

The Research on the Female Features in the Chinese Movie Raise the Red Lantern

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Abstract: Once, in many countries, the status of women was low. Nowadays, as the feminist movement has become a hot topic, more and more people are paying attention to the changes and progress of the status of women in the society. The movie *Raise the Red Lantern* from Zhang Yimou shows the life of women in the old society of China. This article will take this film as an example to analyze the oppression suffered by women and the awakening of women's consciousness under the feudal social system and then deeply analyze the problems caused by this phenomenon and make some advice to those countries which are trying to improve the social status of women. This article will observe the behaviors and characteristics of those actors in the film, and then find some common characteristics, at last we can compare different features to find the items of the film. The women shown in the film are greatly oppressed by feudalism and patriarchal societies. Therefore, by analyzing this film, this article hopes that all countries in the world could promote equality between men and women and avoid a recurrence of history.

Keywords: Female Features, Chinese Movie, the Red Lantern

1. Introduction

Raise the Red Lantern is a movie directed by Yimou Zhang, a famous Chinese director and starred by Gong Li in 1991. It is adapted from a novel called *Wives and Concubines* by Su Tong. Happened in the 1920s, the film tells a story about a young woman who becomes a concubine of a wealthy old man during the Warlord Era and the conflict among these concubines, it is completely a tragedy.

This movie is mainly about a student called Song Lian whose father has died. Dropped out of the university, her stepmother married her to a wealthy man as a concubine. This man has already had 1 wife and 2 concubines. In this palatial abode, the woman with whom their husband would spend the night can receive sensuous foot massages and brightly lit red lantern. The first mistress Yu Ru is as old as the master and she seemed to live out her life as forgotten; the second mistress Zhuo Yun is devious who has framed 2 concubines to gain more attention from her husband. The third mistress Mei Shan is a singer, the master like her best but finally she is punished to death because of fornication. Song Lian feigned pregnancy which makes her be punished by her husband and after the death of Mei Shan, she finally becomes mad and her maid Yan'er who hates her and dreams of being a concubine also died at last.

In March 3th, 1992, this movie was released in North America. It set the highest box office record for Chinese films in North America at that time which reached 2.6 million dollars. In 1991,

the film won the Silver Lion Award at the 48th Venice International Film Festival. In 1992, this movie was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, becoming the second Chinese film to be nominated for this award after the film *Ju Dou* which was also directed by Yimou Zhang. Subsequently, *Raise the Red Lantern* won the David di Donatello for the best foreign language film, it was the first Chinese film to win this award. In 1993, this movie won the British Academy Film Award for Best Foreign Language Film. In 2015, it was named 28th in 100 Best Foreign Language in the history of Film by Empire magazine, making it the highest-ranked mainland film.

Although this film was very well received by the foreign countries, there were also some critics, someone thought this was a stereotype of the ancient Chinese society and a criticism of contemporary China. A Chinese journalist said this work catered too much to Western taste, but Zhang Yimou himself denied it. In some cases, this film is controversial.

Nowadays more and more people concentrate so much on the position of women in the society and the position has improved so much. But it is still necessary to think back of the old times, as in this film, the main features are female and this film shows the obvious characteristics of a special age, so this movie can be a good example to criticize and rethink the harness received by the women in the past time.

2. Literature Review

Cheng Qingyu proposed that Zhang Yimou describes the sharp conflicts between women living in the same house which deeply reveal the connection between the decadent feudal patriarchal system and the fate of women, shows the tragedy of women in that era [1]. Guo Caixia proposed that *Raise the Red Lantern* use a series of design demonstrates the Chinese feudal society patriarchy system has oppressed extremely on women and shows the control and bond of the freedom and independence of women [2]. Lanterns are the main line of the development of the story, while demonstrating the rites of hanging, lighting blowing out the lanterns again and again, the film shows the ugly nature of the feudal class, the feudal marriage and culture, and then begins to think about the essence of human [3]. They are a group of women suppressed and mutilated by the old society. The first mistress takes control of the whole family, she is the advocate of feudal morality. The second mistress is better at acting fake friendly. The third mistress is sincere, and she acts against the feudal morality of this family. Song Lian remains her innocence, but she submitted to the tragic fate at last [4]. Jing Zhang thought that influenced by feudal ideas, the women in this movie dependent so much on men in their life and even enjoy it. The society always regards women as weaker ones. The film also shows the materialization of women from different angles, sensuous foot massages in the film is a symbol of that the women are fertility tools [5].

But this film can be considered as an opposition of feudal society. *Raise the Red Lantern* does not focus on the conflicts between those concubines under polygamy but uses the same fate of different women to reveal the cannibalism nature of feudal etiquette and feudal culture and criticizes the patriarchal society [6]. The feudal society and morality destroyed the youth, love and life of a women. The red element in this movie shows the completely criticism of the ancient society. The tragedies of these women show the enthusiasm for life, the desire of gaining love and the pursuit for liberty [7]. Pan Chengchen found that the oppression from old society was fatal for women, they live in a hard situation that they even could not save themselves. Only when the real life of women is engraved in the historical video, can the value of women's freedom and emancipation be realized [8]. Shi Haitong proposed that with the control and oppression of the men and the conflicts among the women, it is inevitable that the awareness of some women must be unsuccessful such as the death of Mei Shan and the insanity of Song Lian. Nowadays, with the artistic criticism of patriarchy, the writers and directors alert the futures generations do not repeat

the past and also feminist awareness is a rough and endless process [9]. Yu Liyan pointed out that *Raise the Red Lantern* imparts enormous influence on women in some extent, but this kind of attention mostly bases on the compassion, only when the women stand up and get rid of the influence from male, can they really be independent and liberated [10].

As there are many papers investigating the harm received by the women in this film, but there are not many papers basing on the analysis of the features to find the influence until nowadays. This paper will concentrate on the female features in this film and conclude some characteristics of that age, then appeals the whole society make more efforts on changing the status of women.

3. Methodology

Based on the observation of the whole movie, this paper mainly concentrates on five main characters in the film. This paper pays more attention on the scripts and the behaviour of them to find the characteristic of the feudal society and make some conclusions. Using different fates of these females, this paper can clearly show its ideas. This paper also observes the environment of this film, because there are some details that represent the oppression of that era.

4. Result

Through qualitative research, the film reflects the materialization of women in feudal society. In the film, women's feet hammers, and red lanterns exist as a symbol of to serving the men. In addition, under the oppression of feudal morality, most women finally chose to give in. As a woman with progressive education, Song Lian also choses to get married with the old man as a concubine. After experiencing the life in the courtyard, she gradually becomes the same as other women in the compound. Despite the depressing environment, there are always some people trying to break free from the convention. The third concubine and Song Lian are good examples. They resisted the life in their own way. Although they did not succeed in that period, but the consciousness of the women has awakened.

5. Discussion

Under the oppression of a patriarchal society, women in the old era gradually became the biggest supporter of feudal society. In the film, Song Lian, as a student who has received a college education for one year, chooses to go to the Chen family courtyard alone with her luggage instead of waiting for the bridal sedan chair to pick her up, which is enough to show her resistance to feudal society, but she is willing to obey her stepmother's arrangement to marry a rich old man as a concubine after her father's death, from this part, the movie shows that she agrees with an old saying that a woman should follow her father at home and after getting married, one should follow her husband. After Song Lian came to this courtyard, she rapidly changes from an innocent schoolgirl to a woman who competed with other concubines. She even does not hesitate to lie to be pregnancy to gain the favor of her husband. The film can reflect the chance of Song Lian's personality here. The girl living in the isolated courtyard eventually performs as other women in this yard. Acting as others, she uses all kinds of methods to get a better life based on the love of his husband. The eldest wife in the film is the guardian of feudal ethics. She does not mind how many concubines her husband has married but obeys the polygamy system and looks at the disputes among the concubines indifferently. This situation makes women's horizons more blocked. In this environment, they are only locked in a little place every day to set up each other waiting for their husband stay in their room. This phenomenon has also put women at a negative position for many years. These years, although countries have been calling for the emancipation and advancement of women, the historical factor will still pose resistance to this process. In recent years, many countries

around the world have begun to advocate equality between men and women, so what they should do is facing the real history, learn from it, and then promote women's liberation, and avoid the recurrence of this kind of tragedies.

In the social context of male superiority to female inferiority, women are materialized and lose themselves. Although the man of the Chen Family Courtyard in the film never shows his face, the sense of oppression from the master of the whole family is particularly obvious. In his opinion, the women in the courtyard need to be attached to him, therefore they don't have any self-value. All the women in the film need to wait for the master's order at the door every day. He says that women's feet are the most important. If the feet are comfortable, they will be better at serving the men. In his view, they are just tools that can give birth to his offspring. In the film, the man broke the flute left by Song Lian's father, just because he thought that the flute was from her male classmates. Apparently, under the patriarchal society system, the man believes that for the females, the only task is serving him well, he wants to make the women dependent on him mentally and physically, so gradually, the women lose their personalities. As the third concubine says in the film, the women in this yard look like dogs, like cats, like everything but not like human being. This isolated place materializes the women eliminating all the characteristics of them as an independent individual and turns them into the same one who are born on the favor of their husband. For the men, he considers these women as the tools that can meet their needs. The existence of this historical phenomenon also causes the stereotypes of women in today's society. Until now, many people still believe that women should do laundry and cook at home, and even in many fields, female workers suffer from gender discrimination. Perhaps the whole society should pay more attention to this problem. Nowadays, there are more and more excellent women with great abilities, they can also perform well while working, so all fields need to provide equal opportunities for men and women to let the women show their power.

Despite being under great feudal moral oppression, women's consciousness has also awakened. In the film, the third concubine is so outspoken and has long been known clearly about the helplessness of women. Although she is bound by many constraints, she bravely pursues true love and quietly falls in love with the doctor in the courtyard. She has become a representative of the protester of feudal system in the film. After knowing the second concubine does something bad secretly on her, Song Lian cut her ear when cutting the hair for the second concubine, showing the spirit of resistance different from others in a fierce way. But in that era, individual awakening would only be restricted. The third wife was finally hanged on the roof by the man's order, and Song Lian became crazy after the death of the third concubine. Although the awakening of women's consciousness in feudal society was not successful, they did contribute to the development of women's consciousness. They lived a real and wonderful life in that era. Nowadays, when more and more women realize the importance of independence and emancipation, they will work harder to fight for their legal rights and interests, show their values in various industries and promote the ideological progress of the whole society, so as to further reduce the impact of old concepts and protect women's social rights.

6. Conclusion

The old society really does harm to the females physically and mentally with the indifferent feudal morality, in the courtyard, they follow a series of rules carefully, the only thing for them is serving their husband, but there are still some women who are eager to gain liberty as if they were not lose the hope, but finally they find that they cannot against the era. From this film, it is obvious that the patriarchy of the society really impedes the development of women. As the main authority residing in men, they consider the women to be the accessory, they are not allowed to have independent thought and life, and in the eyes of the men, that a normal thing, that causes the inequalities in the

society. But now, things have changed a lot, many countries pay attention to the position of women in the society and the gender discrimination, some organizations appeal to promote a fair environment between men and women and offer opportunities to the women. Many women have begun to be educated which makes them see the wider world and gains more knowledge, so more and more women are beginning to fight for equality between men and women. They also try to show their excellent side in different fields which are once be controlled by the males. These actions have really made a big influence on the whole world. Although the status of women has changed dramatically and the ideology of the women have become more independent and emancipated, it is still necessary for society to face the history and prevent the tragedy of history repeating once again.

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