

# *Analysis of the Direction of Female Survival in Raise the Red Lantern*

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**Abstract:** The film *Raise the Red Lantern*, directed by Zhang Yimou, indicates the fate of women are under the control of men from the perspective of composition and tone, and the irony of the unfair social system and feudal thoughts. This paper mainly analyzes the direction of female survival in this film, and finds that China has a deep-rooted patriarchal ideology, which has not been completely eliminated in modern society. It is difficult for women to play their own rights, interests and roles in this society, and they are likely to be unable to be themselves under the coercion of the system or family. It is hoped that through the expression of the film and the analysis of this paper, people who still live under the controlled system can get out of the haze and find themselves, and at the same time, people who control others can realize their mistakes and cause human reflection, so as to change people's living situation in the society.

**Keywords:** *Raise the Red Lantern*, female, composition, women's liberation

## 1. Introduction

*Raise the Red Lantern* is a film directed by Zhang Yimou, based on the novel *Wives and Concubines* by Su Tong. This is a film with strong symbolic meaning and profound ideological implications. In the space with nowhere to escape, it uses a variety of clever ways to deeply show the sad and helpless lifestyle of women in that specific era [1]. The film *Raise the Red Lantern* shows that in a patriarchal society, women unconsciously follow the patriarchal discourse, and have a natural and strong sense of dependence on men [2]. The late years of the Republic of China were a period between the transformation points of the old and new society in China, and also a period of deep-rooted male chauvinism. It can be said that the patriarchal system from ancient times to the present, as well as the feudal culture and thought that lasted for thousands of years make women live under the male hegemony, and the gap between the social status of men and women continues to exist. In the old times, personality became a vassal of the social system, and there was rarely seen the germination of women's consciousness of independence. Women were born for their husband's likes and dislikes, with the fate of one person [3]. In this context, the women represented by Song Lian are all consumer goods and accessories of the patriarchal society. Even if they have their own distinct personality, they can only gradually lose their true self under the coercion of the system.

This article introduces how to show the direction of female survival through film and television techniques. This film reflects that the women of this era are bound to the rules and systems of a

patriarchal society. Gender and class are treated unequally, from the past to the present. It is hoped that this study can arouse the reflection of people bound by this system, and tries to make women live their true selves.

## 2. Metaphors in Composition

The depiction of the composition of the film is very delicate, in which the symmetrical composition occupies the largest space. China from ancient palaces to modern general housing is mostly symmetrical. This is an architectural aesthetic, with regular repetition, and an orderly arrangement, usually giving people a sense of solemnity and orderly order. As art, both architecture and film have derived a set of symbol systems with rich language expressive functions in their respective systems, and architecture, as the second language in film, plays an important role in the emotional expression and plot development of film [4]. In this film, the contrast of the symmetrical composition shows the other side of the symmetry, with the rigid rules of Chen Fu and the suppressed humanity of the female characters in the courtyard. The film is a traditional Chinese architectural art through symmetry, This closed composition and sense of design with strong unity is obviously the ideographic pursuit of the film, setting the tone of the whole film [5], which shows that the rules in the yard are the same, which has always inherited the very deep-rooted old rules.

Both the symmetrical composition of the beginning and the end echo each other, and the picture content is the heroine Song Lian and the traditional Chinese window frame. In the beginning, there is a static symmetrical composition. Symmetric composition makes the picture more stable, and the viewing line of sight is firmly locked in the picture, thus resulting in depression [6]. In the middle of the picture, the window frames are neat window frames, which shows her to be trapped by traditional family ideas. The window frames composed of multiple wooden strips are like a rule, which becomes an obstacle for Song Lian to have her own life. At the end is the dynamic symmetry composition, with Song Lian wandering in the two window frames, which shows that the spirit of Song Lian has escaped the control of the courtyard and even the whole patriarchal thought and the so-called old rules, but her body will always be trapped in the cage-like courtyard without taking another step out. In the courtyard, each character walks through symmetrical doors, representing the thresholds and rules they pass every day. The whole film was shot in a closed environment, except for the first walk to the Chen family. That period is also the only remaining escape from the original family, which has not entered the shackles of the new family time.

Before entering the gate of the Chen courtyard, Song Lian stood in front of the “longevity picture”. She occupies only about a tenth of the picture. The words on the plaque on the back are neatly arranged and, coupled with the symmetrical composition, it is more rigid and serious as if the whole world is pressing Song Lian. In fact, Song Lian in the yard is really helpless, the master of her as a plaything, the servant girl hated her at the beginning, the sisters in each camp, Song Lian as a person with no love can only be oppressed by reality. Song lotus after dialogue with the housekeeper, using the subjective perspective of the housekeeper makes Song Lian very small in the picture at the same time tilts the dichotomy composition. The viewer intuitively feels that Song Lian’s house with oppression, and her small house also represents the rules of the family, and other’s invisible oppression.

The next scene after the box, the servant girl at the door to help her carry the box, is absolutely symmetrical in addition to the box, including the door frame, the columns on both sides, the windows and the buildings next to it. The small box placed at the bottom of the whole picture stands out in it. The box breaks into the neat courtyard like Song Lian, unbalancing the picture, and suggesting that Song Lian has been trying to break some rules in the courtyard. But the same box is too small in this courtyard, just like Song Lian is only a drop in the ocean in this era, she alone can not change this deep-rooted system, can only be imprisoned in this inescapable cage. Under such a system, it would

be desperate not to obey the master and the rules of the government, but in the end, Song Lian is not willing to disobey her will and choose to fight to the end, just like this rebellious box.

In addition to the substantial symmetry composition of the building or the picture, the film also uses a dichotomy to the symmetry composition of metaphor. Song Lian sits by the bed on the other side of the bed column center is the red lantern, the lantern and Song Lian are relatively called, implying that Song Lian is the red lantern. When Song Lian talks with other wives, the director often puts lanterns at the back of the characters, indicating that the red lanterns symbolize the four wives in the courtyard, even those who have died, who are like the control of the lanterns, and they want to light them and blow them out. Red lantern is the most important object in the film, it is the main line of the film, the symbol of women's status, also the hope of women in Chen courtyard to live, but also a kind of imprisonment, a bondage of women [7]. When the film shows the plot of the lantern, it uses the long pole of the lantern to make the picture form a dichotomy, which has a strong sense of separation. The upper and lower parts, the controlled lantern, above the men who control the fate of women. The first night of the master and Song Lian, he ordered Song Lian to raise the lantern and adjust the balance of the picture. The picture is asymmetric before the light is raised, and the picture is symmetrical after the master's command, indicating that the master controls the whole situation, and the situation seems to be balanced but actually old and conformist.

### 3. The Tone Shows the Psychology of the Characters

Most of the film uses red and black and white colors, with a few blue tones. Red is a warm color, representing warm, blood; blue is a cold color, representing melancholy, coupled with black and white this monotonous color, forming a great contrast. The externalization of the character psychology shows the most vividly, more prominent on the atmosphere of the film. Director Zhang Yimou said in an interview, "I think the film elements can evoke people's emotional fluctuations", so he attaches great importance to the use of color in his films. He often will warm color wanton and appropriate extravagance in order to achieve approximate deviation from the actual effect [8].

From the beginning of Song Lian entering the palace, the film first chooses to adopt the dusk tone, a hint of her own fate. When Song Lian went to visit the big wife, she also used a dark tone, and the sun only shone from the window to Song Lian's body, just like the fresh blood Song Lian just entered the house. The eldest lady was in a dark corner, like she was already old. The whole room was gray, which seemed to feel suffocating, showing the depression of the courtyard. The color of the big lady's dress in the film has always maintained a monotonous and bleak purple color, externalizing her loneliness and forgetting, her life no longer exists as fresh breath.

The director has repeatedly used the very bright full red tone in the picture, which also plays a different role in it. Hegel says that red looks like "the most concrete color." The function of this most concrete color and its performance value applied to the design of female characters are equally important in the screen world [9]. The first time the full red color is on the first night when Song Lian entered the house. Red dizzy dyed the atmosphere of the whole room, red should be a warm and festive color when you get married, here to use red for a kind of irony, but also the inner tension of Song Lian, highlighting the sense of danger the master brings to Song Lian. The third wife in the middle of the night also lets the servant knock at the door of the house on the first night, the red tone also shows that Song Lian has not any sense of belonging in the courtyard, and the only husband and wife master can be called by others. The second time is also on such a night when the master was with Song Lian, the third wife again used the same way to call the master from Song Lian's side, at this time Song Lian learned to resist. The director uses the impressive all red whole picture. In the case of the third wife, she shows the different reactions of the characters and begins to change. She is trying to control her own fate and has a certain degree of success. But in fact, her fate was controlled by her master.

Tone can show the different psychology of the characters by contrast in the same scene. Song Lian twice heard the sound to go to the roof, the first time was sleeping with the sound of the third wife's singing, Song Lian held the dissatisfaction of the third wife to find the source of the voice, the director used the black and white color to make the whole picture, suggesting that the relationship between the two is estranged. Second is that Song Lian heard the sound of flute, the relics her father left, the director at the moment uses a warm yellow color to make two people meet scene very warm. In addition, when Song Lian realized that beating feet were comfortable and began to enjoy the process of beating feet, and felt the happiness above the system, the color of the picture is warm, so that the whole person is full of luster, and the red warmth on her shoulders has a lot of expectations. But when the master because of her quarrel, she can not continue to rely on the pet and arrogant, the picture of the room dims, the externalization of the character lost psychology.

When the fate of the third wife is about to die, the color of the yard in the picture is blue, the blue tone represents the melancholy and cold, with the weather with heavy snow, just like the mood of Song Lian at the moment, the people who really have empathy with themselves in this place will be disposed of now. Since then, most of the three wives use a blue tone to show the sadness here, but also imply that the life atmosphere of the courtyard of the inner spirituality is gone. Because the two people who most retain their character in the whole yard, one is about to die, the other will be crazy to get spiritual liberation. The warm red light in the courtyard forms a huge contrast with the blue tone of the courtyard, just like the huge contrast between Mei Shan's ideas and spirit and the rigid rules of the courtyard, the final song of the lotus crazy is to choose at least let her spirit is not bound to get liberation.

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, *Raise the Red Lantern* mainly adopts the composition techniques of symmetry composition and dichotomy method, and uses the picture to reflect the conditions and thoughts of the characters in the film. Let the audience improve the visual impact of the film to understand the heart of the role, and experience the feelings of the characters in the film. The director also uses a counterbalanced approach to highlight the characters and pave the way for the characters, adding the background and character of the characters to the performance of the composition. The film also shows the relationship between the characters through the tone, and also shows the inner activities of the characters in the tone of the picture, implying the fate of the characters in the film. Behind the image display and the overall narrative, the film reveals the philosophical meditation of the subject position of women: the struggle between women and their survival fate, the contradiction and conflict between human nature and the transcendental order that destroys human nature [10], and the catharsis and publicity of women's consciousness of seeking life freedom, equality, respect and love.

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