

Zhang early 90s)  
differ from the recent



Zhang Yimou's celebration of people's life, exoticism and death in the films is said to be illuminated in his use of red color. For the last 20 years, Zhang used color so that he could effectively tell stories in his films.

This quality can be said to have inspired people's fascination with China at large. There exists vivid usage of red color in Red Sorghum, Raise the Red Lantern and Ju Dou films. He used this color to denote manufacturing of the sorghum brew, the traditional wedding dress, the process of processing silk dyeing and the crimson splashes of blood. Through visual and emotional splendor, Zhang Yimou educated, entertained and enlightened the viewers of the films that he directed. Zhang can be seen to have encoded gender through color in the various stories portrayed in the films.

In the film, Songlian revealed Raise the Red Lantern, Yan'er's secret of keeping red lantern such that the lanterns were dowsed with black forever. In the Red Sorghum, Jiu'er had the red of yang (masculinity) which dominated the wedding gown, the wild sorghum, the sorghum brew and the fire that consumed her at the end. The red force became the black- white power of femininity and death that was enforced from father to son under the ancestral rules (Lu 159).

### **Traceable theme in Zhang Yimou's works.**

The theme perfected by Zhang in all his films can be seen to be the idea that the conflicts of men foretell the desire for inner peace. Zhang tells his stories that consist of humanity and unforced drama. In his films, one can find that Zhang emphasizes on cultural continuity through perverse, conservative or rebellious modern generations that seem to be defined by their masculinity.

Conflict can be seen in most of these films, and the conflicts always seem to have a reason behind them. The reason can be said to be man's desire to gain peace in his surrounding and his heart. In the Red Sorghum, Raise the Red Lantern, To Live and House of Flying Daggers 1 can see the element of conflict through the characters depicted. Through the conflicts, the characters aimed at attaining something, which eventually they achieved.

### **How earlier films differ from the Most Recent ones**

Earlier films (80s to early 90s) differ from the recent ones in the content of the story line. Over the years, movies and films seem to have changed noticeably up to now.

The areas that can be said to evolve are the subject matter, characters depicted, plot setting, and themes contained in the films. Subject matter of the earlier films can be said to revolve around cultural and political issues, which were analyzed, throughout the story line. In the most recent films, one can say that the subject matter involves the contemporary issues that affect the modern society such as love between two people and how they try to overcome problems to end up together. House of Flying daggers (2004) can be described as a love story between two people. In the Red Sorghum (1987), the culture of the people can be seen in the way the main character got depicted by the director. Marriage issues seem to take a principal role in society. Most of the people seem to have been peasant farmers, and the brew made can be said to be traditional brew. In the film, Raise the Red Lantern (1991), marriage and polygamy can be said to be emphasized considering the way the young woman became one of the wealthy man's concubines.

In *To Live* (1994), both cultural and political aspects got recognized as an important part of a society. One can find that there existed society leaders like chiefs and District Officers who led various regions. The characters depicted too can be said to differ in the way that they were conveyed in the story lines. In the films that were directed in the 1980s and early 1990s, one can notice that they were very traditional in the way they acted or made decisions. In *Red Sorghum*, one can find that people feared persons with leprosy since they did not know how leprosy would be passed on to another person. In addition, the women can be said to be naive, and they had no say whatsoever when it came to marriage. The more recent movies can be seen to consist of characters that seem to be liberalized and educated (Zhang 115). The plot setting can be seen to differ noticeably between the films directed in the 1980s and those that are recent.

The story line can be said to be the rendering and ordering of the actions in a story while a setting refers to location and the time at which the story takes place. In the earlier movies, the plot revolved around peasant lives, while in the recent films, the plot revolves around modern lives with sophisticated neighborhoods. The setting of the earlier movies can be seen to be dating back to about a century back, while in the recent films, the setting can be modernized. *Red Sorghum* (1987), a Chinese film based on Mo Yan's novel, has its setting in a village found in China's eastern province called Shandong. The film dates back to the time of Second Sino-Japanese War. *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), an adaptation of Ni Zhen's 1990 novel, can be seen to be set the 1920s during the warlord era before the Chinese Civil War.

The *To Live* (1994), based on Yu Hua's novel, was set in the 1940s. *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), a love story, can be seen to have been set in 859 AD where rebel groups had been formed during the great Tang Dynasty. The theme that is portrayed by the story line differs from the earlier films to the recent movies. In the earlier movies, the focus can be seen to have been a low place of woman in the society while in the most recent movies; the themes seem to change as equality is endowed on the people. In the *Red Sorghum* (1987), marriage for the narrator's grandmother had been pre-planned even without consulting her. The same thing can be noted in the *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) film where the lady got married off to a man who already had three other wives. In *To Live* (1994), the blind daughter was introduced to a man who she later married and they got children. Not all these women could be given a choice by the society when it came to making marital decisions.

In addition, women seem not to have been given equal rights as men when it came to property ownership and education. In the *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), liberation can be seen in the way Mei refused to accept Leo's proposal and instead chose to be with Jin who she had genuinely fallen in love. The roles of women in family and society and how these women are regarded by others and the director (Dixon 98).

The roles that women play in family and society as depicted in these films can be said to be mothers, wives and daughters. As mothers, they should give birth to children and take care of them as the husbands work outside the home. As wives, they ought to be obedient to the men and the husbands must be chosen for them. As daughters, they should obey their parents and

should accept the decisions that their parents make on their behalf. Gender roles seem to have been different regarding what workwomen and men should do.

Females had to be homemakers who did all the domestic work in the homes. In the Red Sorghum, Jiu'er took over her husband's distillery only after the husband died mysteriously. In Raise the Red Lantern, the ladies just tried to impress their wealthy husband and just concentrated in looking beautiful for him. In To Live, the husband of Jiazhen worked to support his family as his wife took care of their two children. Women can be seen to have been regarded as objects only good to be sold off and become sexual objects. In the Red Sorghum, the poor young woman got married off to an old leper simply because the man can be said to have been wealthy. In the film, Raise the Red Lantern, the lady got married off as the fourth concubine to a wealthy man. She had to look beautiful for him whenever he wanted to sleep with her.

Same thing happened to the blind girl in the film To Live where her parents chose a man for her who later married her, and they got a child. In addition, they could not make decisions for themselves since they had no rights to protect them from abuse. In these movies, the women needed to be faithful to one man lest they got punished by the society. In the film, Raise the Red Lantern, the lady who got accused of cheating on the wealthy man had to be hanged by the servants. Women had no rights to own property as seen in the To Live film where the man owned the family property, and after gambling, he lost everything to the other gambler (Bush 119).

## **Handling of female characters in different films by different directors and their effectiveness in progression or regression**

In *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), the story tells of a woman who got raped and she started a revenge mission directed by Meir Zarch. The woman (Camille) got brutally raped by a gang while she resided in a cottage by a lake while writing her first novel. This woman can be seen to be weak at first while the brutal men executed the crime, but, she gained strength while revenging against the men. The men seem to take advantage of the woman while making her resemble a sex object. This depiction can only be described as a regressive way of portraying women as sex objects.

Women should be valued, and handled in a manner that must be respectable since they remain to be human beings (Ramanathan 32). In the film, called *Forgetting Sara Marshal* (2008), the story revolves around Bretter and Sarah Marshal who break up, and the man tries to move on with his life. The film got directed by Nicholas Stoller and in one of the scenes; there appears a photo of half-naked Sarah that Peter finds in a hotel men's room. This displays Sarah as an immoral woman who can get recklessly drunk and behave badly in public. Such depiction can be said to be regressive in that it portrays women as immoral beings and leaves no respect for women's bodies. In another film, called *Why Did I Get Married?*, directed by Tyler Perry, the plot shows how difficult it can be to maintain a strong and healthy relationship in the contemporary world.

The depiction of women in these films can be said to be both recessive and progressive in the way their lives are portrayed by the director. The women have been used to portray the emotional consequences of love and fidelity in

the constitution of marriage. Some women own jobs and can be said to be independent, which is a progressive depiction of women. In *Dracula* (1992) film (directed by Francis Ford Coppola), the marriage roles seem to have changed in that Lucy got proposed to three times at the same time. She got the pleasure of choosing one man among the three which shows women liberation. Her rejection of feminine gender roles, after the transformation, seems to have made men such as Van Helsing to fear her.

Through Mina, it gets clear that men did not expect women to be quite intelligent during the Victorian era. This can be seen through the way Van Helsing keeps on telling Mina that she is so intelligent meaning it would be a rare occurrence to encounter an intelligent woman. These depictions can be said to be both regressive and progressive.

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