

Introduction the  
choices she makes.  
songlian comes



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## **Introduction**

Women have for a long time been underestimated and overlooked in different cultures with men's prejudice escalating their grievances.

Unfortunately, this trend of women suffering cuts across different cultures including China; the setting of the film *Raise the Red Lantern*. This film revolves around Songlian; a newly wedded fourth wife of a tycoon; Master Chen. Upon arrival, she receives royalty treatment; nevertheless, problems start the first night when Meishan, the third wife feigns sickness and Master Chen has to leave Songlian to be with Meishan. To Songlian, this is a wake up call as she realizes she has to fight for her place in this marriage and win Chen's heart to lure him into spending more time with her.

This realization marks the beginning of Songlian's struggles; unfortunately, she ends up being psychologically dead, having suffered numerous 'wounds' in her struggle to beat women oppression. Psychological death is the only way Songlian would be free from oppression for she tries in numerous

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occasions to beat this oppression with no success. Nevertheless, even though she psychologically dies, Songlian fights the good battle of resilience and hope; hope that things would be good someday.

## **Determinants of Songlian's Life**

Class and gender are the greatest determinants of Songlian's life for they shape her life and the choices she makes. Songlian comes from a poor background and she suffers her first 'wound' when her father dies, plunging her family into bankruptcy, which forces Songlian to drop out of university just after six months of study.

The issue of gender comes out clearly at this level for Songlian becomes a sacrificial lamb and 'sold' to as a wife or concubine to Chen a polygamous tycoon where she becomes the fourth concubine. Songlian is completely convinced that women have no voice in society as she readily accepts to be married against her will. She says, "Let me be a concubine then.

Isn't this a woman's fate?" (Yimou). This clearly shows Songlian's mindset on matters of gender. She truly believes men should rule women, something that women cannot question and this mind set explains her remarks concerning woman's fate. This distorted and misinformed mindset dominates Songlian's life and contributes directly to her life choices and actions. As aforementioned, class is the other contributing factor in this film.

Despite the fact that Songlian is educated to university level, she allows her environment to intimidate her and settle for mediocrity. It is true she comes from a poor background; nevertheless, this should not tie her to the kind of thinking she entertains. Unfortunately, the other concubines, probably <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-the-choices-she-makes-songlian-comes/>

having the same poor background serve to intimidate Songlian making her education look insignificant. Zhanyun, the first wife tells her, “ It’s good you are educated. You will get used to it here” (Yimou).

After a series of negative remarks from her co-wives about her education, Songlian concludes that education is of no use, “ What good are books? I am just one of the Master’s robes. He puts me on or takes me off at will” (Yimou). This is resignation and acceptance to settle for less than what one is worth. Nevertheless, Songlian has to fight the battle of oppression and keep her husband close, something that makes her resort to ‘ crude’ ways to have her way.

## **Survival Tactics**

After accepting she can never get out of this treadmill of marriage, Songlian vows to keep her place in this place. To overcome competition from the other concubines, she fakes pregnancy hoping to keep Chen close to her. Unfortunately, her maid, Yan’er exposes her dirty savage tricks making her lose her red lanterns forever; another ‘ wound’.

Her survival tactics backfire for the first time. To avenge this revelation, Songlian exposes Yan’er’s desire to become Chen’s concubine leading to Yan’er’s suicide. After realizing how useless life is, Songlian decides to withdraw from the rest preferring solitude instead. In her solitude, she concludes competition for Chen between his concubines is futile and decides to resort to drunkenness. During her 20th birthday, she takes excess alcohol hoping to forget her woes.

Unfortunately, she reveals Meishan's affair with the family doctor and Meishan is hanged leaving Songlian depressed and traumatized. Once again, Songlian's survival tactics backfires and this causes more harm than reprieve to her.

## **Songlian's Liberation**

Songlian is finally liberated from oppression by dying psychologically.

As aforementioned, this death is the only way Songlian could be liberated from oppression especially after witnessing Meishan's physical death.

According to Shen, " Since she witnessed the death of the third mistress, she confirms her fear that there is no escaping her situation" (Para. 9). In the light of this realization, that there is no exit route from her woes, Songlian decides to drive herself crazy as a way of escapism. In her crazy world, she cannot understand what goes around.

This psychological death is the only way Songlian can get over her problems. Unfortunately, Songlian does not have any other way of getting out of oppression. Every attempt she makes backfires worsening her situation further. If her first plan of feigning pregnancy and trying to get one at the same time worked, she would have high status and gain respect from the other mistresses and servants.

Moreover, if her second strategy of getting drunk worked, she would drown herself into alcohol and forget her woes. Unfortunately, the first strategy of faking pregnancy brought guilt and loss of dignity; similarly, her second attempt led to depression and trauma. Therefore, psychological death is the

only way out because in this state, she would assume everything including <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-the-choices-she-makes-songlian-comes/>

her failures. This only choice shows how women are disadvantaged in most societies. Women do not have the freedom of choice and in most cases have to depend on what men say.

Songlian could not choose not to marry Chen; no, her stepmother had already decided. Women have few choices in society and most of the choices they have are disastrous with Songlian's case as a confirmation.

## **Conclusion**

Songlian's experience is just but an example of what women go through in different societies.

She suffers great loss when her father's death forces her out of university. She is married to Chen against her will and once in this marriage; misfortunes follow her in whatever she does. Yan'er exposes her fake pregnancy while drunkenness makes her blurt Meishan's affair leading to her hanging. Instead of her tactics, working for her, they work against her and the only way out is death. Nevertheless, Songlian decides to die psychological death as a way of escapism from reality.

This death is the only option she has to liberation especially after trying several other tactics with no success. As the film closes, Songlian wanders freely across the fields not even worried about Chen marrying a fifth concubine; this is the kind of freedom Songlian had been lacking all along. Society offers women few or no options when it comes to choosing the way of life as confirmed by Songlian's story.

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