



The Multiple Functions of Color Words in Red Sorghum Family

Xiaorong Yan

School of Literature and Journalism, Shandong University of Finance and Economics, Jinan, Shandong, 250000, China

*wuqing@ldy.edu.rs

Abstract. Mo Yan's novels have great influence in the contemporary literary world. There are many amazing details in his literary world that are written through color. Thick ink and color bring readers amazing sensory enjoyment. For Mo Yan, color has gone beyond the scope of a general expression tool, but the aggregation of text thoughts and writer's consciousness. Therefore, this paper will analyze and discuss the use of color in Red Sorghum Family by means of close reading of the text. The thesis will be divided into three parts: Introduction mainly analyzes the significance, difficulties and innovations of the topic selection. The text starts with the effect of color words in Red Sorghum Family, focusing on character shaping, environmental atmosphere influence, plot rhythm and the symbolic meaning of color words. The conclusion summarizes the characteristics of Mo Yan's color words, reveals the unique meaning behind them, breaks the shackles of color, and inserts the wings of freedom for it.

Keywords: Mo Yan's novels; Moral; Color writing; Literary value.

1 Introduction

A masterpiece of modern Chinese literature, "The Red Sorghum Clan" is one of Mo Yan's most well-known pieces. The novel, which is set in the remote village of Dongbei in Gaomi, Shandong, recounts a 50-year epic of the sufferings of the underclass people during the Japanese resistance, highlighting their turbulent fate and unyielding character amid periods of war and social development in China. The vocabulary employed in the book is distinct, poetic, and full of mystical qualities; special emphasis is paid to the usage of color words.

Color words, such as red, blue, and golden, are words that denote or are associated with specific hues of color. According to a quote by Vincent van Gogh, "Pure color sacrifices everything for it." Since its inception, color has had a tight relationship with human existence. Primary colors and intermediate colors were already being discussed in pre-Qin era ancient China. "The work of painting involves the use of five colors," the "Kaogongji" declares [1]. It is referred to as blue in the east, red in the south, white in the west, and black in the north. Color words serve as symbols for directions in this

situation. There have been different reactions observed in response to exposure to different colors in daily life activities. Similarly, color symbolism has been used at great length by the writers, poets and literary artists in their works profusely[14].

Color words not only describe things but also convey feelings, conjure up images, and establish themes. Color words induce frozen moments of emotion in classic Chinese literature like "The Book of Songs" and "The Poetry of Bai Juyi," much way paintings from the Impressionists do. Color words can be used in a variety of ways by writers to evoke feelings and vivid pictures. Color words have already evolved into a really creative language. The mystical masterpiece "The Red Sorghum Clan" was crafted by Mo Yan using his knowledge of numerous techniques and the synthesis of Eastern and Western color philosophies.

In Mo Yan's novels, color is only briefly examined. Only three master's theses and a few individual publications have so far examined color imagery, color language, color artistic aspects, and the motivations behind the depiction of color. Contemporary literature is not like Mo Yan's masterpieces, which stand out for their distinctive use of color. Colors play a significant role in interpreting Mo Yan's works since they not only enhance the sensory experience of the novels but also convey the thoughts and aesthetic preferences of the author.

Interdisciplinary studies of color words can investigate the connection between color and literature from various angles and levels, broadening horizons and advancing literary theory and aesthetics. This paper takes a multidisciplinary approach to analyze the aesthetics of color in Mo Yan's "The Red Sorghum Clan" in-depth, combining research accomplishments from both China and the West. It aims to address the following difficulties: First, despite extensive study of Mo Yan's writing style, the study of color has received little attention. Second, more investigation into the systematic study of color is required in China. There are still a lot of unanswered questions and flaws in the analysis of color in Mo Yan's books, necessitating more thorough and methodical investigation. For example, color's cultural connotations, narrative purposes, and rhetorical strategies should all be explored. The interpretation of Mo Yan's research will be strengthened by these studies' additional data and analysis.

The choice of the topic, which broadens the research on Mo Yan's novels, the analysis and research on Mo Yan's use of color words, which has largely been superficial and lacking in depth, and the requirement to increase academic attention to the field of color are the main innovations of this paper. In "The Red Sorghum Clan," the author aims to investigate the study of color words by examining their roles and significance in forming character images, furthering the plot, and presenting the historical setting, as well as their connection to the author's original thoughts and aesthetic preferences.

2 Analysis of Color Description in "The Red Sorghum Clan"

2.1 Character Portrayal

The reader's perception of the characters can be made more vivid by using color to describe them in an appropriate way. The impressionistic fixed descriptions used in

"The Red Sorghum Clan" help to create the character images. The words "my grandmother," "green silk pants," and the "deep red silk ribbon" on her ankle draw attention to her young and attractive appearance. Her "snow-white forehead, rosy cheeks, dark eye circles surrounding her eyes, and eyes like a bright moon in the clouds" are described by the author as having bright and delicate colors, emphasizing her lovely face [2]. One of the three soulful characters in "The Red Sorghum Clan," Dai Fenglian, is where all of the love and hate on the red sorghum land starts. She herself is delicate and strong, standing gracefully like a lotus flower in bloom on a land of fire. As a result, Mo Yan frequently uses vibrant hues to describe her appearance, conjuring up images of a vibrant woman through the use of contrasting and complementary hues. This is the earliest phase of Mo Yan's art using light and shadow.

Mo Yan continues his use of light and shadow in the second stage, which is when he explores the psychology of the characters. For instance, Luo Han Grandpa can only vaguely feel the loss of his self-esteem and the physical and mental suffering when he is made to work as a laborer and is unjustly spanked by the overseer. A person who has lived an honest life experiences a slight sense of resistance. The author of the book vividly describes this awakening as a purplish-red flame. Similar effects can be seen in the "red light" flashing in Yu Zhan'ao's eyes during his life-or-death confrontation with Captain Leng and the "green fire" in the eyes of the bandits when Dai Fenglian encounters them. It vividly illustrates the surprise of someone awakening from ignorance and chaos. These sentences emphasize the repressed emotions to the fullest by using a variety of odd color words to represent anger, fear, and calmness in particular scenes [3].

The fusion of color and feeling is the third stage. When Mo Yan was awarded an honorary doctorate from the French university of Aix-Marseille in September 2014, he mentioned in his acceptance speech that many people ignore the impact of foreign painters on him. Mo Yan enjoys paintings by artists with strong emotional content, such as Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Gauguin [4]. Van Gogh gave up on all methods and drew with his passion his entire life. The conflicting feelings of love and hatred are what motivate Mo Yan, who is similar, to describe his distant memories of his home country. In order to illustrate how Luo Han Grandpa would have appeared before his passing, the author uses the metaphor of "more than fifty white birds fluttering out of the river, flying over the heads of the crowd in the blue sky, then turning eastward, flying towards the golden sun [2]." This heartwarming scene serves as a farewell to a soul after all of its hardship. Colors like white, blue, and gold are relatively vibrant and signify a day with exceptional weather, one that should be relaxing for both the body and the mind. This creates a significant contrast with the bloody reality, the people's waxen faces and crimson eyes. The result was that "everyone became shorter, some with faces like yellow soil, some with faces like black soil [2]." as if they had merged with the heavy earth and were looking for comfort in her embrace to end this earthly purgatory. Readers can experience the deep-seated suffering and warmth in their bones, beneath the icy heat, surging with grief, anger, and repressed emotions thanks to the interweaving of cold and warmth.

The bold blocks of color in Van Gogh's paintings are similar in size and vibrancy to the colors mentioned above. Mo Yan captures the agonizing moments of Yu Zhan'ao, Luo Han Grandpa, and other characters in enigmatic blue, menacing green, and fiery

red, exuding dazzling vitality and primal dynamism. Walking on the red sorghum land are vibrating souls, full of life and deserving of respect.

2.2 Environmental Atmosphere

By employing a variety of color words to create an extraordinary atmosphere, similar to dreamy whispers, the novel goes beyond the conventional. The author's use of color to create the environment spins and distorts like a dream. Mo Yan's literary kingdom is made up of a variety of influences in addition to those of Marquez and Faulkner, including those of Freud, Kafka, Chinese traditional mythology, stream of consciousness, and more [5]. As a result, "Red Sorghum Clan" is constantly surrounded by a well-known psychedelic color in the Chinese style.

Grandma can see a vivid green wave when Yu Zhan'ao appears, giving her hope that he will be able to rescue her from the fire and water. Grandma is in despair as she contemplates the tragic prospect of getting married to a leper. Red lightning strikes rip apart the gray-white sorghum and the drooping sky in this way, "a black wind stirring up a green wave." With all the colors intertwined, the contrast of red and green creates an atmosphere of hope amidst the chaos, foreshadowing a century-long love-hate entanglement and laying the groundwork for Yu Zhan'ao's massacre of the Dan family. Another illustration is the yellow weasel from the Second Aunt and Er love story. It is an old yellow weasel that is entirely yellow. Er, who was once tricked by the yellow weasel, has always felt the shadow of the yellow weasel. The yellow weasel represents craziness and oppression in her eyes. The yellow weasel is a crucial symbol in traditional Chinese folklore that cannot be ignored. When the Japanese are about to enter the house, the yellow weasel reappears, this time with its mouth open and gushing bloody red mud. Reddish-brown, light gray, and dark red are some of the colors Er sees. They have a rhythmic quality that seems to be directing the reader's attention and elicits feelings of uneasiness, anxiety, and strangeness. It hides a hidden threat, much like the moment before a gunshot [6].

In the novel, Yu Zhan'ao is shown leading his team in an ambush against the Japanese soldiers. There are a total of three attacks using the whistle of Liu Dahao as a signal. Dark red is mentioned in each of Liu Dahao's three whistle descriptions. When the first whistle sounds, a charge is about to begin, with people dodging bullets while dousing them in their own blood and flesh. When the second whistle blows, almost the entire team is dead, their bodies lying in the trenches and on the ground. The Japanese general is shot and killed on the third whistle, giving the father and grandfather victory in this bloody conflict. All of the cries and screams of the war dead are spread throughout the area by a dark red color that resembles a mist of blood.

The "Five Elements" theory, which originated in ancient China, connected emotions like joy, anger, sorrow, happiness, and resentment to colors like blue, red, yellow, white, and black [7]. Because of this, when readers read "Red Sorghum Clan," hues like "dark red blood," "green wave," and "dark yellow weasel" may cause them to feel repulsed, depressed, or afraid. And Mo Yan defies color conventions by depicting scenes in which certain hues stand for unconventional things. The weight of love, hate, and life is presented by the interweaving of various emotions and colors, like the whirling

nebulae in Van Gogh's "Starry Night," the endless rotation, and the enveloping vortex that encompasses everything.

2.3 Symbolic Meaning

The Red Sorghum Family's primary color is red, which denotes vitality, freedom, desire, wildness, blood, and death. The concept of authority, passion, killing, and holiness are associated with the color red, which derives from the sun. At the same time, red is frequently used to describe women, including the words "gorgeous" and "hiji." The story is set in Shandong Province's Gaomi Township. The field of bright red sorghum serves as a representation of the indomitable, bloody, and masculine native villagers. Rebellion is the "red" of Dai Fenglian. She had the bravery to battle the feudal ethics and pursue freedom her entire life as a woman in the old society. Shandong Province's Northeast Gaomi Township's "red" is the true color of life. The red of the earth is soaked into the bones of those who live here, who consume red sorghum and drink red water. The seed of "my" family's continuation is red. Red is the Red Sorghum Family's most significant symbolic color as a result.

Mo Yan frequently uses the color green in her artwork, and some greens convey hope and prosperity. However, the majority of the green images in "Red Sorghum Family" connote fear, nausea, evil, and other negative emotions. Green challenges readers' comfort while reading the work and creates a visual effect of examining ugliness when it stimulates readers' senses like vision and smell. Green has been given many concepts in folklore according to the ancient Chinese perspective on color. For instance, many people believe that spring is related to everything that is sprouting, including trees and vegetation. In the Northern Dynasty, the place of marriage was known as Qingsuo because spring and marriage are related. According to Qingyi for the maidservant, blue is a cheap color for jewelry and clothing.

Red and green come together in "Red Sorghum Family" to create a striking and beautiful image. The fitches and rollers on carts of all colors turned dark green and became saturated with sorghum juice. Over the construction site, begging seeds had a strong odor. "My father, like everyone else, was half red and half green [2]." as well as "Grandma followed the sound, her feet standing on the tops of the sorghum like a green cloud [2]." Red and green are intertwined, and the rich tones create the impression of flowing gold. "My grandmother's blood dyed my father's hands red and then green; Grandma's white breast was dyed green and then red by her own blood [2]." The father's viewpoint is actually being presented here. Just like the slow motion and black and white perspective frequently used in movies, the scene before the grandmother was shot and killed made the father experience intense panic and pain. The blood in the father's eyes turned green during the trance, and the blood turned red after. In actuality, this is the application of native Chinese color cognition. Color symbols have a long history in China, including the vibrant face paint worn by opera singers, the "Yellow Turbans Army" in the late Eastern Han Dynasty, and the "red light mask" worn by rebellious Boxer soldiers. Red is the representative color of China, and we often hear the word "Chinese red" right now [13].

Mo Yan took in the Western artists' nourishment while keeping in mind the regional traditional culture [1].

Additionally, yellow is a common color in Mo Yan's artwork. Yellow makes up 15.46 percent of Mo Yan's artwork, second only to red and white [8]. Yellow's appearance is frequently linked to emotional inclinations. An example of a Japanese order to torture an arhat uncle is "Arhat uncle cry more than, a yellow urine from between the legs a jump out [2]." "The father, who was watching, also had bright eyes and ringing ears [2]." Yellow represents the shock and rage of the onlookers as well as the torture and excruciating pain endured by the Arhats. Such a use actually serves as evidence of Mo Yan's strong cultural influence from contemporary society. Modern color theory gives yellow the meaning of warning and warning, and the crisis warning in contemporary warning signs frequently uses yellow as the base color. As a result, readers will unavoidably read with a sense of caution, which will help to shape the environment.

In conclusion, he chose red, green, and yellow as the representatives for Shandong Province's Gaomi Northeast Township. In this place, where death and rebirth occur on a daily basis, there is wild chaos and life force.

2.4 Plot Rhythm

Color words are used in literature to add visual elements to the language and can give the plot development a poetic rhythm [9]. The pace of the plot can be unexpectedly affected by different color combinations. In "Red Sorghum," the subtle color descriptions drive the plot to successive climaxes. For instance, when the grandmother receives a slap from her great-grandfather, her once-rosy cheeks become paler before gradually returning to their original, vibrant red. The tension for the readers is reduced by the shift in focus from the argument between the grandmother and great-grandfather to the grandmother's serene and calm demeanor, which is portrayed like a close-up shot in a movie. Similar to how the father's hand becomes stained by the grandmother's blood, first turning it red and then turning it green, it symbolizes the father's feelings of sadness, fear, and numbness. The striking red and green hues contrast with the soothing, calm language to break up the plot's compactness, resulting in a rhythm that is flexible and well-balanced [10].

The relationship between Yu Zhan'ao and Lian'er is a central plot point in "Red Sorghum." Desire is represented by the appearance of the "golden flames". For instance, "the golden flames inside the house burn ferociously when Yu Zhan'ao raises his gun. The golden sparks fly out and are swallowed by the window's red light [2]." Every time the golden flames appear, Yu Zhan'ao's desire to be with Lian'er, both physically and emotionally, is about to erupt. As a result, the plot advances gradually under the direction of the golden flames [11].

According to a quote from Mo Yan, "I am willing to exaggerate and deform life intentionally." Mo Yan draws inspiration for his literary works from both Western literature and art as well as the Chinese myths and folktales he read as a child, including "Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio" and "Investiture of the Gods." His magical realism is a Chinese-style magical realism that is infused with traditional cultural essence and the spirit of the nation. The vivid color scheme in "Red Sorghum" not only adheres

to aesthetic standards but also complements the book's magical realism setting, adding to its allure. In the opening of "Red Sorghum," the endless fields of red sorghum resemble a vast sea of blood, where life is intertwined with ferocious passion, brutal violence, banditry, and valiant ambushes. It displays the innate vitality that is rooted in the landscape and infused with regional and ethnic flavor. It depicts fervent love for neighbors and abiding hatred for adversaries. Readers are profoundly affected by this imagery, which leaves a lingering and unsettling impression and magically combines fantasy and reality. The aesthetic enjoyment and abhorrence of color, along with a number of symbols and metaphors, combine to form Mo Yan's distinctive label [12].

3 Conclusion

Through his own works, Mo Yan has demonstrated the importance of color words in literary creation, offering proof for the study of color words. Color words are used in Mo Yan's literary works in a way that not only demonstrates his artistic ability and creativity, but also his depth of thought and sense of social responsibility. Color words are a powerful tool for expression in literature. They can raise the text's artistic value while also enhancing its aesthetic appeal, inspiring readers' imaginations, evoking their resonance, and more. A significant area of literary research is the study of color words, which enables detailed examination and interpretation of literary works from linguistic, cultural, psychological, and social angles. In order to offer a fresh perspective on the study of color words, this article examines how red, blue, and yellow are used as color words in Mo Yan's literary works. It also explores their expressive purposes, symbolic meanings, and aesthetic values. This article does have some restrictions, though. First of all, it only chooses a few representative works of Mo Yan for analysis, leaving out some of them, which could introduce bias. Second, it only considers how color affects Mo Yan's novels without fully taking into account the impact of other factors, which could simplify and constrict the analysis. Thirdly, it only uses the close-reading approach without incorporating any other theories or methodologies, which may restrict its applicability and leave it wanting.

This article suggests the following areas for future study: In order to produce more thorough and organized research findings on color, it is first possible to conduct a more thorough and in-depth analysis of color in Mo Yan's other works. Second, in order to produce more varied and thorough research results on color, the study of color in Mo Yan's novels can be approached from different perspectives and levels, such as color and psychology, color and society, and color and culture. Thirdly, in order to produce more in-depth and cutting-edge research findings on color, additional theories and methodologies, including color semiotics, color aesthetics, and color psychology, can be applied to the study of color in Mo Yan's novels. Color words offer a variety of creative tools for literature with their distinct connotations and ambiguous meanings, but they have always been on the periphery of literary research. The author's goal in writing this article is to examine how color words are used in Mo Yan's literary works in order to increase interest in color words among researchers and open up new research opportunities.

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