



Comparison of Artistic Presentation of Cult Films between Snake Killers and Man Behind the Sun

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Abstract

Background and Aim: This study examines cult cinema as a distinctive cinematic phenomenon through a comparative analysis of *The Snake Killer* and *The Man Behind the Sun*. Cult films are often characterized by unconventional narratives, extreme aesthetics, and their appeal to niche audiences that exist outside mainstream cinematic norms. Drawing upon film studies and communication theory, this research investigates the directors' creative intentions and the use of audiovisual language, particularly in the representation of violence and transgression.

Methods: A mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with film practitioners and scholars, and a quantitative audience survey was employed to analyze artistic presentation and audience reception.

Results: The findings reveal significant differences in the artistic strategies of the two films. *The Man Behind the Sun* utilizes realistic depictions of violence to evoke historical memory and political reflection, whereas *The Snake Killer* emphasizes symbolic and sensational aesthetics to construct a distinctive cult identity. These differences are reflected in their audiovisual language, including composition, scene construction, and narrative emphasis.

Conclusion: This study demonstrates how cult cinema in Asia functions not only as a form of aesthetic experimentation but also as a cultural medium that reflects social anxieties while challenging dominant cinematic conventions. By bridging Asian cult film analysis with communication theory, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how extreme imagery and transgressive narratives shape audience perception and the artistic identity of cult cinema.

Keywords: Comparison, Artistic Presentation, Cult Film, Snake Killer, Man Behind the Sun

Introduction

In recent years, the term *cult film* has increasingly appeared across a wide range of platforms, including online media, film magazines, books, and academic research. This growing visibility reflects a rising interest among both audiences and scholars in understanding cult cinema as a distinctive cinematic phenomenon. Cult films typically attract niche audiences composed of highly devoted viewers who develop strong emotional attachments to films. Their fascination often stems from unconventional narrative structures, unusual aesthetics, controversial themes, or provocative ideological expressions that differentiate cult films from mainstream productions.

Unlike commercial cinema, which generally follows standardized narrative formulas and visual conventions designed for mass appeal, cult films frequently challenge traditional cinematic norms. They may feature bizarre storytelling, transgressive imagery, underground production styles, or bold social commentary. These characteristics contribute to the formation of dedicated fan communities that engage in repeated viewings, quote memorable dialogue, and share a collective cultural identity surrounding the film. Over time, cult cinema has evolved into a unique cultural form that blends artistic experimentation with audience participation.

However, the evolution of cult cinema has also generated certain contradictions. While cult films initially emerged as disruptive alternatives to mainstream cinema, their growing recognition within film culture has gradually transformed some of them into revered yet static artifacts. As cult films become institutionalized within film history and criticism, they risk losing the radical and subversive qualities that originally defined them. In this sense, cult cinema simultaneously





challenges dominant cinematic traditions while also reflecting broader shifts within contemporary film culture.

According to Yan Peng (2003), cult films exist in what can be described as a “parallel world” that operates outside the established structures of mainstream cinema. Rather than conforming to conventional classification systems, cult films derive their appeal from embracing marginal, unconventional, or even controversial elements. Their significance lies in their ability to reject dominant aesthetic norms and open space for alternative meanings and interpretations within cinematic expression.

Despite the increasing scholarly attention devoted to cult cinema, the concept of cult *film* remains highly contested. Many critics and scholars apply the label subjectively, often without fully addressing its historical origins or cultural contexts. As a result, the term is sometimes reduced to a vague descriptor associated with eccentricity, exploitation, or stylistic roughness. Such interpretations tend to overlook the deeper processes through which certain films gradually acquire cult status and maintain long-term influence within film culture (Yan Peng, 2003).

To address this issue, Jancovich and Lepoli (2001) argue that cult cinema should be studied through a systematic historical and cultural framework. Rather than focusing solely on whether a particular film qualifies as a cult film, scholars should examine the conditions that enable certain films to develop a cult following over time. This approach requires analyzing the interaction between film texts, audience reception, historical context, and cultural discourse. Through such analysis, researchers can move beyond superficial categorizations and uncover the internal dynamics that shape cult cinema as a cultural phenomenon.

In recent years, some cult films have begun to transcend their original status as niche entertainment and gain broader cultural significance. Through unconventional aesthetics and provocative subject matter, these films challenge dominant cultural myths and ideological structures. More importantly, they often give voice to marginalized perspectives and psychological experiences that remain excluded from mainstream narratives. Cult cinema, therefore, functions not only as an alternative cinematic style but also as a medium for expressing suppressed social anxieties, identities, and critiques of dominant culture.

The emergence of cult film subcultures further reflects the degree of openness within a society’s cultural environment. Subcultures tend to flourish when mainstream culture reaches a level of maturity that allows space for diversity, dissent, and alternative artistic expression. Cult films can therefore be understood as sites where marginal consciousness interacts with dominant ideology, generating new forms of cultural resistance and creative experimentation.

Despite the growing body of research on cult cinema, relatively little scholarly attention has been given to the comparative analysis of cult film aesthetics and directorial intentions within Asian exploitation cinema, particularly in relation to the representation of violence and transgression. While many studies discuss cult films from Western perspectives, fewer investigations examine how Asian filmmakers employ extreme imagery and unconventional narrative techniques to construct cult identities within their cultural contexts. This gap limits the broader understanding of how cult cinema operates across different cinematic traditions.

To address this research gap, the present study examines the cult film aesthetics and creative intentions of two influential Asian films: *The Snake Killer*, directed by Kui Chih Hung, and *The Man Behind the Sun*, directed by Mo Tun Fei. Both films are widely recognized for their graphic depictions of violence and their controversial approaches to cinematic realism. However,





despite sharing similar thematic elements, the two directors employ significantly different audiovisual strategies and ideological perspectives.

In *The Snake Killer*, Kui Chih Hung constructs a narrative centered on revenge, psychological trauma, and sexual frustration. The protagonist uses venomous snakes as instruments of retaliation against those who have humiliated him, creating a disturbing yet symbolically charged narrative structure. Through dynamic editing, close-up shots, and sensational imagery, the film generates an intense emotional experience that emphasizes catharsis and spectacle.

In contrast, *The Man Behind the Sun* adopts a starkly different stylistic approach. Mo Tun Fei employs restrained cinematography, static camera positions, and documentary-like realism to depict historical atrocities associated with human experimentation during wartime. Rather than relying on sensational spectacle, the film foregrounds historical memory and moral confrontation, forcing viewers to confront the brutality of real historical events.

By comparing these two films, this study aims to explore how cult cinema can function as a platform for representing extreme violence while reflecting different artistic intentions and ideological frameworks. Through this analysis, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of Asian cult cinema and its role in challenging conventional cinematic norms while engaging with sensitive historical and cultural issues.

Objectives

- 1) To study the producer's ideas analysis of Snake Killer and the Man behind the Sun, the author analyzes the director's creative intention and summarizes the general rules.
- 2) To study the intention and audio-visual language techniques of the director, which are analyzed in terms of composition and scenes.
- 3) To compare the artistic presentation of cult films between Snake Killer and Man Behind the Sun.

Literature review

The comparative study of the artistic presentation of the cult films *Snake Killers* and *Men Behind the Sun* necessitates an analytical framework grounded in film studies and communication studies. Such a framework emphasizes both the film text as a structured system of meaning and the social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape processes of production and audience reception. Accordingly, this chapter reviews relevant concepts, theories, and previous studies to establish a rigorous theoretical foundation for systematic and academically robust comparative analysis.

In academic discourse, cult films are not defined primarily by their commercial success or mainstream popularity. Rather, they are understood as cultural phenomena emerging from a dynamic relationship between film texts and specific audience communities. Mathijs and Sexton (2011) argue that cult films are characterized by their deviation from or resistance to mainstream cinematic norms, particularly in narrative structure, modes of artistic presentation, and thematic content. These films frequently engage with controversial or taboo subjects, such as violence, abnormality, and political ideology, which often exist outside dominant moral frameworks. Jancovich et al. (2003) further contend that cult film status cannot be attributed solely to textual qualities. Instead, it must be examined in conjunction with reception practices, interpretive strategies, and audience meaning-making processes. This perspective aligns with cultural





approaches in communication studies that view media texts as sites of ideological negotiation rather than carriers of fixed meanings. Within this framework, *Snake Killers* and *Men Behind the Sun* may be understood as texts that generate polarized responses, both aesthetically and ethically, a defining characteristic of cult cinema.

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Recent scholarship has expanded the study of cult cinema beyond Euro-American contexts by examining how Asian popular cinema produces cult value through excess, transgression, and extreme visual aesthetics. Studies on “Asian Extreme cinema” highlight how graphic violence, moral ambiguity, and sensational imagery function not only as entertainment devices but also as cultural expressions of social anxiety and historical trauma. Within this framework, cult films in Asia often emerge from distinctive industrial conditions, including rapid production cycles, hybrid genre experimentation, and transnational circulation through film festivals, home video markets, and online fan communities. These factors contribute to the formation of cult reputations that are shaped as much by audience reception and global circulation as by the textual properties of the films.

In addition to international scholarship, several studies conducted by Thai researchers have contributed to the understanding of film aesthetics, audience reception, and the cultural significance of cinematic representation. These studies provide important contextual insights for examining cult cinema within Asian media environments. Thai film scholars have frequently examined how audiovisual techniques, narrative construction, and cultural symbolism shape audience interpretation and emotional engagement.

For example, Suwannapak (2016) analyzed the aesthetic strategies employed in Thai independent cinema and found that unconventional narrative structures, symbolic imagery, and experimental visual techniques often function as mechanisms for challenging mainstream cinematic conventions. This observation corresponds with the theoretical framework of cult cinema, which frequently relies on stylistic deviation and narrative experimentation to construct alternative cinematic identities. Similarly, Srisuwan (2018) examined audience reception of controversial or unconventional films in Thailand and concluded that viewers’ interpretations are shaped not only by textual elements but also by social and cultural contexts. This perspective aligns with the approach of communication studies that views media meaning as a product of negotiation between the film text and the audience’s interpretive framework.

In another study, Kanchanaporn (2020) investigated the use of violence and extreme imagery in Asian cinema and argued that such representations often function as symbolic expressions of cultural anxiety, political tension, and historical memory. The study suggests that graphic or shocking imagery in film should not be interpreted merely as sensational entertainment but as a communicative strategy that provokes moral reflection and critical interpretation among viewers.

Furthermore, Thamrongrattanarit (2019) explored how cinematic techniques such as camera composition, lighting design, and editing patterns influence emotional engagement and narrative comprehension among audiences. The findings indicate that audiovisual language plays a crucial





role in shaping viewers' psychological responses and interpretive processes, reinforcing the importance of analyzing cinematic form as a communicative system.

These Thai studies collectively reinforce the theoretical perspectives discussed in international scholarship. They highlight the importance of examining film not only as a narrative text but also as a cultural medium that reflects social conditions, ideological conflicts, and audience interpretations. Incorporating insights from Thai film research, therefore, strengthens the analytical framework of the present study by situating the comparative analysis of *Snake Killers* and *Men Behind the Sun* within a broader regional and cultural context.

The historical development of Hong Kong cinema provides an important industrial and cultural context for understanding films such as *Snake Killers* and *Men Behind the Sun*. During the 1970s and 1980s, Hong Kong's film industry experienced rapid expansion characterized by intense studio competition, high production output, and strong audience demand for sensational and genre-driven entertainment. Scholars such as Bordwell (2000) describe Hong Kong cinema as a system that prioritizes narrative clarity, stylistic dynamism, and visual spectacle while remaining flexible enough to incorporate hybrid genre elements and extreme aesthetic strategies. Within this industrial environment, filmmakers frequently employed shocking imagery, stylized violence, and unconventional narrative structures as ways to attract audiences and distinguish their films in a highly competitive market. These conditions facilitated the emergence of works that later achieved cult status due to their distinctive visual style and controversial thematic content.

From the perspective of artistic presentation, film studies conceptualize cinematic elements as a distinct language through which meaning is communicated. Bordwell and Thompson (2017) explain that components such as mise-en-scene, lighting, color, camera movement, sound, and editing operate collectively to shape viewers' perceptual and interpretive experiences. Within this framework, cinema is not merely a narrative medium but a semiotic structure that produces ideological meaning.

In the present study, artistic presentation is defined as the structured arrangement of audiovisual elements through which a film communicates narrative meaning, emotional impact, and ideological positioning. This concept encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions of cinematic form, including narrative organization, mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound design, and the aesthetic treatment of violence. These elements function collectively as communicative strategies that shape how audiences interpret cinematic images and respond to the themes presented on screen. By conceptualizing artistic presentation as a multidimensional analytical variable, the study can systematically compare how different directors employ audiovisual techniques to construct meaning and affect within cult cinema.

Monaco (2009) emphasizes that cinematic language plays a crucial role in positioning viewers in relation to the issues presented on screen. In cult films, the deliberate violation of audience expectations through unconventional visual and narrative strategies functions as a communicative device that produces aesthetic shock. Such strategies compel viewers to engage actively in interpretation rather than consume the film passively.

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Based on the review of related literature and previous studies, cult films are recognized as cinematic works that challenge mainstream conventions through unconventional narratives, extreme aesthetics, and controversial themes (Mathijs & Sexton, 2011; Jancovich et al., 2003). Recent research has also highlighted the significance of Asian cult cinema, particularly in relation to the use of violence, transgression, and stylistic experimentation as cultural expressions of social anxiety and historical memory. Furthermore, studies in film and communication research indicate that audiovisual techniques—such as composition, mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing—play a crucial role in shaping audience interpretation and emotional engagement (Bordwell & Thompson, 2017; Monaco, 2009). However, comparative analyses focusing on how different directors employ artistic presentation to construct cult film identities within Asian cinema remain limited. Therefore, this study compares the artistic presentation of *Snake Killers* and *The Man Behind the Sun* in order to better understand how audiovisual language and directorial intention contribute to the formation of cult cinema in an Asian cultural context.

Conceptual Framework



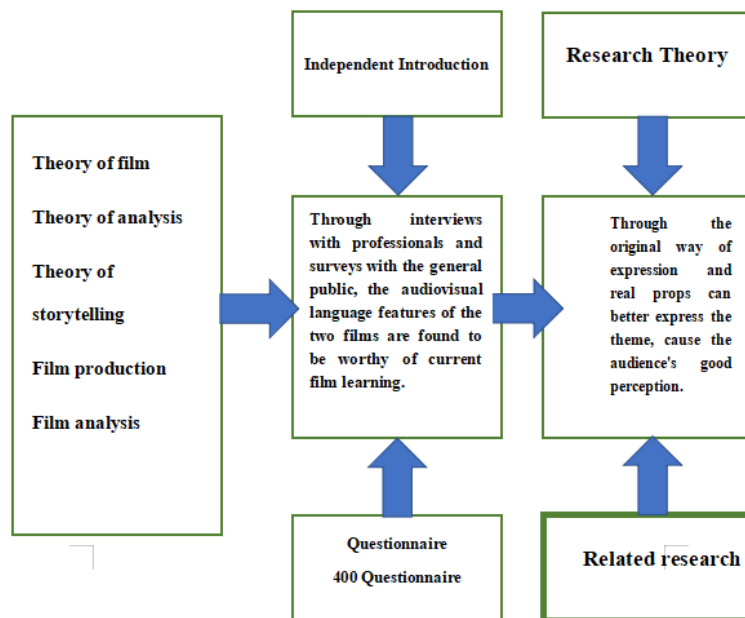


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Methodology

In-depth interview, this study encompasses a comprehensive literature review on the audiovisual language and techniques employed in Snake Killer and Man Behind the Sun, followed by their application to a questionnaire survey for data collection. Firstly, an examination of the popularity and recognition of cult films is conducted, followed by an investigation into their distinctive characteristics and audience perception. Subsequently, an exploration is undertaken to identify elements within cult films that captivate public interest. Finally, these issues are combined with a case analysis involving film samples to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of audiovisual language in cult films through the administration of a questionnaire survey.

A questionnaire survey was conducted to investigate and analyze the audio-visual language performance techniques of cult films across different social strata. The collected data were processed, employing measures such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The findings were presented in a narrative report along with visual representations.

Population: The respondents of this questionnaire consist of individuals who relate to the researchers through social media networks and have personal relationships with them, including relatives and friends. They represent a diverse range of backgrounds, encompassing various educational levels from high school to university, as well as income levels ranging from 2,000 RMB to 20,000 RMB per month. This ensures that the sample covers a wide spectrum of society, enabling comprehensive insights into the advantages and disadvantages of audiovisual expression techniques employed in cult films. The questionnaire is structured into three sections: demographic information about the respondents, general awareness regarding cult films, and evaluations on the merits and drawbacks associated with their audiovisual techniques. Closed-ended questions employing a five-point scale are utilized.



Samples: The participants involved in this study were individuals who shared a particular interest in cult cinema and had prior viewing experience with the films examined in this research. To obtain diverse perspectives on cult film aesthetics and audience reception, the sample included participants from different backgrounds related to film culture. These participants comprised film practitioners involved in film production, film scholars and researchers with academic expertise in film studies, as well as cinema enthusiasts and informed viewers who maintain a sustained interest in cult films. The inclusion of these groups allows the study to reflect both professional and audience perspectives, providing a broader understanding of cult film aesthetics and audience reception within cult film culture.

Research Instruments: The qualitative data are collected through in-depth interviews designed to obtain detailed insights into the artistic presentation, production processes, and expressive strategies of the selected cult films. Interviews with film practitioners primarily focus on historical recollections, production conditions, and artistic decisions. For example, Kan, the actor who portrayed the protagonist in Snake Killer, revealed that all snakes used in the film were real venomous snakes, with their venom removed to ensure safety. Despite the risks involved, the actors demonstrated a high level of professionalism and commitment, continuing production even when injuries occurred during filming. Similarly, Chang, the cinematographer of Men Behind the Sun, stated that the corpses shown in the film were real bodies obtained from a medical institution, and that the dissection scenes involved actual medical procedures performed by professional doctors. Notably, the actors were not informed of this fact before filming, resulting in performances that appeared highly natural and emotionally authentic. The content and structure of interview questions vary according to the background of the interviewees. Interviews with film practitioners employ descriptive and guided questions, while interviews with researchers and film enthusiasts emphasize theoretical interpretation, aesthetic evaluation, and emotional reception.

In addition to qualitative interviews, a structured questionnaire was employed as a quantitative research instrument to examine audience perceptions of the audiovisual language and artistic presentation of cult films. The questionnaire consists of closed-ended items measured using a five-point Likert scale, which allows respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements related to the films' audiovisual techniques, narrative presentation, and emotional impact. The scale is structured as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. This measurement approach enables the researcher to quantify subjective audience evaluations and convert them into statistical data that can be analyzed to identify patterns in viewers' acceptance, interpretation, and evaluation of the artistic presentation of cult films.

Data collection: Data collection for this study is conducted in two stages. First, qualitative data are gathered through in-depth interviews with selected participants. Second, quantitative data are collected through the distribution of online questionnaires to respondents who meet the criteria of having viewed both films.

Statistical Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed to examine audience perceptions, levels of acceptance, and evaluative attitudes toward the audiovisual expression techniques employed in the cult films Snake Killer and Men Behind the Sun. Data were collected through an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and overall trends in audience reception. Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to assess the





internal consistency of the questionnaire items related to audiovisual techniques, with the results indicating an acceptable level of reliability. Inferential statistical analyses were employed to examine differences and relationships among key variables. Independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to compare levels of acceptance and perception across demographic groups such as gender, age, and educational background. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between respondents' familiarity with cult films and their acceptance of extreme audiovisual expressions. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level.

The results of the statistical analysis were presented in tabular form and interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks of film studies and communication studies, emphasizing not only numerical differences but also their cultural and communicative implications. All data collection procedures adhere to ethical research principles, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality of respondents' information.

Results

(1) To study the producer's ideas and analyze the director's creative intentions in Snake Killer and The Man Behind the Sun: The findings indicate that the two films reflect different creative intentions and ideological orientations of their directors. The statistical results show that 65.42% of respondents preferred the storytelling of Snake Killer, while 34.58% preferred The Man Behind the Sun. This suggests that audiences tend to favor the narrative style of Snake Killer, which is characterized by suspenseful storytelling, symbolic imagery, and sensational visual elements.

In contrast, The Man Behind the Sun, directed by Mo Tun Fei, presents a more serious and historically oriented narrative approach. The film emphasizes historical realism and ethical reflection through its reconstruction of wartime events. Audience perceptions also indicate that the directors' works are strongly associated with extreme cinematic expression. Specifically, 40.55% of respondents identified the films as works characterized by strong violence and explicit language, while 22.39% associated them with monsters or extraordinary cinematic elements. These findings demonstrate that the directors' creative intentions are closely linked to the aesthetic characteristics of cult cinema, where transgressive themes and unconventional narrative approaches are central elements.

(2) To study the director's intentions and audiovisual language techniques in terms of composition and scene construction: the analysis reveals that audiovisual language plays a crucial role in shaping the artistic expression of both films. Visual composition, props, lighting, and scene construction function as essential components of cinematic storytelling and contribute to the distinctive aesthetic identities of the films.

The questionnaire results indicate that audiences respond positively to certain audiovisual aspects of the films. For example, in Snake Killer, respondents agreed that the film creates strong sensory effects despite its low production budget (Mean = 3.21) and that the storyline is relatively easy to understand (Mean = 3.22). Furthermore, the film was perceived to encourage audience interaction and discussion (Mean = 3.16) and to convey certain profound meanings (Mean = 3.76).

However, some respondents also identified potential weaknesses in the film's visual style. For instance, the perception that the film contains too many exaggerated horror elements received a relatively high mean score (Mean = 3.80), while excessive blood and exaggerated behavior





received a mean score of 3.47. These findings suggest that the exaggerated audiovisual style of *Snake Killer* contributes both to its cult appeal and to mixed audience reactions.

For *The Man Behind the Sun*, audience responses indicate that the film is perceived as creative (Mean = 3.20) and capable of producing a strong sensory impact with a limited budget (Mean = 3.25). Nevertheless, some respondents suggested that the film's narrative meaning may not always be clearly conveyed, as reflected in the relatively high agreement with the statement "no profound truth in the ending" (Mean = 3.41).

(3). To compare the artistic presentation of cult films between *Snake Killer* and *The Man Behind the Sun*: The comparative analysis demonstrates that the two films represent different artistic strategies within the cult film tradition. Audience responses indicate that both films are widely recognized among viewers, with 30.60% of respondents actively choosing to watch *Snake Killer* and 30.85% selecting *The Man Behind the Sun* when asked which films by the directors they would intentionally seek out.

Despite this relatively balanced recognition, the artistic presentation of the films differs significantly. *The Man Behind the Sun* constructs its cult identity through historical realism, documentary-like visual presentation, and politically charged subject matter. In contrast, *Snake Killer* builds its cult appeal through sensational aesthetics, symbolic imagery, and genre hybridity.

The statistical findings further show that audiences generally associate these films with extreme cinematic characteristics. While 40.55% of respondents identified strong violence as a defining feature, other viewers highlighted unusual narrative structures and visual spectacle as key aspects of the films' cult status. These results demonstrate that although both films employ transgressive imagery and unconventional storytelling, they achieve cult recognition through different aesthetic strategies.

Discussion

1: To study the producer's ideas and analyze the director's creative intentions in *Snake Killer* and *The Man Behind the Sun*. The findings indicate that the two films reflect different creative intentions and production ideologies within the broader framework of cult cinema. Previous studies have emphasized that cult films often emerge from production contexts that challenge mainstream cinematic norms and rely on controversial themes, aesthetic excess, and niche audience engagement (Mathijs & Mendik, 2008; Jancovich et al., 2003). The present findings support this perspective by demonstrating how both directors employ extreme imagery and unconventional storytelling strategies to construct their cinematic identities. The statistical results from the questionnaire survey further highlight differences in audience reception of the two films. Most respondents (65.42%) expressed a preference for the storytelling style of *Snake Killer*, whereas 34.58% preferred *The Man Behind the Sun*. This difference suggests that audiences may respond more favorably to the suspenseful and sensational narrative structures associated with exploitation-style cult cinema. Furthermore, audience perceptions indicate that the films are strongly associated with extreme cinematic expression, with 40.55% of respondents identifying strong violence and explicit language as defining characteristics, followed by 22.39% associating them with extraordinary or fantastical cinematic elements.

These findings reveal that the directors' creative intentions are closely tied to the ideological characteristics of cult cinema. *The Man Behind the Sun* employs graphic realism and historical reconstruction to confront audiences with ethical questions about war and human cruelty, functioning as a cinematic space for historical reflection and collective memory (Sontag, 2003;





Prince, 2003). In contrast, *Snake Killer* adopts a more sensational and symbolic production ideology, using exaggerated imagery and suspense-driven storytelling to create a confrontational viewing experience. This distinction demonstrates how cult cinema can accommodate diverse creative intentions ranging from historical critique to sensational spectacle.

2: To study the director's intentions and audiovisual language techniques in terms of composition and scene construction. The results also demonstrate that audiovisual language plays a crucial role in shaping the aesthetic identities of both films. Film scholars have long argued that visual composition, camera movement, lighting, and mise-en-scène function as essential mechanisms for conveying meaning and emotional impact in cinematic storytelling (Bordwell & Thompson, 2017; Monaco, 2009). Within cult cinema, these elements are often intensified to generate discomfort, tension, and visceral responses from viewers (Williams, 1991). The statistical findings further emphasize the importance of narrative and visual design in audience engagement. Survey results indicate that storyline is the most attractive factor for audiences (51.49%), followed by actors (17.91%), audiovisual performance (16.67%), and costumes and props (13.93%). These findings suggest that narrative structure and audiovisual design operate together as central components of cult film aesthetics.

In the case of *Snake Killer*, respondents generally agreed that the film creates strong sensory effects despite its limited production budget (Mean = 3.21) and that the storyline is relatively easy to understand (Mean = 3.22). However, some viewers perceived the film's visual style as exaggerated, as indicated by relatively high agreement with statements regarding excessive, grotesque imagery (Mean = 3.80) and overly exaggerated blood effects (Mean = 3.47). These responses illustrate how extreme audiovisual aesthetics can simultaneously attract audiences and provoke mixed reactions.

For *The Man Behind the Sun*, respondents similarly recognized the film's creative visual approach (Mean = 3.20) and its ability to produce a strong sensory impact with limited resources (Mean = 3.25). Nevertheless, the relatively high agreement with the statement that the film contains "no profound truth in the ending" (Mean = 3.41) suggests that some viewers interpret the film primarily through its shocking imagery rather than its intended historical or ideological message. This finding highlights the complex relationship between visual intensity and audience interpretation in cult cinema.

3: To compare the artistic presentation of cult films between *Snake Killer* and *The Man Behind the Sun*. The comparative analysis demonstrates that the two films represent different artistic strategies within the cult film tradition. Cult cinema is often characterized by its rejection of mainstream aesthetic conventions and its reliance on excess, transgression, and stylistic experimentation (Jancovich et al., 2003; Mathijs & Sexton, 2011). Both films display these characteristics, yet they do so through distinct cinematic approaches.

Survey results indicate that audiences recognize both films as prominent works within their directors' filmographies. When respondents were asked which films they would actively seek to watch, 30.60% selected *Snake Killer*, while 30.85% selected *The Man Behind the Sun*. This suggests that both films have achieved a comparable level of recognition among audiences despite their controversial subject matter.

However, the artistic strategies underlying this recognition differ significantly. *The Man Behind the Sun* constructs its cult reputation through historical realism and political representation, using graphic imagery to interrogate the nature of human cruelty and institutional violence. In





contrast, *Snake Killer* develops its cult identity through sensational aesthetics, genre hybridity, and exaggerated visual spectacle.

These findings support the argument that cult cinema functions as a form of cultural resistance and oppositional practice within the broader media landscape (Mathijs & Mendik, 2008; Hills, 2002). While both films employ extreme imagery and unconventional storytelling, they do so for different ideological and aesthetic purposes, illustrating the diversity of artistic strategies that exist within the cult film tradition.

Conclusion

The respondents who participated in this questionnaire survey were individuals who shared an interest in cult cinema and had previously watched the films examined in this study. Although the participants were recruited through online networks, the sample reflects a relatively diverse social background. The respondents included individuals with different levels of education, ranging from high school to university, as well as varying income levels from 2,000 RMB to 20,000 RMB per month. Such diversity enabled the study to capture perspectives from viewers across different social groups while maintaining a focus on audiences who are specifically interested in cult films. This diversity also allows for a broader understanding of audience perceptions regarding the advantages and limitations of audiovisual expression techniques employed in cult cinema.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: demographic information of respondents, general awareness and familiarity with cult cinema, and evaluative responses concerning the strengths and weaknesses of audiovisual techniques used in cult films. Closed-ended questions employing a five-point Likert scale were used to systematically measure audience attitudes toward these cinematic techniques.

The questionnaire was distributed in the form of an online survey targeting mainland Chinese residents who had watched the two films analyzed in this study. According to the calculation formula of Taro Yamane, the required sample size for the questionnaire survey was determined to be 402 respondents, ensuring that the collected data could provide a statistically meaningful overview of audience tendencies.

Among respondents aged 15–30, approximately 50 percent reported that they had watched the two films, and among these viewers, around 80 percent indicated that they liked them. These statistics suggest that the two films remain relatively popular among younger audiences. However, among respondents aged 30–50, approximately 90 percent reported that they had not seen *The Snake Killer*, while about 70 percent stated that they had watched *The Man Behind the Sun*. This difference appears to be closely related to the distribution patterns of the films. *The Snake Killer* has rarely been publicly screened in the surveyed regions, whereas *The Man Behind the Sun* has been repeatedly broadcast on television despite its graphic and violent content.

In addition, approximately 99 percent of respondents who reported liking the films were male, suggesting that female viewers are not the primary audience for such films. Meanwhile, 65 percent of respondents indicated that they would recommend films to friends. This pattern suggests that cult films are likely to circulate primarily through niche audience networks and informal word-of-mouth recommendations rather than through mainstream distribution channels.





Recommendation

1. Encourage other scholars to conduct more in-depth and extensive research on the theory of cult films.
2. Expand the research scope to include audiences from different cultural and social backgrounds and explore how cultural differences affect audience attitudes towards cult movies.
3. It is recommended that researchers strengthen cooperation with cult films in future work to develop film production and shooting skills and carry out promotional activities targeting audiences of different age groups. This not only enhances public awareness and understanding of cult movies but also helps to unleash the true power of movies and elevate them to a new level of expression.

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