

Red firecracker, green firecracker

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Red firecracker, green firecracker is an unusual film in so far as how women are portrayed in Chinese movies. The movie tackles the life of a woman who at a very young age inherited her father's firecracker factory. Being the only child, there was no other recourse for the family, even if women were not permitted to have that role in earlier Chinese society. As such, the factory was imposed upon Chun Zhi, without any consideration for how she felt about it. The premise of the movie seeks to explore a woman forced into a leadership role in a society that is still largely masculine in orientation.

My first impression while watching this movie was that “ women were portrayed and positioned better in this movie than others. ” However, as I watched longer, I realized that this movie was not much different from other movies that portray women as prisoners of their unfortunate lives. From the onset, it is easy to misinterpret this movie as I did because of its premise of a woman in a position of power. However as the movie progressed, we can see that while Chun Zhi owned her own factory, she was still by and large a puppet of the society where she belongs.

The only difference lies in the fact that the theme of oppression is presented in a unique manner, different from the traditional and formulaic scripts that depict women as slaves to men. Although Chun Zhi was in the center of power of the firecracker factory that she owned, she had no life outside of her responsibilities in the factory. While she the main character had a slew of people who obeyed her, she was also a slave of her responsibilities. What makes the movie very interesting is that Chun Zhi is forced to take on a masculine identity.

Every one treated her like a man and she was dressed in the traditional male costume and was called “ Master” by the people around her. Moreover, she was not allowed to get married, in accordance with her father’s last wish. This was done in order to keep the factory within the family. I thought that this very ironic because what happens after she dies? There will be no one who will take over the factory because she has no children to take after when she is gone.

As such, it is only a matter of time when strangers eventually take over the family business and claim it as theirs. Living as puppet of the Cai family did not seem too harsh for Chun Zhi. She was portrayed as someone who handled her chains with quiet dignity. She either did not consider herself as a prisoner or just chose to suffer in silence. All was well until Chun Zhi hires Niu Bao, an artist, to paint the doors of the family’s house. Immediately, there was attraction between Chun Zhi and Niu Bao, but Chun Zhi chose to keep her feelings hidden.

But all her composure and control came crashing down when she saw a portrait of herself drawn by Niu Bao. What she saw was an image of a woman, with long, free-flowing hair and wearing a long dress and Chun Zhi remembered that she is a woman after all. For me, this was symbolic of all the different kinds of cages that Chun Zhi was a prisoner of and had no chance of escaping from. It is very sad that throughout the whole movie, Chun Zhi cannot bring herself to forsake all her responsibilities and chose to be free and be with the man she loves.

While she is the head of the family by virtue of her position in the factory, she had no say on how she is to live her life. The movie is a testament to how Chinese society holds family duty as the highest of all values and this must be upheld to the exclusion of most everything else. Red firecracker, Green firecracker was a movie of a woman in power but powerless at the same time. It is ironic that the source of her power are the same chains that keep her imprisoned and oppressed.