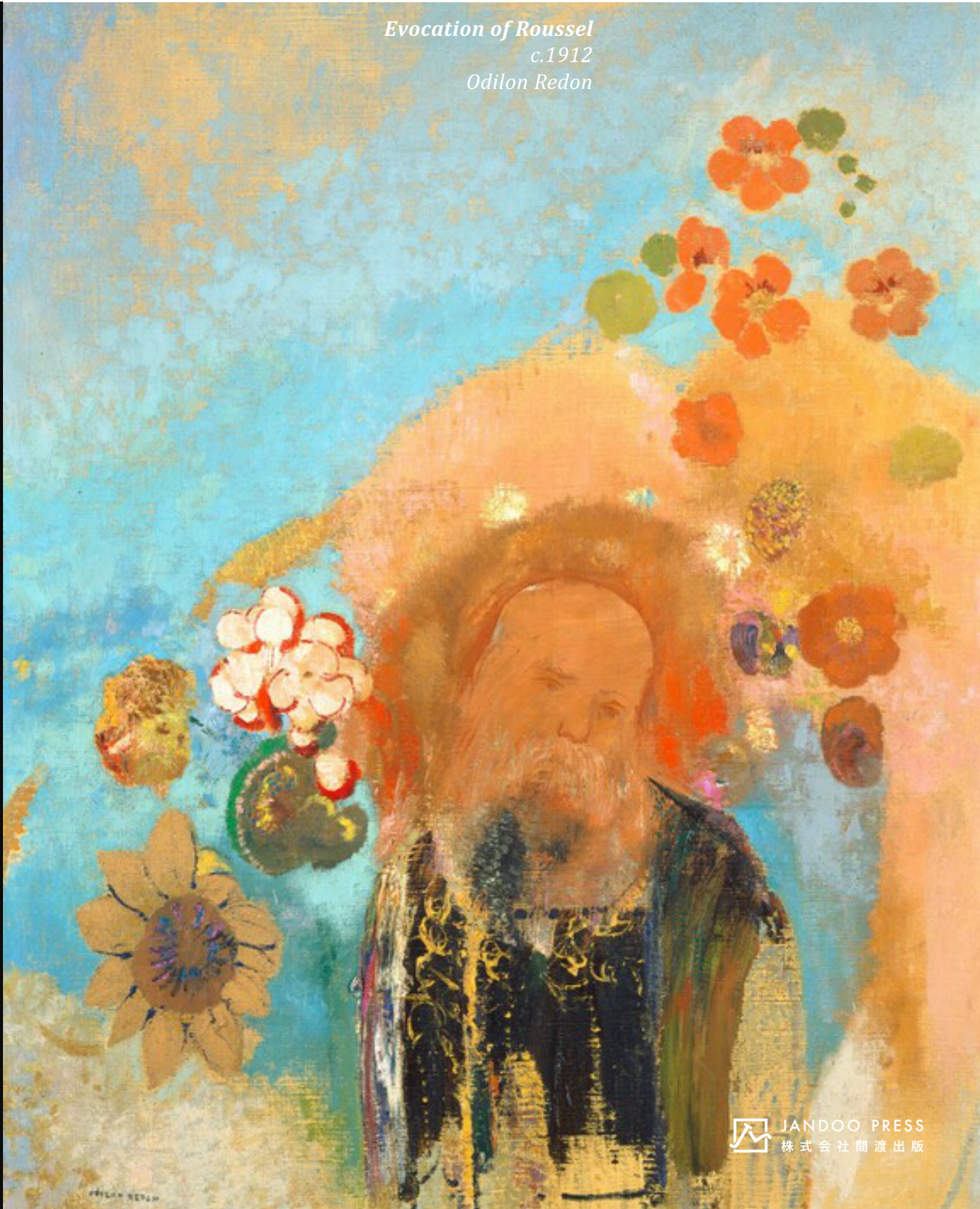


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Contents

1	Research article The Narrative Style, Aesthetic Principles, and Exploration of National Identity in the Films of Majid Majidi Bingtao Xu
7	Research article "A Feast for the Five Senses" and "The Hollowing Out of Meaning": Aesthetic Alienation and Paths to Redemption in AI Micro-Short Dramas Yixuan Li, Meirong Feng, Weijian Huang

The Narrative Style, Aesthetic Principles, and Exploration of National Identity in the Films of Majid Majidi

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Abstract: Majid Majidi is a prominent figure among the third generation of Iranian filmmakers, whose children's cinema holds significant influence within global film circles. His works are renowned for adopting a child-centric perspective, exhibiting strong realist undertones, and manifesting deep humanistic care. Employing case studies and comparative analysis, this paper investigates the narrative style, aesthetic tenets, and national ethos within Majidi's films, while synthesizing their broader implications for the creation of national and children's cinema against the backdrop of globalization. First, by utilizing a narrative mode characterized by both simplicity and depth, Majidi's films successfully depict the tight-knit connection between individual destiny and social reality, thereby offering the audience a space for profound reflection. Second, the convergence of documentarian realism and poetic expression constitutes the core of Majidi's cinematic aesthetics, allowing the films to transcend mere socio-political observation and attain a heightened artistic allure. Finally, by rendering a multidimensional tapestry of national culture, Majidi conveys the spiritual essence of the Iranian nation, showcasing the rich connotations inherent in its cultural heritage.

Keywords: Majid Majidi; Narrative style; Aesthetic tenets; National identity; Children's cinema

Introduction

Majid Majidi is one of the most renowned contemporary Iranian film directors. Infused with a profound solicitude for children, his works have earned him the moniker "the father of Iranian children's cinema" [1]. In 1998, his film *Children of Heaven* was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and grossed nearly one million US dollars at the box office in the United States. This milestone marked the first time an Iranian film achieved an Oscar nomination, while simultaneously setting a box office record for Iranian cinema at the time [2]. Following *Children of Heaven*, his subsequent feature, *The Color of Paradise* (1999), generated 1.7 million dollars at the US box office, further consolidating his status within the global cinematic hierarchy. Since the turn of the new century, Majidi has remained steadfastly dedicated to the care and representation of children, successfully directing films such as *The Willow Tree* (2005), *The Song of Sparrows* (2008), *Beyond the Clouds* (2017), and *Sun Children* (2020). These films not only focus on the lived

experiences of children but also probe the deeper strata of human nature, garnering widespread recognition and acclaim in the international film arena.

Majidi's films frequently place ordinary, unexceptional children from daily life at the nexus of the narrative, utilizing their vantage points to unveil the socioeconomic realities of the lower echelons of Iranian society, while consistently manifesting the subtle and delicate emotional bonds between individuals. Eschewing Hollywood-style massive budgets and grand spectacles, his cinema employs a pure, rustic narrative approach and cinematic language to demonstrate the inner purity and benevolence of children. In characterizing Majidi's cinematic style, one can synthesize it as emphasizing minimalist production, low-cost investment, a focus on micro-level subject matter, and the delineation of ordinary personas. These elements of "the mundane and ordinary" converge to generate a profoundly moving "transcendent affect" within his films. In terms of narrative configuration, aesthetic tenets, and the exploration of nationality, Majidi's unique insights and masterful execution offer vital rev-

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elations and reference values for contemporary children's film production.

A Narrative Style Harmonizing Simplicity and Depth

Grand narratives are rarely found in the films of Majid Majidi; instead, the director exhibits a heightened focus on the material realities of the lower socioeconomic classes and the lived experiences of individual, sentient subjects. By training his lens primarily on these perceptible, concrete lives, Majidi manifests a fundamental humanistic concern through this focused observation. Simplicity constitutes a defining characteristic of Majidi's cinematic narratives. However, this simplicity is by no means simplistic; rather, it is a product of meticulous refinement that excises superfluous plots and redundant details, thereby rendering the story more compact and lucid. Against the backdrop of escalating cinematic commercialization, Majidi steadfastly adheres to his creative principles and upholds the artistic distinctiveness of indigenous cinema. Textually, this is manifested in his strict adherence to the classical dramatic principle of the "three unities"—the unfolding of a single action within a unified timeframe and geographic locale. Furthermore, his plots eschew secondary digressions, uniformly adopting linear narrative structures while rejecting mutated spatio-temporal treatments such as non-linear, cross-cutting, or multi-perspective temporal disruptions. In his cinema, audiences are not required to exert cognitive effort deciphering convoluted plotlines; instead, they are permitted direct access to the core of the narrative, facilitating immediate empathy with the characters.

The storytelling techniques employed in short stories, novels, dramas, or films typically rely on a robust dramatic structure—that is, the artistically logical arrangement of plot components designed to achieve optimal emotional, intellectual, or dramatic effects. Within his minimalist narrative frameworks, Majid Majidi skillfully constructs an inherent plot tension. Taking *The Willow Tree* as an example, although the film utilizes a single-threaded narrative, the plot is far from monotonous; the story of the blind professor, Youssef, manifests a unique internal conflict. Having been blind for 49 years, a successful surgery restores his sight, which, paradoxically, poses a novel challenge. Plunged into a world of light, Youssef experiences disorientation and isolation; he begins to question his self-worth and even attempts to evade reality. Ostensibly, the compelling nature of Majidi's cinema does not derive from tumultuous plot twists or thrilling spectacles, but rather from the textual tension generated through the conflicts within the characters' inner worlds. Furthermore, the simplicity of Majidi's cinematic narrative is exemplified by his ingenious utilization of open endings. Closed, traditional happy endings are rarely seen in his oeuvre. Conversely, the director prefers to suspend resolution at the film's denouement, leaving room for audience reflection and imagination, thereby prompting spectators to construct a reality beyond the screen. At the conclusion of *Beyond the Clouds*, after enduring numerous trials and

tribulations, Aamir chooses not to flee, but instead resolves to stay and confront his responsibilities. However, the film eschews a definitive resolution, concluding instead in an open-ended format. The final shot captures Aamir standing on a railway platform with his back to the camera, gazing into the distance; as the train slowly recedes from view, the narrative continues to extend within the imagination of the audience.

Despite the structural simplicity of Majid Majidi's plotlines, his films frequently embody profound philosophical underpinnings and rich emotional resonance. As Majidi once remarked, "I am particularly interested in the world of children. My own childhood serves as the fountainhead of my creative ideas; I, too, experienced a childhood akin to that of the 'children of heaven'... Innocence is the most captivating attribute of the child's world." Positioning children at the nexus of his cinematic narratives is neither a pursuit of novelty nor a vehicle for didactic moralizing. Rather, Majidi's films adopt a serene and objective vantage point to illustrate children's struggles in the face of adversity and their steadfast pursuit of their dreams. Through a narrative mode that is poignant yet fundamentally hopeful, his cinema illuminates the warmth and benevolence inherent within the world of childhood.

Benevolent intentions and virtuous deeds facilitate a transformative process within the characters' souls, marking a transition from concealment to unconcealment (disclosure)—a persistent leitmotif embedded throughout Majid Majidi's entire narrative corpus [3]. Through his nuanced delineation of characters' inner worlds, Majidi prompts the audience to engage in profound reflection regarding human nature, society, and culture. In *Baran*, upon discovering that Baran's true identity is that of a woman trapped in precarious circumstances, Lateef unhesitatingly exerts every effort to extend a helping hand. Similarly, Maimar possesses a benevolent disposition; despite facing his own financial constraints, he remains willing to offer monetary assistance to Lateef. Furthermore, when Najaf finds himself unable to return to Afghanistan, he chooses to entrust his compatriot Soltan with the money to visit his wife, thereby demonstrating that Najaf likewise harbors a deeply compassionate heart. "Goodness" constitutes a value pursuit at the ethical dimension of artistic creation. While artistic creation reflects life through the lens of aesthetic realism, it simultaneously encompasses a moral scrutiny and ethical judgment of the world, life, and humanity itself—the standard of which is defined by "goodness" [4]. The *Song of Sparrows* delineates a young boy's relentless struggle to sustain his household amidst severe adversity. Throughout the film, whether confronted with the crushing weight of subsistence or subjected to various setbacks and challenges, the protagonist consistently maintains a serene disposition to accept and navigate his reality. The film serves not merely as an authentic depiction of the living conditions of the lower socioeconomic strata in Iranian society, but also, at a deeper level, maps the optimistic and open-minded philosophy toward life upheld by the Iranian people, thereby transmitting an emotionally

resonant chord that transcends cultural boundaries.

Furthermore, the director ingeniously employs symbolism and metaphor, imbuing the superficial narrative of his films with deeper strata of meaning that await discovery by the audience. Moving from the vast rural fields in *Children of Heaven* to the bustling urban streets in *The Willow Tree*, and further to the fluid shuttling between rural and urban spaces in *The Song of Sparrows*, Majid Majidi's cinema is consistently permeated by a profound lamentation over the loss of innocence amidst the process of urbanization. *The Song of Sparrows* aims to re-establish a forgotten, rustic innocence from within the family—the fundamental unit of society. In the film, seemingly inconspicuous elements such as goldfish, ostriches, and sparrows carry symbolic weight as avatars of bygone innocence. Goldfish swimming in a tank symbolize the carefree childhood of the youth; the sprinting of the ostrich represents the flight of freedom and dreams; while the chirping of the sparrows serves as the most melodious music of those uncomplicated days. Rather than functioning merely as narrative props, they represent the director's collective nostalgia for the past and his reminiscence of an uncarved, natural, and pristine world. However, as the film reveals, these beautiful symbols depart from us one after another. Through these symbolic elements, the director conveys anxieties regarding the erosion of childhood innocence within contemporary society. Similarly, in *Sun Children*, Majidi masterfully utilizes object-based metaphors to convey the deeper connotations of the film through rich symbolic meanings. The mine serves as a pivotal setting in the film; it is not merely a physical space, but also a metaphor representing the lowest echelons of society and its forgotten corners. The children's labor within the mine reflects their marginalized status in society and their yearning to alter their destinies. Together, these symbolic and metaphorical elements—the sun, the mine, and water—constitute the film's profound humanistic concern and social critique, which precisely forms the core intellectual value of *Sun Children*.

An Aesthetic Proposition Fusing Documentarian Realism and Poetic Expression

Throughout the history and developmental trajectory of Iranian children's cinema, a documentarian aesthetic style has consistently remained a vital principle upheld by Iranian directors. In particular, the evolution of the Iranian New Wave film movement rendered this documentarian aesthetic sensibility, at one point, the most favored mode of expression among Iranian children's filmmakers. This shared aesthetic inclination originates, on one hand, from Eastern poetic aesthetics, and on the other, from local Iranian religious culture and national psychology. Within Majid Majidi's filmography, one can discern these common aesthetic sensibilities characteristic of Iranian children's cinema. The cumulative overlay of these shared aesthetic preferences has en-

dowed Iranian children's cinema with branded communication characteristics. This branded dissemination serves both as a hallmark distilled from the collective aesthetic traits of Iranian children's films and as a crucial pathway for generating the brand equity of Iranian cinema. It is precisely because Iranian filmmakers continuously inherit and evolve this specific aesthetic disposition that Iranian children's cinema consistently leaves audiences with a distinct impression of documentarian stylistic realism.

Majid Majidi adheres to the documentarian aesthetic paradigms of world cinema and synthesizes them with Iranian history and culture, thereby forging a unique visual expression that captures the rustic realities of Iranian life. The reality depicted in his films is not a simplistic mimesis of daily life; rather, it is infused with profound humanistic reflection, constructing a more emotionally compelling, artistic reality. These aesthetic characteristics distinguish his oeuvre from Hollywood genre films, forming a unique cinematic texture. André Bazin, the founder of long-take theory, posited that "the objectivity of photography confers on the image a quality of credibility absent from any painting" [5]. In stark contrast to the dizzying special effects and convoluted editing techniques prevalent in Hollywood cinema, Majidi's films ubiquitously employ documentarian shooting techniques, improvisational performances by non-professional actors, continuous long takes, and scene capture under natural light conditions, thereby presenting authentic life settings and raw, unadorned natural landscapes.

The deployment of the long take is highly ubiquitous within Majid Majidi's cinematic corpus. As an ontological language of cinema, the long take preserves the spatio-temporal integrity of events throughout their duration, functioning as the cinematic idiom closest to objective reality. Harnessing this ontological language, Majidi integrates ancient Persian civilization and the authentic features of contemporary life into the poetic milieus constructed by the long take, thereby delineating the subtle emotional shifts within his characters' psyches. In *The Color of Paradise*, as young Mohammad plays alone in the forest, the camera fluidly tracks him, elucidating his interaction with nature and his unique sensory perception of the world. Throughout the film, running motifs reappear frequently, captured mostly through smooth, continuous long takes. Utilizing an aesthetic approach akin to traditional *baimiao* (line-drawing technique), the director masterfully intertwines his philosophical inquiries with Iranian folklore and customs within a single, continuous shot, thereby evoking a deep emotional resonance among indigenous spectators. Majidi is also adept at utilizing muted, somber color palettes, typically exemplified in films such as *Baran* (2001) and *The Willow Tree*. In these works, whether depicting urban, rural, or desert topographies, the landscapes are enveloped in a soft layer of gray, stripping away the vibrant hues and flamboyant luster habitual to modern commercial cinema. This somber tonal palette harmonizes with and reinforces the melancholic atmosphere of the narrative itself, enabling the audience to perceive the tragic destinies of the protagonists more acutely.

Furthermore, Majidi demonstrates a signature style in his sonic design, frequently employing lyrical music to intensify the depiction of his characters' internal emotional states. The score in *The Color of Paradise* is thoroughly infused with a poetic sensibility; particularly when delineating the young protagonist Mohammad's perception of the world and his communion with nature, the lyrical music not only accentuates the aesthetic beauty of the visual imagery but also profoundly articulates the rich emotional interiority of the child protagonist.

The films of Majid Majidi are also renowned for their distinctive poetic aesthetics. Through a poetic visual grammar and profound emotional expression, he interrogates the interior world of children and their psychological growth amidst adversity. In *The Color of Paradise*, Majidi trains his lens on the inner world of a blind boy. Employing sophisticated narrative techniques, he delves deep into the psyche of a child who must rely solely on sound and touch to perceive the universe, composing an ode to the vital force and resilience inherent in children's lives. The film adopts a serene and objective vantage point, meticulously portraying the children's steadfastness in the face of hardship and their tenacious pursuit of their aspirations. Although the overarching tone of the film reveals a subtle melancholy, every shimmering ray of hope within it allows the audience to sense the tenacity of life and an inextinguishable optimism. *The Color of Paradise* artfully unfolds the poetry and tenderness within the world of childhood, presenting a profoundly moving aesthetic beauty. Furthermore, existentialist philosophical thought runs as a central thread throughout Majidi's cinematic corpus, profoundly revealing the essence and meaning of human existence. Taking *The Willow Tree* as an example, the protagonist's exploration of life following his loss of sight serves not only as a deep reflection on personal circumstance but also as a profound inquiry into the broader meaning of human existence. Through the protagonist's internal monologues and his interactions with the surrounding milieu, the film delicately delineates his profound meditations on freedom, choice, and responsibility. This exploration of the individual's position within the vast universe imbues the film with a profound existentialist poetry, prompting audiences to reflect upon their own existence and the meaning of life during the viewing experience.

While Majid Majidi's cinema is highly esteemed for its lyrical tone and aesthetic depth, beneath these poetic visuals lies a profound critique of social injustice and class disparities. Baran delineates the arduous life of an Afghan refugee girl in Iran and her unexpected, profound bond with a young Iranian man. Through his unique vantage point, Majidi interrogates critical issues such as gender equality and the refugee crisis. In the film, Baran struggles for survival on the fringes of Iranian society; her presence serves as a silent scream, unveiling the plights and challenges encountered by displaced refugee populations. By exposing the indifference and prejudice directed toward vulnerable groups by society, the film calls attention to systemic injustices, transmitting a deep solicitation for equality, respect, and humanitarianism.

Similarly, in *Beyond the Clouds*, Majidi employs a nuanced visual grammar to sketch a portrait of life among slum dwellers, providing comprehensive representation to those marginalized faces and neglected voices. This socio-political critique constitutes another vital dimension of his cinematic poetic aesthetics, imbuing his films with intellectual depth and topical relevance that extend beyond mere artistic beauty. Ultimately, Majidi's films function not only as visual and emotional feasts but also as a solemn invocation of social conscience and moral responsibility. His cinema compels audiences to confront the injustices and disparities embedded within society, thereby stimulating a yearning and pursuit for a more just and egalitarian social order.

A Multidimensional Rendering of the National Cultural Tapestry

In *The Philosophy of Art*, Hippolyte Taine posits that race, epoch, and environment constitute the three primordial elements that influence art. The impact of the racial factor on art is manifested not only within content and form but also within a profound aesthetic rhythm [6]. It is precisely because a unique race possesses a distinct art that different races frequently engender divergent spiritual connotations and artistic temperaments. Historically, Iran gave rise to the once-prosperous Persian Empire, which commanded one of the world's most expansive territories, nearly encompassing three centers of ancient civilization: the Tigris-Euphrates, Indus, and Nile river valleys. As an ancient civilization, Iran not only possesses a proud legacy of Persian civilization but has also preserved the Persian language and its cultural characteristics [7]. It is precisely the glory of ancient Persian culture and the Islamic faith that have shaped the steadfast, sincere, and benevolent national character of the Iranian people.

Any art form, once severed from the socio-historical and cultural soil that engenders its vitality, will inevitably lose its rich palette, becoming pale, hollow, and ultimately reduced to a vacuous existence. Cinema, as an artistic medium that synthesizes narrative and documentation, is even more deeply rooted within the humanistic terrain that nurtures its development. In *Children of Heaven*, Ali, whose sole intention is to win the third-place prize to secure a new pair of sneakers for his younger sister, accidentally clinches the championship. Enveloped in a sense of despondency, he gently removes his severely worn shoes and submerges his blistered feet into a clear pond. Subsequently, a school of vibrantly colored goldfish slowly swims over, gently nibbling at his toes. This scene was a deliberate cinematic choice by director Majid Majidi, seizing an opportunity to showcase Iranian customs and culture to the world. In an interview, he noted: "The goldfish is a vital element in Iranian culture, symbolizing life and vitality. During the Iranian New Year rituals, we always arrange the Haft-sin table, and one of the essential components is the goldfish. Incorporating the goldfish into the film is a way to embody this beautiful wish."

What the director seeks to articulate in this film is precisely his conceptualization of heaven: heaven is nothing other than a spiritual state that preserves purity and beauty even when confronted with adversity—a realization that constitutes the profound depth of the film. Furthermore, in *Baran*, Majidi interrogates critical issues such as gender equality and the refugee crisis. These themes function not only as a direct depiction of contemporary Iranian social realities but also as a manifestation of the inclusivity, compassion, and humanitarian spirit inherent within Iranian culture. The film is deeply embedded within Iranian history and culture, serving as a profound encapsulation of the director's philosophy regarding cultural inheritance and humanistic concern.

Majid Majidi's cinema not only profoundly delineates Iranian social realities but also ingeniously integrates indigenous cultural elements. For instance, Islam advocates the philosophical concept of the *Wasat* (the "Middle Way"), which requires individuals to utilize moderation as a foundational point of departure for all actions, striving to construct a just, equitable, and peaceful social environment while pursuing a state of tolerance and harmonious coexistence [8]. In *The Song of Sparrows*, this philosophical tenet is masterfully translated into cinematic grammar, as the director intertwines Karim's narrative with Iranian social reality and national culture. After enduring the tribulations of deception and theft, Karim ultimately returns to benevolent intent, receiving a spiritual recompense through his virtuous deeds. This karmic cycle of goodness begetting goodness maps the values of justice and equity championed by the "Middle Way" ideology. Moreover, the film repeatedly captures moments of Karim's devout prayer alongside his demonstrations of friendliness and tolerance toward others, thereby reflecting the propagation of Islamic doctrines concerning faith, benevolence, and forgiveness. Similarly, in *Children of Heaven*, while the family of four sits gathered at home working, the father requests his young daughter to pass him some sugar cubes. The daughter unthinkingly points to the sugar directly beside the father's hand, only for the father to solemnly correct her: "This sugar belongs to the mosque; we are merely keeping it in temporary safekeeping." In another instance, when the father recites scriptures at home, this man—who appears as unyielding as iron in daily life—breaks down and weeps disconsolately like a child. These nuanced narrative details profoundly unveil the Iranian people's devout faith in Islam and their steadfast devotion to Allah.

As a medium of cultural transmission, cinema serves as a vital indexical marker of a nation's existence within the civilized world. The value of Iranian children's cinema lies in its ability to masterfully integrate into the international cinematic arena through its distinctive national characteristics, thereby imbuing world cinema with a unique palette. The fundamental reason underpinning the robust vitality of Iranian children's cinema is its creative ideology and conceptual framework rooted in indigenous consciousness, drawing momentum from its own national culture. This primal dynamism frequently and delicately permeates the films,

manifesting through narratives saturated with humanistic solicitude and cultural perspectives that observe the local milieu. Precisely in order to remain embedded within the soil of national reality and attract a broader domestic audience, Majid Majidi focuses on the world of the child, utilizing the child's vantage point to refract the adult world, thereby providing enlightenment and impact. In *The Willow Tree*, Majidi employs the innocent perspective of children to demonstrate the pivotal role of education in personal growth and social transformation. While appreciating the film, audiences not only perceive the power of education but are also prompted to reflect upon their own developmental trajectories and social responsibilities. Similarly, *Children of Heaven* interrogates the relationship between the individual and society through a child-centric gaze. Via the children's experiences, Majidi unveils the structural inequalities and competition inherent within the adult world, while simultaneously reflecting fundamental human emotional needs through the children's pure sentiments and simple desires. The adversities experienced by the children in these films function, in actuality, as a microcosm of society at large, through which Majidi instigates broader socio-political discourses.

The success of Majid Majidi demonstrates that national cinema can still achieve prominence within the global cinematic arena, while simultaneously reaffirming the axiom that "what is national is universal." Under the sweeping tide of globalized communication, the trend toward cultural homogenization has become increasingly pronounced; Hollywood cinema, along with its embedded ideologies, has inundated the global film market, constructing a distinct and pervasive Hollywood cultural landscape and phenomenon. Against this backdrop, Majidi has successfully navigated a novel trajectory for cinematic creation—one that preserves the unique allure of indigenous culture while adroitly accommodating the aesthetic demands of international audiences. Furthermore, due to divergences in culture and religious faith, the alternative ways in which identical human dilemmas are resolved in his work serve to amplify international spectators' exoticizing curiosity and sense of anticipation regarding Iran. It is precisely this interplay of familiarity and alterity (strangeness) that allows Iranian children's cinema to preserve and defend its nationality in form, while exhibiting internationalism and universality in terms of thematic selection and content. Majidi's cinematic trajectory represents both a resistance against cultural monoculture and a fervent endorsement of cultural diversity. By virtue of their idiosyncratic artistic style and profound humanistic solicitude, his films demonstrate that cinematic art capable of transcending cultural boundaries can achieve magnificent brilliance, thereby contributing invaluable weight to the rich, pluralistic development of global cinematic art.

Conclusion

Within the international film arena, Majid Majidi has garnered widespread respect and acclaim from global audi-

ences by virtue of his unique narrative artistry and profound aesthetic pursuits. His films serve not only as a microcosm of Iranian cinematic culture but have also injected renewed vitality into the advancement of Iran's film industry. On a narrative level, Majidi's films present complex emotions and intellectual thoughts through a concise yet meaningful approach. He masterfully weaves these elements into clear, coherent plotlines, ensuring that each work embodies profound metaphors concerning human nature and society. On an aesthetic level, Majidi successfully synthesizes documentarian realism with poetic romanticism, forging a distinctive audio-visual grammar. Through nuanced visual language and poetic compositions, his cinema not only elevates its own artistic value but also enables the audience to achieve a deep emotional resonance within their visual experience. On a cultural level, Majidi's filmography functions as a rich tapestry of national culture, delineating Iranian history, heritage, and daily life from multiple perspectives. Through his focused observation on the lived experiences of ordinary individuals, he showcases the diversity and complexity of Iranian society, transmitting profound social insight and humanistic care. Overall, Majidi's creative output constitutes not only a precious asset to Iranian cinematic art but also an indispensable component of world cinema culture. Through his unique narrative configurations and aesthetic endeavors, he has influenced global audiences and demonstrated an enduring pursuit of humanity, love, and hope through his profound thematic inquiries. Ultimately, Majidi's films have not only added intellectual depth to Iranian culture but have

also made significant contributions to the diversification and enrichment of global cinematic culture.

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"A Feast for the Five Senses" and "The Hollowing Out of Meaning": Aesthetic Alienation and Paths to Redemption in AI Micro-Short Dramas

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Abstract: Iterative innovations in generative artificial intelligence have propelled AI micro-short dramas into a new form of online art, completely rewriting the production models, aesthetic forms, and reception mechanisms of traditional audiovisual content. Distinct from the traditional film and television aesthetic paradigm of “narrative-driven, emotion-empowered” storytelling, AI micro-shorts rely on algorithmic parameter tuning to construct a comprehensive, immersive “sensory carnival” aesthetic experience. By leveraging a new aesthetic reception contract based on the premise of “accepting the fake as fake,” they cater to the demands of audiences in the age of fragmentation for imaginative consumption and emotional compensation. However, behind the dividends of technological empowerment, the industry is gradually revealing significant issues of aesthetic alienation. Sensory revelry obscures narrative depth, and algorithmic production erodes humanistic substance, ultimately creating a developmental dilemma characterized by “excessive atmosphere and hollowed-out meaning.” Based on existing research on AI micro-short dramas and integrating the logic of human-machine collaborative production, the aesthetics of atmosphere, and reception contract theory, systematically analyzes the generative logic of the five-sense carnival in AI micro-short dramas, elucidates the diverse manifestations and underlying mechanisms of their aesthetic alienation, and explores pathways for the value redemption of a virtuous symbiosis between technology and art from four dimensions: technological correction, content enrichment, audience cultivation, and industry regulation. This study provides theoretical references and practical guidance for the high-quality and sustainable development of AI micro-short dramas.

Keywords: AI micro-short dramas; Sensory extravaganza; Atmospheric production; Aesthetic alienation; Hollowing out of meaning; Value redemption

With the widespread adoption of multimodal generative models such as Sora, Keling AI, and Midjourney, artificial intelligence has fully entered the field of audiovisual content production, giving rise to a new form of online cultural content: AI-generated micro-short dramas. In recent years, China's micro-short drama industry has experienced rapid growth. By 2024, the market size exceeded 50.5 billion yuan, with a user base of 576 million—accounting for more than half of all internet users in the country. Among these, 58 works were planned with AI involvement, and 16 were released throughout the year, demonstrating that AI technol-

ogy has become the core driving force behind the industry's evolution and upgrading. From CCTV's fully AI-produced series *Chinese Myths* and *AI Reads Classical Texts*, to the phenomenon-level independent creation *Huo Qubing*, and on to commercial hits like *The Nine-Tailed Fox Demon Falls for Me* and *Mysteries of the Xing'an Mountains*, AI micro-short dramas have achieved comprehensive implementation across technological experimentation, cultural dissemination, and commercial monetization, forming a diverse and symbiotic industry ecosystem involving government agencies, platforms, and individual creators.

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Existing academic research has explored AI micro-short dramas from multiple dimensions: some studies focus on the logic of human-machine collaborative production, elucidating the industrialized, assembly-line-style content generation model of AI micro-short dramas; others examine industrial aesthetics and narrative innovation, analyzing their fragmented narratives and the visual spectacle-dominated narrative characteristics; while other studies, starting from atmosphere production and aesthetic contracts, reveal the new aesthetic paradigm of AI micro-short dramas characterized by “sensory-heavy, narrative-light” content. At the same time, some research addresses compliance risks, cultural translation challenges, and developmental shortcomings in the AI micro-short drama industry. Overall, existing research fully acknowledges the empowering value of AI technology for the micro-short drama industry, yet it rarely systematically analyzes the aesthetic alienation issues underlying the technological frenzy. There is a lack of comprehensive, systematic academic examination of the binary opposition between “sensory revelry” and “hollowing out of meaning,” as well as their generative mechanisms and paths to redemption.

Unlike the aesthetic system of traditional film and television, which centers on narrative and humanistic values, AI micro-short dramas rely on algorithmic parametric modulation of visual, auditory, and spatial elements to create a comprehensive, immersive experience engaging all five senses, thereby reconstructing the audience’s mode of aesthetic reception. At the same time, the industrial logic of algorithmic mass production, the traffic-driven market orientation, and the “assumed-to-be-false” aesthetic reception contract have led to widespread issues within the industry, including superficial narratives, the reduction of culture to symbols, the instrumentalization of emotions, and the hollowing out of values. This has created an aesthetic alienation dilemma characterized by extreme sensory abundance and extreme spiritual poverty. Based on this, this paper draws upon existing research and, supported by theories of aesthetic alienation, atmospheric aesthetics, and reception aesthetics, elucidates the generative logic behind the sensory extravaganza of AI micro-shorts. It analyzes the specific manifestations and underlying causes of their aesthetic alienation, ultimately constructing a value-redemption system tailored to the industry’s development to help AI micro-shorts achieve a healthy balance between technological empowerment and humanistic integrity.

Atmosphere Creation: The Aesthetic Logic Behind the “Carnival of the Five Senses” in AI-Generated Micro-Dramas

Traditional film and television aesthetics center on linear storytelling, evoking emotional resonance in audiences through complete plot structures, nuanced character development, and profound expressions of values. The resulting aesthetic experience is characterized by gradual progression

and deep immersion. AI micro-shorts, however, have completely overturned this traditional paradigm. Leveraging the parametric modulation capabilities of AI algorithms, they construct a comprehensive atmosphere encompassing visual, auditory, and spatial dimensions. By dismantling the centrality of narrative, they have formed an aesthetic form centered on sensory stimulation—a “Carnival of the Five Senses”—and established a brand-new system of atmospheric aesthetics for the intelligent era.

Multimodal parameter modulation: The technological foundation of the “Carnival of The Five Senses”

According to existing literature, the atmosphere production in AI micro-shorts is not a random visual assemblage, but rather a standardized, parameterized algorithmic process. By quantifying and encoding aesthetic elements such as color, lighting, composition, sound effects, speech rate, and spatial rhythm, AI models precisely stimulate the audience’s senses to construct an immersive emotional field. On the visual level, AI can achieve style adaptation based on the type of subject matter: for traditional culture themes, it uses classical color schemes such as dark gold and dark blue, combined with an overhead composition and a telephoto lens to create an atmosphere of solemnity and grandeur in the Eastern aesthetic style; for comedy and fantasy themes, it employs highly saturated candy colors and shallow depth-of-field close-ups to create a light-hearted and absurd visual effect; The suspense genre creates a sense of tension through tilted compositions and simulated camera shake. This formulaic design of visual parameters allows AI micro-shorts to rapidly adapt to different aesthetic contexts, ensuring the precise realization of visual atmospheres.

On the auditory level, AI enables comprehensive algorithmic orchestration of background music, sound effects, and voice acting. Leveraging intelligent music generation models like MusicGen, AI can match orchestral or electronic music styles in real-time based on the script. It also innovatively employs a dual sound effect mechanism of “super-sound” and “silence,” using unnatural special effects and strategic audio pauses at key moments to amplify emotional tension. Furthermore, AI voice technology simulates human breathing rhythms and intonation pauses to shape distinct character personalities, adding depth to the auditory experience. Empowered by dual visual and auditory algorithms, this approach breaks away from the single-sensory stimulation model of traditional short videos, delivering a multi-sensory, synergistic aesthetic experience.

On the spatial level, AI micro-dramas have achieved an aesthetic shift toward “space transcending narrative.” While traditional film and television center on plot progression, with space serving merely as a narrative backdrop, AI micro-dramas de-emphasize linear narrative logic. Instead, they regulate spatial rhythm through the frequency of camera cuts and the density of visual symbols, using spatial atmosphere to dominate the overall aesthetic experience. Simulta-

neously, AI enables the “visualization of thought,” directly transforming abstract human psychological processes and absurd imaginings into visual imagery. This breaks through the expressive boundaries of traditional film and television, further enriching the dimensions of the sensory experience.

Infinite supply and re-tribalization: The aesthetic effects of a sensory extravaganza

The generative nature of AI technology enables an infinite supply of atmospheric aesthetics—a core advantage that traditional film and television cannot match. Traditional productions rely on fixed libraries of scenes, sound effects, and visual elements, imposing inherent creative limitations. In contrast, the “element factory” constructed by AI can draw upon a vast array of aesthetic elements vertically and dynamically assemble and combine them horizontally. This allows for the continuous output of homogeneous, high-density sensory atmospheres, satisfying audiences’ unceasing demand for entertainment.

Building on this, AI micro-shorts have fostered a collective aesthetic effect of a “sensory carnival,” facilitating the “re-tribalization” of audiences. In the fragmented media landscape, audiences exist in an atomized state; yet, through high-intensity, immersive multisensory stimulation, AI micro-shorts create a shared emotional space, uniting scattered individual viewers into a temporary aesthetic community. By experiencing a unified atmosphere, audiences find emotional resonance and achieve a “brief escape” from the pressures of reality. This immediate, high-intensity sensory pleasure has become the core advantage that enables AI micro-shorts to rapidly captivate the masses.

“Assuming it is false”: The prerequisite for an aesthetic experience that delights The Five Senses

In contrast to the traditional aesthetic contract of “assuming it is true” in literature and art, AI micro-shorts have established a new logic of reception based on “assuming it is false,” thereby providing the necessary foundation for an aesthetic paradigm that delights the five senses. Traditional film and television require plot logic to be internally consistent and emotions to be authentic and believable; audiences suspend their real-world skepticism to enter the fictional world of the work and achieve a profound aesthetic experience. In contrast, audiences of AI micro-shorts can clearly identify technical flaws in AI-generated content—including stiff facial expressions, audio-visual misalignment, illogical plots, and distorted cultural symbols—yet they actively set aside rational scrutiny and tolerate these technical imperfections. With a mindset of “suspending thought to focus on the senses,” they exchange critical thinking for immediate emotional gratification. This new aesthetic contract completely dissolves the constraints of real-world logic on creation, allowing AI to pile up sensory elements to the extreme, ultimately forming an aesthetic form of a “five-sense carnival” that prioritizes atmosphere over meaning.

Aesthetic Alienation: The Hollowing Out of Meaning Behind the “Carnival of the Five Senses” in AI Micro-Series

Aesthetic alienation is the inevitable result of the excessive expansion of technological rationality. The Frankfurt School’s theory of the culture industry argues that industrialized, standardized cultural production erodes art’s originality, humanism, and criticality, leading to the loss of the essence of aesthetics. While AI micro-shorts leverage algorithms to achieve the ultimate in sensory aesthetics, they have also fallen into the alienation trap of the culture industry: the superficial aesthetic experience of the “five-sense carnival” continues to expand, while narrative depth, cultural connotations, humanistic emotions, and value-based reflection remain consistently absent. This ultimately results in a comprehensive hollowing out of meaning, manifested specifically across four dimensions: perceptual alienation, narrative alienation, reception alienation, and cultural alienation.

Aesthetic perceptual alienation: Sensory overload and an abnormally elevated aesthetic threshold

The sensory extravaganza of AI micro-shorts is essentially high-intensity, high-density algorithmic sensory stimulation; prolonged immersive exposure directly leads to the alienation of the audience’s aesthetic perception. To compete for fragmented attention, AI micro-shorts commonly employ a creative model characterized by rapid camera cuts, highly saturated visual impacts, and intense rhythmic sound effects, continuously subjecting the audience’s senses to high-intensity stimulation. This extreme sensory overload constantly raises the audience’s aesthetic threshold, fostering a habit of aesthetic tolerance.

Today’s audiences are increasingly unable to adapt to the aesthetic forms of traditional film and television—characterized by slow pacing, ample negative space, and deep narratives. They have lost patience for subtle, nuanced, and profound artistic works, seeking only immediate, explicit, and high-intensity sensory gratification. At the same time, the aesthetic fatigue resulting from sensory overload has progressively dulled the audience’s ability to perceive beauty, leaving them unable to grasp the subtle aesthetic details, emotional depth, and humanistic significance within artistic works. Aesthetics have thus been reduced from “spiritual nourishment” to mere “sensory entertainment.” This alienation of perception has directly led to the superficialization and utilitarianization of the public’s aesthetic tastes, undermining a diverse and healthy public aesthetic ecosystem.

Narrative aesthetic alienation: The retreat of narrative and the dissolution of artistic depth

According to the industrial aesthetics narrative theory of AI micro-short dramas, the AI-generated point-based production model has completely overturned the linear narrative structure of traditional film and television, creating a

narrative divide where “visual interpretation replaces plot-driven storytelling.” Under the aesthetic orientation of a sensory extravaganza, AI micro-short dramas generally suffer from a complete retreat of narrative; plot logic, character development, and dramatic conflict are no longer the core of creation, while visual spectacles and atmospheric rendering have become the main focus of content.

Examining existing examples, whether it be the nonsensical and absurd plot of *«The Nine-Tailed Fox Demon Falls for Me»* or the spectacle-driven presentation of certain AI short dramas in the *«Classic of Mountains and Seas»* series, all suffer from fragmented plots, logical disconnects, and formulaic storytelling. AI relies on algorithmic templates to mass-produce content, resulting in highly homogenized plots that often depend on “plot twists for thrills” and “fantastical spectacles” to create highlights, while lacking a complete story structure and character development arcs. At the same time, to compensate for these narrative gaps, most AI micro-shorts over-rely on voice-over narration to tie the plot together, further weakening the artistry and emotional impact of the storytelling.

This narrative alienation has caused AI micro-shorts to completely lose the profound artistic core of film and television. Traditional film and television use narrative to reflect social reality, explore the essence of human nature, and convey values, whereas AI micro-shorts remain confined to superficial atmospheric displays. The plot becomes a mere appendage to a sensory orgy, and the works lose their artistic depth and substance, resulting in a hollow dilemma characterized by “visually stunning yet substantively empty” content.

Aesthetic reception alienation: Absence of critical thinking and the loss of aesthetic subjectivity

The aesthetic contract of “suspending disbelief,” while liberating the audience’s freedom to be entertained, has caused a profound alienation in their aesthetic reception. This is primarily manifested in the atrophy of rational critical thinking and the loss of aesthetic agency. Traditional artistic appreciation is an active process of meaning-making; audiences engage in aesthetic reflection and spiritual elevation by interpreting plots, analyzing characters, and comprehending deeper meanings, demonstrating strong initiative and critical thinking. In contrast, audiences of AI-generated micro-shorts voluntarily abandon rational thinking during the aesthetic process, passively accepting the works’ logical flaws and technical imperfections while pursuing solely emotional compensation and sensory pleasure.

Prolonged “mindless” aesthetic consumption fosters mental inertia among audiences, causing critical thinking and logical reasoning abilities to steadily deteriorate, and gradually eroding their capacity for in-depth interpretation of literary and artistic works. At the same time, algorithmic recommendation systems precisely feed audiences homogenized content based on their preferences, constructing a closed “aesthetic echo chamber.” By remaining immersed in

the sensory comfort zone of their own preferences for extended periods, audiences lose opportunities to engage with diverse aesthetics and values, leading to narrowed cognition and a rigid worldview.

More importantly, the audience’s aesthetic judgment is increasingly dominated by algorithms. Rather than forming independent judgments based on personal aesthetic experience and artistic understanding, they passively accept “high-quality content” as defined by algorithms, becoming mere tools for algorithmic emotional consumption and completely forfeiting their aesthetic agency. This alienation of reception confines the aesthetic value of AI micro-shorts to the superficial sensory level, failing to provide spiritual nourishment or elevation.

Cultural and aesthetic alienation: Symbolic collage and the dissolution of traditional cultural spirit

AI micro-shorts created based on traditional cultural IPs serve as important vehicles for cultural “innovation and creation.” However, under an aesthetic orientation focused on sensory stimulation, most works have fallen into the alienating dilemma of cultural symbolization and superficial collage, leading to the dissolution of the spiritual core of traditional culture. According to existing literature, AI’s interpretation of traditional culture relies on algorithmic element extraction and template matching, which can only replicate the external visual symbols of cultural relics, mythical beasts, and classical scenes, without comprehending the historical context, humanistic spirit, or aesthetic significance of traditional culture.

Currently, a large number of AI-generated micro-dramas on traditional culture blindly pursue Eastern aesthetic spectacles and visual atmospheres, simply splicing together cultural symbols such as mythical beasts from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, classical architecture, and traditional attire, while neglecting the spiritual essence behind the myths, legends, and classical texts. To cater to entertainment-oriented aesthetics, some works arbitrarily deconstruct traditional culture and distort historical allusions, transforming solemn cultural traditions into vulgar and absurd entertainment material. For example, certain AI-generated *«Classic of Mountains and Seas»* short dramas excessively pursue sensational visual effects, thereby diluting the core spirit of traditional culture—which includes patriotism, reverence for nature, and the pursuit of self-improvement—ultimately reducing the dissemination of traditional culture to a mere “traffic gimmick.”

This cultural and aesthetic alienation not only fails to achieve the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional culture but also leads to a distorted public perception of it. It reduces traditional culture to a mere appendage of algorithmic entertainment, trapping it in a vicious cycle where “the more it is disseminated, the more superficial it becomes.”

The Underlying Mechanisms Behind the Aesthetic Alienation in AI-Generated Micro-Series

The aesthetic alienation in AI-generated micro-series—characterized by a “sensory frenzy” and “hollowed-out meaning”—is not a random phenomenon caused by a single factor. Rather, it is the inevitable result of the interplay between three mechanisms: technological logic, market logic, and reception logic. It represents an industry paradox in which technological rationality excessively overrides artistic rationality.

Technological logic: Algorithmic industrial production eroding artistic originality

The human-machine collaborative production model of AI micro-shorts is, at its core, a standardized, assembly-line industrial production logic—the technological root cause of aesthetic alienation. Traditional film and television production involves the personalized emotional expression and artistic creation of artists, possessing unique originality and human warmth. In contrast, AI creation relies on training with massive amounts of data; by using algorithms to fit existing aesthetic templates and plot patterns, it generates standardized content in bulk, inherently suffering from homogenization and formulaic flaws.

At the same time, current AI technology has inherent limitations; it cannot simulate complex human emotional experiences, life insights, or humanistic reflections. It can only handle technical, superficial creative tasks such as visual and auditory elements, making it difficult to support deep narratives and meaningful expression. To mask its narrative and emotional shortcomings, AI creation can only play to its strengths and downplay its weaknesses, exaggerating visual atmosphere and sensory appeal to the extreme, thereby fostering a creative inertia that prioritizes form over content. Furthermore, AI’s piecemeal production model disrupts the linear logic and cohesive structure of film and television narratives, naturally aligning with a fragmented, superficial aesthetic. This fundamentally determines the hollow nature of AI-generated micro-shorts from a technical standpoint.

Market logic: The “Traffic-First” approach fuels a superficial entertainment ecosystem

A market orientation prioritizing traffic and monetization is the core driver of this aesthetic distortion. AI micro-shorts possess commercial advantages of low cost, rapid production, and high virality; their total production costs are only one-sixteenth of those of traditional film and television, enabling rapid mass production and monetization of traffic. Driven by capital and traffic, most creators have abandoned the pursuit of high-quality production, prioritizing short-term profits and opting for superficial content that is easy for audiences to consume, highly stimulating, and has a high traffic-to-revenue conversion rate.

The algorithmic distribution mechanisms of short-video platforms have further exacerbated this chaos. With view counts, completion rates, and engagement rates as core metrics, platforms are forcing creators to abandon deep narratives and humanistic expression, compelling them to focus on creating highly stimulating, fast-paced, and accessible sensory content. High-quality, in-depth content struggles to gain algorithmic support due to its slow pace and high interpretive barriers, while formulaic, spectacle-driven superficial content continues to dominate the screen. This ultimately creates an industry ecosystem where “bad money drives out good,” causing the problem of aesthetic alienation to intensify.

The logic of acceptance: Compensatory emotional consumption weakens the demand for deep aesthetics

The transformation of audience aesthetic needs in the era of fragmented media forms the foundation for aesthetic alienation. Today’s Gen Z audience faces immense pressure in both life and work, shifting the core demand of media consumption from “spiritual elevation and aesthetic nourishment” to “emotional catharsis and stress relief,” thereby establishing imagination-driven consumption and compensatory emotional consumption as central needs. The multi-sensory extravaganza created by AI-generated micro-shorts can rapidly provide audiences with an immediate emotional high, filling the emotional void in their real lives.

At the same time, the aesthetic contract of “accepting the fake as fake” further amplifies superficial aesthetic demands. Audiences actively forgo deep critical thinking, trading tolerance for technical flaws and relaxed logical standards in exchange for fleeting entertainment. This passive aesthetic choice, in turn, forces creators to continuously intensify sensory stimulation while diluting content depth, creating a vicious cycle of “audience demand—creator production—platform distribution.” Ultimately, this solidifies the alienated aesthetic paradigm of AI micro-shorts: a sensory orgy devoid of meaning.

The Symbiosis of Technology and Art: A Path to Redemption for AI-Generated Micro-Series

The aesthetic alienation of AI-generated micro-series is not, at its core, an inherent flaw of the technology itself, but rather a developmental deviation caused by the combined effects of technological abuse, market disorder, and aesthetic imbalance. The value that AI technology brings to the film and television industry—including cost reduction, efficiency gains, creative equality, and cultural empowerment—is irreplaceable. The core of industry development does not lie in rejecting technology, but rather in regulating technological rationality and returning to the essence of art. Through multidimensional approaches, we must correct aesthetic deviations and achieve value redemption, thereby building a vir-

tuous development ecosystem that is technology-empowered and humanistic at its core.

Correcting technological deviations: Building a human-centered human-machine collaborative creation system

The primary path to resolving aesthetic alienation is to reshape the boundaries of human-machine collaborative creation, ensuring that technology serves art rather than dominating it. The industry must establish a clear division of labor where humans lead creativity and AI handles execution, thereby fundamentally transforming the distorted model of algorithm-driven creation. Creators must exercise their initiative to delve deeply into scriptwriting, character development, narrative structure, and value expression, while maintaining control over the humanistic core and artistic depth of their works; AI should only undertake repetitive, technical tasks such as scene generation, post-rendering, editing and voice-over, and multilingual adaptation, thereby addressing the efficiency shortcomings of traditional creation.

At the same time, AI algorithm models must be continuously optimized by embedding humanistic aesthetics and cultural norms to correct the algorithmic flaws of homogenization and formulaic production. By building knowledge graphs of traditional culture and databases of artistic aesthetics, AI can accurately replicate the spiritual essence of traditional culture and the connotations of Eastern aesthetics, avoiding superficial collages and arbitrary deconstructions of cultural symbols. Furthermore, an AI content generation evaluation system can be established, incorporating narrative integrity, cultural authenticity, and positive values into assessment criteria to prevent aesthetic alienation at the technical source.

Deepening content: Balancing atmospheric aesthetics with narrative depth and humanistic value

To address the core challenge of hollowed-out meaning, creators must abandon a “sensory-only, traffic-only” mindset, uphold the principle that “content is king,” and achieve an organic balance between atmospheric aesthetics, narrative depth, and humanistic value. On one hand, retain the aesthetic strengths of AI-generated atmospheres by leveraging multimodal technologies to create high-quality audiovisual experiences that align with contemporary audiences’ aesthetic preferences; on the other hand, they must reconstruct linear narrative logic, refine plot structures, character arcs, and conflicts, and break free from the narrative pitfalls of fragmentation and formulaic storytelling.

In terms of cultural expression, AI-generated micro-shorts based on traditional culture must uphold cultural autonomy, delve deeply into the spiritual essence of myths, allusions, and classical texts, and achieve a modern and innovative reinterpretation of traditional culture, avoiding its reduction to mere symbols or its deconstruction for entertain-

ment’s sake. Science fiction and fantasy works must move beyond mere spectacle and incorporate humanistic reflection, social issues, and contemporary values, ensuring that visual spectacle serves the expression of the plot and the transmission of values. At the same time, the industry must vigorously support the creation of works based on real-life themes, mainstream themes, and literary and artistic themes to enrich the content ecosystem, break the deadlock of thematic homogenization, and drive the transformation of AI micro-shorts from “sensory entertainment” to “spiritual empowerment.”

Audience cultivation: Reshaping the public’s rational aesthetic sense and critical thinking

The return of audience aesthetic agency is key to overcoming aesthetic alienation and achieving value redemption. Platforms and the industry must assume responsibility for aesthetic guidance, break out of algorithmic echo chambers, optimize content distribution mechanisms, and balance the traffic allocation between entertainment-oriented and in-depth content. This will ensure high-quality, in-depth works receive greater exposure and guide audiences toward engaging with diverse aesthetic forms.

At the same time, leveraging new media dissemination networks, we should conduct public aesthetic education to guide audiences in discarding the superficial aesthetic habit of “assuming the fake is real,” and reshape rational, profound, and diverse aesthetic concepts. We must help audiences develop a dialectical understanding of aesthetics—one that embraces the new audiovisual aesthetics brought by AI technology while actively avoiding the trap of sensory excess. This involves reclaiming the ability to critically analyze art, learning to interpret the humanistic implications, cultural value, and historical significance of works. By comprehensively enhancing the aesthetic capabilities of the audience, we can in turn drive the industry to elevate its creative standards, fostering a virtuous cycle where “creators delve deeply into content and audiences respect art.”

Conclusion

The iterative innovation of AI technology has brought unprecedented development opportunities to the micro-short drama industry. The human-machine collaborative production model has reshaped the film and television industrial system, while the aesthetic paradigm of atmosphere-driven production has expanded the boundaries of audiovisual artistic expression, providing new pathways for the dissemination of traditional culture, the upgrading of mass entertainment, and the global expansion of Chinese culture. However, behind this technological empowerment, the dichotomy between “sensory overload” and “hollowed-out meaning” exposes a profound crisis of aesthetic alienation in AI micro-short dramas. Issues such as sensory overload, narrative dissolution, the absence of critical thinking, and cultural superficiality severely hinder the industry’s high-quality and sustainable development.

Ultimately, AI is merely a tool and medium for film and television creation; the humanistic core, artistic value, and the spirit of the times are the very foundation of literary and artistic works. The future development of AI micro-short dramas must reject the distorted logic of technology-first and traffic-first approaches. Instead, it must use technology as the framework, art as the soul, and humanism as the core, striking a balance between sensory aesthetics and spiritual depth, technological innovation and cultural preservation, and commercial monetization and social value. Through a multidimensional path of redemption—involving technological correction, deepening content, audience cultivation, and industry regulation—we can overcome the dilemma of aesthetic alienation, achieve a healthy symbiosis between technology and art, and enable AI micro-short dramas to truly become a new form of online literary and artistic medium that conveys the values of our era, passes on Chinese culture, and nourishes the public spirit.

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