

The First 'Unnamed' Poetry Film Symposium

GUESTS: LAO HE, TANG XIAODU, ZHANG XIANMIN, JING
WENDONG, ZHU WEN, ZHU QI, WANG CHAO, DAI
WEINA, SUN MENG, WANG WANGWANG, DING JIANGUO,
JIANG TING, CHEN JIAPING, HUANG YUANYING, YIN
ZIXU, HUANG JIANHUA, TIAN ZHUANG, JINZI, AND XUYI

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(Guests are listed in order of appearance.)

Moderator: Pingzi

Transcript prepared by: Cai Yingming

Photography: Wu Xueling and Chen Jiaping

Date: July 13, 2025

Venue: 15th Floor, Yuanda Center, 5 Huizhong Road, Yayuncun Subdistrict, Chaoyang District, Beijing

PINGZI: Hello, everyone. First, we would like to thank the Beijing Enterprise Confederation and the Beijing Entrepreneurs Association for providing the venue for this symposium. It is extraordinarily hot today, so we are grateful to every guest who has come. Let us begin by inviting Lao He, the initiator of the Poetry Film Eiga Showcase, to speak.¹

LAO HE: It is extremely hot today, the sort of weather in which people can easily suffer heatstroke. Even so, everyone has come, and the gathering before me feels like a major occasion. I do not know whether a symposium devoted to poetry film has ever brought together so many leading critics, filmmakers, poets, directors, cultural scholars, and specialists in the arts. Whether or not there has been such an event before, I believe today’s symposium has genuine pioneering significance. I am especially grateful to all of you for supporting the Poetry Film Eiga Showcase and the festival team that Chen Jiaping and I have assembled.

I will begin with a few remarks by way of opening the discussion. I would like to explain how this event came about and share several ideas that may help us explore the subject further.

The initial impetus for planning the Poetry Film Eiga Showcase came last year, when I watched Yang Li’s documentary *Brilliance* (Canlan). It suddenly occurred to me that enough films about poets might exist to form a screening program. I therefore collected more than a dozen such films. Several were not shown this time, either because of copyright issues or because of their quality. There are doubtless other works that escaped our attention. Even so, the films now assembled offer a recognizable view of poet-related cinema in China.²

The program includes both documentaries and fiction films. *So Much Rice*, *A Journey of Poetry and Illness*, and *Poet on a Business Trip*, for example, are fiction films. *The Three Strings*

1 The showcase title uses 映画 (*eiga*), the Japanese word for “film,” as a stylistic designation; it is retained in “Poetry Film Eiga Showcase.” Throughout the transcript, 诗意 is rendered as “poetic quality” or “poetic feeling,” while 诗性 is rendered as “poeticity” when speakers explicitly distinguish the two.

2 Established English release or festival titles are used where they could be verified. Where no stable English title was located, a descriptive translation is supplied, sometimes with pinyin at first mention; such renderings should not be taken as official distribution titles.

—Exploring Dazai is not a pure documentary either; it contains staged and performative elements.³

I later discussed the idea with Chen Jiaping. His documentary Poet Ma Yan was nearly complete, so we decided to premiere it at the showcase. Chen arranged the screening venue, Magic Lantern Eiga in Songzhuang, and together we moved the program of films about poets forward.

We have used “poetry film” as our organizing concept, but the term can be understood in several ways. Some people set a poem to images and music, with a voice reciting the text; that belongs to what is often called poetry television, which I will set aside here. A second category consists of films about poets. A third is the kind of poetry film that we want to discuss today. We had originally intended to divide the showcase into two sections: one for documentaries or fiction films about poets, and another for films concerned with “poetic quality” and “poeticity.” But how should the second section be delimited? What exactly is a “poetry film”? That is precisely what needs to be discussed.

This is why Chen Jiaping and I ultimately called the showcase “Unnamed.” At present the form resists precise definition; it requires further discussion and may never acquire a conclusive definition or name. We regard this as the first edition. A second edition would have at least two sections: one devoted to documentaries or fiction films connected with poets, and another devoted to the kind of cinema we are tentatively trying to identify, cinema concerned with poetic quality and poeticity.

I would like to single out several films from this year’s showcase. The first is Li Hongqi’s *So Much Rice*. *Trainspotting* screened it in 2008, but revisiting it now was a very different experience. It is an unusually rare Chinese film in a modernist theater-of-the-absurd mode, somewhat reminiscent of Beckett and Ionesco. Yet its absurdity is situated within the larger Chinese context: it follows a Chinese logic and answers to Chinese reality. Absurdity may be the logic of the subconscious, and that is difficult to achieve. To my mind, this film possesses a more authentic absurdity than Li’s second feature, *Routine Holiday*.⁴

Another is Gao Zipeng’s *Anecdotes from an Empty Mountain* (Kong Shan Yi). It had also been shown before, probably at *Trainspotting* around 2010. It is an intensely private film, one that requires some preparation: viewers enter it more readily if they know something about the way of life shared by A Jian, Gouzi, and their circle. Gao once told me that it was an “ink-wash film.” Its empty shots have an ethereal quality and a poetry grounded in reality. More precisely, the film presents the ritualized self-expression of the kind of “declining man of letters” embodied by A Jian. He is forever devising faintly absurd ceremonial events: searches, farewells, commemorations, launch rituals, and so on. Gao filmed all of them. The result combines the literati temperament, radical privacy, and the absurdity of reality in a mood of decadence; it, too, is highly unusual.

3 No single English title for 诗与病的旅程 is stable; this translation uses *A Journey of Poetry and Illness*. Although the speaker groups it here with fiction films, the Chinese Independent Film Archive identifies Geng Jun’s 2011 work as a documentary. “诗与病的旅程,” Chinese Independent Film Archive, accessed August 4, 2026, <https://chinaindiefilm.com/films/poetry-and-disease/?lang=zh-hans>. 唐大年’s 三味线—寻找太宰治 is listed by CNEX/Giloo as *The Three Strings—Exploring Dazai*. Giloo, “The Three Strings—Exploring Dazai,” accessed August 4, 2026, <https://giloo.ist/episodes/921>.

4 The transcript gives no fuller institutional name for 猜火车, which is therefore retained as “*Trainspotting*.” *Routine Holiday* is the established English title of Li Hongqi’s 黄金周.

I consider *So Much Rice* and *Anecdotes from an Empty Mountain* underrated achievements. There is also *The Three Strings—Exploring Dazai*. It was shown in Beijing a few years ago, but I did not see it then; for this program, Tang Danian gave me access to a copy. Its main line follows Gouzi on a pilgrimage to Dazai Osamu. Gouzi had loved Dazai since adolescence and was deeply influenced by him; this is what motivates the journey. In some respects, the film is stylistically heterogeneous. On the surface, it looks as though Danian and Lao Lang have simply accompanied Gouzi on a trip for fun, but it is more than that. The documentary form extends into expressionism: both Gouzi's unguarded state and the film's staged elements are strongly performative. Nor does the film simply affirm or endorse him. In conversations late in the film, Danian, Lao Lang, and Gouzi come into conflict. Their disagreement, including their differing attitudes toward Dazai, opens a fissure in the film. That fissure enriches the work, preventing it from becoming merely the belated worship of a lost youth. I have always believed that art and literature are private in their essence, although creation is also an act of disclosure.

In fact, these three films drew small audiences. Gouzi's film attracted somewhat more people because the principal creators were present. Many viewers could not sit through the other two and left. They mistook the expressionless, "numb" performances by Han Dong and others for an inability to act; they preferred realist films.

There is also Zhang Yin'an's *The Men Talking Nonsense*. I had watched it once on a computer and thought it was reasonably good. On seeing it again, I realized how strongly narrative it is and how carefully its three intersecting story lines have been constructed. The film makes no effort to ingratiate itself. First, it concerns no major or extraordinary event; second, its subjects are neither celebrities nor social outcasts, but three entirely ordinary, distinctly non-mainstream young Beijingers. In Beijing speech, "nonsense" carries the flavor of *pin*—a kind of glib, teasing verbal overflow—but it also conveys helplessness: whatever one says will change nothing.⁵ Drawing on specifically Beijing traits, the director presents their growth, ambition, predicament, and resignation, while also capturing a condition common among a segment of the post-1980 generation. It is a sad film, and an excellent documentary.

Of course, *Poet on a Business Trip*, *A Journey of Poetry and Illness*, Shi Zhi, and the films of Gu Tao are all worthwhile as well. I had seen them long ago, so I will not dwell on them.

I would now like to turn to the central question of this symposium. Many of the guests and senior colleagues present may not have seen these particular films, so we want to use them as a point of departure for asking what "poetry film" itself might be: what, exactly, are a film's "poetic quality" and its "poeticity"? In China, *Spring in a Small Town*, and abroad films such as *Love Letter* and *The Lover*, strike me as "poetic films": they resemble prose essays and possess a romantic temperament. What I want to emphasize, however, are films structured primarily by a "poetic logic": Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* and *Mirror*; Roy Andersson's *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*; Parajanov's *The Color of Pomegranates*; Fellini's *Amarcord* and *Roma*; Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*; Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse* and *Sátántangó*; Alejandro Jodorowsky's *Endless Poetry*; and others. Their logic is not conventional. It leaps and fractures;

5 The supplied transcript names the director as Zhang Yin'an (张阴暗). A later screening notice gives Yinna Zhang (张亦楠) and the English title *The Men Talking Nonsense*; the source form of the name is retained in the body, while the attested English film title is used. "未命名诗电影映画展映后交流：张亦楠《说废话的人》," Luma, accessed August 4, 2026, <https://luma.com/cobe6fbp?locale=zh>. In Beijing colloquial speech, 贫 (*pín*) can describe someone who talks in an overelaborate, teasing, or glibly comic way; "nonsense" alone does not carry the full social flavor.

it is nonlinear, superimposed, twisted together, even paradoxical. Perhaps this is a kind of “deep logical structure” belonging to the subconscious or unconscious; perhaps that is what a poetic structure is. In my view, cinema produced within such a context is genuinely poetic cinema. I would like to place this question before the guests.

I had also hoped to invite several moving-image artists working in the field of video art, because contemporary art video often comes closer to what we call the “nonlinear image.” But, first, coordinating an even larger number of people would have been difficult; and second, I had not yet clarified the direction of that discussion. Chen Tong’s “Video Bureau” in Guangzhou, for example, includes many works of video art, some of which I have seen. Can they be defined as “poetry film,” or perhaps “poetic moving image”? That, too, could become a subject of inquiry. These are my preliminary thoughts. I would now like to hear from the other guests.

TANG XIAODU: I suggest that Zhang Xianmin speak first. He has been one of the principal advocates of Chinese independent cinema, and what we call “poetry film” is an important aspect of independent film. He knows the field and has grounds to speak. I am only here as a bystander.⁶

ZHANG XIANMIN: After 1910, cinema gradually consolidated itself into a theatrical-distribution format. Much that fell outside that format became niche material; at times even comedy did. Today’s popular gag- or sketch-based films are, in fact, also niche forms. The theatrical system itself produces the context of the niche, including the formalism and absurdity we have been discussing. On the question of cinema’s freedom, Li Xianting once asked me: “Zhang Xianmin, can you guarantee that a camera today can truly be as free as a paintbrush?” Such questions remain open. What, exactly, has become fixed? Without industrial support—without, for example, an organization like an entrepreneurs association—what can be stabilized? Neither an association-based system nor China’s official “dragon-logo” approval system can fully encompass the field.⁷

From an academic perspective, university theses contain a substantial body of argument about Chinese poetic cinema in the 1980s. Discussions written before 1966 also refer to a tradition in world cinema, although they often use a critical vocabulary when speaking about films such as *Early Spring* in February. Looking back from *Early Spring* in February (1962) to *Spring in a Small Town* (1948), we find that within the theatrical system the poetic and narrative dimensions of film are difficult to disentangle. This also intersects with the tradition of classical Chinese poetry. Among the three broad categories of narration, philosophy, and lyricism, Chinese culture has preserved the lyrical tradition with particular strength.

In the modern period, despite the many forms of dismantling and rupture that Lao He has described—Zhu Wen has also spoken about rupture—lyricism remains dominant. The widespread “feminization” of culture, for example, can be seen as rupture combined with lyricism. This tendency is common in popular culture and has had a particularly strong influence on short-film production.

6 打酱油, literally “to go buy soy sauce,” is an internet-era idiom for merely passing through, staying uninvolved, or being present without claiming expertise. “Bystander” preserves Tang Xiaodu’s self-deprecating tone.

7 “Dragon logo” (龙标) is the industry nickname for the opening mark attached to a Chinese Film Public Screening Permit. The official submission instructions themselves use the abbreviation 龙标. National Film Administration, “国家新闻出版广电总局关于试行国产电影属地审查的通知,” February 18, 2014, https://www.chinafilm.gov.cn/xxgk/zcfg/gfxwj/dyzpsc/201402/t20140218_1489.html.

A nonnarrative tradition of short-film production can be found in art schools outside the Beijing Film Academy, where some unconventional works are being made. Yet it remains difficult to decide whether such works incline toward painterliness or genuinely involve “poeticity.”

This material is difficult to turn into a dissertation topic because it lacks sufficient academic support. In classical culture, however, poetry and painting are closely connected, as in the tradition of “painting within poetry.” Under the influence of the Soviet educational system, art academies throughout China have concentrated primarily on the visual arts, while poetry has belonged to Chinese departments in comprehensive universities. It is extraordinarily difficult to persuade someone trained in a Chinese department to pick up a camera. By contrast, some people trained in painting or the traditional fine arts also write poetry. Even today, graduates of Chinese departments who begin creating with cameras remain almost inconceivable as a recognizable talent pool. The resulting works are therefore extremely scattered.

Behind this lies an absence of recognition at the national level. In my view, China’s current film law recognizes only feature-length cinema. Under the former regulatory regime, only features produced by studios counted; in the era of the Film Industry Promotion Law, features remain at the center, supported by the dragon-logo system.⁸

The film law says nothing about shorts. What does that imply? Perhaps the National Radio and Television Administration and the China Film Administration assume that short-form work belongs under the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. As matters stand, short films are absorbed into the category of “short video,” while no clear concept of the “creative short film” exists. Private individuals cannot compile reliable statistics for this field. I can say only that I have watched more of it than most, but individual data have no significance in the age of big data. A credible institution is therefore needed to determine how many people are making such work. Outside the theatrical system—and apart from self-produced short videos designed for direct promotion—how much material possesses genuine “poeticity”?

As for future development, in addition to the activities Chen Jiaping has attempted in Beijing, the China Academy of Art might become one possible institutional base.

At the same time, neither civil-society initiatives nor undergraduate students alone are enough. It is unreasonable that associate professors in their thirties or approaching forty stop making work simply because they have already completed a similar project. Civil society is important, but at certain moments we also need constructive work rather than an endless structural dismantling. Because I teach at a university, I often wonder whether the two can be brought together, but policy creates obstacles. We cannot establish a poetry association or a poetry-film association; no stable organization can form, so the field remains permanently loose. Theoretical research, moreover, has scarcely moved beyond Pasolini’s era. When teaching students today, one still has to circulate René Clair and Bresson and eventually return to Pasolini, because otherwise the subject is extremely difficult to explain.⁹

8 The body preserves Zhang Xianmin’s characterization. The Film Industry Promotion Law does not expressly define “film” by feature length: article 2 defines it through audiovisual form, technical standards, and public exhibition, while later provisions regulate review and public-screening permits. National Film Administration, “中华人民共和国电影产业促进法,” November 7, 2016, https://www.chinafilm.gov.cn/xxgk/zcfg/flfg/201611/t20161107_1460.html.

9 The transcript gives only 克莱尔 (*Ke-laier*). René Clair is a plausible referent in this film-theoretical context, but the supplied text does not permit a certain identification.

I once tried to analyze whether the work of Chen Jiaping and others belonged to a tradition of narrative poetry, but that was only a personal experiment and received no recognition from the academic system. There is, however, a fact of film history worth recalling: in the early years of reform and opening, some of the first films were adapted from Guo Xiaochuan's long narrative poems or from prose written during the Yan'an period. This suggests that, over the long term, narrative may provide a basis for the further development of the moving image. Narrativity is difficult to separate from the novel. The films of Béla Tarr and Pasolini, by contrast, are more philosophical, although they also possess intense lyricism.

If this kind of event is held again, Chen Jiaping may need to find someone who knows the work of creators in their twenties and early thirties more intimately—young people who are actively producing. Their formats are less standardized and may also be more "poetic." A second edition might take that form. To be frank, however, it may already be rather late: Chen Jiaping and Wang Shenghua, for example, completed series of five or six documentaries three to five years ago. A future program could perhaps be divided into two sections, one devoted to documentary and another oriented toward experimental film.

That is all I have to say. My apologies for going on at such length.

PINGZI: Thank you very much, Professor Zhang. You have given us a strong framework, approaching the subject through narration, philosophy, and lyricism, while also examining, from industrial and macro-level perspectives, the possible points of mediation and future development. We will now invite Professor Tang Xiaodu to speak. Thank you.

TANG XIAODU: My first encounter with the concept of "poetry film," as I remember it, was in 1983. I came to Beijing in 1982, and the following year—or perhaps a little later—Yevgeny Yevtushenko's *Kindergarten* became very popular in our circles. People called it a "poetry film" or "a poem in cinema." Poetry and film possess an inherently intimate relation. Poetry has a much longer pedigree, of course, but in the closeness of their relation, poetry and film are nearly unique. Montage, cinema's most important expressive means, was first devised by Eisenstein under the influence of classical Chinese poetry.¹⁰ The point is not merely the traditional ideal of "painting within poetry and poetry within painting," nor simply the fusion of scene and feeling. More important is a way of structuring the inner space of aesthetic experience; put more broadly, it is a way of presenting images of the subjective world and of grasping the world artistically. Film and modern poetry subsequently influenced one another as well. Both synthesize time and space, so this is only natural. In their total expressive powers, each has its strengths and its limits. Yet in the directness and breadth of their influence on audiences, poetry is far more marginal, especially after the advent of the so-called "age of images." Perhaps this is one reason that something called "poetry film" emerged and has received increasing attention. To say that "poetry film is cinema in pursuit of poetic quality" is not entirely wrong, but it weakens cinema's agency. It would be more accurate to say: "film that uses the language of the shot and the methods of editing in the way one writes a poem." *Kindergarten* makes extensive use of modern poetic procedures—leaps, flashbacks, ruptures, juxtapositions—and cares less about the completeness of the story. Its rhythm is much faster than that of an ordinary film, while possessing greater intensity and a more lingering resonance. In any event, "poetic quality" and

¹⁰ Eisenstein's essay "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram" draws on Japanese ideograms and haiku—whose written characters derive historically from Chinese—as models for montage. It is more precise to say that these forms informed his theoretical account of montage than that classical Chinese poetry singularly caused him to "invent" it. Sergei Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), 28–44.

“poeticity” cannot be reduced to lyricism, least of all romantic lyricism. This does not mean that lyricism should be abolished or that romanticism is an original sin. It means that, within modes of expression and reception repeatedly deepened since modernism and characterized overall by irony, lyricism and romanticism—as the bearers and principal signs of traditional “poetic feeling”—have been riddled with holes. They can no longer be elevated without qualification; a stubborn attachment to them suggests only narrowness and superficiality. This does not prevent them from functioning as elements within a more powerful composite expression. To my mind, speaking of “the poetic” today largely means speaking of “irony,” and of the degree of subtlety with which irony is used. We should remember that “irony,” as a central principle of modern poetics, originally describes the way language or scenes, through juxtaposition or superimposition, negate, pierce, or constrain one another. It corresponds to the contingency, contradiction, and even paradoxical complexity of the world and human nature, while the author’s subjective position or aesthetic attitude remains comparatively neutral and behind the scenes. Because film works through the language of the shot, it clearly has even more possibilities in this regard. Many people now misuse “irony” by conflating it with traditional satire. That is a mistake. The films Lao He has just named all display an outstanding ironic force in their visual language. The seven short films he sent me do not operate on the same level, but there is no reason we cannot read them by the same principle.

I watched all seven films. For some reason, the first person who came to mind was Wu Wenguang. In the history of independent film, his *Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers* inaugurated an entire tendency. I was among its earliest viewers: Wu and Chen Ka brought the equipment to my home and screened it there. To be honest, I found the experience uncomfortable. Even as a documentary, its flat, almost purely objective mode of presentation made me wonder, “Can this really be called cinema?” Later I understood that this state was precisely what he sought. It belonged to changes then taking place throughout poetry, literature, and indeed the whole humanistic field—whether the earlier rise of colloquial poetry in the 1980s or the later vogue for “oral history” among historians. All were part of a larger historical current, signaling a transformation of the contemporary cultural ecology. The common features of that transformation are fully visible in these films: they are nonmainstream; they strip away grand narratives; and they are anti-iconic. All are committed to dismantling what appears lofty and authoritative.

If these films, almost all directed by poets, possess something irreplaceable, it lies in their revelation of the poet’s state of “being-present,” and in the importance they consequently assign to ordinary and marginalized people within history.¹¹ In China, poets have traditionally been revered and enjoyed high status. Like poetry itself, their inner worlds and everyday lives usually arrived already wrapped in mystery. The contemporary situation is different. As poets’ social and cultural standing has generally declined, that inherited mystery has become increasingly entangled with negative associations. At the extreme stand Gu Cheng’s murder of his wife and subsequent suicide, along with the suicides of a series of poets including Hai Zi. Then there are “Lower Body Writing,” the “Trash School,” “Pear Blossom Style,” “Lamb Style,” and similar

11 亲在 (*qinzai*) is Tang Xiaodu’s own compact expression for an immediate, embodied “being-present.” It is translated functionally rather than treated as a fixed philosophical term.

labels.¹² These phenomena have not only intensified public curiosity; they have also raised a related question: what, exactly, has happened to poets? Many people even use the term “mentally ill” to express their hostility. Yet who is “ill,” and where does the “illness” lie? In *A Journey of Poetry and Illness*, Zhang Xixi’s father says of him, “From childhood he never joined up; his thinking never joined up either.” The remark is fascinating. Grounded in an ordinary person’s perspective, it dissolves the poet’s former loftiness and mystery. To varying degrees, all seven films have the character of an “unveiling” or “self-unveiling.” *Brilliance*, for example, abandons grand historical narration without concealing its desire to canonize itself. As host, Yang Li sits before the camera and pronounces on so-called “Third Generation Poetry,” asserting that its historical contribution was not only unprecedented but unrepeatable. Even so, by focusing on poets’ everyday lives and private sphere, including their interactions, the film offers many revealing details. While watching *Brilliance*, for instance, I saw Han Dong sing karaoke for the first time. It astonished me. Whenever we had been together, we had always discussed serious questions; I had never imagined how thoroughly he would enjoy holding a microphone. Yang Li is plainly a little intimidated by Zhou Lunyou. In the film, Zhou recalls rendering Wang Jun “speechless” within three sentences at their first meeting, and describes a discussion of Freud with Ouyang Jianghe. After lightly reviewing their former collaboration, he specifically instructs Yang to end the interview with the sentence, “Although we no longer work together, we can still be good friends.” Every one of these details reveals his powerful command of the situation. When Lan Ma plays the guitar and sings, the calm gentleness of both his expression and voice reaches a place ordinary verbal exchange rarely can. Then there is Xiao An. I have visited Chengdu many times but apparently never met this woman poet associated with Not-Not (Fei Fei). At last I saw her in *Brilliance*. Her unadorned openness was entirely unlike what I had expected: she looked like an ordinary Sichuan woman, especially as she adjusted her makeup before work and repeatedly straightened the medical cap on her head. It felt completely real. Presented by the camera, such details are more vivid than prose, because writing has difficulty capturing minute changes of tone, mood, and expression. That is precisely cinema’s advantage. These images not only reveal unknown aspects of the poets; they make the poets more fully dimensional.

A focus on everyday life and the private sphere inevitably produces fragments and trivia, but that does not mean the films cannot pose questions. *The Men Talking Nonsense*, for example, consistently points toward the relation between poetry’s “uselessness,” underlying social logic, and ordinary existence. *The Three Strings—Exploring Dazai* reveals the depth of Gouzi’s unwavering attachment to Dazai Osamu, whom he had adored since youth. He and several friends visit Dazai’s birthplace, a literary memorial wall, bookstores, the family home, and the site of his double suicide, all in an effort to answer the question, “Why did he kill himself?” A subtle displacement emerges between what Dazai’s relatives and Japanese readers say and the reasons Gouzi himself assumes. That displacement is compelling.

The most acute issue raised by these films’ acts of “unveiling” is the relation between poetic writing and mental illness. There are many examples, but Zhang Xixi in *A Journey of Poetry and Illness* is the most representative and the most deeply ironic. He seems well aware

12 “Lower Body Writing,” the “Trash School,” “Pear Blossom Style,” and “Lamb Style” are polemical or internet-generated labels from debates around contemporary Chinese poetry, not four stable schools of equivalent status. For the literary field and its contested labels, see Maghiel van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

that he suffers from adolescent-onset schizophrenia. At the same time, he tries to act as director and has Zhang Zhiyong play “a Shakespeare moving among apartment blocks”—a role that had originally been his own self-definition—in an attempt to escape or displace his illness. As a friend, Zhang Zhiyong cares for him but cannot truly enter his world. At last he can only say, “If nothing else works, I’ll play it myself.” Zhang Xixi repeatedly declares that “one must not waste time because of illness; one must turn waste into treasure.” This self-understanding is peculiar. His mental world is dispersed yet governed by its own logic. He can discuss Sartre and the Buddha, the economic crisis and the destiny of the nation; while watching a military parade, he can pontificate about “what has happened to China since the Qianlong reign.” Yet the moment a concrete problem arises, he falls back into confusion and powerlessness. One cannot help wondering: did mental illness lead him to write poetry, or did writing poetry trigger the illness?

Of course, the pathological evidence these films provide is only one angle from which to read them. They engage many dimensions of contemporary life; a passing pan or cut can contain a multitude of questions, including questions about writing itself. I think the difficulty of naming these films has much to do with their directors. Poet on a Business Trip, for example, was clearly planned with great care. During the journey, the poet writes sixteen poems. The relation between each poem and the places he visits or people he meets is not a simple matter of “arrive in Korla, write about Korla,” but something subtle and deep. The poet writes in dim surroundings, an activity set in tension with the everyday acts of drinking, dancing, and watching sunsets.

There is also Zhao Laoda in Farewell to 1988, a percussionist and singer. The film begins, suggestively, with a medical consultation; both the doctor’s questions and Zhao’s account of himself are rich in implication. Unfortunately, the playback later froze, so I could not finish it. He is a genuine “master,” dismissive of theory and creating through a direct apprehension of music, although his condition later deteriorated badly. He says, “I have always lived in the 1980s. I have never been to the twenty-first century.” The line is as formidable—as downright badass—as the sound waves with which he once burst a drumhead. His “refusal” of the present has great force, but also an indescribable bleakness. In performance, one feels his absolute commitment to art. Even in decline, he retains a spiritual point of support.

Taken together, these films present a new cultural ecology rich in possibilities for further development. The question of naming is secondary. Who ever “certified” the Third Generation poets in the development of contemporary poetry? In the end, their works became historical facts that could not be bypassed. Naming is only an acknowledgment of existence. The value of these films lies precisely in the “unfinishedness” and exploratory energy they display. That is all I have to say.

PINGZI: Thank you very much, Professor Tang. Your remarks have given us many points of departure. You spoke of leaps and fractures in cinematic technique, and also of leaps and fractures in poets’ mental states, which produce what is called “pathology.” You also addressed the unveiling and self-unveiling of poets, the private sphere, and everyday conditions. We will now invite Professor Jing Wendong to speak.

LAO HE: Let me add two sentences. In the narrow sense, neither Gouzi nor Zhao Laoda writes poetry. Yet in their overall condition, in their state of being, they are even more fully poets. They have probably written privately without showing the work. What they present is a poetic mode of existence rather than the identity of “poet.” In their case, the attribute of being a human person is more fundamental than the “poet” identity claimed by many others. That is why I selected films about them.

JING WENDONG: First, thank you for inviting me. I do not understand cinema, but I am very glad to see everyone. When I was studying in Shanghai in the 1990s, I read many of Zhu Wen's stories and came to think of him as an avant-garde novelist. Later I heard that he had begun making films. At the time I felt rather disappointed, because it seemed we would no longer see more of his fiction. Meeting Zhu Wen today, I am sincerely pleased that he succeeded in moving across disciplines.

A few days ago, Lao He sent me the "Unnamed" documentaries. I was already familiar with several of them: Poet Ma Yan—I knew Ma Yan personally; Qin Xiaoyu's *The Verse of Us*; his unfinished film about Xu Lizhi; and *Brilliance*.¹³

Tang Xiaodu has just said that "the poet is a state." I would put it differently: a poet is a poet only while writing poetry. When not writing, the poet is no different from anyone else. In fact, being a rational, ordinary person may make it easier to become a good poet; Du Fu is one example. Of course, "mad poets" such as Nietzsche and Hölderlin were also great poets. Qin Xiaoyu's *The Verse of Us*, including its portrayal of Xu Lizhi, brings the poet's feelings closer to those of ordinary people and therefore appears more honest and trustworthy. As for joining poetry to film, the problem resembles joining poetry to prose: poetry itself must remain prominent. Poetry must lead, and film must follow.

I do not believe ours is a lyrical age—or, rather, we readily mistake lyricism for emotional excess. Lyricism can easily become sentimentality, narcissism, and affectation. I have discussed with many poets why poets seem more prone to narcissism than novelists, scholars, or essayists. It is because poets continually speak as "I," while poetry as a form gives exceptional support to the poet's narcissism. Narcissism is, of course, part of human nature, but I think it is better to keep some distance from it. The later Western Symbolists, including Eliot and Pound, advocated an "escape from the self" precisely because they recognized the hollowness and vanity of Romanticism.

Yet the poetry we discuss today cannot be separated from the Chinese language used by the ancients—a language organized around the "tongue." Shennong, for example, tasted the hundred herbs and through "tasting" came to know flavor and worldly experience. Ancient Chinese epistemology understood things through savoring; "flavor" was the root of the ten thousand things. Such a language is intrinsically lyrical. This is why I agree with Chen Shixiang that classical Chinese literature possesses a "lyrical tradition," although I am not entirely satisfied with the formulation: "lyrical tradition" is too abstract and must be made more concrete. The concrete form of lyricism is the sigh or exclamation; these are the soul of ancient Chinese. Chinese of this texture, as Ernest Fenollosa and Pound argued, is the language most suited to poetry because its relation to the ten thousand things is one of "zero distance." If one wanted a vivid action to embody the "unity of Heaven and humanity," I would call it the ancients' "interpretation of the ten thousand things." Such interpretation does not seize the soul of things, impose an attribute on them, or assign them a fixed position. It follows their inherent state, taking form in accordance with the thing and striking the most fitting moment. Put simply, one must know and speak the ten thousand things by "resting in the highest good." Only then can the

13 我的诗篇 has circulated internationally as *The Verse of Us* and *Iron Moon*; the former is used in the body because it is a direct translation of the Chinese title and a documented release title. Tabitha Speelman, "Poet Worker Documentary Hits Cinemas Through Crowdfunding," *Sixth Tone*, June 9, 2016, <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/929/poet-worker-documentary-hits-cinemas-through-crowdfunding-0>.

human person “assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth” and “form a triad with Heaven and Earth.”¹⁴

Modern Chinese is different. Saturated with Latinate grammar, it has become scientific and logical. Its center is no longer taste but vision. Classical poetry emphasizes atmosphere and the fusion of scene and feeling; what one sees is already a poem. Thus the ancients could write, “Two yellow orioles sing in the green willows; / a line of white egrets rises into the blue sky.” They needed only to record what they saw for poetic quality to be present. Today, however, we say, “I see myself seeing,” as though pulling ourselves out of the situation we inhabit and allowing this split-off self to monitor its own behavior. Contemporary Chinese poetry and literature therefore emphasize “precision”—the precision of detail rather than the precision of atmosphere. Correspondingly, poetic lyricism can no longer consist only of spontaneous praise; it must examine more rigorously whether what is said is accurate and rational. Only after we understand this transformation of Chinese, and the corresponding change in lyric expression, can we discuss the limits of lyricism in modern Chinese poetry and in poetry film.

I see no contradiction in an alliance between poetry and film. The crucial task is to define the position and limits within which lyricism remains free of emotional excess, manipulation, and narcissism—within which it is safe and acceptable. In 2015, I remember, Qin Xiaoyu invited us to a cinema to see *The Verse of Us*. I felt that parts of it manipulated emotion: certain shots lingered for two extra seconds, as though saying, “Applause should come here” or “This is where you should cry.” I later discussed the matter with Xiaoyu and said that these were places where the emotional handling was not “clean.” If even someone like me, who rarely watches films, can feel that something is wrong, filmmakers themselves must understand the problem more clearly. For me, therefore, the most important issue in poetry film is one of limits.

One final point: there is nothing wrong with being a minority form. In a country of 1.4 billion people, a minority practice can survive.

TANG XIAODU: What I mean is that these films have made me attend closely to the relation between writing and mental illness. But a question follows: is the film centered on the poet, or on the poem? A documentary devoted solely to Han Dong, for example, would necessarily be made in a different way. What I appreciate is that the narrative tone of these seven films is basically neutral; they do not manipulate emotion. Still, Wendong has raised the relation between the poet’s condition while writing and the poet’s everyday condition. How far can cinema penetrate the poet’s interior and the act of writing? This is extraordinarily difficult. The same is true of so-called “unveiling”: how much can really be unveiled?

LAO HE: Yes. I share Wendong’s reservations about the rhythm of *The Verse of Us*. Among the documentaries in our program, it is the closest to a traditional documentary. Its archival value and characterization are both excellent; it is a rare and valuable record. Its sole problem is that it is too “certain.” Its film language is highly determinate, whereas the other films incline toward uncertainty. A blurred position can come closer to poetic quality. Here the expression is so determinate that it approaches propaganda reportage. To add one point about

14 The passage combines several classical references. The legend of Shennong tasting the hundred herbs is recorded in early Chinese traditions, including the *Huainanzi*. “Attaining the highest good” echoes the *Great Learning*; “assisting the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth” and “forming a triad with Heaven and Earth” echo the *Doctrine of the Mean*. See John S. Major et al., trans. and eds., *The Huainanzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); and James Legge, trans., *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, and The Doctrine of the Mean* (New York: Dover, 1971).

what we call “poetry film”: I think it means writing poetry with shots, writing poetry in the language of cinema. That is one way to put it.

ZHU WEN: I did not attend the showcase. Songzhuang is too far away, so I will speak only about what I know. I produced *So Much Rice* and *Routine Holiday*, the two films Lao He admires. As for *Poet on a Business Trip*, which several of you have mentioned, Ju Anqi originally wanted me to play the poet traveling from southern to northern Xinjiang. I recommended Zuoxiao Zuzhou. They quarreled and broke up less than a week after shooting began. Ju then cast Shu, and that collaboration also collapsed. I imagine the director grieved over the film for many years. It was shot around 2002 and not assembled into a finished work until more than a decade later. I still have not seen the completed film.¹⁵

They brought me in to see *The Three Strings—Exploring Dazai* during postproduction. It is called a documentary, but it is not an ordinary one; therein lies its value. Gouzi is the kind of person for whom “life is theater.” Several scenes require blocking that even a professional actor would find difficult, yet he handles them without trouble. His performance is stable and layered—helped, of course, by alcohol. I once wrote a role for Gouzi, casting him as an alien in my third film, *Little Things*. He was excellent there as well. He is an actor who resists classification, genuinely distinctive; in everyday life he naturally slips into performance mode. Danian and Lao Lang, moreover, are highly self-aware creators. Throughout the journey they are both recorders and makers, conscious of what each scene requires. Dazai Osamu is ultimately only a pretext.

The directors just mentioned work in a deeply personal manner—from the original idea through fundraising, assembling a crew, and finally completing the film—with relatively little interference. In this respect, their process resembles the writing of poetry. Every major role in *So Much Rice* was undertaken by a poet, including the cinematography, by Yu Xiaowei. That is unusual. My observation is that anyone who creates moving images while also being a poet will inevitably carry poetic habits into the work. If the person is also a mature and self-confident poet, the aesthetic experience and standards of poetry may be transplanted into cinema and become obstacles to creation. Nonetheless, poets’ participation in cinema is immensely valuable, especially for Chinese film: they bring another voice.

Seeing Wang Chao reminds me of twenty-five years ago. In 1999, Yang Li, Zhai Yongming, and others took over *Film Literature*, the official journal of the Emei Film Studio, and used it as a platform for a film conference in Chengdu, inviting many friends from the film and literary worlds. Wang Chao and I met at that event. At the time he was Chen Kaige’s special assistant. He stood beside Director Chen in a suit and looked thoroughly intellectual. I never imagined that twenty-five years later Wang Chao would have degenerated into a poet. [Laughter.] I met Zhang Xianmin in Nanjing in the summer of 1995. He had just finished acting in *Rainclouds over Wushan*. He was very shy, and I could tell at once that he was a poet in hiding.

ZHANG XIANMIN: I wrote poetry in my teens. Once I began having sex, I stopped.

ZHU WEN: Precisely because I know these friends well, I understand why they would draw together and why an event like today’s could happen: they share an aesthetic understanding and exacting standards. Poets appear capable of anything and concerned with everything. Bei Dao’s *Today* published two special issues on Chinese cinema and also organized a Chinese

¹⁵ *Poet on a Business Trip* was filmed in Xinjiang in 2002 and completed much later; its international festival version is dated 2015 and incorporates sixteen poems. Film at Lincoln Center, “Poet on a Business Trip,” accessed August 4, 2026, <https://www.filmlinc.org/films/poet-business-trip/>. “Shu” (竖) is the screen name used in the transcript for the performer eventually seen in the film.

independent film festival in New York. Whenever cinema—or any art form—engages the highest standards of perception and aesthetics, poets will attend to it. Your discussion of documentary categories or whether cinema possesses poetic quality may have difficulty reaching the decisive point, because the poetry of the moving image differs from the poetry of verse. Poetry is the oldest artistic form. In literature, the nineteenth-century novel occupied a consumer role comparable to that of television drama today. European cinema spent a long period trying to free itself from the older and more mature tradition of theater; Bresson and others deliberately maintained a distance from drama. All of this belonged to its historical context. As a new art, film was naturally influenced by poetry, literature, and theater. Yet at a certain stage—certainly by now—cinema has created its own poetic quality, which could be said to have nothing to do with poetry. Even so, every art that pursues a high aesthetic standard will eventually encounter poetry.

In China, poetry has always been a point of growth for every art because it is unofficial and possesses the greatest autonomous space. As Tang Xiaodu observed, film has difficulty surviving outside the institutional system, and the same is true of fiction outside officially recognized publishing houses. I stopped writing because I could no longer bear the literary environment of the time. Poetry is different. It has always belonged to civil society; it is therefore the most flexible and creative field. That Lao He and Chen Jiaping could organize an event of this kind in the present cinematic climate shows imagination and has required considerable effort.

ZHU QI: I, too, wrote poetry thirty years ago and later stopped. Lao He has spoken about types of “poetry film” and the works a future showcase might select. I think we can distinguish several categories. The first is the “poetry film” just discussed, to which I will return. The second is the poet biopic. Many such films have been made abroad, about figures ranging from Baudelaire and Eliot to Dylan Thomas and Elizabeth Bishop. The third consists of documentaries or filmed interviews about poets. Before the pandemic, for example, I conducted Meng Lang’s final interview. We recorded only the interview and no scenes from his daily life. He died six months later, so all I have is the filmed conversation made in Hong Kong. I regret that deeply.

I want to concentrate on “poetry film.” Almost no one in China has made such work, but in the West it existed as early as the 1920s and 1930s, among avant-garde artists such as Duchamp and Picabia. Man Ray made *L’Étoile de mer* (The Starfish), a representative poetry film. Cocteau made *The Blood of a Poet*. Although it is a surrealist film about a poet rather than a poetry film in the pure sense, it explores the relation between the poet and the imagination. In the 1950s, the American filmmaker Jonas Mekas made *Walden* and *Diaries, Notes and Sketches*, both composed of essayistic, poetic shots and belonging to poetry film.¹⁶

In summary, poetry film has two principal features. The first is montage editing. Before Eisenstein, montage followed narrative logic: it told a story with plot and context. With Duchamp, Man Ray, and others, transitions between shots began to follow a poetic logic; this is especially clear in Man Ray’s *The Starfish*. The second is that the images themselves must possess poetic quality, or visually embody poetic images. A film may take poets as its subject, but if its images contain no poetry, it cannot be considered a poetry film. Thus the poetic logic of editing and the poetic or imagistic quality of the shots are both essential.

16 *Walden* and *Diaries, Notes and Sketches* are not two separate 1950s films but alternate titles for one work, released in 1969 from diary footage shot principally between 1964 and 1968. The body preserves the speaker’s chronology; this note records the bibliographic correction. Tate, “Jonas Mekas: *Diaries, Notes and Sketches* aka *Walden*,” accessed August 4, 2026, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/jonas-mekas-diaries-notes-sketches-aka-walden>.

Later, in Tarkovsky, poetic shots are interspersed through the films, but the editing as a whole still follows narrative logic because a story must be told; poetic images are inserted into that structure. Parajanov's *The Color of Pomegranates*, *The Legend of Suram Fortress*, and *Ashik Kerib*, by contrast, transform poetic texts into images. *The Color of Pomegranates* was constructed from fragments of the eighteenth-century Armenian poet Sayat-Nova's verse. Each segment visually realizes a poetic image, while installation art and performance are added to bring poetry film to an extreme. Even postwar science fiction developed a poetic language. Tarkovsky's *Solaris* and Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, for example, render the desolation of the cosmos and the astronaut's solitude as poetic images—an area Chinese science-fiction cinema has not addressed at all.

There is also the French tradition of films made by writers, such as Marguerite Duras's *India Song*. The entire film contains only a little more than seventy shots, some lasting as long as ten minutes. The camera remains fixed while Duras's melancholy, decadent voice-over murmurs over the images. Its visual language is intensely poetic, and the film can also be regarded as poetry film.

Some Western poet biopics are also very well made. They present the poet's genius without avoiding egocentrism or even selfishness. *Set Fire to the Stars*, for example, concerns Dylan Thomas. A young teacher in New York adores him, helps him apply for funding, and organizes a lecture tour. Thomas shows no gratitude and creates endless trouble for the organizer, nearly driving him to collapse; in the end, however, the man still remembers their period of "mutual torment" as something beautiful. Another film about Elizabeth Bishop, *Reaching for the Moon*, follows her after a period of frustration in New York, when she goes to Mexico. There, under the care of her lover, a woman architect, she writes the collection that wins the Pulitzer Prize, but later leaves the relationship to teach in New York. The film is remarkably candid.¹⁷

Some passages in Ju Anqi's *Poet on a Business Trip* achieve effects similar to those foreign examples. Unfortunately, the quarrel between Ju and Shu during filming was not recorded; had it been incorporated, the result might have become a more experimental "metafilm." Several sequences translate Shu's poetic images into pictures: a voice-over recites his poems while the camera presents their imaginative world, without a direct relation to the main story. This is highly experimental, combining documentary observation with poetic imagery, and I think it works well. Some of the other works, however, remain rough in their visual language, especially when viewed from the perspective of contemporary art.

LAO HE: Yes. We had originally planned to show two foreign poet biopics, one about Verlaine and Rimbaud and another about Sylvia Plath, but time ran short; the four weekends were already full. We may screen them on another occasion. Let me also ask: within contemporary art, are there moving-image works that, as images in themselves, come closer to poetry film? There should be many. Yet some seem to fall entirely outside the language of cinema.¹⁸

17 The source says that Bishop goes to Mexico. *Reaching for the Moon* is set in Brazil and dramatizes her relationship with Brazilian architect Lota de Macedo Soares. The source claim is retained in the body and corrected here. Apple TV, "Reaching for the Moon," accessed August 4, 2026, <https://tv.apple.com/us/movie/reaching-for-the-moon/umc.cmc.wrpfmru1p7iuw9b952bkf09n>.

18 The two films intended were most likely *Total Eclipse* (on Verlaine and Rimbaud) and *Sylvia* (on Sylvia Plath). The transcript does not give titles, so the identification remains provisional.

ZHU QI: There are many such poetic moving images. They are not connected only with montage; they are also inseparable from the long tradition of classical Chinese poetry and have deep roots in that tradition.

PINGZI: Thank you, Professor Zhu Qi. You have given us another coordinate system for the discussion and many new points of inspiration. We will now invite Professor Wang Chao to share his thoughts.

WANG CHAO: Zhu Wen's remarks take me back more than twenty years—twenty-four or twenty-five, to be precise. That gathering was unusual. Chen Kaige and Xia Gang both attended, as did Jia Zhangke, who had just completed *Xiao Wu*. There were poets everywhere. Only later did I learn that the poetry world was then divided between an intellectual tendency and a colloquial or popular tendency. That meeting was, in effect, a national gathering of the popular camp. From that point on, however, I realized how passionately many Chinese poets love cinema; some have probably seen more films than I have. They later established a "Ten Poets Film Company" in Chengdu. Looking back over the years, I think Zhu Wen not only became a director but made very fine films.

The critic Wang Gan also attended that conference and made a remark I found suggestive. He said that the literary resource of writers born in the 1950s was Russian literature, whereas for writers born after the 1960s the more important resource was the DVD. VCDs and DVDs had appeared by then, making a vast number of foreign films available.

Last year in Nanjing, after a screening of my film *Kong Xiu*, I suggested that we stop discussing the film and instead talk about the relation between cinema and literature in the 1980s. Everyone immediately became animated. They said that what people discussed then was not literature, nor whose fiction was best, but "What discs have you watched lately?" The literary world, poetry circles, and cinema in China have in fact always been closely connected, especially after translated literature began to circulate. We should remember that translations in the 1980s and 1990s often lagged behind: most of the works people encountered were twenty years old or more. Film alone was nearly synchronous with the world and offered direct contact with contemporaneity. I, too, began by writing poetry, but later found poetry insufficient; it seemed less directly connected with the present than cinema. In the early 1980s I read the screenplay of Duras's *India Song* in *Foreign Literature and Art*. That journal actually published screenplays, not only fiction. Journals such as *Film Literature* also specialized in foreign screenplays. I subscribed to *World Cinema* and read film scripts as though they were fiction or poetry. Antonioni's screenplays, for example, seemed to me to be poems. Film and literature are therefore part of a single field, sustained by a common force that has driven Chinese poets and writers alike.

I saw *So Much Rice*, which has already been mentioned, about a year ago and liked it very much. I also met Li Hongqi and his child. What surprised me was that Li, an avant-garde poet, could lead such a normal life and maintain such a good relationship with his son, even though his films are so cool. I found this moving. He seems to have achieved a remarkable balance.

The films I watched for this event fall roughly into two groups: those made by contemporary artists, writers, and poets, and those made by independent film directors. Ju Anqi and the others just mentioned are also poets, so their documentaries belong to the first group. They differ from films made by professional independent directors.

I watched more than half of Tang Danian's *The Three Strings—Exploring Dazai* in a state of anxiety, feeling that the film placed too much trust in its subject, Gouzi. Fortunately, near the end the question of a "militarist" emerges. The director challenges the position and, by extension,

Gouzi himself; that intervention rescues the film. The later dispute between Gouzi and Lao Lang also carries the director's point of view. This is crucial and not accidental. When a writer films a person, an additional layer of reflection comes with the act. Shi Zhi, by the contemporary artist Jiang Zhi, contains a cooler and sharper reflection. That layer is somewhat weaker in films by independent directors, perhaps because their creative routes and emphases differ. Some directors trust their subjects too much, giving them excessive, prearranged, even actively encouraged freedom to improvise, in the belief that it will stimulate "vividness." The film then begins to follow the subject wherever the subject goes. In my view, a good documentary—and a good fiction film as well—should reject this kind of "deliberate vividness."

I saw Li Hongqi's *So Much Rice* last year and wrote a short review. Let me read it: "The creative team behind this film is fascinating: Han Dong and Zhang Yaodong in the leading roles, Zuoxiao Zuzhou in a supporting role, Yu Xiaowei as cinematographer, and Zhu Wen as producer—all associated with Nanjing's Tamen ['Them'] literary circle. Li Hongqi says he was not part of the group; he simply loved Zhu Wen's fiction and was grateful to Han Dong for supporting his literary development. These people banded together to make a first film, and the result is distinctly cool. Teacher Mao, played by Han Dong, is a mature left-wing fighter who also seems to be withdrawing from battle for a while. In fact, he wants to conduct a little secret social practice. When they meet, it is inevitable that they discuss the world: internationalism, the national front, 9/11 as the background to the conversation, and the whole great life of Mao—perfectly reasonable. Then a woman is invited in. Zhang Yaodong oppresses her; Han Dong liberates her—again entirely natural. The three begin living together, and everything is now fully reasonable. The woman redeems her freedom with a sack of rice yet remains devoted, presumably because she has secretly recognized that Teacher Mao is a man of lofty ideals. Sure enough, Teacher Mao undertakes a sequence of street-level acts of witnessing: the human heart cannot be saved; class persists forever. Not even Zuoxiao Zuzhou, the fortune-teller, can obstruct Teacher Mao's resolute advance. He opposes bureaucracy. At last he shoulders the sack of rice that has 'recognized his worth' and departs, while his understanding of the revolutionary family rises to a new level. After he gets off the bus, a peasant woman first carries away the rice. This is a delicate moment. Teacher Mao turns and calls her back. In the end, he decides, the economic base still determines the superstructure, and he retrieves the rice. He removes his shirt, exposing the pectoral muscles that reveal the true mettle of the courageous fighter. Dwelling upon the earth, with so much rice. Revolutionary realism united with revolutionary romanticism. In certain respects the film resembles works Godard made during his 'Maoist period.' But where Godard destroys, Li Hongqi builds. Teacher Mao descends to the grassroots with a blueprint concealed in his breast; even with coquettish sounds disturbing him from the next room, he continues revising it. Here he loses nothing by comparison with old Godard. The film's form drifts between concrete metaphor and abstract paradox. The inexplicable poetry it releases passes beyond a certain ambition and genuinely rescues a film."¹⁹

In short, film and poetry are inseparable and mutually influential.

DAI WEINA: Thank you, Lao He, for the invitation. I have been listening with fascination. Through the thread of poetry film, we seem to have reconnected with the incomparable brilliance and vivid life of an earlier scene in contemporary Chinese poetry. For those of us born in the

¹⁹ The source at one point prints 左小诅咒, an evident character-level error for the musician's established stage name 左小祖咒, rendered Zuoxiao Zuzhou. "Tamen" (他们, "Them") was the name of the Nanjing literary circle and journal associated with several members of the film's creative team.

1980s, who missed its liveliest and most individualistic period, these accounts are especially compelling. I am actually an outsider to cinema, so I can only speak informally.

Not long ago, Zixu, Xuyi, and I attended the Berlin Poetry Festival, which has a poetry-film section said to contain the most comprehensive selection in Europe—several hundred works. During a coffee break, I spoke with the person responsible for the program. As an outsider, I asked directly what criteria they used and what, ultimately, a poetry film was. Without hesitation he replied, “I don’t know. There are no criteria.” He added that they simply provide a platform on which people throughout Europe who believe they have made poetry films can show their work. I think this still-developing condition is precisely what makes the form so captivating.

What, then, is poetry film? A film is certainly not a poetry film merely because a poet made it; nor is every film about poetry a poetry film; even a film with poeticity may not qualify. None of these definitions is precise enough.

I often joke that poetry rises and falls in different periods, while people like us are really only its props. In every age, poetry finds a new form of manifestation. In an age of images, poetry film may be a new “outer garment” or “skin” for poetry’s primordial consciousness. “The Dao gives birth to One; One gives birth to Two; Two gives birth to Three; Three gives birth to the ten thousand things.” Poetry, perhaps, comes before the “One”: it is a primordial consciousness not yet given form. Every age searches for its own form of expression.²⁰

Professor Zhang Xianmin has just observed that academic discussion of poetry film remains stuck at Pasolini. We can see that the subtle psychological structures in Pasolini’s films are isomorphic with the larger historical process of the twentieth century: understanding reality from within reality, doubting faith from within faith. Yet poetry film of such extraordinary spiritual intensity and destructive power seems to lack soil in which to grow today. Perhaps, however, we should be grateful for poetry film’s marginality. Professors do not study it because it lies outside academic performance metrics and has not been systematized. Precisely for that reason, it has not yet been ruined by formulaic academic “eight-legged prose,” nor standardized and systematized. This is, in fact, fortunate.

The system in our age is stronger than ever, and individual resistance more futile than ever. Yet the spirit of poetry should be able to initiate a new struggle of ideas at any time and place; it should embody intellectual energy. Over the past twenty or thirty years, however, people in China have gradually become estranged from poetry, and Chinese cinema has had almost no relation to it. This is not because poets failed to “take charge of” cinema, but because Chinese cinema declined so quickly that poetry simply could not keep pace.

This marginal condition has protected the free growth of poetry film. It has kept the form from being standardized, captured by academic metrics, or fully absorbed into a system or ideology. If we look back at genuine periods of cultural renaissance—the Axial Age, for example, or China’s Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties—we find a common feature: political disorder. Those in power were too busy contending for authority to manage writers and scholars; culture could therefore flourish, with a hundred flowers blooming, each in its own form. Within the powerful system of the present, the very fact that we can discuss a form such as

20 “The Way gives birth to One; One gives birth to Two; Two gives birth to Three; Three gives birth to the ten thousand things” is from chapter 42 of the *Daodejing*. Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau (London: Penguin, 1963).

poetry film—unrelated to performance metrics, with a past and future no one can clearly describe—is itself an encouraging sign.

Beginning with Qu Yuan's "Heavenly Questions," poetry has represented a cosmology and an absolute spirit. Pasolini's films show how a poet thinks about the world and how the poet engages it on poetic terms. Poetry never chases facts; it creates reality. Poetry film may be one way for poetry to reclaim an increasingly withered world.

If Chinese cinema over the past thirty years has been a down-market sphere created by capital and power, the future may be an age of cinema controlled by artificial intelligence. Yet poetry film offers a mode of thought directly opposed to AI-dominated image forms. AI produces "emergence" through the accumulation of data and information. Poetry requires neither a volume of information, nor complete narration, nor vividness. It "turns stone into gold," "attains Buddhahood on the spot," and "ascends to immortality in broad daylight." It is poetic thought, the opposite of data-driven, instrumental, and mass thought. This mode of thinking will be the most intellectually powerful weapon of the future.²¹

Whatever poetry film may be at this moment, and however little we know of its past or future, it necessarily connects past and future. Thank you.

SUN MENG: First, I would like to thank Chen Jiaping and Lao He for the invitation. I am delighted to meet so many new and old friends today. Wendong and I have known each other for a long time. In 1993, I read his "Archive of Poets' Deaths" in a newspaper, still fresh with the smell of ink, and immediately cut the article out to keep it. As for Professor Tang Xiaodu, I first met him at the 2007 Rougang Poetry Prize. It was winter; he wore his characteristic Brodsky-style scarf and said to me, "We have known each other for a long time." I was deeply moved.

Today I am meeting many teachers and friends in person for the first time, including Professor Wang Chao, Director Zhu Wen, and Professor Zhang Xianmin. Yet we have long known one another spiritually, friends linked by tacit understanding and mutual esteem. Professor Zhu Wen used the word "luxury" a moment ago, and it is exactly right. On such a hot day, everyone has gathered to speak at length about poetry film. The more deeply we enter the conversation, the more it feels as though we are meeting among the clouds; the spirit is soothed, with a sense of returning to a spiritual home. Lao He accurately described this as a conference crossing the boundaries between cinema and poetry. I work at the Institute of Film and Television Studies of the Chinese National Academy of Arts and specialize in film research. People around me often say that "whatever I study, I mix a little poetry into it." In fact, I have always been conscious of doing so.

In 2017, I organized a forum titled "The Poetic Spirit of Art Cinema." The invited guests included Ouyang Jianghe, Wang Jiaxin, Professors Tang Xiaodu and Zhang Qinghua, and Director Zheng Dasheng, whose film *Village Opera* had just been released. Two scenes remain in my memory like a montage: Ouyang Jianghe criticizing Feng Xiaogang's *Youth*, then at the height of its popularity; and Wang Jiaxin speaking expansively about Tarkovsky's poetic cinema before reciting his own poem "Tarkovsky's Tree." It was wonderful. The forum later produced an essay collection, a beautiful record of the collision between poetry and film. These remain high points in my memory.

21 "Turning stone into gold," "becoming a Buddha on the spot," and "ascending to heaven in broad daylight" are conventional Chinese formulas for sudden qualitative transformation. Here they contrast poetic intuition with accumulation, procedure, and instrumental calculation.

The speakers today have approached poetry film from many dimensions. Professor Zhu Qi is in fact an art historian. Last year Dai Weina participated in another forum I organized, “The Literary Spirit of Cinema.” Its title was inspired by an essay by Professor Wang Chao. We invited directors including Geng Jun and Liu Miaomiao, as well as writers such as Shi Yifeng. We also hoped to invite Director Wang Chao, but unfortunately I did not know him at the time.

Speaking of Director Geng Jun, I have seen all his films, and they offer perhaps the best interpretation of “cinema’s literariness.” In the history of Chinese film, Director Zhang Junxiang advanced the concept of “the literariness of cinema” in the 1980s, provoking endless debate. I understand him to have emphasized cinema’s poeticity and poetic quality. His own *Red Flag on Cuigang* and Dr. Norman Bethune consciously pursued this realm: one resembles a fresh and restrained ink wash, the other a dense and vigorous oil painting. Director Xu Changlin, who made such films as *Suspicion in the Boudoir* and *Haunted House No. 13*, likewise emphasized the poetic characteristics of Zhang Junxiang’s cinema. In essays including “Cinematic Montage and the Poetic Modes of Exposition, Comparison, and Evocation” and “On the Description of Detail, Past and Present,” he affirmed this pursuit of the poetic. Xu Changlin is an overlooked figure in Chinese film history. His *A Host of Demons* was the first Chinese film to make a group of negative characters its protagonists.²²

When assigning research topics to graduate students, I of course respect their own preferences, but I also deliberately guide some toward this kind of subject. Two of my students graduated this year: one studied Director Zhang Ming, and the other the Polish filmmaker Andrzej Żuławski. In China, scholarship on Żuławski is almost nonexistent. People pay attention to the scandal surrounding him and Sophie Marceau and know more about his private life than his work. In fact, he resembles Tian Zhuangzhuang in China: displaced and unsettled, with a profound and complex creative vision, he made films of great poetic and experimental force. His work is exceptionally sophisticated and deserves sustained study.

In discussing poeticity in film, several speakers have mentioned Pasolini. His 1965 essay “The Cinema of Poetry” was deeply influenced by Russian Formalist film poetics; he was an admirer of Roman Jakobson. Both the Moscow Linguistic Circle and the St. Petersburg group studied poetry and language. Russian Formalist film theorists transferred established methods and results from literary study to cinema. In 1927, they published *The Poetics of Cinema*, the earliest book to approach film art from the perspective of poetics. The Russian literary theory of “defamiliarization” formed a rhetorical foundation for cinema, and this in turn was connected with Russia’s deep literary tradition.²³

Russian literature has profoundly influenced many directors. One example is Emir Kusturica, whom I admire. I attended a lecture he gave at the Central Academy of Drama and spoke with him afterward. I had written a poem using images from his films; he asked me to translate it into English and then signed it, which delighted me. Later I also attended a concert he

22 The English titles in this paragraph are descriptive where no stable release title could be confirmed. The claim that 徐昌霖’s *群魔* was the first Chinese film centered on a group of negative characters is retained as the speaker’s historical judgment; it could not be independently substantiated from an authoritative filmography.

23 Pasolini first delivered “The Cinema of Poetry” in 1965; its English translation appears in *Heretical Empiricism*. The 1927 Russian volume generally cited in English as *Poetics of Cinema* was an early collective application of Formalist poetics to film, but “the earliest” remains a historiographic claim rather than an uncontested fact. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Boris Eikhenbaum et al., *Poetics of Cinema*, ed. Richard Taylor (Oxford: RPT Publications, 1982).

gave in Shanghai. While we were talking in a bar, he said that Russian literature had greatly influenced him.

The concept of poeticity can be traced back to the Italian philosopher and aesthetician Giambattista Vico. In *The New Science*, he proposed “poetic thought” and “poetic wisdom.” Much of what we now call “childlike innocence” derives from his account of the poetic essence. Vico, in turn, was influenced by Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which discusses not only tragedy and comedy but poeticity itself.²⁴

In China, Liu Na’ou of the New Sensationist school made *The Man Who Has a Camera* in 1933, inspired by Dziga Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera*. Liu not only practiced filmmaking but also advanced the concept of “pure cinema,” which comes very close to poetic cinema. At the time, Hollywood films could be screened in Shanghai almost simultaneously with their foreign releases, and European and American aesthetic movements circulated rapidly. Liu, Huang Jiamo, Mu Shiying, and others advocated “soft cinema,” entering into a debate over “what constitutes a good film” with leftists led by Xia Yan and Chen Wu. This became the famous “Soft-versus-Hard Cinema Debate” in Chinese film history. The Left emphasized the political mainstream, a tendency that continued to shape Chinese film history and generally treated “soft cinema” critically. Not long ago, I published an essay in *Film Art* titled “The Construction and Future Prospects of an Academic System for Film Studies with Chinese Characteristics.” I noted the change in scholarly attitudes in recent years: instead of simply condemning “soft cinema” through revolutionary historiography and Marxist theory, researchers now analyze more objectively its cultural significance and social background. They are reconsidering the theories advocated by Liu Na’ou and Mu Shiying—“pure art,” “pure cinematic subject matter,” and an “aesthetic attitude of contemplative regard”—and affirming their attempt to understand cinema’s essence through the properties and emotions of film art. Art should not be the concrete “flower,” but the “fragrance of the flower.” That poetic quality and poeticity are what matter most.²⁵

Zhang Yimou’s *The Flowers of War*, for example, may display superb technique and enormous expenditure, but there is still something wrong with the “flavor” it gives off; its aesthetic position and values are questionable. Chen Kaige’s *The Volunteers* trilogy demonstrates the iterative development of Chinese film industrialization, but compared with *Evening Bell* and *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru*, its nationalist position feels somewhat dated and lacks a cosmopolitan perspective. It is difficult to find satisfying. The most important position for a war film should be antiwar: it should address peace, attend to trauma, reflect on humanity, and possess a cosmopolitan vision. Films of this kind fall outside today’s discussion; there is little we can say about them here.

History nevertheless offers productive explorations, including the tradition of *xieyi*, or expressive suggestiveness. In 1934, Fei Mu proposed a “theory of atmosphere,” arguing that film technique should create effects in which feeling inhabits the scene and scene merges with

24 Vico develops “poetic wisdom” most fully in book 2 of *New Science*. Aristotle’s *Poetics* is a foundational account of poetic making, tragedy, and epic, but the modern abstract term “poeticity” should not be read as a direct Aristotelian category in the speaker’s wording. Giambattista Vico, *New Science*, trans. David Marsh (London: Penguin, 1999); Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996).

25 Liu Na’ou’s 1933 film is commonly rendered *The Man Who Has a Camera*, distinguishing it from Dziga Vertov’s 1929 *Man with a Movie Camera*. See Ling Zhang, “Rhythmic Movement, the City Symphony and Transcultural Transmediality: Liu Na’ou and *The Man Who Has a Camera* (1933),” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 9, no. 1 (2015): 42–61.

feeling. This became one of the principal paths toward the nationalization of Chinese cinema. Theater arrived at related ideas even earlier. In 1924, Yu Shangyuan and Wen Yiduo proposed the National Drama Movement. In 1962, Huang Zuolin explicitly formulated a “theory of xieyi theater,” although he had already practiced it in his 1950 film *Corrosion*, emphasizing atmosphere and artistic conception in a manner consonant with poeticity. “Poeticity” may be a Western concept and xieyi a Chinese tradition, but the boundary between them is no longer so clear.²⁶

Since publishing “Paths of Recurrence: Poetic Nostalgia in *The Artist* and *The Piano in a Factory*” in *Literature and Art Studies* in 2012, I have written nearly twenty essays on poetic and poetically inflected cinema, including studies of directors such as Fei Mu, Wu Yonggang, Tian Zhuangzhuang, Xu Haofeng, and Liu Miaomiao. Tian Zhuangzhuang’s films truly “write poetry with the camera.” *On the Hunting Ground* is especially clear in this respect and approaches an ideal form of poetry film, although there are more examples abroad.

Let me respond to the discussion of Tarkovsky. Professor Wendong said that many poets incline toward narcissism—the Narcissus complex—but Tarkovsky’s films attain a realm of the “superego” and even “no-self.” This is the ideal state of poetry film. Terrence Malick, one of my favorite directors, writes poetry with images in *Days of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line*, *The New World*, *A Hidden Life*, and other works. They attain “no-self” and stand as exemplary poetic films.

Poetry is created by an individual. One person, a sheet of paper, a pen, and a blank wall are enough, so the process is comparatively manageable. Film is collective creation, more like a tribe: screenwriter, director, actors, cinematographer, production designer, sound crew, and many others. To capture a single elusive, mist-shrouded shot may require waiting several days and depends on the cooperation of every department. Achieving even a few poetic moments is therefore extraordinarily difficult.

After more than a decade of studying poetic cinema, I still find it difficult to define. Unlike research on the film industry or in science and engineering, it cannot readily be reduced to charts and data analysis. In several essays, however, I have tried to explain its essence, implications, and possible definition. The fascination of poetic cinema is that it opens a passage from “self” to “no-self.” Within it, one sees oneself, sees others, sees all sentient beings, and sees Heaven and Earth, finally arriving at the free realm in which humanity and Heaven are one—something like the moment in *The Shawshank Redemption* when a person breaks out of confinement and sees the sun again.

Poetic cinema can probably be divided into three categories. The first, and ideal, form is the poetry film represented by Tarkovsky and Malick. Here poetic quality becomes the film’s structure and framework, overturning conventional narrative; the work attends to the velocity and succession of emotion, emphasizing suggestion, association, and sensibility, and giving the viewer a new aesthetic receptivity and a sense of defamiliarization. This is cinema that writes poetry with images. The second category includes Chaplin, Ozu Yasujiro, Bergman, and Mizoguchi Kenji. In their work, the poetic does not reside in language understood as an overt technique; the viewer does not feel the camera’s presence. Poetry permeates the stories

26 写意 (xieyi) literally means “writing/depicting the idea” and denotes an expressive, suggestive mode rather than exhaustive mimetic description. Fei Mu’s “theory of atmosphere” (空气说) is discussed as an indigenous strand of Chinese film thought in Victor Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

themselves, stirring emotion and association, exploring eternal questions such as life and death, and producing poetic experiences of shock, elevation, purification, and compassion. In the third category, lyrical and signifying passages built from poetic images are inserted or embedded in the narrative to color and elevate the plot. Films such as *Early Spring in February*, *The Song of Youth*, and *The Lin Family Shop* contain individual shots or scenes with a lyrical atmosphere.

Making poetry film today is certainly difficult, as Dai Weina has said. Yet many filmmakers still obtain creative freedom within constraints and strive to make poetic work, pursuing the realm I have described along all three dimensions. I believe poetry film in China still has a future. Directors present today and absent, as well as the senior filmmakers who train younger directors, are all engaged in this task. When Jiaping and Lao He invited me, I admired their planning and courage and was glad to participate. That is all I have to say.

WANG WANGWANG: I will say only a few words. To create a poetic feeling in film, it is not enough to have lofty ideas or an ethereal theme. The poetry has to appear concretely in how you shoot and how the camera moves. If the images are dry and lifeless, then no matter how profound the ideas may be, the poetry will be like a butterfly with broken wings: it will never reach the viewer's heart. A powerful combination of image and music is one of the surest ways to create poetry. Consider the use of Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* in *Fantasia*. The screen shows points, lines, and blocks of color transforming and leaping in response to the music. There is no specific story, yet as the abstract forms and colors flow with the melody, they produce a deeply moving poetic sensation. It is difficult to explain, but it strikes directly. This is a perfect collaboration between image and music: music gives rhythm to the image, while the image makes music "visible." When they come together, poetry emerges. Profound ideas and emotions in cinema depend even more on the way they are realized through the shot. Tarkovsky was a master of this, particularly in his extremely slow, extraordinarily steady long takes. In the famous sequence from *Nostalgia*, for example, the poet holds a candle and walks slowly, step by step, across an emptied mineral pool. The camera follows without haste, and time itself seems to slow. A faint ripple on the water, the wavering candle flame, the drifting mist—under the camera's solemn "gaze," these details no longer feel like ordinary walking but like a pilgrimage of the soul. The effect does not come from the action of "carrying a candle across a pool" by itself. It comes from the director's ability to "sculpt in time" with the camera, transforming a simple walk into an overwhelming spiritual rite. This method is a kind of magic that turns an ordinary action into poetry. Ultimately, then, the most important thing is to shoot the image well—to give it feeling and depth. Camera movement is not merely a technical matter; it directly determines whether poetry can emerge and enter the viewer's heart. The shot itself must be a "visible poem." If the shot has no feeling and no poetry, then however profound the ideas or beautiful the images may be, their value remains locked in a cage. The viewer cannot experience the poetry that makes the heart tremble.

LAO HE: In fact, we invited almost none of the directors whose films appeared in the showcase. Some were unavailable, but more importantly, this event was conceived as a symposium rather than a discussion of their individual works. It is a symposium on poetry film. Wang Wangwang is the only director from the program who is here today. His contribution is very short—whether one calls it a short film or a video. It records Zhang Zao at Huang Ke's home with more than a dozen poets, including Yang Lian, Xiaodu, old Mang Ke, Li Yawei, Ye Fu, and many others. The footage is extraordinarily precious: a living scene of poets eating, drinking, and making merry, somewhat like Gu Hongzhong's painting *The Night Revels of Han*

Xizai.²⁷ We therefore used the short as the prologue to the showcase. Wang Wangwang has in fact made many short works, marked by abstraction and a surrealist style.

DING JIANGUO: Many of the people present are senior figures in literature, poetry, and film. Professor Zhang Xianmin was my teacher. I have long admired the work of Directors Wang Chao and Zhu Wen and often use their films as case studies in my classes. I will set aside poeticity and poetic cinema for the moment and first offer several points of reference.

First, as some of you may know, a statistic circulated last year claiming that information in simplified Chinese accounted for only 1.3 percent of the global internet. In other words, anyone who understands neither English nor another foreign language will have a severely limited field of vision. Wang Chao has just noted that many of the essays we study are already several years old and that we cannot consult the originals. Of the thirty-one most important websites for academic research worldwide, sixteen are blocked in China and simply cannot be accessed.²⁸

Second, I strongly agree with Director Zhu Wen: whatever the art form—writing poetry or making films—one must maintain a high aesthetic standard. Without sophisticated taste and adequate cognition, the result is garbage. I served for five years as a juror at the Pingyao International Film Festival. Each year, I read as many as five million Chinese characters of material for the project-promotion section. We first reviewed four-thousand-character synopses for one thousand projects and selected one hundred. We then read complete screenplays of forty to fifty thousand characters for those one hundred and chose fifteen finalists, before attending the jury meetings in Pingyao. On that basis, I offer the following judgment on contemporary Chinese cinema for your consideration.

In my view, 80 percent of Chinese-language cinema—including works from Hong Kong and Taiwan and by Chinese directors overseas—fails to reach a passing standard. The principal problems are three fatal defects: self-entertainment, narcissism, and self-induced emotional intoxication. Several speakers have mentioned emotional excess and manipulation in poetry. If a work truly suffers from these problems, it has no meaning; like many Chinese films today, it remains confined to a small circle. A film festival without strong films and strong directors in competition likewise loses its purpose. Anyone with eyes can see this. A filmmaker's understanding of cinema—the filmmaker's concept of film—must therefore at least pass a basic threshold.

What supports that threshold? Intellectual history. Without training in the history of ideas, one cannot attain a high level of understanding or insight into life; the result can only be self-indulgent. Chinese film criticism, moreover, is as poor as Chinese filmmaking.

When you have the opportunity, read film reviews in major American newspapers. A single review can directly affect box-office performance, and the writing is highly professional. Younger colleagues in the Literature Department of the Beijing Film Academy often translate these pieces. A review of a few hundred words written abroad can far surpass the twenty-thousand-character essays we produce.

27 *The Night Revels of Han Xizai* is a celebrated handscroll traditionally attributed to the tenth-century painter Gu Hongzhong. The analogy emphasizes an observed social scene organized through successive episodes rather than a literal claim of visual quotation.

28 The precise figures—1.3 percent of global internet information, and sixteen of thirty-one major academic websites being blocked—are retained as Ding Jianguo's 2025 claims. No stable, authoritative dataset matching both figures and definitions could be located; they should not be treated as independently verified statistics.

I also agree with Professor Zhu Qi: documentaries made by poets and poet biopics do not in themselves constitute poetic content or poetry film. Nor do I think poetry film must be defined. Today's meeting has been excellent: little empty talk and abundant intellectual collision. IMDb—the Internet Movie Database—uses twenty-four film genres. That is more than enough. Europe and the United States are ahead in this respect; we can simply adopt an existing framework.²⁹

When poetry film is mentioned, everyone accepts Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* and *Mirror*. But let us change the angle. Kinji Fukasaku's Japanese film *Battle Royale*, for example, strikes me as a prophecy about death: a group of people is placed on an island and compelled to kill one another until only one remains as the model of a future adult. The film employs more than a dozen forms of death—I counted roughly eighteen. Is that not a poem? Its defining method is “metonymy”: one thing expresses the condition of another in the present.

I majored in Chinese literature as an undergraduate and wrote poetry. Later I could no longer bear to read my own poems, so I stopped. My entry into film was also somewhat reluctant, but I know that poetry must have standards. After reading Rilke, Celan, and Miłosz, one cannot help feeling that much Chinese poetry is merely self-entertainment.

I have taught at universities for many years and directly mentored Bi Gan, Li Ruijun, and Da Fei. Bi Gan's films have been influential because he is half Miao. Miao culture differs completely from Han culture; its poetry, imagery, and mythology are different, and without understanding them one cannot understand his work. I served as executive producer and producer on his first feature, *Kaili Blues*, and continued to collaborate on *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *Resurrection*. His imagination did not arise from nowhere. He read a great deal of philosophy in middle school, and every poem he wrote then—none of which he published—was eventually used in his films. When I took the screenplay to potential investors, no one could understand it. They asked whether it had a story or stars. I said it did not. I told them the young man had enormous potential, but fewer than twenty people in all of China understood his poetry; investors understood it even less. In the end, I had to finance the film myself. After the first cut, Professor Xianmin and I discussed its long take. Professor Zhang is a standard-bearer of independent cinema, a figure of almost godfather-like stature. I do not care much about defining poetry film. Chinese people are too fond of definitions, always staking out territories and forming little circles. Even in training graduate students, they do not ask whether the direction itself is sound. Take “community film aesthetics,” for example: if a major scholar invents such a thing, apparently it does not matter. These are all successful people. I will stop here. Thank you for organizing the meeting.³⁰

ZHANG XIANMIN: Jia Zhangke, Nai An, and I read the screenplay of *Kaili Blues* together, and we all thought it was very good. That we could not fund it at the time is another matter. We had only a prize of sixty thousand yuan available.

DING JIANGUO: In the end, we finally saw it through. The film was Bi Gan's third proposal; the first two were rejected. It failed review twice in Beijing. The first project was titled *The Flower of Rust*, and the second *Dazed Road*, *Swaying Road* (Huangran Lu Huang), which followed a path somewhat like Brady Corbet's. The third used an original work by their assistant

29 IMDb's contributor taxonomy is an operational database scheme, not a fixed academic canon of exactly twenty-four film genres; its categories and associated “interests” change over time. IMDb, “Genres,” accessed August 4, 2026, <https://help.imdb.com/article/contribution/titles/genres/GZDRMS6R742JRGAG>.

30 狂野时代 is officially presented internationally as *Resurrection*. Festival de Cannes, “Kuang Ye Shi Dai (Resurrection),” accessed August 4, 2026, <https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/f/kuang-ye-shi-dai/>.

director and took a route resembling *Stalker*. They eventually went to Zhejiang, spent fifteen days registering a new company, and only then passed review. It could never have passed in Beijing; during review it was condemned as utterly worthless. Yet afterward we won virtually every kind of prize, all over the world. There must be a minimum standard. Many directors considered brilliant in China, for example, have no capacity for dialogue abroad; they cannot enter a genuinely human frame of reference.

JIANG TING: It is an honor to take part in this event. My own creative work is concentrated in poetry, but I am also a cinephile and regularly attend screenings at the China Film Archive. Chen Jiaping invited me to this symposium. In my mind, he is first a poet and only then a director, and I would like to approach the discussion from that perspective. The preceding remarks have been extremely illuminating.

The most recent of Chen Jiaping's films I have seen is *Poet Ma Yan*, one of the works screened in this showcase. I watched it last December 30, the anniversary of Ma Yan's death, in a space near the Drum Tower. The version I saw was already Chen's third edit. He told me that the editing had taken fourteen years. From 2019 to the present, I have in effect witnessed the film's gradual refinement from a version of a little more than twenty minutes into its final form. Chen recorded interview-like conversations with Ma Yan's father, relatives, and friends, including Hu Xudong and Zhang Dinghao, and then integrated this material through editing into the completed cinematic text. There is one regret. Because of objective circumstances, Ma Yan herself appears only rarely: Chen did not begin the film until after her death. Yet to my mind, the speech and visual presence of the other friends create a "circular order." It is like a ring formed from many freshly cut, blue-green branches, with an empty space at the center. That very emptiness brings Ma Yan's image into view. She does not appear through her own direct presence, but through what has been left vacant—a condition like a burning void, or an empty chair. Similar conditions have appeared in other arenas in our country: an "empty-chair condition."³¹

In addition to *Poet Ma Yan*, Chen Jiaping's films include *The Orphan*, *My Mother and I*, and several other works that have not been publicly screened. They can be understood as a series—whether a trilogy or a sequence of four or five—because Chen's own intellectual line runs through them. Their subjects differ, but each is grounded in his central concerns as a poet and as an activist within contemporary literary life. I have recently been writing an essay about him. In an online search I found a media article on "orphans." The commentator, Gezi, begins with Baidu Tieba's "Orphans Forum," describing it as "Baidu's most benevolent, positive, and reasonable mutual-aid utopia." "They, like all orphans, may have wondered whether there is an answer to the loneliness into which they were born. The answer is hidden in the reality of lived life." One answer the author then gives is Chen Jiaping's independent film *The Orphan*: "The critic Manman summarizes this true story through lines from Chen Jiaping's poetry: 'One can never understand the arrangements an era makes for a person, because my life is not the life of one person alone.' 'Every orphan is a child created by God; they should not be alone.'" This, I

31 "The empty-chair condition" may evoke the internationally circulated image of Liu Xiaobo's empty chair at the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony. Jiang Ting does not identify the allusion, so the translation leaves the phrase open.

think, reveals the real and profound connection between Chen's artistic practice and contemporary Chinese society.³²

Let me return to today's theme, "poetry film." Professor Sun Meng has given an excellent genealogy. The concept of "poeticity" was first proposed by Vico in *The New Science*. Following her line of thought, I looked further and found that Vico's concept entered the Chinese context through translations by Zhu Guangqian and Zong Baihua before being accepted more broadly in Chinese intellectual discourse. By extension, a work in any medium and any text can possess poeticity; film is no exception.³³

I would also like to address the relation between lyricism and narration. The preceding speakers have treated the issue very well, but I do not think the two can simply be separated. We cannot say that only the lyrical is poetic while the narrative is not. Lyricism and narration are both parts of the poetic tradition, parallel aspects of it. The earliest literary form was the epic, such as the Homeric epics in the West. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács described a continuous line from epic to the modern novel: in modernity, the epic tradition is carried forward by works such as *Don Quixote* and *War and Peace*. Running beside it is the lyrical tradition, represented in the West by Sappho, the earliest woman poet, and in China by the *Book of Songs* and the *Songs of Chu*.

Changes in media affect these lines of development. In both East and West, the earliest cultures were oral and dominated by sound. Before printing, culture was transmitted by word of mouth; the Homeric epics and the *Book of Songs* therefore had to use rhyme, making them easier to remember and circulate. The age of printing changed this condition. Printing was already highly developed in China under the Song dynasty, but it was Gutenberg's invention of metal movable type in fifteenth-century Europe that bound printing closely to modernity. The medium of transmission changed at once, and human society entered a thoroughly visual age: a newspaper or printed book could circulate across Europe rather than being spoken aloud to only a few thousand people in a square.

My point is that the transformation from poetry and epic to the novel was in fact catalyzed by print in early modern Europe. Film is likewise the product of a media transformation. Why did it emerge at the end of the nineteenth century, then spread rapidly and establish the institution of the cinema in the early twentieth? The answer is inseparable from the civilization of the mechanical age. Benjamin, of course, wrote about cinema in relation to mechanical reproduction. Film is thus the product of media renewal and represents an entirely new way for human beings to perceive art. It cannot simply be fitted into the traditional subject categories of fiction, poetry, or prose. It differs from earlier genres and forms, and from artistic paradigms such as painting and music. It is an art of modernity.³⁴

32 The online article attributed to a commentator named Gezi, and the embedded quotation attributed to a critic named Manman, could not be securely identified from the information supplied. The wording is therefore translated exactly as reported rather than reconstructed from an external text.

33 The claim that Vico's concept of poeticity entered Chinese discourse "earliest" through translations by Zhu Guangqian and Zong Baihua could not be established from a definitive bibliographic history. It is retained as Jiang Ting's account.

34 The allusion is to Walter Benjamin's essay commonly known in English as "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 217–51.

On the basis of my own viewing, I would distinguish several kinds of poetry film, broadly similar to Professor Zhu Qi's categories. The first consists of films about poets. Recent examples I admired include *The Night Fernando Pessoa Met Constantine Cavafy*, the Brodsky biopic *A Room and a Half*, and the film about Leopardi, *Leopardi (The Fabulous Young Man)*.³⁵

The second category consists of films with an intrinsically poetic structure, such as the work of Tarkovsky and Theo Angelopoulos, and of the Spanish director Víctor Erice, whom I especially admire. The twentieth century produced many such art filmmakers; the form and structure of poetry are internal to their cinema. Professors Ding and Sun have both observed that these works cannot be judged by the standards of traditional verse, yet they are unquestionably art. Some express poeticity through narration, just as narration in epic and the novel can be poetic; others do so through the image. Parajanov's *The Color of Pomegranates*, for example, conveys lyricism through the beauty of its images.

The third category consists of films directed by poets. Chen Jiaping and Pasolini, whom several speakers have mentioned, are professional poets as well as film directors; this is my third category, "films made by poets." It is not separate from the first two. A film may also belong to the first category—Poet Ma Yan, for example, is about a poet—or to the second, because its cinematic text expresses a poetic aesthetic.

Chen Jiaping's films seem to me to occupy precisely this intersection. His line of thought is continuous. Although the subjects differ, the works are grounded in his perspective as a poet and in his reflections as an activist within the space of contemporary literature.

That is all. Thank you.

CHEN JIAPING: Thank you for the criticism, Jiang Ting. As a documentary filmmaker reflecting on poetry film, I believe my documentary *The Orphan* contains several of its features. In one passage, I wanted to portray the priest at an orphanage. Faced with faith and with kinship, he too is an orphan.³⁶ My method is to express reality through reality. The first "reality" is the actual world in which the priest lives: the cross, pigeons, the earth, a dying old man, a grave. These are elements of life captured by my camera, and they possess symbolic force. Then, of course, comes a dream. In flashes of lightning, everything appears and disappears. Within the religious atmosphere of the open wilderness—whether before God or before his mother's grave—the priest takes on the image of an orphan. I understood that one workable method was to create a poetic cinematic language and use the language of poetry to construct a pseudo-story. Free and indirect subjective shots can secure a certain subjectivity and thereby establish a style; style, in turn, is the true protagonist of poetry film. Poetry film must touch the essence of things, a capacity unavailable to other languages and media. Through image and sound, I reproduce reality, allowing cinema to express real emotion through images taken from reality.

The Orphan, released in 2017, was my first film. During that period, several young filmmakers and I initiated what we called the "Toxic-Independence Film Movement."³⁷ The

35 The standard English titles used here are *The Night Fernando Pessoa Met Constantine Cavafy*, *A Room and a Half*, and *Leopardi*; the last has also circulated as *The Fabulous Young Man*.

36 The source reads 结亲, literally "forming kinship/marriage ties." The immediate context may suggest 亲情 ("familial affection"), but the transcript is not emended without audio or another textual witness; "kinship" preserves the transmitted reading.

37 毒立 (*duli*, "toxic independence") is a pun on the homophone 独立 (*duli*, "independent"). "Toxic-Independence Film Movement" retains both the joke and the self-consciously provocative label.

self-label may sound faintly ridiculous, but the courage and exploratory spirit displayed by the fifteen films we produced were real and visible. These works emerged from the lowest strata of society; some even contained remnants of the Mao era. Most were essayistic and appallingly rough in production. Zero budget is not an excuse, of course. But within that creative atmosphere I obtained enough freedom to grow.

The Poetry Film Eiga Showcase opened with the premiere of my documentary Poet Ma Yan, a film commemorating the poet Ma Yan. I also intend to make a feature about her titled The Allure of Food, tracing the era through which our generation lived together.

HUANG YUANYING: Hello, everyone. I am really something of a gate-crasher today, but it is rare to have an opportunity to speak about both cinema and poetry, so I will offer a few informal remarks. First, I want to respond to Professor Zhang's discussion of poetry's narrative tradition. Whether we consider the Homeric epics in the West or the earliest two-character poems preserved in Chinese writing, both served narrative needs. It occurred to me just now that early human command of language may have been limited and still exploratory. Narration was therefore poetry's most basic task: to tell what happened and preserve it. At present, cinema continues to insist that "story is king." That, too, is narration, and perhaps it likewise reflects our limited and still exploratory command of cinematic language. Whether one can write poetry in the language of film remains a question worth discussing.

As language develops, I retain the rather traditional belief that poetry is its highest form. To my mind, the novel is popular, film is popular, and poetry is the most elevated. A speaker just said that poetry is the freest form of expression, and I agree completely. It is the expression of an absolute self, but this freedom demands an enormous price. Just as someone once said that "woman is a situation," I think the poet is also a situation—perhaps even a predicament.³⁸

A speaker mentioned Cavafy, a Greek poet I love. More than ten years ago, when I interviewed for the directing program at the Beijing Film Academy, I chose to recite his poem "The City." The poem concerns the spiritual predicament of every poet: there is neither road nor oar, and wherever one goes, the place becomes a prison from which there is no escape. The poet writes with acute pain and the totality of lived experience. The scene at the interview was rather comic, however. Everyone seemed more interested in the performative rise and fall of my recitation; perhaps no one truly cared about the poet's predicament or what a young literary enthusiast was doing in a state of self-induced emotion.³⁹

To discuss poetry film, we must ask what "poeticity" actually is. To me, poeticity is almost indescribable. It is uncertain and unfinished, ambiguous and strange, disorderly and distant, available only to limited understanding. I think of the line from a poem in Bi Gan's *Kaili Blues* that Professor Ding quoted: "To find you, I hid in the eye of a bird / and caught the wind passing by." The line has remained with me. The senses have no boundaries, and there is indeed a strangeness brought by Miao culture.⁴⁰

38 "Woman is a situation" is a compressed allusion to Simone de Beauvoir's existential account of woman as a historically and socially produced situation, not a verbatim sentence from a standard English edition. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011).

39 The description paraphrases C. P. Cavafy's "The City," whose speaker learns that changing place cannot free him from the life he has made. C. P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savidis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

40 The quoted line is translated from the wording in the supplied transcript. English subtitles and published transcriptions of the poem in *Kaili Blues* vary, so this version should not be treated as an official subtitle.

Another speaker suggested that Chinese poetry film has left science fiction unexplored. I would mention Yu Lik-wai's *All Tomorrow's Parties*. It might be called soft science fiction; its primary work is conceptual, imagining and constructing a future world. I recommend it. The abnormal conditions of the past several years have, in fact, made me appreciate the film's prescience.

Other Chinese films that approach poetry film, in my view, include Yang Chao's *Passages and Rainclouds over Wushan*, which is connected with both Professor Zhang Xianmin and Director Zhu Wen. I once wrote a long review of *Rainclouds over Wushan* exploring its affinities with the expressive methods of classical-style verse.

The last time I wrote a poem was at the solar term Awakening of Insects in 2012, while Yang Chao was making *Crosscurrent*. I wrote a drinking poem addressed to a traveler separated from me along the Yangtze. Poetry cannot be forced. Once life has stabilized and the dust has settled, it may become difficult to write a decent line; perhaps one is a poet only in certain phases. This is, of course, an amateur view.⁴¹

One final example. Many Western poetry films have been mentioned, and I think of Antonioni's final work, *Beyond the Clouds*, which I greatly admire. There is an interesting story behind it. Wim Wenders served as his assisting director. During production, Antonioni shot a great deal of material that Wenders found impossible to sort out and, he feared, impossible to edit. He wondered whether the old master had lost his mind or become senile. Afraid that Antonioni had gone too far into free flight and would be unable to return, Wenders secretly shot a large amount of "Plan B" footage. Yet during the final edit, they used only Antonioni's material and none of Wenders's, and the finished film is mesmerizing. The old man was writing poetry with the experience and wisdom accumulated over most of a lifetime in cinematic language. The story also confirms poeticity's uncertainty: it is difficult to state clearly what the film's four stories are "about," yet the work simply exists in a state of extreme beauty. Wenders was ultimately convinced. That is roughly all I have to say. Thank you.⁴²

WANG CHAO: While the microphone is still working, let me add two points. Professor Sun Meng and Jiang Ting have just spoken in relatively academic terms about the concept of poetry film, and I think a supplement is necessary. The concepts they discussed—Pasolini in the 1960s and Christian Metz's semiotics in the 1960s and 1970s—are certainly important. But film studies, including the study of poetry film, continued to develop, especially after the 1980s.

The development, however, was not driven primarily by film studies itself, but by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. The "rhizome" and "nomadic thought" developed in works such as *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Difference and Repetition* continue to guide some of the most advanced contemporary thinking. Deleuze's thought on cinema was equally far ahead of its time. His two related books, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, are not simply works of film scholarship but philosophical books that use cinema to "liberate

41 惊蛰 (*Jingzhe*, "Awakening of Insects") is one of the twenty-four traditional East Asian solar terms, falling in early March. *Crosscurrent* is the established English title of Yang Chao's 长江图.

42 The body preserves Huang Yuanying's anecdote. The Wim Wenders Foundation states that insurers required a second director who could take over if Antonioni's disability became an obstacle; Wenders accompanied the production without needing to replace him and directed the framing story. It does not support the claim that secretly shot "Plan B" footage was discarded wholesale. *Beyond the Clouds* was Antonioni's final feature-length film, though not his final moving-image work. Wim Wenders Foundation, "Beyond the Clouds," accessed August 4, 2026, <https://wimwendersstiftung.de/en/film/beyond-the-clouds/>.

philosophy.” Zhu Wen said that “poets should take charge of cinema,” but we now live in an age when “cinema should take charge of poets,” especially as audiovisual and image media assume ever greater importance.⁴³

Recently, Xia Kejun and others have repeatedly discussed “organs” in essays on poetry. They focus on the “organ” when addressing contemporaneity, but I understand contemporaneity through Deleuze’s “body without organs.” This does not mean a body literally without organs. It means that the organs have not been organized and institutionalized, so the body remains in a freer state. The “organ” they discuss resembles the “genital organ” in Romantic poetry. But even a genital can be bound and become a problem. Deleuze’s analysis of Francis Bacon’s paintings embodies precisely this contemporaneity of the body without organs.

The situation of contemporary art and cinema has changed completely. We have spent a long time discussing “poetic quality,” but perhaps we have also been constrained by it. Deleuze does not use that concept. He speaks instead of “crystalline time,” because attachment to “the poetic” can itself become a limitation.⁴⁴

For Deleuze, liberating philosophy through cinema means advocating the liberation of a human tendency. But that tendency should not be reduced to poeticity. Wittgenstein questions human subjectivity from the perspective of language; Deleuze goes so far as to oppose human subjectivity. “Poetry,” however, may be the form that represents subjectivity most strongly, and therefore most deserves to be questioned. With what can it be questioned? With the “body without organs.” I moved from poetry to film because poetry seemed too absorbed in the self, whereas the cinematic “machine” might purge certain things—especially the inherited ambiguity of Chinese accumulated over a thousand years.

What is this concept of the “crystal”? It consistently avoids “poetic quality.” Once, while lecturing at Tongji University, I was pressed to explain what the “crystal” actually was. I had to admit that it might resemble the poetic, but Deleuze’s position is firm: he never speaks of poetic quality, only of crystalline time. He describes a “pure optical and sound situation,” a discontinuity, and so forth. I understand it as a kind of “short circuit,” like the Chan Buddhist statement, “The mind of the past cannot be grasped; the mind of the present cannot be grasped; the mind of the future cannot be grasped.” It is a flash of illumination in the present. That is the point I wanted to add.⁴⁵

SUN MENG: Deleuze’s philosophy of cinema actually developed out of an exchange concerning Pasolini and the “cinema of poetry.” Pasolini inspired many thinkers, including Foucault, Agamben, and Sontag. I once wrote an essay on The Big Road by Sun Yu, known as

43 The established English titles are *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *Difference and Repetition*, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. “Rhizome,” “nomadic thought,” and “body without organs” are technical terms in Deleuze and Guattari rather than descriptive metaphors alone. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

44 Standard Deleuzian terminology more often speaks of the “crystal-image” and the “crystal of time.” “Crystalline time” follows Wang Chao’s oral formulation while signaling its relation to the established vocabulary of *Cinema 2*.

45 The threefold formula is from the *Diamond Sutra*: “Past mind cannot be grasped, present mind cannot be grasped, future mind cannot be grasped.” *The Diamond Sutra*, trans. Red Pine (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2001).

the “poet of the screen.” Its original title was “Affect, Body, and Messianic Time.” In Agamben’s sense, messianic time is an “empty simultaneity”: an explosion directed against the artificially written linear form of historical time, a simultaneity in which past and future converge in the present. It is the “short circuit” Professor Wang Chao has just described. The editor, however, told me that “messianic time” could not be used, so I changed the title to “Affect, Body, and Poetic Expression.” When I include the essay in my own collection, I will restore the original title.⁴⁶

YIN ZIXU: Let me say a few words. When Professor He told me about the event in June, I was preparing to leave for a poetry festival in Europe and regretted that I would miss it. I am delighted that I returned in time for the symposium and could at least come and “catch its scent.” I have learned a great deal from the speakers, especially Professors Sun Meng and Zhang Xianmin, whose views often resemble my own. I had not intended to speak, but Professor He said that this subject “has no definition.” I am not persuaded. I think it can be defined, so I will offer several observations that may be slightly provocative.

First, at the level of definition, I strongly agree with Professor Sun Meng’s discussion of “poetic wisdom.” Vico’s “poetic wisdom” in *The New Science* can even generate a “poetic science”; naturally it can also generate “poetic cinema.” That much is beyond doubt. For this reason, I find the concept of “poetry film” itself somewhat outdated, perhaps even a “pseudo-concept.”

Second, let us consider the historical line of development. Earlier speakers traced a media genealogy from epic to film. I see it differently. I would rather follow the line “epic—Greek tragedy—drama” and analyze cinema through the theatrical tradition. With the industrial age, theater became “cinematic drama,” and then cinema. The crucial transition is from “cinematic drama” to film proper, whose central feature is the retreat of the three unities. What decisive change followed the retreat of the unities of time, place, and action? Cinema’s core technique: montage.⁴⁷

Several speakers have said that cinema should “write poetry with shots.” How is this done? Through montage. Montage is cinema’s unique artistic form, while poetry’s value lies precisely in its leaps; the two follow a common logic. I therefore believe that the retreat of the three unities generated montage, and montage removed any essential difference between cinema and poetry. Cinema is poetry; poetry is cinema. From the Homeric epics to contemporary film, the tradition is continuous rather than broken. This is the point I most wanted to make.

PINGZI: Thank you to all the speakers. Because of the time, we may have to end this part of the program here. It is clear that everyone still has much to say and that the subject remains unfinished. We can continue the discussion more deeply over dinner. I will now invite Professor He to offer concluding remarks, unless another speaker wishes to add something. Professor He, please.

46 Agamben’s “messianic time” is the operative time that remains, in which chronological time is contracted and transformed. “Empty simultaneity” is Sun Meng’s formulation here, not a direct quotation from the standard English translation. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

47 The “three unities” of action, time, and place are a later classical and neoclassical codification associated with Aristotle’s *Poetics*; Aristotle explicitly privileges unity of action, while the standardized triad emerged through later interpretation. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996).

LAO HE: My apologies. Some participants may not have had enough time to express their views fully. At dinner we can speak freely and continue the conversation. This is an inexhaustible topic—perhaps even a “pseudo-topic,” an act of imagination. By organizing this showcase, Jiaping and I brought film and poetry together for discussion. The connection may be somewhat forced, but it is also capable of growth, and the collision among different views can produce further ideas.

Before the symposium ends, let me add two final remarks. Wang Chao has just spoken about “poetic quality,” an ancient term. In discussing poetry film, we have tried to separate “poetic quality” from “poeticity.” At its earliest stage, poetic quality is lyrical and romantic; at its highest, it becomes wordlessness and silence. Poeticity, by contrast, should refer to the poetic structure and linguistic structure of poetry. It differs from logical structure and does not depend on contextual causality. The media transformations discussed by Zhu Qi and Jiang Ting also bear on this distinction.

I strongly agree with Sun Meng’s phrase “writing poetry with images.” The image is cinema’s language. It does not imitate poetry; it creates poeticity through cinema’s own means, and this is something new. Even if we produced ten, a hundred, or a thousand definitions of poetry film, we might never explain it adequately. It resists definition and naming; it remains in growth. Wisdom often emerges from paradox and chaos. Theory requires clarity, but creation requires precisely this sense of paradox. That is one conclusion I draw from today.

Thank you all for taking part in this discussion, “useless yet valuable.” The screenings and symposium have proceeded in parallel; the symposium is not simply an extension of the program. Through a concentrated series of screenings, we hoped to let viewers experience the forms poetry film can take, while allowing the concept to ferment and encouraging more directors and filmmakers to experiment with it.

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