

## The Study of Traditional Color Aesthetics in Zhang Yimou's Films -- Taking *Shadow* for Example

Huaguo Cui<sup>1</sup>, Jang Dong-yeu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. Academy of fine arts, Chuzhou University, Aanhui, 239000, China

<sup>2</sup>. Institute of fusion design, HANSEO University, Republic of Korea

email:drjang@hanseo.ac.kr

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**Abstract:** As an artist in China's contemporary film history, Zhang Yimou directs films with strong traditional color aesthetics, a highlight of the film *Shadow* which has already made its world premiere at the Venice film festival. This paper mainly explores traditional color esthetics expression in the film named *Shadow* directed by Zhang, in order to promote the skillful use of traditional colors in films.

### 1. Introduction

*Shadow* is directed by Zhang Yimou and starring Deng Chao, Sun Li, Zheng Kai, Wu Lei, Wang Qian yuan and other well-known actors, a strong leading cast. It mainly tells the story of a nobody, a stand-in, who has been imprisoned for many years to recover his free humanity after suffering hardships. It is a 115-minute feature, action and knight-errant film. The characters are as follows: Deng Chao plays the role of Ziyu, chief commander of State Pei and Sun Li plays Xiaoi, wife of Ziyu. Wang Qian yuan plays general of State Pei, Zheng Kai the ruler of Pei, and Hu Jun plays the general of enemy state. Ziyu, chief commander of State Pei, defeats the enemy but gets injured so he starts using stand-in, showing on the battlefield on behalf of him. The shadow struggles to survive in the power and interests, the calculation between Ziyu and ruler of Pei. Through all kinds of struggles and difficulties, he finally wins back the life of his master at the critical moment and integrates with his master<sup>[1]</sup>.

### 2. The significance of the application of traditional color aesthetics in films

The research of film aesthetics focuses on its artistic conception, style and artistic charm, and the overall color combination is appropriate and appropriate, so it presents the best visual effect, which has become a highlight to attract the audience. The aesthetics of the film is embodied in sensibility, based on the psychological activities of the characters and starting from the perspective of the audience, so as to bring the audience a new visual experience and subjective feelings<sup>[2]</sup>. Films directed by Zhang Yimou, pay attention to overall coordination and consistency in the layout of scenes, shots, pictures, colors and other aspects, and carry out creative aesthetic treatment and embodiment. Because of its unique and novel artistic features, the audience's aesthetic needs have been greatly satisfied. The influence factors of the use of color to become the character modelling effect, reasonable colour collocation and processing, are no longer limited to the objective reality copying, but pay attention to the inner activities of the characterization, effectively rendering film environment atmosphere, thus shaping the image of the characters, using the traditional colour suggest that character, it lent great charm to film<sup>[3]</sup>.

### **3. Research on the traditional color aesthetics in Zhang Yimou's films -- centered on the film Shadow**

#### **3.1 Application function of color in character modeling**

In previous films directed by Zhang Yimou, the characters' costumes are all gorgeous with their own aura, bright colors are dominant. However, the broadcast of "Shadow", the star lineup is strong, that is, Deng Chao and Sun Hao's husband and wife partner, also related to Guan Xiaotong, Wu Lei and other popular actors, the color of the whole film is close to black and white, which is the color of the past red and green. The design is very different, and it is also an attempt to traditional aesthetic design. The rendering method of the costumes is black and white, which was never seen in previous Chinese movies<sup>[4]</sup>. The aesthetic style of "Shadow" is reflected in the costumes of the characters. The black and white gray tone is chosen. The design of the costumes is mainly Hanfu. The design is a simple crossover shirt, which conforms to the characteristics of the Han Dynasty costumes. Adapted and incorporated into some fashion elements, the whole fabric is mainly based on Hanfu. For example, the specific position and size of the splashes of Chinese paintings have been greatly improved, and the details are handled. Breaking the traditional black and white, the clothing is soft and elegant, with an ethereal feeling. At the beginning of the creation, it emphasizes the Chinese style again, emphasizing the traditional color aesthetic style. In the process of watching the movie, it has a deeper understanding and feeling of the Chinese style.

#### **3.2 The narrative role of color**

Zhang Yimou's film, with its color matching, plays an important role in narrative. For example, in the story development, turning, conflict and other plots, with effective color design, promoting the development of the story, it also affects the hearts of the audience. For example, the flexible use of the color in the movie "Ju Dou" makes the film more artistic and aesthetic<sup>[5]</sup>. The concept of color has been constantly updated. Under the development of the times, Zhang Yimou's color concept has been constantly updated. In the plot of narrating the environment and characters, the color is used to lead and complete the development of the plot. With modern color matching, the idea brings a better movie to the audience. The background color of "Ju Dou" is light yellow. The dyeing house is the place where the story takes place, a place where colors are created. This combination makes the film more mysterious. For example, the red dyed cloth falling down from the sky, symbolizing the desires and reflecting a special artistic conception and also reflecting the dissatisfaction with real life. The colors in the film are multicolor-red-multicolor-red-yellow, so that effective color transformation is given to the audience and what is presented is the change in the development of the film story. In the film "Raise the Red Lantern", the color plays an important narrative role. The film begins with a static long shot, the atmosphere is serious. From the frontal angle, the portrait is close-up, and the eyes are barely visible. The audience focused their attention on the stepmother outside the painting, and her inner disobedience and resistance were well represented. The appearance of this character like a ghost. This design increase the mystery of the film. The gray ground, the thick black wall and the gray-black sky create a visual image in an infinite visual space. In an infinite visual space, people's understanding of the characters is more comprehensive. The gray color design makes the atmosphere of the whole movie appear oppressive and heavy. The gray color design reflects the solidity of the city wall, unbreakable, and the gray fog is impeded. This symbolizes the suppression and restraint of human nature by the marriage system and feudalism system. People's heart is like gray, dark, life is not alive without any wave, which forms a strong color contrast with the red lantern. The high-walled courtyard impedes the hearts of the people, and uses the ingenious color setting to map the compulsory force of women's life and destiny at that time, constantly changing the color of the transformation, and the image reflects the reciprocity of the female destiny<sup>[6]</sup>.

#### 4. The expressive power of color on the character's emotions

With the help of color using, it effectively displays the inner feelings of the characters, which is also the most direct and effective way of expression. Zhang Yimou's film controls the color very well. Not only does it use monochrome, but also the Chinese style. For example, "Shadow", the overall color is mainly gray, without the red, green and green design of the past, focusing on the emotions of the characters' performance. Red is the color of the sun, symbolizing love, enthusiasm, and fierceness, giving people a feeling of vigorousness and vitality, especially in festive festivals, using red to add a sense of good fortune and joy. In *Hero*, the atmosphere is khaki, desolation, and silence, thus rendering a mournful mood. The yellow sand of the sky echoes the sad atmosphere, and the sadness of the character is expressed in yellow. The *Ten Faces Ambush*, as a martial arts film, the whole picture merges into a spectacular ocean, which makes people ecstasy and tempted. At this time, the film characters and the heaven and earth are combined to push the environment to a more intense level. Generally, Black brings people the feeling of sorrow, which is the color of death, making people insidious, dark, and sinful, while the white makes people feel more stable, sacred, clear and bright.

#### 5. Color acts on the expression of artistic conception in Shadow

The overall style is like an ink painting immersed in water, the frame is aesthetic, the scene is wide, and the use of color is different from the past, which has also become the breakthrough in this drama. Inheriting the Chinese style, the mountains beyond the palace are overlapping, making people forget their worries. Such a scene makes people yearning. For example, when compared with Yang Ping in Jingzhou, the flag collapsed, the wooden pole broke and fell on the bamboo pole, and the water was dense, in which the details are handled very well, so it is easy to get noticed and thus engraved in the hearts of the audience. By abandoning exaggerated color design and using gray-white performance mood, the movie expresses ink-staining effect and shows that human nature is not simply black or white.

#### 6. Conclusion

To understand the important significance of traditional color aesthetics in the film and bring the audience new visual experience and subjective feelings, reasonable color matching plays an important role in narration, sending out a strong color aesthetics. The gray color design makes the atmosphere of the whole film seem depressive and heavy, and also presents a special artistic conception, inheriting the Chinese style. The overlapping mountains outside the palace makes people forget their worries and attract more audience by the ink-stained effect.

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