



# A study on the application of "new power" directing aesthetics in the film "Full River Red"

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**Abstract.** The film "Full River Red" is the second time that director Zhang Yimou brought his works into the Spring Festival file. Up to now, the film has made a total of 4.5 billion yuan at the box office, which can be described as the "Full River Red" in the box office. "New power" director group is the main force of the Chinese film market at present, they have become the synonym of high box office, the creation of the film "Full River Red" is also affected by it, the film all reflect the elements of "new power" director aesthetics. First of all, the film breaks the shackles of traditional genre films, and uses a variety of genre elements and localization to enrich the connotation of the film; Secondly, it chooses the direction of popular aesthetics to balance the subjectivity and popularity of the film; Finally, the use of "new media aesthetics", the creative team with the Internet thinking of the film to carry out a full coverage of publicity. It is the use of "new power" aesthetics that makes the film stand out in the Spring Festival and become famous.

**Keywords:** New power director; Multi-type elements; Popular aesthetics; New media aesthetics.

## 1 Introduction

The directors who have achieved high box office in recent years are mostly the "new power" directors group in the new era, they are completely different from the fifth and sixth generation directors. Their names come from the government. The "2014 Chinese Film New Power Promotion Ceremony" led by the Film Bureau of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television was held grandly in 2014. By then, Han Han, Guo Jingming, Guo Fan, Chen Sicheng, Yu Baimei and other young directors appeared one by one, which directly completed the official naming of the group of "new power" directors. <sup>[1]</sup>The origin and educational background of this group of directors is complicated, they are not all received professional college education, many are actors, screenwriters, writers, micro filmmakers and other identities into directors, it can be said that the "new power" group of directors is cultivated by the Chinese film market, so they will inevitably have unique aesthetic characteristics. These directors are well aware of the importance of the film market and the audience, and commercial positioning is undoubtedly their focus, so the Hol-

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lywood film production model becomes their learning object. Under the influence of the Hollywood model, they actively explore the elements of genre films; At the same time, the new power directors can accept the shrinking of subjectivity, and choose to use popular aesthetics to balance the popularity and subjectivity in order to win the recognition of the audience<sup>[2]</sup>. As the group of "new power" directors grew up in an era of great changes in media, "Internet +" media surpassed the paper media and rose to the dominant media, which made the new power directors marked with a natural "network" label, and proficient use of new media aesthetics has become their requirements. Combined with the above aesthetic characteristics, these directors produced "Monster Hunt", "Black Coal, Thin Ice", "Animal World", "Dying to Survive", "Life events", "Hello, Li Huanying" and other high box office, high official recognition of the double high works. However, the film Full River Red shows obvious traces of "new power" directors, which indicates that director Zhang Yimou was inspired by "new power" directors in his creation, grasped the changes of The Times, and successfully applied "new power" directing aesthetics into his films.

## **2 The Diversified Practice of Genre and Localization are Blended Together**

The exploration of genre films by the group of "new power" directors is not limited to a single genre, but often pursues the mixed application of various types of elements, forming a situation of "big fish and small fish" integrating various small types of elements under the main genre. For example, "Lost Mother", "Heart Flower Road", "The Future" are all films integrating the road type elements under the leadership of the comedy genre; Secondly, their exploration of genre films also marks their pursuit of commercialization and Hollywood film model, but this does not mean that they directly adopt the production model of Hollywood genre films. Localization and grounding are the aspects that Chinese film genre exploration must face and implement, such as: "The Whole People Witnessed" adopts the Hollywood shooting concept and the down-to-earth story of China's real society, and "Very Perfect" combines the "chick" type film with the Chinese local story. All of these reflect the transformation of genre films in the aesthetics of "New power" directors.

The film "Full River Red" can not simply determine its genre boundaries, director Zhang Yimou himself said in an interview that this film is an attempt he made, he mixed many genre styles, suspense, thriller, murder, reversal, comedy, absurdity and other types of narrative elements together<sup>[3]</sup>. Due to the selection of the Spring Festival release, it emphasizes the comedy component of the film. Although the film is mixed with many elements of genre films, it is by no means a simple copy of various types of Hollywood elements, but the director's multi-genre hybridity after localization. Simple comedy is simple, but in order to achieve a comedy that is in line with education and entertainment, and in line with Chinese aesthetic values, it cannot be a single laugh, so the film innovatively integrates the elements of Chinese skits, making it have the process of shifting from laughter to tears. From the absurd farce led by Zhang Da and Wu Yichun to the last time when the whole army recited the

Jianghong, the memory of the national hero Yue Fei and the moving of the little people who sacrificed their lives for justice made the audience's emotions change from two poles; The film is full of killing from the very beginning, Sun Jun punishes the soldiers, kills the sacrifices of the soldiers Liu Sanwang and his horse mate Liu Xi, and finally only Qin Hui and Sun Jun are left, all the characters are doomed to death, which fully reflects the type elements of murder, and different from the Settings of western murder films, the final ending does not take killing the enemy to get revenge as the ultimate goal. Director Zhang Yimou takes "One Song" as the end, so many little people sacrifice their lives for the great justice of the nation, in the end, it is to exchange for the spread of the word "Full River Red · Write Huai", which is rare in the scope of genre films in the world, and it is also the embodiment of Chinese culture and feelings of the family. The sentiment of the family and the country that the film wants to express is also of strong national color. In the film, Qin Hui asked Sun Jun when he turned against the tide, and Sun Jun said: "The words behind Zhang Da pushed me." This line moved most of the audience, "mother-in-law tattooing" and "Serving the country with loyalty" are a true historical story with the label of the Chinese nation, and are part of the traditional Chinese culture. This line directly enhances the audience's sense of national identity. Near the end of the film, the whole army repeats "Full River Red", which directly pushes the film to the climax. Director Zhang Yimou changes the climax of a film into a text, which puts forward the concept of "visual culture" to Balazs and predicts: "With the emergence of the film, the visual culture will replace the printed culture" after a rebellion, using the text to produce the climax of the film, I am afraid this is a unique Chinese romance.

### 3 The Choice of Popular Aesthetics

Different from the fifth and sixth generation directors, new power directors are more willing to hide their subjectivity in the process of creation, and take the popular aesthetic of the majority of the audience as their goal. They carry out industrial production with objective and neutral attitude, "zero" emotion, playfulness and consumption standpoint and mentality, and most of their viewpoints are objective omniscient perspective or uncertain side knowledge perspective<sup>[4]</sup>. They are also able to balance the relationship between subjective expression and popular needs, can give up some "self-oriented" and "stylized" expression for the audience, the audience needs is not a grand epic and unrealistic superhero, the Chinese audience still like to earth small people, hope to see their own figure in the film works. "Dying to Survive", "Life Matters", "Miracle Stupid Child" and other films, all use down-to-earth characters to let the audience see the "civilian heroes" around them, while following the trend of realism, directly addressing the practical problems in society, highlighting humanistic care.

The success of The film also lies in Zhang Yimou's ability to put down the identity of the fifth generation of well-known directors, follow the needs of The Times, and firmly choose the path of popular aesthetics. Between personal expression and public appreciation, he gave up many of his own ideas in order to cater to the mainstream

aesthetic of the public. At first, the film was intended to be shot in one shot to the end, but the rhythm of the whole film became uniform, which could not adapt to its suspense and high inversion; In addition, the performance of the actors would be damaged, resulting in the performance of many actors may not be clearly seen by the audience, thus affecting the interaction with the audience and destroying the audience's viewing feelings. Finally, in order to ensure the audience's viewing and understanding, the film still adopts the form and narrative corresponding to the content, following the concept of film as a comprehensive art of interaction. <sup>[5]</sup>On the contrary, when Jiang Wen, a director who was at the same time as Zhang Yimou, was asked in an interview that the audience could not understand the meaning of his film *The Sun Also Rises*, his answer was: "If you don't understand it, watch it several times." This kind of treatment will undoubtedly make many audiences not buy it, blindly express their personal opinions, and highlight the subjectivity of the film without any restrictions, which will inevitably lead to the "Waterloo" of box office and reputation. The popular aesthetic application of "Full River Red" is also reflected in the choice of the audience. Director Zhang Yimou made it clear that this film is not for the older generation, there is no magnificent battle scene of Yue Fei resisting gold in the film, and even Yue Fei does not appear, which also led to the polarization of the film's word-of-mouth. But in fact, the older generation of viewers who criticized this film, Has been abandoned by the director of the audience group, the main force of today's Chinese film market is already the young and middle-aged group. The story narrative and plot development of "Full River Red" contain many elements of suspense and reversal. In terms of character identity, take Zhang Da for example, his identity changes from the guard of the Prime minister's house to the leader of the assassination of Qin Hui, and finally reveals his identity as a personal soldier of Yue Fei. In the plot, the death of each character is a move in the assassination game, and the reversal is produced in the climax, Zhang Da persuaded Sun Jun, the audience thought Sun Jun had been moved, but Sun Jun killed Zhang Da and became the chief steward of the Prime minister's house during the assassination, Sun Jun let Qin Hui repeat Manjiang Hong, and Qin Hui died as a substitute, really Qin Hui was not killed, such a series of reversals, As well as the plot of the burning brain undoubtedly attracted the main force of the current movie-young and middle-aged groups, especially for the young audience, it is easy to think of the more popular script kill in recent years, "Manjiang Hong" the whole movie is like a panoramic immersive script kill game, in the prescribed time to find out the murderer to solve the puzzle.

Of course, the choice of popular aesthetics does not mean the complete abandonment of the director's subjectivity, but the demand of the public is higher than the director's self-expression, and the ultimate sublimation of the film still needs the director's subjectivity. <sup>[6]</sup>Full River Red tells the story of Zhang Da and other small people who sacrifice their lives for the great cause of the nation and the Chinese spirit of "serving the country with loyalty". It can be seen that director Zhang Yimou retains his consistent view of history, taking the small to see the big and using the small people in the grand history to narrate. In the film, the great Prime minister Qin Kuei, the prime minister's house director He Li, all the big men have a heart of evil, and rack their brains for personal interests: Wu Yichun is an undercover officer serving the

imperial power, He Li is ruthless and cruel to rely on the prime minister to obtain power and status, Qin Kuei at all costs to cover up the fact of collusion with the golden people; On the contrary is the small soldier Zhang Da, Maiji Yaoqin as the representative of a group of small people for the great justice of the nation and risk their lives to assassinate national sinners. This dislocation between the big and the little people, deeply reveals the national hero Yue Fei's strong spiritual inspiration to the soldiers, these humble little people, but still remember the hatred of the country, the dislocation contrast satirizes Qin Hui and other "big people" who are afraid of death, and finally sublimates the theme of the film to the big family feelings. As one of the fifth generation directors, Zhang Yimou also has a strong desire to explore the history of national culture and the structure of national psychology. The reason why he chose ManJiang Hongde to produce the film is that it is the story of China itself, and Yue Fei himself is the hero of the Chinese nation and our root. This choice itself reveals the national culture of the Chinese people, which is the emotion that director Zhang Yimou wants to express to the audience through this film.

#### **4 The Application of New Media Aesthetics**

In the era of increasingly developed economy and full coverage of Internet technology, the effect of marketing and publicity has to some extent become the key to whether a film can achieve box office and reputation. Nowadays, in the Internet era, people are almost inseparable from their mobile phones, and the public generally use the Internet to obtain information. Therefore, the promotion and marketing of films must rely on the Internet, which involves the application of "new media aesthetics". "New media aesthetics" is one of the characteristics of "new power" directors, most of whom are the generation of network, game and new media. Because of the current situation of network existence, they are also called "network generation". The change of media reality has also affected their artistic thinking, film<sup>[7]</sup> production and marketing methods. We call the Internet thinking related to film "new media aesthetics".

The current use of new media aesthetics has been very mature, "Chinese Ping-Pong Jedi Counterattack" is another director Deng Chao's work, which was also released in the Spring Festival file, but it was hurriedly withdrawn one day after the release and changed to a small-scale broadcast, which includes the reasons for improper publicity and marketing. The high box office of "All Over the River Red" is certainly inseparable from the publicity and marketing of the film. Before the film was released, the Internet thinking was fully used to carry out the full coverage of the promotion. Offline press conferences and online advertisements are already a thing of the past<sup>[8]</sup>. Now Tiktok platform has a huge traffic password. By 2023, the number of daily active users of Tiktok will reach 1.6 billion, and the number of registered APP users will reach 2.2 billion. As of March 9, 2023, it is still continuously updating the tittlework and short video behind the scenes. Up to now, the account has received a total of 94.979 million likes, a total of 1.791 million fans, and 352 works have been released. From the number of likes, the promotion of "Full River Red" Tiktok has brought huge potential traffic to the movie, and continues to create topics and maintain the popular-

ity of the movie. The use of short videos to promote films is not new, but "Manjiang Hong" can be said to use the fragmented publicity of short videos to the extreme. The videos released by the official account of "Manjiang Hong" are all less than 30 seconds in length, and the main types are divided into three categories: First, some short trailers, which make use of quick cuts and special effects to create cool and suspenseful effects; The second is the daily recording of the director and actors on the shooting scene, which mainly highlights the investment and dedication of the director and actors, especially records the private and secret training of some new actors, as well as the interaction between professional stars and less well-known actors, to satisfy the curiosity of the audience and let the audience see the status of the actors outside the camera<sup>[9]</sup>; Finally, it records the moments of mutual concern between some actors and directors, such as Shen Teng checking props for Pan Binlong, including the encouragement and guidance of seniors to new actors, creating a warm working atmosphere. Through the promotion of Tiktok, "Full River Red" lets the audience watch some behind-the-scenes scenes to satisfy their curiosity, and encourages the groups who have watched it to comment on "like" and continue to trigger the topic; While those who have not watched it will stimulate their interest through their comments and exciting tidbits, thus encouraging them to watch it.

At the same time, an official Weibo account has been set up to update the latest box office situation, upload exciting stills and tidbits, follow up the latest reports and interviews, set up topics and lucky draw to attract the majority of netizens to interact and discuss, and forward the updates and videos related to the film by the actors in "Full River Red". Forming a huge publicity network. Up to now, the official Weibo account of Manjiang Hong has released a total of 353 works, with a total of 7.636 million comments and likes. The daily reading volume exceeds 100,000, and the interaction number exceeds 10,000. Similar to the effect generated by Tiktok, Weibo has also continuously created a buzz for the movie through its huge information flow network, and attracted a large number of users to watch the movie in theaters. The success achieved by director Zhang Yimou and producer Pang Liwei in the publicity and marketing of "Full River Red" is completely replicable. This kind of Internet thinking is crucial to the construction of movie box office and reputation in the new era.

## 5 Conclusion

The film "Full River Red" can be called "event film"<sup>[10]</sup>. After the release of "Full River Red", it triggered the national memory of Yue Fei's heroic deeds of loyalty to the country, awakened many people's feelings of home and country, and triggered the upsurge of reciting Yue Fei's "Full River Red". Behind the success of "Full River Red" is the study and application of the director's aesthetics of "new power", which explores traditional Chinese culture through the mixture of typification and localization, tells Chinese stories, conveys the feelings of the family and the country, and enhances cultural confidence; And make clear the choice of popular aesthetics, balance the popularity and subjectivity of the film, and let the needs of the audience

dominate; Finally, try the application of new media aesthetics, input the Internet thinking into the publicity and marketing of the film, promote the whole network for "Full River Red", attract a large number of audiences and earn a good reputation for the film. The success of "New power" directing aesthetics in the film "Manjiang Hongde" undoubtedly provides a new line for filmmakers to create movies.

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