

Zhang Yimou Films: The Reflections on Chinese Society and Culture in the Context of Republic of China (1912-1949)

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Abstract

This study adopts qualitative research methods, and the research texts are three Zhang Yimou films that reflect the history and social culture of the Republic of China, namely Red Sorghum, Ju Dou, and Raise the Red Lantern, also known as the Red Trilogy. This study explores the phenomenon of consuming history through the art form of films. The study finds that history is not only concerned and used by historians and archaeologists but can also be used by artists and consumed by the audience. The consumption (use) of history by artists and audiences is not consuming its complete authentic history. In Zhang Yimou's Red trilogy films, the history and social culture of the Republic of China are arranged and designed. The audience can get a feeling that goes straight to the heart by watching these artfully processed. Re-made history, which is different from the historical knowledge read through words in history books, this kind of consumption is more intuitive, attractive, and acceptable to the audience. By watching these films, the audience colloquially learns about history, and although it is not a serious and complete history, it gains cultural value just as much.

Keywords: Zhang Yimou's films, The Social Culture of Republic of China, Consuming History.

Zhang Yimou's Red Trilogy films reflect the history and social culture of the Republic of China period in the form of art.

Red Sorghum (Zhang, 1990) released in 1987 tells a legendary story of rural love that happened in the 30s of the 20th century, with the Chinese people's resistance to Japanese aggression as the background, creating a group portrait of a group of ordinary Chinese people

such as Jiu'er, Yu Zhanao, and Uncle Luohan, praising their national spirit of daring to live, dare to die, dare to love, and dare to hate, and also make reflections on the history, culture, and survival mode of the Chinese nation (Gao, 2016).

Ju Dou tells the story of the emotional entanglement between two men who are commensurate with uncle and nephew and the same woman in a family that dyes cloth for a

living. The story reveals the bondage and imprisonment of feudal etiquette and religion.

Raise the Red Lantern revolves around feudal etiquette and tells the story of several concubines in a large polygamous family in China in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century, who led to a series of tragedies.



Figure 1: Red trilogy films poster. From left to right: Red Sorghum, Ju Dou, Raise the Red Lantern. These three Zhang Yimou films are all related to the history and culture of the Republic of China, women, and red. Red Sorghum Film Post shows the heroine Jiu'er (played by Gong Li) and the custom of shaking the sedan chair during the bride's marriage. Ju Dou film poster shows the heroine Judou (played by Gong Li) and the red-dyed cloth. Raise the Red Lantern film poster shows the heroine Song Lian (played by Gong Li) and the mansion house.

Source: <https://image.baidu.com/> [Accessed on September 21, 2022]

One of the outstanding features of the Red Trilogy is that it takes history as the stage, selects common social phenomena during the Republic of China, and even creates some cultural rituals, designs life scenes, carries the performance of characters, advances the storyline, and meet the audience's consumption needs for "past" society, history, and culture (Fu, 2014).

This study explores the phenomenon of consuming history through the art form of film. Zhang Yimou's Red Trilogy film is the entry point for this study. This study will further enrich the content of Zhang Yimou's film theory research, fill the gap in related fields, and provide

references for film theorists and other film creators.

Research Methodology

This is basic research using qualitative research methods. The information collected includes video data, documentary materials, and interviews with informants. The video materials come from online platforms and film studio archives. The literature comes from CNKI materials, published books, library materials, etc. Informant interviews include key informant interviews and informal interviews. Based on the research framework, the data synthesis explores the relationship between Zhang Yimou's red trilogy films and the history and culture of the Republic of China. Research results are presented in the form of descriptive analysis.

Research Results

Part 1: Reviewing History: Chinese Society and Culture during the Republic of China (1912-1949)

This part only explores the history and social culture of the Republic of China(1912-1949) related to Zhang Yimou's Red Trilogy films, including the historical events and cultural phenomena reflected in the important plots and specific scenes in the films.

1.1 Overview of the History and Culture of the Republic of China

The Republic of China from 1912 to 1949 was when the history of feudal dynasties and republics converged. The feudal monarchy ended during this period, and a new democratic republic system was established. The nascent regime could not rule over a huge country, and there were constant wars for dominance within the country. Japan launched a war of aggression against China (Shen, 2022). The government has been in turmoil and struggle due to internal and external wars. China's economy, politics, society, ideology, and culture have undergone unprecedented and tremendous changes, but the characteristics of feudal society, feudal

remnants, traditional culture, and folk customs still exist.

The period of the Republic of China (1912-1949) was an important node of social change in China. This important juncture is full of interplay between innovation and conservatism, Western culture and traditional Chinese culture, and war and patriotism. The changes in Chinese society and culture have affected Chinese family concepts, clan concepts, identity changes, class mobility, clothing, food, housing, transportation, weddings and funerals, education, entertainment, beliefs, social interactions, etc. Most of these influences and changes have occurred in central cities and elites. In contrast, in the vast rural areas, traditional culture, ancient customs, local traditions, and folk beliefs still dominate all aspects of people's lives (Lu, 2017).

This structure is the main structure of the social culture of the Republic of China and has become an important inspiration for Zhang Yimou's film creation, which is used in the story background, scene design, and character identity setting in the Red Trilogy. Zhang Yimou uses historical scenes to show the audience the ability to experience and consume history by enjoying film art (Shi, 2009).

1.2 The Way of Culture

China's regional culture has a unique charm. During the Republican period, various regions retained rich traditions, customs, beliefs, celebrations, etc., which not only inherited traditional culture and values but also continued cultural diversity and the national spirit (Shen, 2022).

1) Artificially brewed sorghum wine

Sorghum wine is a traditional Chinese liquor, also known as "sorghum rice wine" or "sorghum wine." It is made from sorghum as the main raw material. Sorghum is a cereal crop widely cultivated because of its drought tolerance and adaptability. Sorghum liquor is mainly made by traditional manual processes, including fermentation, distillation, and other processes. During the fermentation process, the starch in the

sorghum rice is converted into alcohol, which is then extracted by distillation.

2) Artificially Dyed Cloth

Hand-dyed cloth is one of the representatives of traditional Chinese handicrafts. During the Republic of China period, some villages and towns still used traditional printing and dyeing techniques. "Dyeing blue color, dry the cloth or yarn through water, put it into the indigo liquid heated in a large vat (burn charcoal fire outside the tank), and stir repeatedly to make the coloring uniform. Then, take it out, dry it, and hang it on a rack to dry. This has been done three times in a row.

3) Marriage Customs

The folk marriage culture of the Republic of China period has a long tradition and profound cultural heritage. The wedding process is tedious and involves a series of traditional customs (Dai, 1993).

3.1. Buying and Selling Marriages

Marriage is still a social phenomenon, especially in some rural areas, where marriage is regarded as an economic transaction, where the buyer is usually a man with a small property but ill health, and the seller is typically a woman, mostly poor farmers, hoping to improve the family's economic situation through marriage. In buying and selling marriages, women are in a relatively weak position, and their marriages are often decided by the elders of the family (usually parents), with less regard for their wishes. This form of marriage often leads to unequal marital relationships, and women lack the right to choose their marriage and life (Gong, 2011).

3.2. The Custom of Shaking the Sedan Chair

In some areas, there is also the custom of flipping a sedan chair. The sedan chair, also known as carrying the sedan chair and picking the sedan chair, usually occurs on the way to the groom's house when the bride leaves her parents' house. When the sedan chair is upside down, the bride usually sits on an ornately decorated chair called a "palanquin" and is carried by some wedding honor guards. The palanquin is usually decorated with red as the primary color and

carefully decorated with flowers, ribbons, colored paper, etc., to symbolize happiness and auspiciousness. The bride wears a red hijab, a bright red wedding dress, and embroidered shoes.



Figure 2 : A sedan chair for the bride. During the wedding ceremony, the bride travels to the groom's house in a sedan chair to show respect for the bride, showing the importance of family life and the beginning of a new stage of life for both men and women who enter into marriage.

Source: Sutton (1994)

3.3. Widows do not Remarry or Remarry

Widows are not allowed to remarry, which is a traditional cultural norm for women whose husbands have died. This concept originated from Confucianism and ethical and moral concepts in feudal society, emphasizing that widows do not marry again as a sign of loyalty to their deceased husbands. Widows were often restricted from social interaction and were required to wear light, modest clothing. In some areas, attitudes towards widow remarriage are relatively tolerant (Wang, 1991).

4) Birth and Death Rituals

During the Republican period, birth and death ceremonies remained an important part of

traditional Chinese culture, reflecting people's reverence and prayer for birth and death.

Regarding childbirth, the full moon banquet, 100-day banquet, and first birthday celebration of newborns are common festive ceremonies to celebrate the arrival of a new life and express blessings and joy.

Regarding death, funeral rites are essential rituals in which families and communities participate together, including funeral and sacrifice to express their grief and remembrance for the deceased, as well as respect and prayer for the deceased. Crying in front of the coffin and blocking the coffin's progress is an integral part of traditional Chinese funeral rituals. In front of the coffin of the deceased, relatives and friends gather to weep and mourn the deceased as a final farewell to the deceased. Blocking the coffin occurs during the funeral process, where male relatives and friends carry the coffin forward, and the deceased's family blocks the coffin, which is the last tribute and send-off to the deceased.

5) Mansion and Polygamy

In the Republic of China, the mansion refers to a large mansion, a luxury mansion, or a courtyard where a significant family lives. These houses were often the homes of wealthy or prominent local families, representing the status and wealth of the social class. Large mansions are usually large in scale and cover a vast area, with several courtyards, including gates, courtyards, main halls, living rooms, gardens, pavilions, cloisters, and other architectural structures.



Figure 3: Qiao's mansion in Qi County, Shanxi Province. It is a national second-class museum in China, located in Qiaojiabao Village, Qi County, Shanxi Province. Founded in 1756, the whole courtyard is in the shape of a double "Xi," divided into six courtyards, 20 small courtyards, 313 houses, a construction area of 4175 square meters, three facing the street, surrounded by a fully enclosed blue brick wall of up to more than 10 meters, the gate is a city gate type hole type, it is an ancient house with the traditional residential architectural style of the north. Zhang Yimou's "Raise the Red Lantern" film was filmed using this house.

Source: (Parker & Sedgwick, 1995)

Polygamy, to be precise, is polyandry and concubinage, which refers to the institution of marriage in which a man has both a legal wife and several informal concubines. Under this system, wives are usually of legal status, while concubines do not have legal marital status but maintain marriage-like relationships with men.

During the Republican period, although the government legally abolished polygamy, polygamy still existed in wealthy families. Having multiple wives is often commensurate with a man's wealth and status, and polygamy is not only a symbol of wealth and status but is also related to traditional concepts such as having more children and more blessings, inheriting the family business, etc.

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In short, Zhang Yimou arranges China's traditional culture, thoughts, and folk culture in the films, as the scenery and scenes, as well as the background of the characters' identities, become the cultural traditions of the community and the survival mode of the characters in the films. By watching the films, the audience can understand the history and social culture of the Republic of China (Dai, 1993).

Part 2: Consuming the Past: The History and Culture of the Republic of China in Films

This part explores Zhang Yimou's "use" of the Republic of China's history and culture to make films and the audience's understanding of popular history and culture through films.

2.1 Women in the Films

In the films *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, and *Raise the Red Lantern*, the female characters face unequal and oppressive marriages that determine their social status and limit their independence. Despite their struggles, they rebel against their fate and strive for a better life. However, societal norms and traditional beliefs ultimately lead to tragic outcomes for these women. The films reflect the challenges faced by women in the Republic of China, where traditional gender roles and expectations restrict their opportunities for equality and happiness. The characters' experiences highlight the enduring influence of patriarchal values and the limitations placed on women in a society focused on marriage and motherhood (Gong, 2011).

2.2 Red in the Films

The *Red Trilogy*, consisting of *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, and *Raise the Red Lantern*, is named for the prominent use of the color red by director Zhang Yimou. Red holds significant cultural symbolism in Chinese tradition, representing festivity, warmth, passion, and death.

In *Red Sorghum*, Zhang Yimou masterfully incorporates red elements such as a red sedan chair, clothing, and sorghum wine to evoke feelings of celebration, intimacy, and tragedy. The film's visual storytelling captivates audiences with its unique narrative style and innovative use of Chinese imagery.

Chinese film theory researcher Lin Yan reflects on the impact of *Red Sorghum*'s release in 1987, noting its groundbreaking approach to storytelling and visual representation. The film's portrayal of characters, history, and scenes challenged traditional conventions, leaving a lasting impression on viewers and setting a new standard for cinematic expression in China. ”



Figure 4: "Red" image from the *Red Sorghum* film

Source: <https://v.qq.com/> [Accessed on March 11, 2023]

In the *Ju Dou* film, red is both a symbol of lust and the abyss of death. *Ju Dou* and Yang Tianqing had sex for the first time, and the red-dyed cloth quickly fell into the dye pool. *Ju Dou*'s husband, Yang Jinshan, and lover, Yang Tianqing, both died in the red dye pool. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, red lanterns are everywhere. The "red lantern" is an indicator of sexual intercourse between the hero and heroine, and the concubine's door and house hang them, which means that the man will have sex with the concubine and thus obtain a series of privileges. The "red lantern" is seductive sex and a symbol of power. The red cheongsam and red costume of the third concubine, Meishan, are a portrayal of her fierce and unyielding character (Yang, 1993).

2.3 Creating Ritual

The *Red Trilogy* uses artistic techniques to reproduce the social life and cultural customs of people during the Republic of China and even

creates some rituals to satisfy the audience's consumption needs for the history and culture of a bygone era.

2.3.1. Shaking the Sedan Chair

In some areas of Shandong Province, a custom called "Shaking the Sedan Chair" is practiced during wedding processions. Sedan chair bearers carry the groom in a sedan chair, moving in a figure-eight pattern while drummers play festive music. The bearers follow the rhythm, dancing and vigorously shaking the sedan chair while singing playful songs. This tradition adds to the celebratory atmosphere of the wedding in rural communities. During the filming of *Red Sorghum*, the production team recreated this custom with dance, music, and lyrics as the original details were lost over time. The team prepared the set by laying loess on the road for the actors to carry the sedan chair and create a dusty effect. Director Zhang Yimou instructed the actors to shake the sedan chair joyfully, symbolizing a dance of happiness and life.



Figure 5: "Shaking the Sedan Chair" from the film *Red Sorghum*. The wedding customs in some villages in Shandong Province are a form of entertainment used to set off the festive atmosphere of the wedding.

Source: <https://v.qq.com/> [Accessed on March 11, 2023]

The lyrics of "Shaking the Sedan Song" are playful and witty. The soundtrack abandons the complex singing tone, choosing to use simple and wild original folk songs to express strong emotions. It also uses folk instruments, *Suona*, and Chinese drum percussion. Zhang Yimou did

not use professional singing actors but shouted and sang with the actors in the film crew.

2) Sacrifice to the God of Wine

China has a long wine culture, and the history of winemaking can be traced back thousands of years. In ancient Chinese legends, Du Kang is the inventor of winemaking. Later generations respected Du Kang as the god of wine, and the liquor industry worshiped Du Kang as the ancestor.

There are records of sorghum wine brewing in some books and materials in China, but there is no detailed record of the specific brewing method. Zhang Yimou believes that art can be created, and folk culture can also be created. He and the film crew gave full play to their imagination to build a wine shop by hand. Based on the new wine made by the staff of the wine shop in the original novel, they added drinking songs and toasts and compiled a series of music, dances, and lyrics to worship Du Kang, the god of wine, in the film.

3) Blocking the Coffin

Ju Dou is an ethical tragedy that critiques the oppressive feudal order that restricts individuals. A pivotal scene in the film is the "blocking the coffin" ritual, symbolizing the transition from freedom to repression in Ju Dou and Tianqing's lives. After Yang Jinshan's death, the elders of the Yang clan force Ju Dou and Tianqing to perform the coffin blocking ceremony to prove their innocence and prevent Ju Dou from remarrying. During the funeral, Yang Tianbai, the illegitimate son of Ju Dou and Tianqing, oversees the ritual with a stoic expression, embodying the patriarchal control that continues even after Yang Jinshan's death. Ju Dou and Tianqing endure the grueling ceremony, throwing themselves at the coffin repeatedly to demonstrate their purity. The relentless repetition of the coffin blocking ritual reflects the enduring influence of male authority in the patriarchal system, weighing heavily on Ju Dou and Tianqing's lives. Despite Yang Jinshan's passing, the oppressive forces of tradition persist, shaping their existence into a constant struggle.



Figure 6: The "Blocking the coffin" ceremony at Yang Jinshan's funeral in the Ju Dou film. Ju Dou and Yang Tianqing blocked the advance of the coffin to express their filial piety to Yang Jinshan.

Source:<https://www.iqiyi.com/>[Accessed on June 8, 2023]

"Blocking the coffin" was also created by Zhang Yimou, but it is also not unfounded, and there are similar traditional customs in the northwest of Fujian Province. When Zhang Yimou shows this part of the content, he processes it artistically and enhances the film's appeal by rendering the tragic atmosphere. "Zhang Yimou's advantage over others lies in the fact that he sublimates the oriental culture from folk culture and uses it to make a profound exposition of the humanistic spirit and the status quo of existence in the blurred era, and his film art connotation is more inclined to the exploration of 'metaphorical China,' so folklore is not simply treated as an 'exotic,' but dissolves it into the film story and becomes a part of the plot (Yang, 1994).

4) Red Lanterns

The red lantern in *Raise the Red Lantern* symbolizes identity, power, and status in a ritualized sociocultural context. Zhang Yimou uses the visual effect of red lanterns to interpret traditional Chinese culture. In the film, the red lantern signifies a woman's status and position in the household. The "Wait for the Call" ceremony determines which concubine Master Chen will spend the night with, as indicated by the lit red lantern at the chosen concubine's courtyard gate. Being "favored" by having the red lantern hung in her courtyard grants the concubine special treatment and privileges. The red lantern rituals also include lighting an "everlasting lantern" for

a pregnant concubine and "sealing the lantern" for a concubine who has made a mistake.



Figure 7: The Red Lantern Ceremony from the film *Raise the Red Lantern*. From left to right, the above are Waiting for the call, Announcing the lighting of the lantern, Lighting Lanterns, and Hammering feet Rituals. From left to right, the following are ordering, Putting out the lantern, everlasting lantern, and sealing the lantern ceremonies.

Source:<https://vip.1905.com/>[Accessed on January 12, 2024]

Waiting for the call, announcing the lighting of the lanterns, lighting Lanterns, hammering the feet, ordering food, putting out the lanterns, and sealing the lanterns constitute a complete set of rituals, which are the unique "rules of the game" of the Chen family mansion. The women in the Chen family's mansion started a series of power struggles for "lighting lanterns." Zhang Yimou fictionalized the lantern ceremony to reinforce the film's theme of "the tragedy of women under feudalism."

2.4 The Culture of Space

The space in the films is not only a background but also an essential means for the director to express political views, social systems, power relations, etc. This kind of space is a visual presentation and a profound interpretation of society, history, culture, power structure, etc.

1) Sorghum Field

The red lantern in "Raise the Red Lantern" symbolizes identity, power, and status in a traditional Chinese context. Director Zhang Yimou uses the visual motif of red lanterns to explore these themes. In the film, the red lantern

signifies a woman's position in the household, with the "Wait for the Call" ceremony determining which concubine Master Chen will spend the night with based on the lit red lantern at her courtyard gate. Being favored with the red lantern grants special treatment and privileges, such as an "everlasting lantern" for a pregnant concubine and "sealing the lantern" for a concubine who has erred.

2) The Yang Family's Dye House

The Yang's Dye House in the film *Ju Dou* is filmed in a typical Huizhou house. The patio of the house is not only a breathable window but also an environment for viewing the sky, which can make you feel hopeful or extremely depressed. The brightness of the sky, the darkness on all sides, the brilliant colors, the gloomy environment—people seem to live and struggle in dire straits, deep in the bottomless abyss at the bottom of the well.



Figure 8: Yang's dye house in the *Ju Dou* film

Source:<https://www.iqiyi.com/>[Accessed on June 8, 2023]

"In the film, the dye house is represented by contrasting its high gray walls with the red and yellow cloths hanging high, the former representing the closed space and the heaviness of the atmosphere, while the latter represents Ju Dou's always suppressed desire". The dyed cloth hanging high from the top of the courtyard of the dyeing workshop became a rope and curtain that bound Ju Dou and Yang Tianqing infinitely after descending. When the two were cheating in the dye house, the flying wooden wheel and bright, red-dyed cloth rushed down from above and fell into the dye pool. It not only hints at the passion of the two but also implies that these two people not only live under the public opinion of society but also cannot escape the suppression of social

ethics and family traditional etiquette, and also implies that they are always under the shadow of Yang Jinshan's invisible patriarchal power and majesty. The dye house was like a giant cage that trapped everyone. Whether they were resigned or resisted, their end seemed doomed. This is also why, in the end, Ju Dou chose to burn down the dye house with a fire when there was no way back. This is not only a rebellion against feudal etiquette but also a desperate struggle against fate.

3) The Chen Family's Mansion

The Chen family's mansion in the film *Raise the Red Lantern* is depicted as closed and solemn, with a symmetrical and regular design. The building consists of small rectangular courtyards forming a large rectangular courtyard. The architecture is exquisite, with a focus on symmetry and precision. The mansion reflects Confucian culture and emphasizes the importance of rules and hierarchy. Within the confines of the mansion, strict rules govern behavior, and individuals must adhere to these rules without question. Those who defy the rules are oppressed and punished. Women are treated as objects and must obey the patriarchal authority of Master Chen. Their status and dignity are determined by his favor, and they must constantly vie for his attention and approval.

The courtyard of the four wives mirrors the hierarchical structure of the mansion, with Master Chen at the center of attention. The wives must navigate the complex dynamics of the household, constantly vying for Master Chen's favor. The dining space is oppressive, with portraits of ancestors lining the walls, symbolizing the weight of tradition and the expectations placed on the current generation of the Chen family. Overall, the Chen family's mansion is a microcosm of a society governed by strict rules and hierarchy, where individuals must conform to tradition and authority to maintain their status and identity.



Figure 9 : The Chen family mansion, dining room, and death house from the film *Raise the Red Lantern*.

Source:<https://vip.1905.com/>[Accessed on January 12, 2024]

The third concubine, Mei Shan, was arrested for a private meeting with her lover, Dr. Gao, and Song Lian saw several servants carrying Mei Shan to the roof, so she quietly followed. The death house on the roof of the Chen family mansion stands alone in a corner, and there is no other building symmetrical with it and the death house is inconsistent with the overall specifications of the Chen family mansion; that is to say, the death house is outside the rules, and those who break the rules cannot escape the death house. The House of Death is not just a hut; it is the tomb of the woman who pursues her happiness, and it is the place where the dark side of feudal society is vividly manifested. Mei Shan violated the rules of the Chen family and eventually died in the death house. Song Lian saw Mei Shan being killed in the Death House, and she had a nervous breakdown and became a crazy woman.

In short, Zhang Yimou's Red trilogy films are produced using women's social status, feudal etiquette, and religious order, marriage forms and customs, wine-making culture and sacrificial rituals, dyeing culture, funeral customs, lantern culture, rural social life, the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and other historical and cultural cultures of the Republic of China. In rural society, sorghum fields, dyeing workshops, mansions, folk songs and folk music, clan culture, family relations, and other social cultures of the Republic of China were consumed.

Part 3: Reflecting History: The Art of Film Brings History Back to Life

The "constructed" nature of film determines that it always deals with history artistically.

However, the history presented in the movie still has a considerable appeal, subtly affecting how people view the past and their cognition of it.

3.1 Film is an Artistic Reflection of History

There are two levels of history: serious history and artistic history. Serious history is recorded by historians, studied by historians, recorded as authentic, cannot be changed, and its function is restricted. Artistic history is used to infect people through the director's rearrangement of the design and the actors' performances so that it has a creative effect, becomes intuitive and vivid, and then conveys it to the audience. The two functions and their requirements are different: serious history pursues the truth, and artistic history requires an appeal.

Film is an art form related to history, which reflects history in the form of art. *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, and *Raise the Red Lantern* are all set in the Republic of China, reflecting the history and social culture of the Republic of China through multi-faceted depictions of political, economic, cultural, and social life during the Republic of China. The three films involve critical historical events, such as the Anti-Japanese War and the Civil War, and explore social problems, such as the bondage of feudal ethics, the complexity of family relations, and the low status of women. By representing these historical events and social problems, the audiences can understand the historical background of the society at that time and people's living conditions, social styles, and cultural customs.

The history in Zhang Yimou's Red Trilogy films is not historical but an artistic history, so it doesn't need to be entirely true. Those interested in the integrity of historical truth focus their attention on the problem of errors and interpretations of historical knowledge, and real history should be left to professionals. For the audience, while watching the films, there is no need to care too much about the historical complexity of the film or the way of interpreting history. The severe and real history is quite dull. Still, after Zhang Yimou's artistic processing, it

has become history in the films because of its good visual effect and ease of understanding; people are willing to contact it, consume it, and experience feelings from it.

Therefore, history in film does not have to maintain the highest level of professionalism and absolute seriousness like popular history. Audiences also try to balance fiction and authenticity when appreciating film, understanding that film is an art form rather than merely presenting historical facts.

3.2 Film Brings History Back to Life

As social animals, human beings play various roles in daily life, are regulated and shaped by society, and interpret their destiny at each stage of life. Even now, people are still bound and pressured by traditions, customs, culture, family, etc., so they need to touch and consume the things that make them today's ethnic group and today's self, and films are one such thing.

The Republic of China period was at the junction of the feudal and republic periods, and there were remnants of feudalism and new things in this period. In processing history and transforming it into a film, Zhang Yimou needs to sort out and select historical events, social life, cultural customs, etc., and then arrange and narrate them so the audience can watch them and be emotionally infected. The audience seeks empathy through the history that has been reanimated after the consumption of film has been artistic and understands the complex emotions of people in the Republic of China era such as confusion, struggle, and restraint faced by people in the entanglement between tradition and modernity, as well as the suffering and oppression suffered by people in the old era, to cherish the present life more.

Through film consumption, Chinese audiences seem to have returned to a historical period where their ancestors lived and learned about the history and social culture of that era. Foreign audiences learn about the history and culture of China, even if these historical cultures are not strictly and seriously academic

knowledge, but through this method, people learn about the history and culture of the Republic of China popularly. The audience enjoys entertainment and leisure from the consumption of films, seeks emotional resonance, and obtains educational and cultural values, which are the purpose of audience consumption and the value of consumption.

Discussion

The selection of three of Zhang Yimou's Red Trilogy films for primary consideration was based on several factors. Firstly, the films were recognized as critically and culturally important, making them suitable for study due to their historical portrayal of Chinese elements and social dynamics. Secondly, the thematic relevance of the Red Trilogy films to the research objectives played a significant role in their selection. These films align with the study's focus on exploring the consumption of history through films in the context of the Republic of China. Moreover, the films' director, Zhang Yimou, brings a distinctive creative vision to each movie, making them culturally significant representations of the period. This, along with the films' unique visual style, justified their inclusion for more in-depth analysis within the research framework.

Including possible objections or different perceptions of the Republic of China's history and social culture portrayed by Zhang Yimou adds to the overall comprehensiveness of the discussion of the given films. Adding various concerns and possible criticisms tracing back to how the history is represented and which aspects of Chinese culture, as well as both genders' roles and relations, are depicted in the movies by Zhang Yimou extends the conversation and provides different insights. Such factors include criticisms or debates concerning the portrayal of the actual events, social norms, or cultural diplomacy that may exist between current and older generations; societal structure, beliefs, and values and their contradictions or similarities

with present-day ones; the analysis would offer a better understanding of how the films have depicted the ROC's history and its society's culture. This would offer a more intensive analysis of the movies' impact and reception in society, enabling a probing into potential contentious issues regarding their cultural importance. Zhang Yimou's Red Trilogy films have effectively altered the world's perception and culture, affecting society in a significant way. In China, they are appreciated for their aesthetic values and for the representation of the history and culture of China. Globally, the films have helped outsiders gain an understanding of Chinese past and present, resulting in earning accolades in film festivals. The richness of themes and the high quality of shooting have put Zhang Yimou on the list of famous directors. The films have initiated discussions and emphasized understanding China's past, affecting history, society, and traditions discourses. Therefore, the Red Trilogy films have added value to the fountain of popular films and, in turn, encouraged the creation of thought-provoking debates on Chinese history and social culture.

Conclusion

This study explores the phenomenon of consuming history through the art form of film. Zhang Yimou's Red Trilogy films are the entry point for this study. The study finds that history is not only concerned and used by historians and archaeologists but also can be used by artists and consumed by the audience. The consumption (use) of history by artists and audiences is not consuming its completely authentic history but consuming history that has been artistically processed.

In Zhang Yimou's Red trilogy films, Zhang Yimou rearranged and designed the history and culture of the Republic of China and even created some rituals and customs based on local culture, enhancing the visual effects and artistic expression of the films and sublimating the themes of the films. The audiences can get a

direct feeling by watching these art-processed and re-animated histories, which is different from the historical knowledge read through words in history books; this kind of consumption is intuitive, infectious, and more acceptable to the audiences. By watching these films, the

audiences colloquially learn about history, and although it is not a serious and complete history, it gains cultural value just as much.

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