



A Study of the Cultural Significance of Traditional Colors in Chinese Movies

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Abstract. As a visual carrier of traditional Chinese culture, color is used in film art not only to show the emotions and feelings of the characters, but also to carry a strong artistic and cultural connotation. Taking traditional Chinese color culture as the entry point, this paper analyzes the cultural connotations of the five colors - white, blue, black, red and yellow - in excellent Chinese movies. By exploring the use of Chinese color culture in film art, the significance of traditional color in the creation of Chinese film art as well as in cultural communication is clarified.

Keywords: Chinese movies · Traditional color · Color culture · Film art · Cultural significance

1 Introduction

In today's increasingly globalized world, film is a major medium of cultural transmission and an important means of cross-cultural communication [1]. As a mass communication medium, film has an indispensable role in the process of promoting national culture and enhancing national cultural soft power. Under the increasingly fierce competition among countries in the world for cultural soft power, the interpretation of traditional culture is an important consideration in the creation of Chinese films. Color aesthetics has a deep historical origin with the traditional culture of the nation. In the flow and evolution of Chinese culture, a unique Chinese color culture system has gradually formed, and has been inherited and carried forward in the continuous practice of Chinese film artists. The combination of traditional Chinese color culture, which incorporates traditional humanistic connotations and a sense of historical importance, and the modern digital film medium not only helps improve the influence and dissemination efficiency of Chinese national culture, but also effectively promotes the further enhancement of China's cultural soft power.

2 Chinese Traditional Colors and Culture

2.1 Integrate the Color Concept of Chinese Traditional Culture

Color has different symbolic meanings and cultural connotations in different nations and countries. In the long and splendid culture of the Chinese nation, the color aesthetics

Table 1. Correspondence of the five elements, five colors, five directions and five seasons [Owner-draw].

Five elements	Five colors	Five directions	Five seasons
Gold	White	West	Autumn
Wood	Cyan	East	Spring
Water	Black	North	Winter
Fire	Red	South	Summer
Earth	Yellow	Middle	The last month of summer

and color concepts of the Chinese people have continuously developed and evolved, eventually forming a traditional Chinese color culture system with strong humanistic and philosophical characteristics. The ancient Chinese people, under the philosophical idea of “unity of heaven and man”, abstracted the interactions of the material world into the five elements of “gold, wood, water, fire and earth” [2]. The doctrine of the five colors derived from the five elements of yin and yang is the basis for the construction of China’s unique color culture theory system. “The five colors” are “white, cyan, black, red and yellow”, and the five main colors are used as the base for blending to obtain colorful inter-colors. In traditional Chinese culture, the five colors are not only associated with the five elements, but also correspond to things such as the five directions, the five animals and the five seasons. In “The Five Elements and the Five Colors” (2005), Wang Wenjuan has sorted out the correspondence of these things based on informative historical data (see Table 1) [3]. The rich social ideology and material content make the “five color concept” develop and inherit in close combination with various elements of society, and gradually formed a traditional Chinese color culture system with white, blue, black, red and yellow as the main colors [4].

In the traditional Chinese color culture system, each color reflects a different cultural meaning. Through the research on the Chinese traditional color system, it is found that red is the most traditional and revered color of the Chinese nation [5], which symbolizes festivity and warmth [6], and surges with the most primitive vitality. The yellow color corresponds to the middle position of earth in the five elements, which also has a very noble status [7], and is reflected in politics as a symbol of imperial power. Blue is interpreted in the “Origin of Chinese Characters” as “the color of the East”, symbolizing sanity and renewal. Both black and white have a dual nature, symbolizing integrity on the one hand, and misfortune and evil on the other [8]. The charm of traditional Chinese colors is not only the visual enjoyment of beauty, but more importantly, its metaphorical and symbolic meaning conveys a deeper cultural heritage and the spirit of Chinese colors. The concept of color, which has been incorporated into traditional Chinese culture, is a constant source of sustenance for modern art creation, and film art is no exception.

2.2 The Cultural Metaphorical Nature of Traditional Chinese Colors

The visual language of color in Chinese films is largely supported by the traditional Chinese color art aesthetics. When creating films, the creators should fully consider

Table 2. Connotation of traditional Chinese color metaphors [Owner-draw].

Color	Metaphorical connotation
White	Innocence, honesty, mourning, death
Blue	Purity, responsibility, holiness, calmness
Black	Authority, solemnity, solemnity, righteousness, evil
Red	Heat, celebration, blood, life, sun
Yellow	Power, dignity, land worship, hope

the metaphorical meaning of color in traditional culture, so as to guide the audience's psychological and emotional direction, stimulate their cultural thinking, and give the films a deeper humanistic meaning. The above exploration of traditional Chinese color concepts can sort out the connotation of color metaphors unique to Chinese culture (see Table 2).

In the process of film color design, it is very important to take a holistic view of the emotions to be expressed in the film, combine the symbolic connotations of different colors, and choose the right colors for picture modeling and spiritual expression. In addition, film images are not made up of isolated colors, but often have to use a combination of colors for representation, in which case it is crucial to understand the connotation of different color metaphors.

2.3 The Beauty of the Mood of Traditional Chinese Colors

With the influence of Chinese traditional painting art, Chinese films also pursue the mood and rhythm of Chinese paintings in their images and shapes [9]. The use of traditional Chinese color culture in Chinese films is to create the overall color “scenario” of the film to achieve the “mood” of the film, and this blend of mood and scenery elevates the aesthetic tone of Chinese films to a new level, reflecting the unique charm of Chinese color art.

In the movie “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon”, the floating effect of the picture is like a landscape painting, with a long rhythm and unique craftsmanship. The clear lake, the vibrant bamboo forest and the immortal surrounding Wudang Mountain create a very oriental aesthetic mood, while the lush green, deep and clear colors show a Chinese martial arts spirit. It is this way of expressing color that organically blends the metaphorical connotation of color with the beauty of context that conveys the ideological connotation of the film, while also presenting the unique aesthetic quality of Chinese cinema on the world screen.

3 Traditional colors in chinese films

3.1 White

White has a double-sided nature in traditional Chinese culture. In the doctrine of the five colors and five seasons, “white” corresponds to “autumn”, whose sluggishness and

decay are also reminiscent of withering and death. On the other hand, the bright white color also symbolizes purity and noble character. Therefore, the use of white in Chinese films has complex humanistic emotions. In Zhang Yimou's film "Hero", the two-sided connotation of white is perfectly interpreted.

The film is an adaptation of the story of Jing Ke's assassination of Qin, in which Can Jian and Fei Xue were a pair of chivalrous warriors who disagreed on the goal of assassinating Qin. After Wu Ming's failed assassination of Qin, Fei Xue, full of rage, killed Can Jian and then committed suicide, and finally the two died in the desert dressed in white. At this time, in addition to the characters' clothing is white, the overall lighting of the picture is also bright and high-key. The white color here symbolizes not only the mourning for their death, but also the noble soul of the Can Jian. The Wu Ming was persuaded by the Can Jian to give up the assassination of the Qin, because only the King of Qin can unify the world and let the people live in peace, it is this ideal of the heart of the world, so Can Jian is willing to give up the ego, to make the whole world. The white tone presents the complex emotions of the poignancy of death and the self-sacrificing heart of Chinese chivalry to the audience and sublimates the spirit of the film.

3.2 Blue

Blue is taken from the five elements of the five colors "cyan". In *Xunzi - Persuasion of Learning*, it is said that "Cyan is taken from blue, and cyan from blue." [10]. Blue is the color between blue and green, symbolizing the beginning of life. In Chinese culture, blue is regarded as a solemn and holy color, pure and transparent, and full of hope.

The movie "Chinese Captain" is a biographical film about the disaster adapted from the real-life story of the heroic captain Liu Chuanjian. The overall color tone of the film is a cool blue, and the details of the interior of the cabin are deliberately weak in other colors. This blue atmosphere highlights the calmness and sanity of the captain and the rest of the crew in dealing with the danger, and symbolizes their outstanding accomplishment of their responsibilities and mission to bring everyone on the plane back to life. The use of blue conveys not only the calmness of the heroic captain, but also the Chinese spirit rooted in the bloodline of the Chinese nation.

3.3 Black

In traditional Chinese culture, "black" is also known as "xuan", from the "the sky is 'xuan' and the earth is yellow" shows that black symbolizes the supreme sky, so black has a solemn, authoritative, elegant symbolism. On the other hand, black corresponds to the north in the doctrine of the five colors, five directions and five seasons, symbolizing the winter when everything is slaughtered, so black also symbolizes darkness, coldness and terror. Although people's attitude toward black is very ambivalent, black also has a rich cultural connotation, and can effectively express the emotional meaning that the director wants to convey in the film creation.

In the film "Hero", the Qin palace, army, and the image of the Qin king are all portrayed in large areas of black, which is in line with the historical fact that the Qin people "liked black" and also carries a lot of cultural information. The black armor creates an authoritative and cold image of the Qin king. The blackened Qin palace and

the army create an eerie, depressing atmosphere, and a layer of melancholy for the film. The last dense black arrows shot towards the Wu Ming, especially highlights a chivalrous man with the world at heart, generous to death of the solemn and resolute.

3.4 Red

Red, the color of the sun, fire and blood, symbolizes light, life and hope in traditional Chinese culture [11]. It is widely used in people's daily life and festival celebrations, and has a deep historical and cultural heritage. Especially, the red couplets, red firecrackers, red lanterns and red bags used in the most important Chinese Spring Festival show the Chinese people's fervent love for red.

In the movie "Red Sorghum", director Zhang Yimou made a bold treatment of red, using the "Chinese red" to the extreme. The overall color of the film is red, red sorghum, red palanquin, red cover, red candle, red flame, red blood, red sun and other red objects throughout the film, symbolizing the Chinese people's wild, primitive, but also the endless tenacity of life and national blood, eulogizing people's cry for life, creating a red feast with life tension. Throughout the film, color has become a national cultural symbol, reflecting the strong sense of life and the never-ending national vitality of the Chinese people.

3.5 Yellow

In China, yellow has an unparalleled status of dignity [12]. Yellow is the color of the earth, Chinese civilization originates from this yellow earth. Yellow earth, yellow river and yellow skin are the primary colors of Chinese people's life, symbolizing light and hope, and carrying the Chinese people's deep affection for the Chinese land. In addition, the Chinese people's reverence for yellow is also reflected in politics. From the Sui Dynasty, yellow became the exclusive color of the emperor, which undoubtedly made the authoritative position of yellow more deeply rooted in people's hearts [13].

The film "Curse of the Golden Flower" tells a tragic story of civil strife at the palace. In the film, yellow is used extensively in the scenes, costumes and props, building up the color tone of the film. The golden glaze, armor, chrysanthemums and gowns all highlight the dignity and luxury of the royal family. And in this sea of gold, surging members of the royal family with bloody strife. Yellow authority and the crisis behind it formed a sharp contrast, greatly enhancing the artistic connotation of the film.

4 Conclusion

The use of color has given films a richer form of cultural expression. Traditional Chinese color culture contains the philosophical concepts, cultural connotations and aesthetic consciousness of the Chinese nation. Its use in film art firstly enhances the aesthetic mood of Chinese films, giving them a strong humanistic connotation, and secondly enhances the effect of the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture, bringing the audience the ultimate visual feast of color culture. Although there are still some gaps in the expression and creation methods of Chinese films compared with those of Western

films, the traditional color culture of Chinese films is unique to Western films. Therefore, while learning the color expression methods of foreign films, it is important to continue to deepen and explore the cultural meaning of China's traditional colors, combine them with modern digital communication media, and interpret Chinese films with Chinese culture, which is an important means to promote China's excellent traditional culture and improve China's cultural soft power, as well as an important practice direction for Chinese film art workers.

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