.

Fig. 11: As Xiaoyang contemplates the mural, her figure is lower than but aligned with the Virgin Mary's; the composition emphasizes their marked resemblance. WAITING FOR GOD (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2012), 00:28:52.



Fig. 12: The three preachers stop to talk to Xiaoyang as they come from the East; they stand opposite Xiaoyang, balancing her figure within the frame. WAITING FOR GOD (Gan Xiao'er, CN 2012), 01:10:13.



from morning to dawn, and the fetus is almost full term when Xiaoyang meets the preachers.

The film ends with the following scene: Xiaoyang is sitting behind Guo on the motorcycle with her arms around Guo's waist, showing a sweet and peaceful smile. She finally dares to love her husband and fully accepts her baby. This is the theme of the entire film: love – "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). Throughout the film, Xiaoyang encounters spiritual pressure from her fellow believers and her church leader. She has been struggling to reconcile with the reality that her husband is a non-believer. Her rapidly advancing pregnancy is commensurate with her growing anxiety until she meets the three preachers, who give her a non-oppressive, non-dogmatic, open and loving interpretation of her conundrum. Through his character, we see the director's own confusion, perplexity, and distress in his religious life.

Conclusion

In the course of 10 years, Gan made three feature films portraying Christianity in rural China. Dissatisfied with what he saw in films that represent peasants as either simple country bumpkins or cunning tricksters,⁵³ Gan sought to portray the Christian lives of Chinese peasants and thus introduce a Christian discourse into Chinese (independent) cinema. Because of the religious element, Gan's films stand at a distance from popular Chinese films and other independent films both thematically and stylistically.

Gan is both the director and screenwriter of all three films. To preserve his budget, he played the male protagonist in the first film and acts in the last two. His worldview, moral values, and cinematic knowledge mean that his films are quiet and restrained. And this restrained directorial style is exerted to an extreme in the third film, which is close to Gan's ideal of a good movie.⁵⁴ While Jia Zhangke's films are full of a marketplace atmosphere and have a strong sense of history, Gan's films are about the present and about the current inner struggles of the individual in particular. In Bergman's cinema, this individual is a knight, a priest, or an artist. In Gan's films, this individual is a peasant man or woman.

Among the various difficulties faced during the filming process, such as shortage of funds or lack of actors, Gan admits, the biggest problem is his own "inner strength".⁵⁵ He strives to find a way to portray spirituality but finds himself on unfamiliar ground. While he may still be groping for many aspects, he portrays the world he sees with a strong sense of social and cultural mission, and his attempt to grasp rural Christian themes has greatly expanded the narrative space of Chinese cinema. Certainly, anyone who wants to understand the conditions of Chinese Christians in the early 21st century must not bypass Gan's works.

53 國內有神論導演甘小二訪問 (Interview with the Theistic Director Gan Xiao'er), 10 April 2007, <https://is.gd/0qpXE2> [accessed 1 February 2023].

54 When asked what kind of film is a good one, Gan answers: "[A film that can] clearly express and present people's spiritual and emotional world, which is difficult to articulate and present. WAITING FOR GOD is close to my ideal of a good movie. It's just that it is a very, very lonely movie. There is no story, and the characters in the film don't have much catharsis, and don't look like those passionate characters [in other films]." 甘小二: 拍非常寂寞的中国电影 (Gan Xiao'er: Makes Very Lonely Chinese Films). 阳光时务周刊 (iSun Affairs Weekly), 2012. I thank Gan Xiao'er for providing me with this source.

55 Cui 2022.

Bibliography

- Aikman, David, 2003, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*, Washington, DC: Regnery.
- Berry, Chris, 2008, Xiao Wu: Watching Time Go By, in: Berry, Chris (ed.), *Chinese Films in Focus II*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 250–257.
- Berry, Michael, 2009, *Xiao Wu, Platform, Unknown Pleasures: Jia Zhangke's "Hometown Trilogy"*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cardullo, Bert, 2002, The Space of Time, the Sound of Silence, *The Hudson Review* 55, 3, 473–480.
- Chow, Rey, 2007, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Cui, Zi'en, 2022, 山水為何依舊清雋如畫 (Why the Mountains and Rivers are Still Picturesque), <https://www.narratage.plus/en/910fb383f6/> [accessed 10 February 2023].
- Elliott, Tim, 2019, "Crime against Humanity": Is China Killing Political Prisoners for Their Organs?, *Sidney Morning Herald*, 11 September 2019, <http://tinyurl.com/2p-8jk9pa> [accessed 10 February 2023].
- Gan, Xiao'er, 2002 《第七封印》：伯格曼的啟示錄 (The Seventh Seal: Bergman's Revelation), *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, 2002.
- Gan, Xiao'er, 2007a, 伯格曼给我们的精神创伤 (The Trauma Bergman Inflicted on Us), 南風窗 (*South Review*) 16, 82–84.
- Gan, Xiao'er, 2007b, Director's Statement on RAISED FROM DUST, 16 May 2007, <https://is.gd/CzqJOA> [accessed 15 February 2023].
- Gan, Xiao'er, 2008, 生命是恩賜，藝術是居所 (Life is a Gift, Art is a Shelter), *Kosmochina*, 10 December 2008, <http://tinyurl.com/4kh8ekd9> [accessed 1 February 2023].
- Gan, Xiao'er, 2015, 精神是我面对的第一现实—独立电影创作谈 (Spirituality as the First Reality I Confront: On the Creation of Independent Films), *Journal of Guizhou University* 29, 5, 15–18.
- Gan, Xiao'er, 2022, 與獻民在一起 (Together with Xianmin), 26 March 2022, <http://tinyurl.com/yym6s289> [accessed 25 February 2023].
- Hattaway, Paul, 2009, *Henan: The Galilee of China*, Carlisle, PA: Piquant.
- Hattaway, Paul, 2021, *Henan: Inside the Greatest Christian Revival in History*, Carlisle, PA: Piquant.
- Huang, Zhaohui, 2003, Interview with Gan Xiao'er, 南方都市報 (*Southern Weekly*).
- Jia, Zhangke, 2020, “對話|《三峽好人》：故里、變遷與賈樟柯的現實主義 (Dialogue, *Still Life: Hometown, Change, and Jia Zhangke's Realism*), *Cinephilia*, 20 November 2020, <https://cinephilia.net/78318/> [accessed 20 June 2023].
- Lai, Yung-Hang, 2013, *The Postsocialist Cross in Rural China: A Case Study of Gan Xiao'er's Religious Features*, Master's Dissertation, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong: Pokfulam.
- Lian, Xi, 2010, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Liu, Jin, 2006, The Rhetoric of Local Languages as the Marginal: Chinese Underground and Independent Films by Jia Zhangke and Others, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 18, 2, 163–205.
- Lutz, Jessie G., 2001, *China and Protestantism: Historical Perspectives, 1807–1949*,

- in: Uhalley, Stephen Jr. / Wu, Xiaoxin (eds.), *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, New York, NY: M. E. Sharp, 179–93.
- McGrath, Jason, 2007, The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic, in: Zhang, Zhen (ed.), *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 81–114.
- McGrath, Jason, 2022, *Chinese Film: Realism and Convention from the Silent Era to the Digital Age*, Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press.
- Mello, Cecilia, 2019, *The Cinema of Jia Zhangke: Realism and Memory in Chinese Film*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Mitchell, Jolyon / Plate, S. Brent, 2007, Introduction to Part 3, in: Mitchell, Jolyon / Plate, S. Brent (eds.), *The Religion and Film Reader*, New York, NY: Routledge, 69–73.
- Stark, Rodney / Wang, Xiuhua, 2015, *A Star in the East: The Rise of Christianity in China*, Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press.
- Tan, Zi, 2019, 甘小二導演《在期待之中》交流實錄 (Interview with director Gan Xiao'er on WAITING FOR GOD), 18 January 2019, <https://is.gd/tng4SB> [accessed 23 January 2023].
- Watts, Jonathan, 2003, Hidden from the World, a Village Dies of Aids while China Refuses to Face a Growing Crisis, *The Guardian*, 24 October 2003, <http://tinyurl.com/23vxz7ms> [accessed 15 February 2023].
- Yam, Chi-Keung, 2013, Contemporary Christianity and the Religiosity of Popular Chinese Cinema, in: Lim, Francis Khek Gee (ed.), *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-Cultural Perspectives*, London: Routledge, 91–104.
- Yao, Zhangming. 傳道人的薪酬問題 (The Issue of Preacher's Salary), 29 August 2018, <https://is.gd/1rASUz> [accessed 25 August 2023].
- Zhang, Yaxuan, 2003, 甘小二訪談：我想拍人的軟弱 (Interview with Gan Xiao'er: I Want to Film People's Weakness), unpublished.
- Zito, Angela, 2015, Crossing Cameras in China: Christian Aesthetics and Realized Fictions, in: Lu, Sheldon H. / Zhang, Zhen / Zito, Angela (eds.), *DV-Made China: Digital Subjects and Social Transformations after Independent Film*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 237–259.
- 國內有神論導演甘小二訪問 (Interview with the Theistic Director Gan Xiao'er), *The Gospel Herald*, 10 April 2007, <https://is.gd/0qpXE2> [accessed 1 February 2023].
- 甘小二：拍非常寂寞的中國電影 (Gan Xiao'er: Makes Very Lonely Chinese Films), 陽光時務周刊 (*iSun Affairs Weekly*), 2012.

Filmography

- 教堂電影院 (CHURCH CINEMA, Gan Xiao'er, CN 2008).
- DET SJUNDE INSEGLET (THE SEVENTH SEAL, Ingmar Bergman, SE 1957).
- 中原紀事 (EPIC OF THE CENTRAL PLAINS, Ai Xiaoming and Hu Jie, CN 2006).
- JOURNAL D'UN CURÉ DE CAMPAGNE (DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST, Robert Bresson, FR 1951).
- JUNGFRUKÄLLAN (THE VIRGIN SPRING, Ingmar Bergman, SE 1960).
- NATTVARDSGÅSTERNA (WINTER LIGHT, Ingmar Bergman, SE 1962).
- 巫山雲雨 (RAIN CLOUDS OVER WUSHAN, Zhang Ming, CN 1996).
- 舉自塵土 (RAISED FROM DUST, Gan Xiao'er, CN 2007).

SÅSOM I EN SPEGEL (THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY, Ingmar Bergman, SE 1961).
喜梅 (STAY HOME, Ai Weiwei, CN 2013).
三峽好人 (STILL LIFE, Zhangke Jia, CN 2006).
頤和園 (SUMMER PALACE, Lou Ye, CN 2006).
山清水秀 (THE ONLY SONS, Gan Xiao'er, CN 2002).
好死不如賴活著 (TO LIVE IS BETTER THAN TO DIE, Chen Weijun, CN 2003).
TYSTNADEN (THE SILENCE, Ingmar Bergman, SE 1963).
在期待之中 (WAITING FOR GOD, Gan Xiao'er, CN 2012).
小武 (XIAO WU/PICKPOCKET, Jia Zhangke, CN 1997).

On January 29th, 2024, this article
has been retracted
at the request of the author.