

Feminism In Chinese Cinema--Taking "*Big Red Lanterns Hanging High*" As an Example

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Abstract. Zhang Yimou, as one of the representatives of the "Fifth Generation Directors", most of his films are dominated by men, while women are always subordinate to men. However, as history continues to change and the development of society gradually abandons these old morals and ethics for women, in the contemporary era when the status of women continues to rise, the development of women's ethics can be glimpsed in the way out and the direction of women's ethics when women's lives are examined through movie works. Specifically, in Zhang Yimou's films, he scrutinizes traditional values and feudal ethics, and at the same time, he also touches upon the development and return of women's ethics in a sideways or even positive way. This study takes the film "Big Red Lantern High Hanging" as material to study the dissolution and sympathy for feminism in the male-dominated society. Through the study of the character of the protagonist, the audiovisual language and the director's consciousness, and by using the methodology of textual analysis, the study concludes that women have always been in a disadvantaged and oppressed position in the male-dominated society. This study points out that the status of women is affected by the period of society, and the women represented by Song Lien in the movie are consumer goods and substitutes for the patriarchal society. It aims to explore the expression of female ethics in a particular historical period, which is important for the study of women to break the traditional values and perspectives.

Keywords: Feminism; masculinity; color composition; director's perspective.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the end of the Republic of China, a period of social transition between the old and new societies and discusses how the deep-rooted feudal chauvinistic ideology of this special period is expressed through film and television works. Taking the feminism presented in the movie "*Big Red Lanterns Hanging High*" as an example, it shows the objectification of women by men and the self-objectification of women, and the tragic fate of women who ultimately achieve discipline in the context of the environment in which the movie is set. Women, as objectified objects, are objects that exist for the sake of the subject. Under the oppression of men, women are reduced to inanimate "objects", they lose the right to speak and cannot control their own destiny. The purpose of this paper is to explore the expression of women's ethics in a special historical period, which is of great significance to the study of women's breaking away from traditional values and perspectives. This study combines the methods of feminism and feminist film criticism, starting from the image of women in the film, the audio-visual language in the text, and the director's consciousness, etc., to analyze, through the way of reproducing women, how this kind of film text, which grows on the basis of the patriarchal culture, constructs the center of the patriarchal discourse and digs out the "objectification" and exploitation of women's image by the patriarchal power that is lurking in the back of the text of the film. "And exploitation of women's image. The main use of the literature analysis method is to find and read relevant information and literature, the advantage of this method is that it can be well combined with the three aspects of the storyline, the language organization, and the period of the background for analysis can be more comprehensive understanding of the background of the story, to understand the thinking of the director, is conducive to the study of the research. The ultimate research goal of this study is to analyze the film from a feminist perspective, so as to reveal the fact that traditional women are repressed and dissolved under the ideology of patriarchal culture and patriarchal cultural mechanisms hidden behind the text of the film.

2. Character Analysis

Claire Johnston is an early critic of the modeling of women's image in films from a semiotic point of view. She believes that the image of "women" in classic films is in fact a kind of structural code, which is the code of the ideal woman in the male standard, and it is meaningless to women themselves [1]. In the movies, this code, which only conveys men's desires and fantasies, does not refer to the "reality" of women's lives. In the movie "Big Red Lanterns", Songlian is the main character of the narrative, but she is also brought to the audience as a lifeless "symbol". Songlian is an intellectual who has received new ideas, and new and old ideas have been colliding in her body, which is why she struggles with her own insistence and the master's rules and regulations but is never able to obtain a balance, which ultimately leads to the tragedy of insanity.

Songlian's psychological change process is reflected in her clothing. The first time Songlian comes to Chen's house is at the wedding, she is dressed in a student uniform, wearing an extremely simple white and black dress, and the wedding sedan chair's joyful red "contrary", giving people a strong visual impact. The revelation that Songlian is a betrayer of feudal rites from the very beginning and that she has always held shameful thoughts about her parents' arranged marriages, reflects Zhang Yimou's movie's strong attack on the idea of "three obediences and four virtues" that women need to strictly follow in the old Chinese society. In the middle of the story, Sung-ryun meets the young master, Fei Pu, who is also wearing a red dress. The two of them look like a new couple, and in her red dress, she is looking forward to loving, but this is also the beginning of Sung-ryun's journey into the darkness. "The flute is the "last straw" for Songlian, holding onto her beautiful past and her hopes for love, but the master's fire destroys everything, burning the flute and Songlian's last sense of self. Songlian completely loses herself, changing all her light-colored clothes into dark colors, and learning to use the rules to suppress her subordinates from the beginning, which means that Songlian has fully accepted the baptism brought to her by the environment, and she has become a conscious supporter of the feudal rules. At the end of the movie, Songlian is finally driven mad by the rules and changes back to her original clothes - a white and black dress, using a back-and-forth technique to suggest to the audience that Songlian has a different kind of "return" after overturning her self-perception.

The movie presents the audience with the whole process of Songlian's domestication. Though she tries to break the pedantic rules when she first joins the Chen family, and tries to break away from the female rivalry (i.e. female rivalry refers to the competition between women for men, which is generally interpreted as the competition between women for men's attention and favor, or in short, the behavior of girls competing with each other for men's favor), in essence, Songlian is still "merely a subject of sexual desire" and is manipulated by men. While the group life of the women is a form of "male-centered discourse" or patriarchal cultural formations, Songlian remains "merely a subject of sexual desire" and is manipulated as "a symbol of instinct and desire, a spectator of the men's flesh" [2]. As the structuralist psychoanalyst K. Lacan points out, "In a male society, the most direct manifestation of male-centrism in the symbolic order in the film text is the tokenization of the female figure, that is, the appearance of the female as an object of male erotic consumption, and the reduction of the diversity of meanings possessed by the female to a monotonous homogeneity." Songlian is, in fact, an extremely multi-faceted character. She has the free will that girls of her age have always admired, so she is not willing to be trapped by "the order of her parents and the words of matchmakers" and tries to change her fate, but at the same time she is also obsessed with the superiority brought by the feudal hierarchical order, and she oppresses and destroys other women in the courtyard as the concubine of Chen's master. As a concubine of Master Chen, she oppresses and destroys the other women in the courtyard. It can be said that she carries in her bones the preliminary consciousness of women's awakening, but she will still be tripped up by the ugly desires of human nature and the unchanging environment of the old society, and she can't take any substantial action, but can only let the passage of time, letting the environment wear out her own sense of resistance.

Songlian's own psychological changes reflect the patriarchal society's demands on women, obedient and well-behaved into a tool of egoless sex is the final destiny of every woman, and through this long-term passive obedience solidifies the position of men at the center of the discourse. Beauvoir

has pointed out that all survivors are simultaneously immanent and transcendent [3]. All subject establishes themselves concretely as transcendence through a plan; they can only realize freedom through constant transcendence towards other freedoms. The wheel of history rolls forward, and from these traces, it is found that only men are able to constantly transcend the established reality, change the external world, and realize creation, while women are destined to shackle their mission to perpetuate the species or take care of the family. In the movie, when Master Chen meets Songlian for the first time, he says, "How is it? How's the foot massage? A woman's feet are the most important thing. When they are comfortable, everything will be straightened out, and she will be better able to serve men." A simple sentence directly proves that women are just ordinary tools for him to give birth to children and that nothing in a woman is as important as being able to give birth to a son.

3. Audio-Visual Language Analysis

Zhang Yimou, as the leader of the "fifth generation director", has been making some bold attempts to break through the traditional color, establish a unique picture composition to give the audience a strong visual impact to win, forming a unique Zhang Yimou aesthetics, which is very obvious in his film "Big Red Lanterns Hanging Tall", so that the whole film has a strong expressive effect. The picture has a strong expression effect.

3.1. Color

In the movie "Big Red Lanterns Hanging High", the lighting of lanterns as a ritual is repeated in film, the director uses it to imply that the Chen family is to achieve the exhortation of women through this ritual, whenever the night is approaching, which room to serve the bedding of which room in front of the door of the wife will be lit up with red lanterns, a large piece of black brick and mortar and lighted up with red lanterns to form a strong contrast of color. In color science, color contrast is to put more than two color systems together and compare their differences and their relationship to each other [4]. Putting two or more colors together is the first condition that constitutes a color contrast; the contrasting colors should be different, which is the purpose of color contrast. The big red lantern is lit up in the gloomy, dark mansion, with no other light source, and the red light is extraordinarily obvious in the blackness, where the red and the black are contrasted in the same time and space. In color science, it is said that only together in the sense of time and space can accurately develop the similarities and differences, and can most fully show the due contrast effect, otherwise the visual impression will be indifferent or even disappear so that the significance of the contrast is lost. Therefore, in the dark closed space, the red lantern "red" in contrast brings a different meaning.

In addition to the red lanterns outside the house, the furnishings inside the house are also very elaborate, and seem to be under the illusion of soft light, presented is the black and red fight, red candle flames flickering with the darkness of the room, and each other to erode, can not be melted also can not do to devour each other, as if it is the destiny of an innocent woman and the fierce struggle between the bad habits of feudalism. Red, as a major color in the film, is both the joy and happiness of the newlyweds when they are favored, but also presents a sense of loneliness and sadness, the large courtyard is gray everywhere, and there can only be one room so brightly lit, which shows the cruelty of the ancient feudal rites, and the red candles every night are full of sighs and helplessness of many women. The large red lanterns are specific symbols declaring that feudalism is like a tumor, the toxin continues to spread and is difficult to remove.

Zhang Yimou's red color is always very elaborate, for example, on the wedding night, when Songlian proposes to put out the lights, Master Chen puts the red lantern close to Songlian's face and says that he wants to see the face of the Fourth Mistress clearly, at this time, the picture presented to the audience is a beautiful woman extremely behind the two red lanterns, and the color of the whole picture is only left with the two colors of black and red, Songlian is completely shrouded by the color of red, which also represents that she gradually identifies with the "objectification" of women. Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex*: "He is the subject, the absolute, and she is the other" [5].

Women are "objectified" and can only exist in dependence on men. The big red lantern behind Songlian's back foreshadows her future fate of being "objectified".

Similar color scenes are used in many places in the film. After Songlian's lanterns are sealed, the red lanterns are covered with black cloth, and the two rows of black lanterns are shrouded in a gloomy atmosphere, like discarded garbage piled up on one side, giving a sense of death by the throat, which, to a certain extent, foreshadows the end of Songlian's being driven mad. This is also a place where the contrast between red and black, the lighting and extinguishing of the lanterns alternates between red and black, and the red color, once bright and extinguished, changes the status of the women in the mansion. Once the black cloth is covered with the extinguished red lantern, it is as if the woman in the courtyard has been imprisoned for life. The red lantern not only maps out the sad and happy life of the women in the compound but also deeply reflects all the bleakness that happens to the women under the system of "polygamy", which represents the situation that human destiny cannot be avoided [6].

Almost all the scenes in the movie are wrapped in black in a cold world, and there are few extremely bright images, as if the sun never shines into the courtyard, suggesting the darkness of the Chen family's mansion, which devours the lives of young girls one after another like a whirlpool. Most of the black tones in the film come from the environment of the courtyard. The film was shot in the famous Qiao's compound, which is constructed of gray bricks and tiles, and is inherently old-fashioned, and then more somber through the addition of filters. The heavy black color not only lays down the overall emotional tone of the film, but also makes it easier for viewers to enter into the destiny of the characters, and to understand the connotation of the film.

3.2. Shooting Angle and Composition

The film uses a large number of overhead shooting techniques to look down on the whole compound from God's point of view, which makes the neat tiled houses appear more closely together, deepens the sense of depth, and at the same time, gives a sense of suffocation with no bottom to the bottom, and creates a feeling of overlooking the human world for the audience as if they are watching a play to see the rise and fall of the fate of the characters in the play.

At the same time, the film uses symmetrical compositions, adding a more distinctive structural layout to the scenes shot in the courtyard, enhancing the solemnity and oppression brought to the audience by the black-tiled houses. The symmetrical layout of the old house is also a sense of ceremony of the old house, these are like a box to confine people inside, as if the unshakeable rules of the Chen residence are oppressing all the women who are gasping for breath. This composition can produce a strong sense of perspective, guiding the viewer to focus on the center of the pivot point from all around, the same can also be expanded from the center of the pivot point to all around [7]. In addition to the overhead shooting method, which focuses on showing the depth of the compound, the viewer's line of sight radiates from the pivot point of the corridor to the surrounding area, and sees a low house and high walls, thus achieving the purpose of the composition, that is, the closed display of the compound, suggesting the feudalism and decadence of the compound.

The film's framed compositions are not only reflected in the aerial shots; for example, when Songlian first enters the Chen family compound, the scene is set against the backdrop of the family's training, along with the archway that frames the character, alluding to the fact that she will be firmly locked in. The butler also stood in this position when conveying the master's thoughts, suggesting the omnipresence and inability to break free from the rules of feudal etiquette. In addition to this, framed and diagonal compositions are also used when Songlian meets the Young Master for the first time. In the movie, Songlian and the Young Master are each situated in an enclosure, alluding to the fact that they are bound by their own identities and are unable to get close to each other. The diagonal composition, on the other hand, represents their attraction to each other, and the combination of these two compositions fully expresses their relationship - contradictory and entangled. The director's delicate emotions are incorporated into each of the chic compositions, giving the audience a visual and spiritual shock.

4. Feminism Constructed by the Director

In the images directed by Zhang Yimou, the female body has become an important carrier for others, the nation, the state, and society, and women have sacrificed their bodies again and again in the false myths constructed by men, and have become the victims of self-submergence in the male-dominated culture, and the individual experience of life is often attributed to the theme of the nation and the state, and the identity of these "heroines" has been subconsciously "de-feminized" [8]. In Zhang Yimou's portrayal, although these female figures are still subjected to traditional feudal concepts and still play the role of the maintainer of family relationships, the revelation of the need for renewal of the times is gained from them, and these characters fight to the maximum extent possible within the confines of their characterization. Taking "The Red Lantern Hangs High" as an example, Songlian, after a series of twists and turns, sees through the nature of fate and the mansion. Unable to escape her confinement, she chooses to destroy herself, in such an extreme way to break away from the cage of the feudal order. Zhang Yimou's focus on women in this film centers on the harm done to women's bodies, spirits, and even lives by the injustices of the system and rituals, gently recreating the injustices suffered by those women in history. These women are the medium of succession in the patriarchal society, although even though they realize clearly that their lives are withering, there is no way to change them, and they can only choose to obey in the end by resisting continuously, with Songlian as the representative of a group of women who are eager for the freedom of their lives, which to a certain extent breaks the pattern of the traditional image of women.

For thousands of years, Chinese women's life paths have been marked by the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues," which subjected them to more mental constraints in a male-centered discourse, as if it were a tool used to maintain the stability of the family as perceived by men. Because Chinese movie audiences have long been accustomed to such images of women, Zhang Yimou can fully analyze and examine the state of women's existence with the help of background resonance and collective memory by virtue of his understanding of the audience's cultural background [9]. Zhang Yimou's search for and attention to women's ethics in his films is beyond the norm, and he combines his films with a full expression of the worries, degradation, misery, and struggles of women as a complex individual, providing the viewer with the possibility of obtaining a direct, incisive, comprehensive, and profound interpretation of women. In Zhang Yimou's movie art, what is shown is always the care for the survival status of people in the lower class society. In terms of ethics, order, and traditional culture, Zhang Yimou uses the image of women to draw people's attention to the cruelty of fate, the suppressed humanity, and the deprivation of the right to speak on survival [10]. With the help of his movie, he presents and reflects on the survival status of Chinese women all along, and through the deep-seated historical excavation, he arouses the viewer's empathy and makes the viewer think further about human nature and the situation of women in today's society. All these are of some significance to the research and development of women's ethics.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study show that women have always been in a weak and oppressed position in a patriarchal society, and that women face great challenges in traditional society. It is further concluded that whether it is Songlian or other aunts, they are just a "tool" in the prevailing environment and have not been able to escape from the traditional roles of women, and they still serve as objectification of existence and a rhetorical device for men. Due to low social tolerance, they do not have the courage to change their fate. This study delves into the feminist elements in the film through textual analysis, socio-historical contextualization and application of feminist theories. The exploration of this theme is of great significance to feminist expression and social reflection in Chinese cinema, providing strong support for the feminist movement and the cause of gender equality. The movie "*Big Red Lantern Hanging High*" not only reflects the history of China's feudal society but also encourages viewers to think about and reflect on the importance of gender equality. It

emphasizes the struggle of women in traditional society and the importance of feminism in Chinese cinema, which has had a profound impact on social progress and gender equality.

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