

## *Research on Chinese Art Film Screening*

Zhixia Mo, Shenzhen University, China

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2019  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

In China, commercial cinema is the mainstream screening channel. Unlike the United States, Europe, and Japan, China lacks independent art film distribution and screening channels. Compared with big productions, art movies are not so popular, and the time and space of screening are often limited. At present, the viewing of Chinese art films presents a variety of appearances. First, the Art Filming Alliance was established, and through the establishment of cooperation with commercial cinemas, it opened a fixed scene and a movie theatre in the cinema. Second, domestic and international film festivals and film exhibitions offer opportunities to display works. Third, the streaming media platform provides network screening. Fourth, the film screening platform helps fans to watch art films. Fifth, the folk screening organization is moving, but the official department regulates it. A variety of artistic screening forms a unique cultural atmosphere. This paper intends to sort out the current Chinese art film screening methods, discuss how local art film screenings survive under the film system, marketization and globalization; the relationship between official regulation and the distribution of art films; and the construction of art film screening space.

Keywords: art film, art theatre, Chinese film

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## **Introduction**

When the popcorn-style entertainment and family style of commercial movies attract the public, the art film is famous for its more realistic social status and more in-depth humanistic care, highlighting its unique characteristics. In the world, commercial films and art films differ in the channels of screening. In general, mainstream cinemas usually show newly released films, while independent cinemas will arrange movie curation, classic re-enactment, long-term testing, etc. so that some unique styles of the film can meet the audience who pay attention to them. The screening methods of art films in the world, such as in the United States, France, and Japan, have art theatres that are distinguished from commercial cinemas, providing enough space for art film screenings to avoid the shortage of distribution funds and compact filming cycles. The audience missed. Although Chinese art films have initially established an art film screening alliance, their operations rely mainly on the enthusiasm of cinema managers, and they have not been able to manage the proportion of screen-screening art films efficiently. On the contrary, through the convenience of the Internet, private independent film curators have organized and established movie theatres and separate art film screening spaces through the activities of art films. While thinking about the texts and society expressed in art, literature, and film, they wandered on the edge of official film screening rules, providing power for independent film screenings and underground screenings.

## **Current Status of Chinese Art Film Screenings**

At present, China's mainstream film screening channels are in commercial cinemas, lacking independent art theatres. But the venues that accommodate the movie screening space are diverse. An art screening space with a background in public culture. For example, China's most famous art film space is the China Film Archive in Beijing. It is based on the China Academy of Art and has an extensive collection of old film collections. It is rich in daily platters, and movies are held every Monday to Saturday. Lin Li, student fans, young white-collar workers, low fares.

The official screening agency has an art film screening alliance established in 2016. There are also art capitalization agencies for market capitalization. For example, the art cinema line represented by Broadway Film Center, relying on the resources of Hong Kong Broadway Film Center and Angle Group, introduced the theme film exhibitions such as the re-enactment of Hong Kong films and the cooperation with the consulate.

There are two Broadway Film Centers in mainland China, located in Beijing and Shenzhen. Other Broadway cinemas in mainland China are based on regular commercial screenings. Commercial cinemas and art theatres parallel the Broadway Film Center's business model. The commercial cinema screens the newly released movies to meet the public's viewing needs. At the same time, the art theatre line is integrated into curatorial activities and art discussions to create a film culture atmosphere. Not only do commercial and art films work together, but the Broadway Film Center also creates an artistically acclaimed movie viewing space. It sets up the Kubrick Bookstore, which sells books, cultural products, and drinks related to film. The bookstore has a small screening space, often planning film lectures, and some art screenings.

More spontaneous film screening organizations are spread across cities. These film organizations are produced in colleges of interest, or bookstores in cities, or various social movie clubs. Such as Ladybug Image, an independent film screening organization, it cooperates with volunteers, obtains the authorization of the director, uses the mode of public welfare screening, establishes base areas in different cities, and then publishes messages in channels such as Douban.com and WeChat open account. Attract people's attention and watching. The art films screened by such films focus on the marginal figures of society or focus on the research issues of film art and culture at home and abroad.

With the use of social media in China more prevalent, the WeChat public account, WeChat group and Douban platform have become the gathering place for such fans of art film screenings. These platforms publish news about art films, which are shown in bookstores, university movie theatres, or community spaces, not in cinemas. Because, in current China, if a movie wants to be displayed in a movie theatre, it must go through a film censorship system. There are no touches on the topic and the lens, sensitive lenses such as eroticism, smoking, etc.

This kind of art film comes from independent film creators. They pay attention to the bottom of society, have rebellious characteristics, and even present a repressed atmosphere, intent to trigger the audience to think deeply about life. Such films may be used in film festivals. When they don't have permission to show, they can only cooperate with such film curators to help them publish news, recruit viewers, and explain in places such as bookstores and independent auditoriums.

Independent curators and fan groups establish more art film screenings. They are rooted in various cities. Through the curators, they can access the film screening resources. The fans participate in the activities organized by the curators and form a regional viewing atmosphere. This mode of viewing guided by independent curators is not only concentrated in first-tier cities, but scattered in the fascination of various prefecture-level cities, and based on the independence and scarcity of the role of curators. The distribution of such fascinating organizations is random. Such as Chongqing's Lily Zhou Guanying Group, Wuhan's pants sister viewing group, Shenzhen's beautiful venues.

### **The Art Film Screening Alliance: Extensive Coverage, the Low Screen Utilization Rate**

On October 15, 2016, the National Art Filming Exhibition Alliance was established in Changchun, which marked the official establishment of China's first art cinema alliance. The first batch of 100 movie theatres joined the coalition. They are distributed in more than 50 cities in 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government. These cities include first-tier cities such as Beijing Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and provincial capitals of provinces and independent territories. These cities include some economically developed second- and third-tier cities in the north, which will guarantee at least three art films per day, and at least ten gold screenings per week. The movie of the Art Film Screening Alliance will also break through the narrow range of art films, with international award-winning new works, Chinese and foreign film history classics, and some types of movies with artistic breakthroughs and high artistic quality as the

primary source.

The National Art Film Alliance is a domestically recognized art film screening channel supported by an official background. Since its inception three years ago, the Film Show Alliance has given a space for art films to grow through fixed screens. In recent years, it has gradually introduced good movies, and there is a fixed screening space in the cooperative theatre, which complements the coverage of art films in various cities. However, in terms of current operations, after joining the alliance, the overall situation is still self-restraint, and there is no mandatory supervision. Some theatres will face the pressure of screening and business operations, and they will have to reduce the screening screens of art films. In the third- and fourth-tier cities, the audience of art films is very few, the effect is not known, and the operation status is difficult to supervise.

The National Art Film Federation also organizes fans to conduct movie viewing by establishing curators in the region. It cooperates with the Taobao ticket to develop a screening discussion platform for the City of Aiyi. However, the time for the release of its movie line is unstable, so the time for organizing events is also precarious. Faced with a wide range of commercial films, especially in the first-tier cities, the audience's weekend viewing activities are active. Still, the choice of viewing movies is extensive, and the art film screening alliance sometimes uses free viewing to promote art movies.

### **The Dot-Casting Platform: the Fire of the Stars, Difficult to Poke**

In recent years, the dot-casting platform has been escorted by the crowdfunding and the screening of art films. The elephant initiated this model, and the filmmakers obtained the film copyright. Through crowdfunding promoters, through crowdfunding, they convened a movie that was interested in the film. Crowdfunding needs to plan the number of people in the package to ensure that the film has sufficient attendance. Otherwise, the crowdfunding will fail, and the ticket will be returned. At present, Elephant Point reflects the stability of the audience by introducing award-winning films and establishing a regional fascination. However, because this crowdfunding method requires crowdfunding promoters to have sufficient network resources, the success rate of crowdfunding will increase when they are placed in multiple cultures and movie friends in the region. However, because crowdfunding requires relay, and this way can initiate the originator of the relay area, the network has hidden high requirements, even if the amount of crowdfunding has been reduced from 80 to 100, to 30. Fifty people, but many crowdfunding promoters have difficulty gathering a steady stream of audiences after one or two activities. Therefore, it is challenging to initiate actions and give up repeatedly.

At present, although elephants have also set up regional viewing fans in various regions, each group has official operators of elephants. The message sent every day is mainly the sharing of movie content. Some cities lack the curators of active organization activities and require the operations of long-term organizations. Therefore, the discussion of group members, the enthusiasm of participation in activities is slowly decreasing, the passion for continuous debate is lacking, and the links between the members are not close, starting with elephants. The slogan of the social media platform is reflected.

The new speed of the film resources is slow, and the content copyright of the library is also a problem that the platform is currently facing. The elephants are the mainstay of the release of art films, which are mainly divided into unique spots and advanced spots. Elephants are used as a distribution platform to cooperate with the film and watch them through the film. However, in the November 2019 data, the total number of movies in the library was less than forty. Most of the productions are domestic films, and there is only one foreign language movie. At the same time, the critical period of such cinema is more extended than the regular screening of cinemas. According to the truth, people can record at any time and watch them at any time. Faced with the continuous release of movies in the cinema, the unstable update time of the platform, limited movie selection, it can only become a kind of hobby and choice for people.

### **The Film Festival: the Window of Attention for Art Movies**

The film festival is a new film, and the young director offers opportunities for film selection and fame. In mainland China, the famous film festival is the Beijing International Film Festival, the Shanghai International Film Festival, and the Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film Festival. The festival includes film screenings, film forums, venture capital units and film selection. The audience can find good works in the recent film festival, where the trading of the film sets up a platform.

More attention to young directors is the First Youth Film Show, which is a film festival service platform dedicated to discovering and promoting young filmmakers and their works. The theme of the film exhibition is more independent, and the content idea is a pioneer, attracting attention. For example, *Four Springs* and *August* have gained an excellent reputation. These films have not yet obtained domestic film screening licenses and are therefore not screened through cinemas. However, the ongoing screening activities allow the filmmakers to collaborate with the screening spaces of various cities, usually in schools or independent cinemas, to create different screening atmospheres. Sometimes, the director will also participate in the exhibition and discuss the audience by organizing a meeting. I also take this opportunity to let the audience help spread word of mouth and publicize the film in the theatre. However, the Chinese film censorship system still plays a vital role in the regulation of film content. In the initiative screenings held between the cities, the films of the First Youth Film Festival were not licensed for screening and were also controlled by the local propaganda department. For example, in the activities of Shenzhen First Active Screening in 2019, the selection was arranged at the school from the beginning, and it has cooperated with a local film curator, and finally realized in a screening space. Due to the periodicity of the screening, different films participated in the filming. After the news was heard, the regulatory authorities went to search and tried to terminate the activity.

At present, art films have different styles of presentations and content, forming the characteristics of distinguishing commercial films. Art films are also often well-received, but the distribution space is small. Film energy allows them to judge and gain more exposure in public, so they can continue to explore the possibility of distribution. However, more domestic film festivals are set up in different cities. In terms of form, the film festival has the space for screening and discussion. However,

through the film festival, it is also a significant way to improve the cultural image of the city and increase its popularity is also the primary purpose.

### **Folk Screening Organizations: Regional Curators Have Distinct Functions**

The folk screening organization is still the leading force for the current Chinese art screening. Such screening organizations usually contact online, contact, and watch together in the form of fan groups.

In general, the folk screening organization is initiated by individuals and will be held in bookstores, cafes, and private cinemas. The number of screening organizations is related to the current level of cultural activities in the region. The screening organizations in the first and second-tier cities will be more productive. For example, first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen have more cultural and artistic activities and a healthy cultural atmosphere. A group of young people gathered here, they are keen to participate in cultural activities, some of them are fans, and they have become the audience of art films. However, in the broader regions of China, there are third- and fourth-tier cities, cultural activities are relatively lacking, and young people's consumption tastes prefer pop culture. The niche, art film culture is therefore tricky to popular, it is difficult to form a fan base, and folk screening organizations are more difficult to organize.

In the folk screening organizations between cities, it is usually arranged by curators to organize activities. Curators use generally the role of film screening resources. They are experienced fans who have watched movies for many years. They have a large number of readings, accumulated in literature and art discussions, and are also fans of movies. At the same time, they have the networking resources of the film and television industry and can communicate with regional film festivals, film distributors and even film directors. Sometimes you can get some opportunities and resources for film viewing, organize a director's meeting, or contact the producer to get the copyright for an independent screening. When the curator's activities are continuous and exciting, they will continue to attract new viewing groups in different activities or friends' introductions. Gradually, the viewing group becomes stable. The group affirms the curator's selection style and taste, and they are willing to follow the curator to watch the movie.

Of course, at present, China's film copyright system is still not perfect, and film resources can be easily obtained on the website, and it has become a film resource for folk screening organizations. One type of curator has a fixed screening space and has accumulated his own pirated video library for many years. They will recruit viewers to watch movies in a membership-based manner. The fare is 30 to 50 yuan, which is similar to that of cinemas. Membership films will also have discounts during the event. This type of viewing is generally a set of theme curation, such as the Japan Film Festival, the Women's Film Festival, or the director's theme exhibition. One type of curator collaborates with screening spaces such as theatres or bookstores to select new and exciting movies with a good reputation. Through the curators, fans are satisfied with such film. Of course, you will also encounter the immature creations of new directors or dark themes, but fans rarely greet the voices and always share the strengths of the film from different angles.

Fans participate in such viewing activities not only because they watch movies, but also when they gather for a group of people to taste coffee, tea, and snacks. After watching the video, communication is the critical activity. Usually, the curator leads and raises the topic. The fans discuss the plot of the movie and put forward their thoughts on the aesthetics and life issues involved in the film. Over time, fans have become familiar with each other and even come together to watch movies together.

The films of folk screening organizations are different from the screenings of commercial cinemas. Movies premiered at the festival and films directed by independent filmmakers can be seen here. Some art films involving marginal topics, and even independent film meets, can be organized here. However, the flaws of the folk screening organization are also in the viewing experience. Traditionally, commercial cinemas have completely enclosed environments, comfortable seats, professional projections and screens, and sound. The pleasant viewing experience also makes it easy for people to enjoy the movie in full immersion. However, folk screening organizations are mostly scattered in the corners of bookstores or cafes, or projection rooms with projectors. Although these devices can also watch movies, they are far from the cinema in terms of quality of viewing. Sometimes there will be a movie accident. For example, because the hard disk directly plays the computer, the computer runs out of memory, and some of the sound and picture are not uniform. Even the need to re-screen, these are not going to be experienced by the cinema. In recent years, private cinemas have also worked hard to improve audio-visual equipment to mimic the cinematic experience of real cinemas. One of the reasons is that fans generally believe that watching movies in a movie theatre has a sense of ritual, rather than watching it on a computer or mobile phone screen.

Also, WeChat has become a necessary social tool for people, and WeChat group has become a platform for curators and fans to communicate. Usually, the curator will set up a viewing group in his name. Some curators will organize their independent viewing groups according to different activities. In the group, they enthusiastically discuss the newly released movies and the news of the film industry, including the award-winning films of various film festivals, or share the stories of filmmakers.

Movies that are not available in China are more attractive to them. Although this type of film cannot be introduced to China, it can be released in Hong Kong or Macau. Some fans will go to Hong Kong or Macau to watch the movie. Especially in the international film festival, the group can get high-definition photos of the film festival through the industry. The group often communicates with each other. Everyone sees valuable movie reviews on the Internet. Movie messages, viewing messages, and resources are all willing to share in the group. When such groups are spread out in cities, fans are not confined to one group. They travel around the community of different curators, film events are usually organized on weekends, and they even need to face the difficulty of choosing to decide which movie to watch.

## **Conclusion**

Although there is no independent art cinema in Chinese art film screenings, its screening space is diverse, forming a cultural atmosphere different from commercial films. Including the official National Art Film Screening Alliance and the introduction of the Hong Kong Broadway Film Culture Center. Folk screening

organizations are also diversified, and the role of curators is becoming more and more apparent. In social media, there are even channels for publishing various independently displayed information. Sometimes, the content of the art screening is a pioneer, and there is a rebellious feeling about social phenomenon. The topic is on the verge of film censorship. However, its unique style, the formation of viewing, discussion space and commercial theatre parallel, become a unique aspect of popular culture.

At present, the Chinese film grading system has not yet been established, and the construction of art cinemas nationwide lacks a historical basis. Therefore, it is impossible to copy the advanced experience of the world to develop more independent screening spaces, such as the art theatre model of the United States, France, and Japan. For a long time to come, the art film screening space will remain diverse but unstable. Although these sporadic art exhibiting organizations cannot form a force to compete with mainstream commercial cinemas and business culture, they provide a variety of viewing options for local audiences and create a unique cultural atmosphere.

### **Acknowledgements**

The paper was supported by the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Project of Country Garden-Shenzhen University. Project number 000002-14.



## Reference

- Yang L. The Formation of Chinese Art Cinema: 1990-2003[M]. Springer, 2018.  
Chinese film festivals: sites of translation[M]. Springer, 2017.  
Edwards D. Independent Chinese Documentary[M]. Edinburgh University Press, 2015.
- 李大伟,施昕怡.探讨中国艺术电影市场的发展策略——以《地球最后的夜晚》为例[J].中国电影市场,2019(07):38-44.
- 高越.合作与坚守——关于新时代中国艺术放映运营策略的思考[J].中国电影市场,2019(05):28-31.
- 高越.中国艺术电影与艺术影院现状评述及关系研究[J].电影评介,2019(08):5-9.  
邹希望. 国内艺术影院探究：关于“艺术体制”论的一次实践[D].厦门大学,2018.  
孙向辉,江志强,路伟,孙丹妮.全国艺术电影放映联盟:从构想到实践[J].当代电影,2018(02):4-10.
- 刘思羽. 中国艺术电影放映的发展历程与文化诉求[A]. .影博·影响（2017年第02期 总第110期）[C].:中国电影博物馆,2017:4.
- 苏焱. 在探索中前行——“全国艺术电影放映联盟”项目负责人汪艺岚访谈[A]. .影博·影响（2017年第02期 总第110期）[C].:中国电影博物馆,2017:3.
- 刘思羽. 百年中国影院史论[D].中国艺术研究院,2012.

**Contact email:**szumozhixia@163.com