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REVIEW ARTICLE

The Interplay of Affect and Power Structures in *Mountains May Depart*

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, affective theory has gained significant attention in Western film studies and gradually influenced Chinese cinema research. However, its application in Chinese film studies remains superficial, particularly in the lack of in-depth exploration of the political nature of affect and its interaction with power structures. As a representative of China's 'Sixth Generation' directors, Jia Zhangke is not primarily known for political narratives, but his works centre on social realities, implicitly revealing the oppression and influence of social power on individuals through the depiction of ordinary lives. This study applies affective theory to analyse the interaction between affect and power structures in Jia Zhangke's *Mountains May Depart*. The analysis focuses on three dimensions: affect as the embodiment of power, affect as the physical manifestation of power, and affect as a means of resistance and self-rescue. Through specific analyses of the film texts, the study demonstrates that affective movement is both an important medium for emotional expression and a key to the operation and resistance of power in film narratives. The study finds that *Mountains May Depart* fuses individual emotions with social power through the multidimensional expression of affective movement. The affective movement not only demonstrates the implicit operation of power, but also expresses the individual's resistance to social oppression and the reconstruction of subjectivity through the transformation of emotions.

Contribution/Originality: The main contribution of this paper is a unique analysis of the process of interaction between affect and power structures in Mountains May Depart. This study enriches the existing literature on affective theory and provides new perspectives on the topic of the politics of affect in contemporary Chinese cinema.

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1. Introduction

As an art form, film is not only a visual and narrative expression, but also an important medium for revealing social structures and power relations. In the course of film history, the language of images has gradually become an important tool for exploring the political nature of society. Brecht (2014) suggests that Verfremdungseffekt is a way to break with the traditional logic of narrative and to stimulate viewers' political reflection through affective interdependence. Gunning (2000) also points out that the language of cinema not only serves as a function of entertainment, but also implicitly conveys political intentions through emotional narratives and symbols to implicitly convey political intentions. Especially in the context of Chinese cinema, images reflect social change, political issues and the tension between individuals and social power in a unique way.

In the context of Chinese cinema, Jia Zhangke, as a representative figure of the sixth generation of directors (Nie, 2021), has made his films an important tool and vehicle for reflecting social change, depicting the life of the underclass and revealing political issues (Zhang, 2007). From *Xiaowu* (Jia, 1998) to *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), Jia has shown the contradictions of Chinese society in the process of transformation through his films, and in the process has commented silently on the far-reaching impacts of the political system, the social structure, and globalisation on the lives of individuals (Wang, 2018). Compared to other Chinese directors, Jia has created films that are more subdued in their response to politics (Cheung, 2015), often using the emotional externalisation of his characters as a means of display. In short, the study and interpretation of the interaction between emotional externalisation and power structures in Jia's films is a fresh perspective (e.g., Jia, 2015).

Affect, as a dynamic mechanism that connects the individual and society, has become an important topic in contemporary cinematography and cultural studies. The concept of Affect is not only about the depiction of characters‘ emotions, but it also involves a deeper interaction between emotions, the body, and socio-politics. Deleuze (2019b) regards Affect as a bond between the image and the viewer, which is not only an outward form of the characters’ emotions, but also the key to the intertwining of the individual's emotions with the social structure and the relations of power. Massumi (2002) further points out that Affect has the non dual qualities of being both linguistic and political, which transforms the implicit dynamics of power relations into a visualised and perceived experience through the language of images. Emotional movement is not only an expression of emotion, but also a materialised form of the operation of power that can reveal how individuals perceive, react and resist within social power structures.

Meanwhile, Emotional action acts as a political signifier, showing the socio-political structure and how individuals feel oppressed or liberated in the political environment through fluctuating emotions (Manning & Holmes, 2014). In Jia's films, affective movement often serves as an important driving force for the narrative, which ceases to be a mere emotive representation and becomes a key tool for revealing the political situation of the individual (Tan, 2013). Furthermore, affect is often generated through the action of power structures and in turn demonstrates power in the form of body language, spatial relations and visual symbols (Roseman, 2013). The interaction between affect and power structures is particularly evident in the film *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015). The film shows how patriarchal, masculine, and economic power

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affects individual choices and emotional fluctuations through the collision of the characters' changing emotions and power relations. Whether it is the physical contact between the characters, the occupation of space, or the repression and release of emotions, affective action becomes an important bridge connecting individual private emotions and macro-social power.

Using the film *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015) as a case study, this paper aims to explore the manifestations of the interaction between affect and power structures. In the film, affective action is not only an outward expression of emotion, but also a visual medium through which power operates. Therefore, through the characters‘ facial expressions, body movements and spatial relations, affective action shows that power can penetrate individuals’ emotional choices, forming a two-way interaction between emotion and power. This study analyses the situation at three levels: firstly, affective action is a direct manifestation of power, revealing how individuals are oppressed by patriarchal, masculine and economic power; secondly, affective action is a physical manifestation of power, analysing the dynamic operation of power through body language and spatial relations; thirdly, affective action is a means of resistance and self-rescue, exploring how individuals can break through power's oppression and discipline through the release and transformation of their emotions.

Through its research, this paper aims to enhance the understanding of the relationship between affect and power, revealing how affect interacts with power structures in film narratives. This study expands the application of affective theory in cinema studies and provides new perspectives for discussing the role of power structures in the affective domain. In addition, this paper not only enriches the interpretation of *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), but also provides insights for creators to explore emotional narratives and expressions of power. In conclusion, the study of emotional action as a bridge between emotional and political narratives is of great significance to the fields of cinematography, cultural studies and sociology.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Literature Review of Affect Theory

Affect has become one of the most important topics in cinematography and cultural studies in recent years. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest that affect is not only an individual's physiological or emotional response, but an interweaving of psychological, social and political dimensions.

Power is at the centre of the politics of affective action. In this regard, Legault (2020) argues that affective movement transcends intrinsic emotional responses within the individual and has a trans-subjective force, as an embodiment of social relations and power dynamics. Emotional movement does not exist solely at the individual psychological level, but is manifested as an outward form of power through bodily movements, gestures and spatial relations that interact with the social environment.

Massumi (2002) further explores the role of affect in cinema, emphasising that affect is more than just an intrinsic sensation within an individual; it connects with the viewer through the elements of the image, stimulating an emotional response and conveying political connotations. Emotion in film is an invisible political force that conveys the profound meaning of social and political change by touching the emotions of the

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audience. As such, affective action is able to visualise power relations through visual symbols and body movements, allowing the viewer to perceive the workings of power at an individual level (Nummenmaa et al., 2014).

In cinematography, affective action is an important tool for narrative and image analysis, and is increasingly used to explore the ways in which power is represented in cinema. Bryant (2016) examines the multiple functions of affective action in cinema, pointing out that affective action is not only an outwardly visible form of a character's emotions, but also a dynamic medium through which power operates at the societal and individual levels. Through affect, cinema is able to show the impact of power structures on individuals and how power permeates emotions and behaviours in implicit ways. Emotion in the film is not only the result of the interweaving of individual emotion and social power, but also an important channel for the audience to perceive the operation of power.

2.2. Literature review of film and politeness

The relationship between cinema and politics has been one of the central themes in cinema studies. In the process of cinema as a social and cultural product, the implicit operation of power structure is revealed through the language of images. Bordwell (2013) points out that cinema not only conveys complex ideas through narrative structure and characterisation, but also reflects the dynamics of power relations through symbols and emotional expression. In the context of social change, films often show the mechanisms of power operation in a metaphorical or symbolic way, enabling the audience to perceive the potential impact of social power through emotions (Coëgnarts, 2017).

Emotion is not only a driving force for narrative advancement in cinema, but also an outward mediator of power relations. Fuchs and Koch (2014) argue that emotion reveals the implicit modes of operation of power through the representation of the body, the flow of emotions, and the shaping of space. Power controls the behavioural and emotional responses of individuals through affective movement, making cinema an important medium for showing the workings of power.

In addition, affect also serves as a bridge between the individual and social power in cinema. Massumi (1995) points out that affect is able to visualise power relations, especially in the interaction between the individual and power, and that affect becomes an important tool for revealing the implicit workings of power. The film shows the unequal distribution of power through affect, such as how individuals are disciplined and restricted by power in their family structure, social status and cultural identity (Royce, 2009). This structure of power revealed through affective action allows the audience to reflect on the far-reaching effects of social power on the individual on the basis of emotional resonance.

2.3. Affective Research in Cinema Studies

As a highly visual art medium, film's unique narrative language and image expression make affective action an important tool for presenting power relations. Gunning (2000) points out that through the movement of the camera, the rhythm of editing, and the combination of visual symbols, cinema translates the dynamic workings of social power into a visual experience that can be perceived by the audience. Emotional movement is

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an important element of film narrative, not only as an outward manifestation of a character's inner emotions, but also building an emotional bridge between the film and the audience that allows the complexity of power relations to be conveyed. As Marks and Polan (2000) argued, affective action in cinema can reveal how power affects individual perception and cognition through physical and visual symbols through subtle sensory expressions.

In the context of Chinese cinema, the study of emotions has gradually become an important entry point for understanding socio-political and cultural changes, and Zhang (2007), discussing the works of China's 'Sixth Generation' of directors, points out that this generation of directors has reflected the profound pains of the post-reform and opening-up period with their unique emotional narratives. Jia's films are particularly prominent, as his works delicately record through the lens the emotional fluctuations of ordinary people and their interactions with power structures during social change (Lo, 2021).

Further, affect in Chinese cinema is not only a reflection of individual emotions, but also presents the implicit operation of power through body language and spatial relations. Feng (2018) analyses the visual presentation of affect in Chinese cinema and argues that affect is able to show the unequal distribution of power through close-ups, body movements, and the distance between characters.

Shaviro (1993) further adds that affect in cinema has the ability to transcend language and culture, allowing the audience to visualise the workings of power structures through sensory experience. In cinematic narratives, affective action visualises the implicit disciplines and social constraints of power through a combination of visual and auditory senses, and the audience perceives the complex dynamics of political, cultural and power relations through emotional resonance (Del Rio, 2008).

2.4. Emotion and Power in Jia Zhangke's Films

As an important representative of China's 'Sixth Generation' directors, Jia's works are known for their focus on the survival of individuals at the bottom of the social ladder and their delicate portrayal of emotions. Through the language of the camera, he closely links personal emotions with social power dynamics, revealing the profound changes in Chinese society in the context of globalisation and marketisation, and how power shapes individual emotional relationships and identities (Mello, 2019). In *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), affective movement is not only a tool to drive the narrative, but also an outward form of the operation of power, demonstrating the oppression of individuals by patriarchal, masculine, and economic power, while at the same time hinting at the potential ways in which affective movement can act as a means of resistance and liberation.

Liu (2018) notes that *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015) presents the intertwining of affective dynamics and power structures through a narrative structure that spans three time periods.

The affective movement in Jia's film also expresses the unequal distribution of power through spatial relations. Feng (2018) analyses that in *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), the interaction between the body and space reveals the restriction of power on individual freedom.

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The role of affective movement in Jia's films is not only limited to showing oppression, but also embodies the individual's resistance and liberation in the face of power. Shaviro (1993) points out that affective movement, as part of the language of cinema, not only expresses the oppressive nature of power, but also provides a means for individual resistance to be perceived and expressed.

2.5. Research gap

Although affective theory has been widely used in Western film studies, the interaction between affect and politeness, especially with power, has yet to be fully explored in Chinese cinema, especially in Jia's films. Existing studies have mainly focused on the socio-political criticism or emotional expression of Jia's films, but the multidimensional interaction between affect and power structure has rarely been systematically studied. In Jia's films, the setting of the films is mostly the county area in the limited era context, which is often neglected in the Chinese social context, so the multiple expressions of affective action as power operation in the context of Jia's films deserve further exploration. By analysing the interaction between affect and power structures in *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), this study aims to enrich the theoretical discussion on the relationship between affect and power in cinema studies, and at the same time provide new academic perspectives for understanding the politics of affect in Chinese cinema.

3. Research Methods

In this study, the paper uses textual analysis in conjunction with the Mise en scène analytical framework to examine the interaction between affect and power structures in the film *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015). Textual analysis reveals the cultural and emotional dimensions behind the film by focusing on the visual, aural, narrative structures and symbols in the film (Neale, 2005).

In film analysis, Mise en scène plays an important role in influencing the emotional expression and the construction of social themes in the film. Mise en scène includes spatial layout, lighting and colours, actors' performance, costumes and make-up, and props, which work together to convey emotional and social contexts (Chion, 2019). Specifically, through the use of warm and cold tones, character distance, and props, the film not only shows individual emotional conflicts, but also extends affectivity into the socio-historical context, embodying the ways in which affectivity and power are physically externalised as well as revolted against (Deleuze, 2019b).

The object of study chosen for this research is *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), which was chosen because of the presence of a clear interaction between the logic of affect and traditional power structures. By incorporating Mise en scène, this study reveals how *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015) deepens the multidimensional expression of affect through visual narrative and explores its wider social and cultural implications.

4. Discussion

This paper focuses on the interaction between affect and power structures. In *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), the interaction between affect and power is present throughout, and is the central thread of the film's narrative. Emotion is not only an outward manifestation of the characters' emotions, but also deeply intertwined with social,

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historical and political forces, becoming a concrete manifestation of the operation of power. In the film, affect is expressed as repression and control, as well as resistance and liberation, and it is the visualisation of the operation of the power structure at the individual level.

According to Boccagni and Baldassar (2015), affective action is a complex mechanism that connects the individual to society and emotion to power. In cinema, affective action not only conveys the inner feelings of characters, but also reflects how social power operates in the emotional sphere through visual language (Plantinga & Smith, 1999). For example, in *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), the close-ups of facial expressions and body language show the dilemmas of the individual's emotional repression and choices under the pressure of patriarchal, masculine and economic power.

Meanwhile, affective movement is manifested in the film as a physical expression of power. Power is revealed through individuals' body movements, physical gestures and emotional interactions (Grodal, 2009). For example, the physical distance, subtle movements and contacts between characters in the film reflect how individuals struggle and compromise in social power relations. Thornton (2020) emphasises that affective movement conveys the tension of power through bodily expressions, which makes power not only exist at the level of social institutions, but also penetrate into the individual's emotions and body.

However, affective action is not just a passive manifestation of power; the film also shows the possibility of affective action as resistance and self-rescue. Emotional release and awakening become an important way for individuals to break free from the bondage of power. The characters seek freedom through emotional expression, regaining control over themselves and their lives from a state of repression and control. This kind of resistance is not only a challenge to external power, but also a transformation of emotional energy and a reconstruction of self-identity.

In conclusion, the interaction between emotion and power structure in *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015) is mainly reflected in three aspects: firstly, emotion as the embodiment of external power, revealing how social oppression is manifested through emotional expression; secondly, emotion as the physical manifestation of power, reflecting the depth of the interweaving of individual emotion and the tension of power; and thirdly, emotion as a means of resistance and self-rescue, demonstrating how emotion can becomes the power to break through the limitations of tradition and power. This paper analyses these three dimensions, and these forms of interaction not only enrich the depth of the film's narrative, but also highlight the role of emotional action as a bridge connecting private emotion and social power, which is an important way of interpreting the political expression of power in *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015).

4.1. Affect as an expression of power

Affect is not only an intrinsic emotional expression of the individual, but also an important manifestation of the operation of power relations. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) point out that power permeates and perpetuates itself through affective action, which does not manifest itself through coercive actions or material displays, but rather through the implicit flow of emotion that influences individual behaviour and social relations. Affective action in this sense transcends individual experience and becomes a symbol and mediator of the operation of power at the individual and social levels.

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In cinema, affective action not only expresses the effects of power through the emotional changes of the characters, but also materialises the structures of power through a specific language of images. Thornton (2020) emphasises that affective action has a translingual character, internalising the oppression or control of power as an individual's affective response and cognitive experience through the language of the camera, the plotting of the setting, and the rhythm of the soundscape. The politics of affective action therefore lies in how it expresses the implicit shaping of power over the lives of individuals through the language of cinema, thus enabling the viewer to perceive and reflect on these power relations.

It is noteworthy that the embodiment of emotions as power in film is often manifested in the shaping and suppression of individual identities, emotions and choices by social power. Patriarchal and patriarchal power, as the core power structures of traditional societies, often exert their influence on women through family relationships, emotional attachments and social roles. These powers are not directly visible in the form of violence or coercion, but rather they exert invisible control over individuals through traditional customs and economic pressures (Foucault, 2008). Women's dilemmas of choice in film, such as the conflicting choices of marriage, career and family, are concrete manifestations of the implicit operation of external power structures in the emotional realm.

In addition, facial expressions and close-ups in films are important means of showing the relationship between emotion and power. Deleuze (2019a) emphasises that facial expressions are an excellent vehicle for conveying a character's emotion.

In *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), close-ups of facial expressions also play a role as a vehicle for 'emotion'. Emotional action is a manifestation of power, often expressed through female characters. In a male-dominated society, patriarchy and male power are important factors in the oppression of women. Shen, the female protagonist of the *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), is a character oppressed by power.

As shown in Figure 1, this is a close-up shot of the film, Zhang and Liangzi are in conflict because of the competition for Shen's favourite, Zhang does not allow Shen and Liangzi to come and go together, Shen has no rebuttal but to keep hitting his head against the pillar. At this moment, Shen's eyes are confused and self-blaming. Shen's banging his head against the wall is a direct expression of his inability to vent his emotions. This extreme physical action is not merely an outward manifestation of an individual's inner pain, but a result of the oppression exerted by male power at the emotional and physical levels. Zhang's prevention of Shen's relationship with Liang represents the deprivation of women's right to choose by patriarchal and masculine power. Deleuze (2019a) argues that emotional action is a manifestation of the concretisation of power relations at the individual level. The action of hitting her head against the wall reflects the extreme repression of Shen's emotions and demonstrates how male power forces women into silent desperation through its control of discourse. In addition, for the woman oppressed by power, the action of banging her head against the wall suggests the powerlessness of the woman in the face of oppression, as she tries to transfer her inner emotional pressure through physical pain, which is the oppressive embodiment of power over the individual. Foucault (2019) suggests that power penetrates into the life of the individual through implicit control, and the film shows through this close-up shot as well as the

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facial expression how the male power on the emotional and physical levels limits women's choices and freedom.

Figure 1: Shen hit her head against the wall

Source: Jia (2015)

Therefore, this shot not only shows Shen's state of being oppressed by power as a female character, but more importantly, affective movement becomes an important medium for the operation of power relations here. Through the repression and physicalisation of emotions, the film visually demonstrates how male power enforces implicit oppression by controlling emotions, and at the same time, through close-ups, the viewer is made to empathise with the emotions of the characters, and to feel the dynamic role of affectivity in the power structure.

In addition, *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015) has a close-up shot. In contrast to Shen's extreme physicalised emotion of banging her head against the wall, another close-up shows her more calm but helpless facial expression. As shown in Figure 2, Shen calmly tells Liangzi that she has been divorced and her child has been awarded to Zhang. Although there is no obvious emotional fluctuation in her facial expression, the audience can feel her inner depression and loneliness through the subtle changes in her expression and eyes captured by the close-ups. At this moment, Shen shows a 'silent emotion', which is the embodiment of power's deep control over individual emotions.

In this scene, Shen's calm expression seems to be indifferent, but in fact it hides strong emotional fluctuations. The influence of power is expressed here through the 'implicitisation' of emotions. She does not explicitly express her feelings about the failure of her marriage or the belonging of her children, but the helplessness and self-reproach in her eyes reflect that male power influences women's emotions and destinies through the invisible forces of economic dominance, the legal system, and social conventions. As Foucault (2008) argues, power does not only come through direct violence or oppression, but penetrates individual choices, emotions and behaviours in subtle ways. This silent emotion is the result of the implicit operation of power at the individual level.
Emotional action as the embodiment of power does not only include the emotional outworking of women's oppression, but the role of power can also be seen in the emotional flow of vulnerable men. In the film *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), Liangzi, as a coal miner, is a vulnerable male in the social power structure. He likes Shen, but Shen eventually chooses Zhang, which causes Liangzi to leave his hometown. Years later Liangzi chooses to return to his hometown after suffering from a terminal illness. As

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shown in Figure 3, the set of shots in the film about Liangzi being bedridden is not long, but it directly demonstrates Liangzi's predicament, both on the economic level and in his physical condition.

Figure 2: Shen's helpless expression

Source: Jia (2015)

Figure 3: Liangzi is sick in bed

Source: Jia (2015)

Showing Liangzi in bed due to his illness externalises the profound impact of economic power on an individual's life through affective action. Foucault (2019) argues that power acts on individuals through social institutions and economic structures, making their emotions and bodies a direct reflection of power. Liangzi is unable to afford treatment, and economic power deprives him of the ability to control his own life. Emotional movement here becomes a medium for power to manifest itself. Liangzi's powerless physical performance allows the audience to feel the oppression and influence of social power on the underclass men. In addition, Liangzi's affective performance is not an intense emotional outburst, but rather a manifestation of the depth of control of economic power through physical pain and emotional repression.

In summary, in the film *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), affectivity becomes an outward form of power exertion through close-ups and facial expressions. Through Shen's facial expressions and the visual presentation of Liang's current situation, the film reveals how patriarchal, masculine and economic power affects individuals' choices and emotional experiences through implicit control. The presentation of these affective movements not only shows the oppressive nature of power, but also allows the audience

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to intuitively perceive the dynamic mechanism of power operating through emotions. At this point, affect is both the result of oppression and the medium through which power operates. Through the reinforcement of visual language, the film makes the repression, conflict and silent resistance of emotion visible, and lays the foundation for this paper to continue exploring the various forms of interaction between emotion and power.

4.2. Affect and the physicalised manifestation of power

Affect often materialises power in the form of corporealisation, showing how power is manifested at the individual level. According to Deleuze (2019b), affect has a trans-individual force of action, which reveals how an individual interacts with the external environment through bodily movements, gestures and spatial relations. Emotion, as a bodily sensation, is to some extent dependent on the body's mobility and to some extent continuously fluid. Therefore, in the film, the body is not only a carrier of emotion, but also a direct field for the pressure of power. Power transforms emotion from the implicit to the visible through the language of the body.

Clough (2008) states that the politics of affective movement lies in the ability to visualise power relations through bodily representations.The corporealised representation of affective movement in film narratives is also reinforced by the interaction between space and power. How the body occupies space, moves or is forced to reduce space reflects the power to oppress the individual. Thus, through the representation of the body, the audience can visualise the impact of power on individual behaviour and emotions.

In short, the physicalised representation of affect is an important medium for the operation of power in cinema, and it demonstrates how emotion can be used as a visual form of power through a combination of body language, spatial relations, and visual symbols.

The film *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015) contains numerous shots that show affective generation through body language and physical contact, and these shots further explain how power operates through physicalisation. During Zhang's efforts to pursue Shen at the beginning of the film, physical contact becomes an important way of displaying emotional outgrowth. As shown in Figure 4. In the dance scene of the New Year celebration, Zhang takes the initiative to put his hands on Shen's waist, through which Zhang is trying to bring the two of them closer, as well as concealing that Zhang belongs to the dominant person of power behind the physical action. As shown in Figure 5, a shot of Zhang teaching Shen how to drive a car, Zhang's action of putting his arms around Shen demonstrates the role of physical contact as a catalyst for emotion generation. These body movements not only reveal the externalised form of affective movement, but also show how the body becomes a field of interaction between power and emotion.

Spinoza (2016) states that the movement or stillness of one body is necessarily triggered by another. This idea directly correlates to the relationship between bodily interaction and the generation of affective movement. The generation of affective movement does not happen by chance or alone, but is triggered and generated through physical contact and collision between individuals. In the above footage, Zhang tries to establish an emotional connection with Shen through active physical actions, which not only generates emotional flow, but also implies Zhang's dominant power in the emotional relationship. This power relationship is reinforced through physical contact, further

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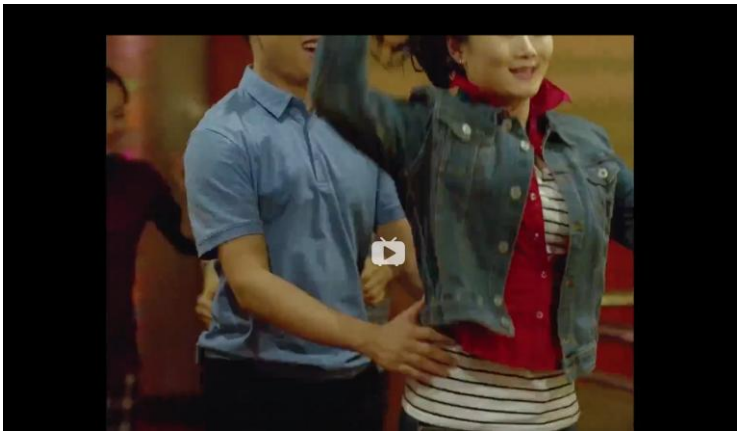
reflecting the fact that affective action is dependent on physical interaction for its generation.

Figure 4: Zhang puts his hands on Shen's waist



Source: Jia (2015)

Figure 5: Zhang wrapped his arms around Shen

Source: Jia (2015)

It is worth noting that interactions between bodies are not only a natural outpouring of emotion, but also an implicit manifestation of power. Massumi (2002) suggests that corporealised representations of affective action tend to show power relations through visualised movement symbols. In these scenes, Zhang's body language conveys how power shapes affective interactions through physical actions by touching and controlling spatial positions. Zhang's action of wrapping his arms around Shen as he teaches her how to drive has the surface meaning of helping, while the deeper meaning reflects his attempts to control the emotional relationship between the two of them through physical contact, as well as his attempts to wield dominant power in the midst of the emotional relationship. Thus, physical contact not only generates affective action, but also constitutes a direct expression of the power relationship in affective action.

In addition to physical contact that stimulates affective generation, the film *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015) repeatedly uses body movements and spatial relations to show the dominance of power. As shown in Figure 6, Zhang constantly makes the action of kicking things when facing Liang's provocation, and these actions are not only the outward form of emotional arousal, but also directly become affective generation. Through Zhang's physical expression, the film concretises Zhang's angry emotions and desire for control, embodying Zhang's attempt to take control of the emotional situation

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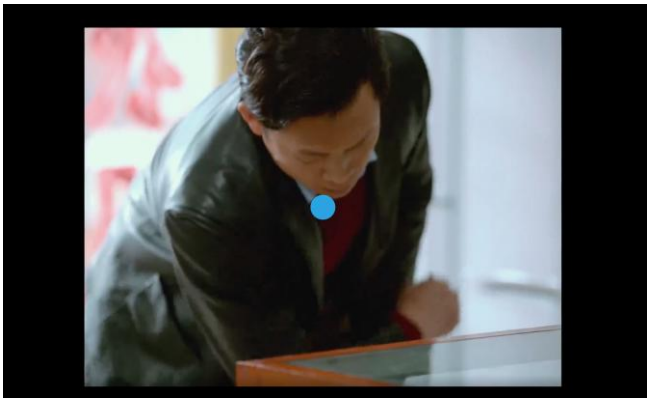
through body language. Therefore, this expression of affective movement reinforces Zhang's position as belonging to the dominant power in the emotional relationship.

Figure 6: Zhang is kicking something



Source: Jia (2015)

In addition, a set of shots of Zhang and his son Dollar, as shown in Figure 7, further demonstrates the role of affective movement in power relations. Although the two are physically far apart, Zhang expresses anger and resentment through exaggerated body movements, while his son remains stationary without any movement. This contrast in body language reflects the dominant-submissive relationship in the power structure. The physicalised representation of affective action often reinforces the power relationship through dynamic contrast. In this scene, Zhang's movement is not only an outward manifestation of affectivity, but also an important means of exerting his power in the father-son relationship. The son's stillness is not an absence of affective movement, but rather an expression of repressed emotion. This shot further shows power operating through body language.

Figure 7: Zhang's exaggerated body movements when confronted by Dollar

Source: Jia (2015)

Notably, these two sets of shots highlight the interaction between affective movement and spatial relations. Whether it is the close confrontation between Zhang and Liangzi or the long-distance interaction between Zhang and Dollar, the combination of bodily movement and spatial location becomes a visual symbol of the operation of power. Zhang's occupation of space and active imposition of movement through his body forms the centre of emotion and power, while Liangzi and Dollar's passive state reflects the one-way flow of power. This spatial asymmetry is an important embodiment of the way

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in which affective movement becomes the structure of power, and the viewer is able to intuitively feel the impact of power through the interaction of emotion and the body.

In short, these film scenes demonstrate that affective movement constructs a dominant manifestation of power through the expression of bodily movements and the scheduling of spatial relations. Whether it is Zhang's action of kicking something or the body language in the confrontation with Dollar, the generation of affective movement is not only the result of the flow of emotions, but also an important manifestation of the operation of power in affective relations. Through these bodily expressions of affective movement, the film reinforces the intertwined relationship between emotion and power, providing the audience with a more intuitive perception of the power structure.

In summary, in *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), affect is generated and externalised through the contact and collision between bodies. The scenes of Zhang's interaction with Shen demonstrate the dual role of the body as a carrier of emotions and a tool for the operation of power. Through the amplification of body language, the film reveals how emotions are expressed through physicality in power relations, providing the audience with a perspective to visualise the interaction between power and emotions.

4.3. Affect as a means of resistance and self-rescue

Affect, as a perception that transcends language, is an important tool for individuals to rebel against power constraints and pursue self-rescue. Ahmed (2014) argues that affective action, through its dynamic transmission, is able to stimulate individual and collective dissatisfaction with and questioning of the status quo, and to seek paths of emancipation through the externalisation and transformation of emotions. Emotional action is thus a social force with the ability to transcend individual limitations. The defiant nature of affective action is not only manifested in the release of emotions, but also in the reorientation of emotions and the construction of meaning (Markwica, 2018). There is a ritualised presentation of Shen's body in the film - dance. The first scene in the film is her dance with Zhang and Liangzi, etc. Dance is an ecstaticisation of the body, and it involves the liberation of the body subject. People in the dance generate emotion and identity by watching and touching each other's bodies. As shown in Figure 8, the second half of the film again features shots of Shen dancing.

Figure 8: Shen dancing in the snow

Source: Jia (2015)

By this time Shen is old and she dances alone in the snow. After Shen's divorce, although her family is urging her to remarry, she does not choose to place herself under male

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authority again. Therefore, the camera produces emotional action through dance as a form of resistance. At this point, however, Shen breaks through the oppression of her ego as well as the power structure and takes ownership of her body and will to be chosen for her power.

The generation of affective movement is always beyond the framework of language and reason, and in this openness lies the possibility of resistance (Córdova, 2024). Through affectivity, the individual is able to break with the established order and seek new identities of subjectivity and spaces of freedom at the emotional and physical levels. In *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), Zhang is very angry in the face of his love rival's pursuit of Shen. As shown in Figure 9, Chang purchases explosives in an attempt to blow up Liang. In the second half of the film, Chang purchases many guns. As shown in Figure 10, several guns are placed on the coffee table. In Chinese society, guns and explosives are subject to a strict control mechanism and no one is allowed to possess them illegally. Zhang easily obtained the guns and explosives, which he acquired through his male power and financial strength. And Zhang's purchase of these contraband items is a way for him to seek a breakthrough in his angry emotions. These emotional releases are externalised through the guns and explosives, and are important manifestations of Zhang's display of male power and economic power.

Figure 9: Zhang buys the explosives

Source: Jia (2015)

Figure 10: Guns on the coffee table

Source: Jia (2015)

In addition, the defiant nature of affect is reflected in its role as a catalyst for collective action. Hardt and Negri (2005) suggest that affect, as it flows between the individual and

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the collective, is able to form an affective community that converges individual emotions into a collective force of defiance. In the film *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), Shen's son Dollar meets Mia, a middle-aged divorced woman, and chooses to stay with Mia. They embrace as shown in Figure 11. In the context of Chinese culture, Dollar and Mia's love for each other is refuted by ethics and morality. But at this time Dollar is fed up with the repression and oppression of the patriarchal power, he longs to break free from the power, so he tries to communicate with the patriarchal power, but his father forcefully refutes his idea. Whilst Mia and her husband are divorced, her husband refuses to divide the property and ignores Mia's contribution to the marriage, believing that women are expected to give. It can be seen that Mia has lived under the oppression of male power for a long time, and her divorce can be seen as an attempt to break out of the power bondage, while her subsequent falling in love with Dollar is the reason for the dynamics of the two of them becoming a community of emotional fluidity in the face of the oppression of male power. Therefore, Dollar and Mia's falling in love is not only a simple generation of affective movement, but also an attempt by two individuals to rebel and break through the collective male power.

Figure 11: Dollar and Mia embracing each other

Source: Jia (2015)

In conclusion, in the film *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), the transformation of affect not only expresses the individual's emotional growth through the delicate details of the characters' performances, but also symbolises the new identity of subjectivity and the pursuit of freedom through the changes in the characters' relationship with their environment.

5. Conclusion

Through the study of the interaction between affect and power structures in *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), this paper finds that affect is not only a tool for the externalisation of individual emotions, but also an embodied means of power operation and social oppression. Through facial expressions, body language, spatial relations and emotional transformations in the film, affective action demonstrates how patriarchal, masculine and economic power implicitly affects the lives of individuals, while also revealing the potential for resistance and the possibility of self-rescue in the face of power oppression. These findings further suggest that affective action is a central narrative element in the film and an important tool for connecting individual emotions with power relations.

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Firstly, the erotic action is an embodiment of power, highlighting the individual's emotional struggle and dilemma of choice under the oppression of patriarchal, masculine and economic power. Secondly, the corporealised representation of affective action materialises power relations through physical contact, action confrontation and spatial occupation between characters. Thus, through the interaction of body and space, affective action can be an important medium for perceiving the inequality of power distribution. Finally, affective action as resistance and self-rescue demonstrates the individual's effort to break through the oppression of power through emotional release and transformation. This transformation of affective action shows that affective action is not only a passive result of the action of power, but can also be a key means for individuals to reconstruct their subjectivity.

This study is significant for the application of affective theory in cinematography. Through the multidimensional analysis of affective action, this paper reveals its unique value as a tool for the operation of power and provides new ideas for affective action research. At the same time, this paper deepens the understanding of Jia's work, especially how it intertwines personal emotions with social power through affective action, providing audiences with a more profound political and social perception. However, this paper mainly focuses on the specific analysis of the film *Mountains May Depart* (Jia, 2015), and does not address the study of the integration of other film texts. Therefore, future research could further explore the interaction and significance of affective action in cinema by incorporating other film texts as well as the audience's emotional responses.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study did not involve human participants, therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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