

A Study on the Tragic Consciousness of Han Yan's Directed Works: A Case Study of *A Little Red Flower*

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Abstract

Han Yan, a new-generation director in China, is known for his keen perspective and profound humanistic concern, especially when exploring significant themes such as illness, he shows strong emotional and social concern, highlighting the artistic value and social significance of his works. Through the life stories of two young people suffering from cancer, the film *A Little Red Flower* shows their growth process amid illness and pain, reflecting the mutual redemption and emotional support of life in the state of extremity. Based on the realistic dilemma, director Han Yan integrates the sense of tragedy into his movie to bring aesthetic pain and beauty to the audience and gives the audience the power of resistance and transcendence at the spiritual level, which constitutes a unique cultural value.

Keywords: Han Yan, *A Little Red Flower*, tragic consciousness, life

1. Introduction

Han Yan has been engaged in film creation since 2002, and he has always insisted on exploring and expressing his art in his unique way. Han Yan's movies are mostly about patients of different types, and most of his movies are about patients as the main characters, reflecting various problems in society through their stories. He chooses to observe the people and things around him from such a tragic perspective, and there is no lack of socially significant thoughts and views in his movies, such as exploring the meaning of life, the issue of death, and the issue of cancer. These issues are all about human existence itself and are also worth digging deeper and discussing in the movie creation.

The ultimate contemplation on the meaning of life has always been an eternal theme of concern in literature and artworks. The movie *A Little Red Flower* is more serious in terms of narrative expression and form and explores the issue of life and death in greater depth. In the movie, the open-mindedness in Ma Xiaoyuan is constantly infecting Wei Yihang and pulling him back to reality from his pessimistic and world-weary state. These different individuals project director Han Yan's perception of life and people's attitudes when they are on the brink of life and death, injecting the creator's strong humanistic concern while thinking about the ultimate meaning of life.

2. Presentation of the Theme of Tragic Consciousness

2.1 Tragic Expression of the Value of Life

From ancient times to the present, life, and death have been a proposition of eternal contemplation for human beings, and it is the ultimate concern for human beings. Human beings have never stopped thinking about how to broaden the length and depth of life, and movies, as a means of artistic expression, have never stopped paying attention to the course of life (Mei Ping & Wu Shaoyan, 2020). In director Han Yan's movies, the value and meaning of life are often conveyed through the protagonist's own life experience and life experience, and new values are constructed.

In *A Little Red Flower*, the sense of tragedy, through skillful and profound expression, mines the depth of the eternal proposition of life and death. The film's exploration of disease is even more profound. The little red flower throughout the film is not only the encouragement given to Wei Yihang by Ma Xiaoyuan, but also serves as a physical symbol that lets the audience feel the power and hope of life, forming an interaction between the film and real life, and leading the audience to use this symbol to reflect on the value of life. Wei Yihang's dreams are also an important carrier of his tragic consciousness. These dreams are not only a reflection of his subconscious but also a metaphor for the unknown and fragility of life.

The greatest event that any sentient being must experience is death (Kim Jae-sung, 2011). Death is the ultimate problem facing human beings, and the Chinese attitude toward death has long been in a paradoxical discourse of absence and prudence, this concept has been in a difficult position for a long time. Although the development of science and technology has provided mankind with the means to intervene in the life process and prolong life, it cannot change the fact that death will eventually come. In the movie, the youthful and energetic Ma Xiaoyuan finally collapses on the train chasing his dream, failing to reach the destination in his heart. This episode is a cruel portrayal of the impermanence of life. With the help of such a tragic plot, director Han Yan makes the audience face up to the fragility and helplessness of life. In the expression of tragic consciousness, director Han Yan's work contains the spirit of persistence and resistance to life, which not only lets the audience re-examine the fragility and preciousness of life but also leads the thinking about life and death issues to a deeper level.

2.2 Tragedy and Emotional Conflict at the Family Level

In *A Little Red Flower*, affection is one of the core themes expressed in the movie. The young characters in the movie face a severe test of life due to major illnesses, and their lives are gradually fading away while they are physically and mentally battered. In the face of this cruel reality, parents and children begin to fight together against the threat of illness and death. This mutually supportive affection not only profoundly expresses the warmth amid illness, but also demonstrates Han Yan's emphasis on life and family bonds, enabling the audience to experience the selflessness and power of affection in emotional resonance.

The movie focuses on Wei Yihang's family. Wei Yihang's mother is meticulous in her daily life to save money, even haggling with the staff to save five dollars after parking overtime, and constantly pinching off the unattractive-looking leaves to lighten the portion size when she buys vegetables at the market. Wei Yihang's father, on the other hand, went to work part-time as a chauffeur after work following his child's illness. Wei Yihang also tried to lighten his parents' burden by applying for a job as a drug tester. Everyone in the family is trying hard to stay alive. This fear and worry of an unknown fate, and the helplessness that life can fade away at any moment, form the deep sense of tragedy in the film, making the audience sigh for their fate while feeling the warmth of the family and hope for life.

The family is a microcosm of society. Generally speaking, the family issues that appear in movies are the director's worldview of family and society, which can be used as a criterion to grasp his or her work (Park Min-soo, 2019). In the film, Han Yan takes the daily life between the sick children and their parents as the narrative thread, depicting the significant transformation of the affectionate relationship between the young children and their parents after they suffer from serious illnesses, from the generation gap in the initial daily communication to the communication barriers between the parents and their children after the illnesses come to pass, and then to the eventual joint fight against the illnesses and active treatment. Han Yan gives a deeper social significance to the value of affection through the presentation of these affectionate relationships. In this emotional trajectory, the sense of tragedy runs throughout, profoundly presenting the selfless dedication of parents to their children and their deep concern for their children's future, highlighting the powerlessness and struggle between families under the predicament of illness.

3. Color Expression of Tragic Consciousness

The Russian painter Leben said, Color is thought, color is feeling, and different colors can arouse different emotional reactions in people (Xing Xiaogang, 2011). French existentialist philosopher Marcel Mardin in the language of the film, proposed that the creator according to the audience's feelings to respond, from the point of view of the film's theme idea, character image, consciously use color expression to express the meaning of the plot to help the development of the plot, to explore the story of the deepest emotional appeal, which is the value of the use of color (Marcel Mardin, 2006). Red, orange, yellow, and other colors are often associated with hot, passionate, and enthusiastic, known as warm colors; the blue, green, and purple system is often associated with calm, calm, known as cold colors. Color can hit people's eyes, give people the first stimulation of the senses, and even penetrate people's eyes, penetrate the heart, and feel its power. Director Han Yan has his unique artistic style in the visual field, and he is good at constructing a visual tone rich in emotional tension through colors and images and outlining the complex state of mind of the characters in a specific social background in a delicate way.



Figure 1. Wei Yihang's characterization

The design of large cold tones accurately conveys the character's inner loneliness and helplessness, and the facial expression covered in greenish gray not only maps Wei Yihang's deepest despair but also strengthens his sense of isolation from the outside world. (Figure 1) The use of cold colors creates a heavy and depressing atmosphere, making the character's inner struggle seem more profound. In the tragic world where the disease exists, Wei Yihang is like a bird out of a flock, living himself on an island. Sickness is not only a physical torture for him but also a mountain that stretches across his heart. This mountain symbolizes fear and helplessness and is so heavy that it takes his breath away.



Figure 2. Wu Xiaomai who lost her lover

Wu Xiaomai always wears an optimistic smile and wholeheartedly helps every patient. As the leader of the patient group, he organizes activities and shares his experiences, bringing hope and strength to patients in darkness. That is until he mentioned his own story for the first time. Wu Xiaomai's beloved was originally optimistic, but eventually chose to end her life because of a relapse of her condition, escaping the torture of her illness in such a determined way. (Figure 2) This event is a heavy tragedy for Wu Xiaomai, and the movie deeply shows this plot through the delicate portrayal of emotions and the use of cold colors. Wu Xiaomai's expressionless face in a dark green jacket and the gray brickwork in the background convey his deep sorrow and despair without words.



Figure 3. The scene in Wei Yihang's mind

From time to time, Wei Yihang dreams of the scene he fantasizes about in his mind, in which the bright lake water contrasts sharply with the gray ground. (Figure 3) This change in color tone expresses Wei Yihang's detachment and loneliness from the real world and also becomes a visual metaphor for his brief escape from the pain of reality. The large area of cold colors and the open composition together construct a kind of surreal world. Hallucinations, often accompanied by dreams, are on the one hand the incarnation of the disease, and on the other hand the projection of Wei Yihang's psyche. Such hallucinations are not only the incarnation of the pain brought about by the disease but also hold the dream of his longing for freedom.



Figure 4. A father who lost his child

The episode of a father who has just lost his daughter sitting on the roadside with braised beef and rice in his hand, bawling his eyes out as he eats, becomes the most powerful moment in the movie. (Figure 4) Through this scene, the movie truly shows the pain and helplessness experienced by families fighting against cancer in society, and sublimates the personal tragedy into collective emotional resonance. In this scene, the use of cold colors shows the fragility and powerlessness of life in the face of fate. The takeaway that Wei Yihang quietly ordered for the father symbolizes a weak but precious humanistic concern. Although this action cannot change the father's tragic situation, it injects a touch of humanity into the heavy picture.



Figure 5. The Parallel World of Wei Yihang's Fantasy

At the end of the movie, after Ma Xiaoyuan's unfortunate passing away, Wei Yihang goes to the dream world of Qinghai Lake and meets Ma Xiaoyuan again, seeing the two of them living happily together in a parallel time and space, a world free of sickness and sorrow. (Figure 5) This surreal plot design not only provides emotional comfort for the characters but also builds a unique spiritual space. The clarity of the lake and the openness of the sky reflect Wei Yihang's spiritual sublimation and his new understanding of life. This use of cold colors expresses the film's sense of tragedy, the fragility and resilience of life in a cold visual experience, and Wei Yihang's inner growth and reconciliation, which fills the journey with spiritual power.

4. Social Values and the Tragic Reflection of Cinema

Han Yan mentioned in the interview of the special documentary *A Little Red Flower* that the radius of his expression of the sick group is from individual to family, then expanding to the group of people who have the same encounter, and finally radiating to all the people around him, bringing a broader social value and social significance (Wang Yuliang, 2021). In Han Yan's movie, we can see a large number of social group portraits, from the sick individual to the sick family, and finally expand the perspective of the sick group, revealing the universal problems and dilemmas faced by this group. Director Han Yan uses a discursive image expression of "mourning but not hurting" to think deeply about the creation of the movie. Through this unique creative approach, director Han Yan lets the audience deeply feel the resilience and beauty of life. His image writing on patients is not just a simple visualization of the relationship between human beings and diseases, but also a deep and multi-dimensional view of social reality, hitting directly at the core of various life-related topics in society.

Against this creative background, Han Yan has shown his appreciation for the sick. His film *A Little Red Flower* focuses on the internal psychological problems of patients with serious illnesses, such as the fear of death, the painful experience of discrimination, and the psychological defense mechanism of self-enclosure, as well as the external problems of survival, such as strained family relationships, heavy financial burden, and imperfect medical care system, etc. These are not the individual plights of the patients but reflect the inadequacies of society as a whole in the areas of medical care and humanistic care, which trigger people to think deeply about the improvement of the living environment and the improvement of the social medical care system. These are not the individual plight of the patients alone but reflect the deficiencies of the whole society in medical protection, humanistic care, etc., which triggers in-depth thinking on the topics of improving the living environment of the patients and perfecting the social medical system.

5. Conclusion

The sense of tragedy in Han Yan's films is not only the tragedy of individual lives but also a profound reflection of the cultural, ethical, and emotional problems of contemporary Chinese society. As early as 100 years ago, Eugene O'Neill said, only the tragic possesses the important beauty, the truth. It is the meaning and hope of life (O'Neill Eugene, 1921). In his works, Han Yan reveals the pain of the characters when they face the decision of life and death by showing the individual's struggle and resistance in the predicament of life. At the same time, he utilizes his unique aesthetics of images to express the intertwining of tragedy and hope, giving his works richer emotional levels. Therefore, through an in-depth study of Han Yan's sense of tragedy in his films, we will reveal the intrinsic connection between his works and real society, and explore the expression of his sense of tragedy as well as the profound value and meaning it implies. Han Yan's works resonate strongly with the contemporary audience emotionally, arousing the audience's awareness of social responsibility, and at the same time conveying distinctive humanistic concern and criticism of reality. Han Yan is good at combining life, disease, and tragedy, and has shown a unique way of thinking and methods in the innovation of genre films, which provides rich materials and inspiration for the creation of genre films.

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