

# The Comparative Research on the Color Application of Chinese and Western Film Directors

Zeqian Lu<sup>1, \*, †</sup> Jingyi Zhang<sup>2, †</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Media College, Nanjing University of the Arts, Jiangsu Province, China

<sup>2</sup>Academy of Television Arts, Zhejiang University of Media and Communication, Zhejiang Province, China

\*Corresponding author. Email: 15020440317@xs.hnit.edu.cn

†These authors contributed equally.

**Abstract.** As one of the common elements of films, color has always played its unique value. It not only decorates the pictures of the films but also assists in expressing the emotions and states of the characters. The extensive use of color in films reflects the self-innovation and technological breakthroughs of modern film and television art. From early black and white films to modern color films, the aesthetic trend of human beings is also evolving with the times. Chinese and Western directors have also made certain differences in the use of color due to subjective and objective factors. This paper takes the different color use styles of Chinese and Western film directors as the research object and adopts the comparative analysis method. Firstly, it briefly describes the development of color films, color functions, and several characteristics in films, and then introduces the different concepts of color used by Chinese and Western directors through specific examples and analyzes the reasons in detail. Finally, the differences in color consciousness and use style between the two are obtained. Chinese directors pay more attention to the symbolic expressiveness of color and are experts in using the freehand style of color, while Western directors attach significance to the structure of color in films, and the color use style is more realistic.

**Keywords:** Color, Films, Comparative Analysis, Color consciousness, Use style.

## 1. Introduction

Color is the most sensitive form element that can cause our common aesthetic pleasure. Color is an important aspect of the study of artistic beauty, which is the basis of aesthetic feeling and artistic charm and an important means of artistic formal beauty expression. The use of color in movies is mostly to express emotions and senses through pictures. In different Chinese and Western film and television works, color has become the most direct condition for all kinds of directors to show different visual impacts. This difference also implies the difference in the development of Chinese and Western films. Color can not only represent the current environment but also embody the psychological emotions of the characters. Color is the basic factor in the construction of film and television pictures. Understanding the significance of color to film is a key condition to studying the form of film expression. From narration, exposition of the main idea, enhancement of atmosphere, strengthening of emotional interaction, and creation of special aesthetic taste, all of them prove to the audience the unique value and meaning of color based in the film. This paper is divided into two chapters, respectively from the perspective of color and the difference between China and the West. Color includes the development of color film and the characteristics of color film. The differences between China and the West are illustrated from the most typical directors' perspectives. The chapters advance directly to deepen the understanding.

## 2. Color -- One of the Visual Languages of Film

### 2.1 The Emergence and Development of Color Films

Since the birth of the film in 1895, people have been used to seeing everything and pictures in black and white. The monotonous black and white colors depicted the life that people were

accustomed to. However, in the early 20th century, this situation began to transform, and many filmmakers started to pursue the color world on the screen. In 1935, American directors Rouben Mamoulian and Lowell Sherman filmed the world's first color film *Vanity Fair*. Since then, the industrial production of color films has been carried out in succession. The early generation of "color pictures" originated from the French "founder of the film industry" Georges Méliès, who used the method of manual coloring on black and white copies of the film. This form further stimulated technical researchers to yearn for color images. Therefore, advanced "photography" methods were widely studied and applied by workers, and transparent color images gradually appeared in films. Then, due to the continuous breakthrough of technology, many methods such as the three-primary color additive method, two-color subtractive color method, dyeing, and printing method continued to emerge. It was not until the multi-layer color film was produced that it provided a photosensitive material that was relatively simple and had a strong color transmission capacity for shooting color films. As a result, various color pictures gradually appeared on the screen, and color became a real feature of reality. Whereas, the color technology at that time was still in the practical stage and not yet fully mature. Most colors could only have the effect of decorating the film, but could not be fully integrated into the film modeling to make its expression more natural. Until the mid-20th century, the performance of the color film was gradually improved. Not only did color simply appear in the film as a technical form, it gradually acquired the soul and became a key auxiliary means for directors to express the characters' emotions and states. Hence, after the 1960s, black and white films were gradually replaced by color films, and color also played a pivotal role in world films.

## 2.2 The Color Functions of Films

Since the advent of color films, the influence of color in film can not be underestimated. Marcel Gabriel, a famous French film theorist, wrote in his famous book *Film Language*: "The real invention of film color should start from the day when directors understand the fact that color does not have to be true (i.e. the same as reality), but must first be used according to the value of different tones (such as black and white) and psychological and dramatic meanings (cold and warm colors) [1]". The role of color in movies can be divided into the following four points: information function, symbolic function, composition function, and emotional function. First of all, the information function is the most basic function of film color. In the early black and white film era, because there was no color distinction in modeling, the audience needed to judge the identity of the role through the characters' lines and actions, but the arrival of color gave the audience more clear hints. For example, in the early film *Raise the Red Lantern* directed by Yimou Zhang, the different colors in the clothes of the four wives of the Chen family imply the discrepancies in their personalities and destinies: The shrewd eldest wife and second wife have been wearing silk clothes with complex colors. The third wife Mei Shan's clothes range from bright red at the beginning to multicolor in the middle, then to light blue in the later period, and all white at the time of her death, which reveals the whole process of her being favored and insolent to becoming shrewd, to gradually disregarding and finally dying miserably. Similarly, the clothes of the fourth wife Song Lian go through the process of white, multicolor, light blue, and eventually returning to white, which reflects the whole process of her from being pure and innocent at the beginning to struggling for fame and fortune, to gradually ignorant and ultimately despairing. Such color application is clear and explicit, giving the audience obvious identity prompts. Louis Giannetti, a famous American film theorist, pointed out in his book *Understanding Movies*: "Since ancient times, all visual artists have used color to achieve symbolic purposes [2]". Color also has a symbolic function, but the symbolism is not uniform. It has different symbolic meanings in different films. For instance, in the commercial film *Shadow* directed by Yimou Zhang, black and white are the main colors in the film, symbolizing the cultural characteristics of "two opposing principles in nature" mutually reinforcing and neutralizing each other. The opposition of black and white also symbolizes the unreachable affection between Jing Zhou and Xiao Ai, and the whole film is full of the unique artistic conception of traditional Chinese ink painting art. The composition function of color is reflected in the effect that various colors can split the picture, highlighting the

parts that the director wants to emphasize, and balancing with other areas. For example, in the film, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* directed by Wes Anderson, a variety of wonderful colors divide the picture into multiple obvious areas. A striking example is that in the section where the manager and the doorman are sitting face to face on the train, the purple clothes, the brown door, and the red wall create a smooth and balanced symmetrical picture, full of a sense of order, similar to the form of the European puppet show, which brings the audience a sense of psychological pleasure and comfort. The distinction between warm and cold colors is the most significant way to manifest the emotional function of colors. The reason is that warm colors give people a warm and pleasant feeling, and can even render people and generate stimulation and excitement. On the contrary, the cold tone will appear calm and low-key, indicating the character's melancholy inner state or foreshadowing that a bad situation is coming. For instance, in the large-scale commercial film *Titanic* directed by James Cameron, when the giant ship is about to sail, the overall picture is warm, setting off the intimate atmosphere at that time, and everyone is full of enthusiasm. Next, during the period when Jack and Rose meet and fall in love, most of the pictures adopt warm tones, especially when they stand on the bow of the ship and bathe in orange rays, expressing their romantic and eternal love. When the giant ship hits the iceberg, the overall tone instantly turns cold and dark, with black and blue filling every corner of the picture, strongly indicating that a dangerous situation is coming, and emotional changes are vividly displayed.

### **2.3 The Characteristics of Film Color**

The composition of the film picture has the lens, camera movement, soundtrack, sound, and other main elements, and the most intuitive display to the audience is the color. Colors have multiple meanings in a movie. In the traditional sense, blue represents sadness and depression, red represents warmth and brightness, green represents vitality, and yellow represents nobility and elegance. However, the themes told in different movies also mean that the use of colors in movies has different characteristics and meanings, and plays a dominant role in the development of things. Therefore, the use of film color should also follow several characteristics of film color.

#### **2.3.1. Color Hierarchy**

The use of color in movies has multiple effects. The most direct manifestation is the difference in rank and inferiority in movies. As one of the basic characteristics of the film, color is the most objective visual representation of the content and theme of the film narrative itself, which with the soundtrack, scene scheduling, and other elements of the film reflect each other. After the 21st century, the film and television industry entered a stage of saturation development. More and more film directors seek to show hierarchical differences in visual and audio language. For example, in *Parasite* by South Korean director Bong Joon-ho, in addition to using a ladder up and down to represent the class difference between the rich and the poor, a large number of colors are also used to represent the actual difference between the upper class and the lower class. When shooting the villa where the rich lived, the director used a lot of bright and highly saturated green and white, and most of them wore bright clothes, such as white and yellow. The difference is that when shooting the living environment of the poor family, the colors presented in the picture are mostly dark colors such as gray and dark green, and the clothes are also mostly black and gray with low saturation. This is a clear demonstration of the hierarchical differences in colors. In addition, in traditional Chinese culture, yellow represents the color of noble imperial power. When watching and appreciating some ancient palace films, the audience can find obvious differences in the attire of princes and ministers as well as concubines. In the traditional imperial system, yellow represents nobility and supreme power, most of which is used by the emperor of Heaven. In terms of princes and ministers, there are obvious differences in the color of dress according to the different positions of power, not to mention the rank difference of concubines. Similarly, in the Western tradition, cinnabar symbolized wealth and status in ancient Rome. There were also strict hierarchical differences in the color of clothing worn by emperors, ministers, women, and children.

### 2.3.2. Regionality of Color

Solar once said: "Color is part of the language of cinema, and we use color for different emotions and feelings, just as light and shadow are used to symbolize the conflict between life and death. I believe that different colors mean different things and people from different cultures interpret colors differently [3]". The color appears in our daily life all the time and is closely related to the audience. Color also exerts a certain influence on our local culture. Different regions have many similarities and differences in their understanding of color due to their geographical environment, cultural environment, lifestyle, historical background, and other factors. In the film *Yellow Earth* directed by Chen Kaige, to vividly show the simplicity of people in the Northern Shaanxi Plateau area, yellow is used a lot in the picture. The yellow earth shows its ecological environment in the context of a large panorama, which is particularly solemn and solemn against the setting sun. At the same time, in the overall composition of the picture, the yellow land accounts for the majority of the proportion, while the proportion of the sky and people is small, which is used to show the richness of the land and show the simple characteristics of the people. However, in the film *Curse of the Golden Flower*, director Yimou Zhang uses a large number of yellow chrysanthemums to show the strict and solemn interior of the imperial palace, which gives people a sense of oppression rather than simplicity. In traditional Chinese culture, red represents enthusiasm and joy. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, red represents joy in everyone's heart, which is often used on wedding occasions, but in western culture, red represents violence, lust, and killing. In the movie *Taxi Driver*, red not only reproduces the bustling dream of the streets of New York through neon lights but also represents the filth and cruelty behind the city. When shooting some violent scenes, Western directors tend to use a lot of red to bring visual impact to the audience.

### 2.3.3. The Nationality of Color

China has a vast territory and abundant resources. There are 56 different ethnic groups in China. These ethnic groups have their cultural differences and living habits. The cognition and understanding of color are also different. Different religious beliefs and cultural heritages contribute to this situation. Take red as an example. The Yi people are fire worshipers. The Yi people believe that red represents fire, which can drive away evil and bring good luck. Red is the main color of their clothing. In the movie *Flower Waist Bride*, the "flower waist" Yi people in Shiping County, Honghe River wear blue and black clothes with red flame patterns all over their bodies. This interchangeable color relationship between red and black reflects their worship of fire. However, in the eyes of the Hani people, the sky is glowing red with the sun, as the gods protect mankind, so red symbolizes heaven. In Hani's sacrificial ceremonies, the priests wear God-given clothes in red. They face the direction of the sunrise when they welcome the god of heaven. The canopy on their heads is also wrapped in red cloth. Hani children also wear red on their clothes, hats, or leggings. They believe that red can protect their children's lives and souls. These various colors are also represented in the movies, taking on different meanings.

## 3. Color Concepts of Chinese and Western Film Directors

With the development of the film industry and the continuous expansion of the film market, more and more film directors begin to pay attention to the detailed description of the film language. As color is the most direct element presented to the audience on the screen, more and more directors pursue the stylization of color. Color is the most sensitive form element that can cause our common aesthetic pleasure. "What accompaniment is to song lyrics, color is to image; not only that, but sometimes the color is the word and the image is only the accompaniment". This is what Danner says in *Philosophy of Art*. In the Chinese traditional aesthetic concept, the use and meaning of color can well represent its character, connotation, theme, meaning, and so on. In western film thinking, color also determines the aesthetic value of its films. Yimou Zhang and Kaige Chen, as typical

representatives of the fifth generation of Chinese directors, use colors boldly and with unique skills. Bertolucci and Chieslowski's use of color is similar to those of the two Chinese directors.

### **3.1 The Color Thinking of Chinese Film Directors' Ideographic Symbols**

#### **3.1.1. Yimou Zhang's Freehand Style of Color**

Chinese directors are skilled in expressing the theme of the film with the assistance of a single color, adding the symbolic meaning of the color and giving it accurate connotations. Yimou Zhang, the leader of the fifth generation of directors in China, has formed a distinctive directing style with his strong perception and unique understanding of color in constant attempts. He brought the potential of color to the extreme in his films, bringing audiences a grand visual feast after another. Yimou Zhang studied photography and had a special sensitivity to color. He was proficient in presenting the scenes in his films to the public in the form of color pieces, which increased the visual impact and conformed to the aesthetic style of contemporary people.

First of all, Yimou Zhang was adept at attracting the audience's attention with pure and simple or bright and exaggerated folk colors. Traditional Chinese folk colors usually employ complementary colors to contrast with high-purity colors, and a gorgeous, abundant, lively, and warm atmosphere is produced in this sharp contrast, which reflects an ideology that integrates many aspects of nature, humanity, and society. The audience perceives and understands the psychological states, thoughts, and feelings of the characters through remarkable color contrast. In the sophisticated film colors, the connotations and details of folk culture come into being, which also provides film researchers with research value in many aspects [4].

When it comes to the color in Yimou Zhang's films, the most impressive color is his idiomatic bright red. Red is the most representative color in traditional Chinese culture because bright red can represent strong emotions and vigorous vitality, as well as ethics or bloody and cruel killing. Yimou Zhang's preference for red is reflected in many of his compositions: In the film *Red Sorghum*, red runs throughout the film. Red bridal gowns, red veils, red embroidered shoes, red sorghum, and the world reddened by the sun and fire... Red appears as a sign of extreme enthusiasm, burning the eyes of the audience all the time, and illustrating the simple, free, and enthusiastic patterns of farmers' lives in the land of China. A large number of active and vibrant artistic images appeared on the screen. In the same way, this kind of scorching vitality like bright red has always been contained in the blood of the Chinese nation from generation to generation. The red color of the blockbusters in the film seems to remind the audience that no matter what difficulties our country faces, or the conformist feudal customs, or the ethnic contradictions caused by the Japanese invasion of China, the Chinese nation has a tenacious spirit, and this vitality will never be destroyed. Nevertheless, in the movie *Raise the Red Lantern*, red is no longer a symbol of vigorous vitality, but a silent resistance to the feudal forces that oppress women. When night falls, the neatly arranged red lanterns in Chen's courtyard contrast with the surrounding black bricks and tiles, as if it is a fierce struggle between the fate of women and feudal corrupt customs. The red lanterns in the courtyard are the main line of the story. Their appearance and extinction, to some extent, determine the fate of women in the claustrophobic Chen's courtyard. Every night, the servant in the room where the master lives will beat this wife's feet and light the lantern for her so that she can get the opportunity to be favored. Mistakes and deceits will directly lead to lantern sealing, which means that her favor and status will be deprived. The red lantern, like a specific symbol in the society at that time, accused the inevitable cruelty of feudal forces. In the film, the third wife Mei Shan wears a red costume. The red color originally symbolizes enthusiasm and hope, and also shows Mei Shan's desire for opera singing, but this desire seems tiny and helpless in the dark and deep courtyard. When Mei Shan dies, the red background and objects in her room directly hit the hearts of the audience. These reds seem to overflow the screen, leaving the cruel bondage and returning to freedom. While paying homage to Mei Shan, they also strive to break through the oppression of feudal power. Yimou Zhang once said, "I want to be completely bright. All colors should be scary, even if they are a little vulgar." Thus, Yimou Zhang endowed red with various meanings and symbolic functions, conveying his scrutiny and sympathy

for the image and fortune of the characters. On the one hand, it complements the theme of the film, on the other hand, it is closely combined with the dramatic structure, plot development, and characters' emotions in the film, which is full of unique artistic charm [5].

Yimou Zhang also excelled at expressing his creative intentions with a variety of high-purity folk colors. For example, in his large-scale commercial film *Hero*, the overall tone of the film is black, but Director Zhang describes different versions of the story with changes in four colors: red, blue, green, and white. The black and murderous atmosphere runs through the entire film, from the palace of the King of Qin to the decisive battle of the protagonist in the sky and finally to the ending of him. The story with red as the main color is full of exaggeration and indignation. The protagonist makes up a story about the Broken Sword and Flying Snow for the King of Qin, showing his inner restlessness. Red is full of anger and reaches its peak when the protagonist kills Ru Yue and red leaves fall all over the sky. Blue has the meaning of tranquility, stability, and rationality. This part of the story is composed of realistic narratives, praising the great love story of Broken Sword and Flying Snow. The cool color enables people to feel sympathetic and pitiful. Next, in the story told to the protagonist by Broken Sword, the green color, which symbolizes romance and peace, becomes the main tone of the narrative, reflecting Broken Sword's desire to return to a quiet and simple spiritual home and the protagonist's desire to prevent King of Qin from killing since peace can bring society back to life. The white, which symbolizes simplicity and holiness, emerges in the real scene told by the protagonist. White represents the loyalty and determination of the protagonist and others to assassinate the King of Qin. For Broken Sword, white is also a kind of optimism and open-mindedness, an unrestrained magnanimity to see through the world of mortals. Consequently, the natural conversion of these colors divides the film content, which together constitutes a grand visual feast, deepening the audience's perception and understanding of the film.

It can be seen from the above that Yimou Zhang, whose major was photography, did have a particular understanding of the grasp of color. His use of color did not remain at a single level allowing the picture to be aesthetically pleasing. What's more, he endowed color with more concrete implications and ideological connotations. It must be said that Yimou Zhang's film works are the perpetual masterpieces of Chinese film color art.

### 3.1.2. Kaige Chen's Color Meaning Style

As a typical representative of the fifth generation of Chinese film directors, Kaige Chen has many films works. From the early *Yellow Earth* and *Farewell My Concubine* to the later large-scale production of *Legend of the Demon Cat* and *Changjin Lake*, Chen's grasp of color and thinking have formed their unique style characteristics. The fifth generation of directors represented by Kaige Chen was involved in the whirlpool of great social unrest in China when they were young, which had a profound impact on their later film creation. Similarly, fifth-generation directors always have their own unique and sensitive views on the exploration of new ideas and new artistic techniques. They continue to explore the national ideology and the structure of national psychology and achieve a unique and unconventional style in their films. In Kaige Chen's films, the broad and profound traditional Chinese national culture is reflected, which reflects the integration of personal feelings and national feelings. For example, the film *Yellow Earth*, in the bleak and pitiful historical story, conveys deep thinking and a sense of anxiety about the national spirit. The enhancement of the original state of people and land in the image, the unconventional color, and composition, shocked the world immediately. Another example is *Farewell My Concubine*, which shows the thinking and understanding of traditional culture, human existence, and human nature through the half-century of joys and sorrows of two Peking Opera actors. Similarly, in Kaige Chen's films, a large number of colors, light and shadow changes, and camera language are often used to create metaphorical effects. In this way, the symbolic meaning and main idea of the film are fully expressed and profound. Many of Kaige Chen's classic films were adapted from novels, such as *Yellow Earth*, adapted from Ke LAN's essay *Echo from Deep Valley*; *King of Children* is based on Aching's novel of the same name. *Farewell My Concubine* is adapted from Bihua Li's novel of the same name. It also means that the film is rich in literature, has strong social significance, and arouses emotional resonance among the

audience. It is this kind of narration, which symbolizes flow and literature flow, that makes Kaige Chen's directing style distinctive.

The most typical one is his expressive style of color. His representative film *Yellow Earth*, as the beginning of the work of the fifth generation director, has a very representative grasp of the color ideographic style. The film tells the story of a northern Shaanxi rural poor girl Cui Qiao since childhood the father decided the baby, she can not get rid of the bad luck, had to use the "Xintianyou" song, to express the pain in her heart. The film is different from other traditional films in the portrayal of characters and the performance of folk customs. In *Yellow Earth*, the main color is yellow, and a large number of the film compositions focus on the yellow earth itself as the center point of the picture. This yellow not only covers its geographical characteristics but also the people with yellow skin, the sky shot from an elevation Angle, and the Yellow River in the film. Yellow itself, as a color with low vividness, is easily covered by colors with high saturation in the film. However, in *Yellow Earth*, yellow seems to constantly hide other colors, and even red appears dull in front of yellow. In the film, the most classic part is the "Wedding reception in the court". Red is the most classic color for wedding celebrations in Chinese traditional customs, and the joy and publicity behind it are slightly weaker when yellow is used in a large area. Because of the contrast of yellow, the audience will feel the sadness and helplessness behind their marriage. The bold use of color here gives the audience a good emotional resonance, and the audience's emotions are more easily brought into the film. In *Yellow Earth*, the most impressive shot for the audience is the large panorama shooting of the whole yellow Earth. With the use of the large panorama, both the overhead shot and the upshot make the picture full of yellow. The bold composition gives the picture a strong sense of pressure. Even the sky is full of yellow because of the wind and sand, and there is no vitality. The bold use of this yellow color makes the film solemn, adding a unique national character and emotional atmosphere to the film. Behind it is the tragic fate of the men and women as well as secular helplessness. In the film *Yellow Earth*, color not only reflects the keynote atmosphere but also highlights the geographical landscape and fate results, which brings a strong visual impact to the audience.

In Kaige Chen's other film *The Orphan of Zhao*, there is an ulterior motive in the use of color. The film tells the story of Cheng Ying, a folk doctor who is involved in the killing of Zhao's family by chance and uses a medicine box to bring the orphan out of the hands of evil, and Cheng Ying because offer "Zhao's orphan" be accepted for Tu An Jia's guest, bring up Zhao's orphan adult, final revenge. The film for the historical series, in the use of color, should be bold to have characteristics and should conform to the norms of history. The main colors of the film are red and black. Black gives people the feeling of dark and evil in the stereotype, which reflects the sinister and viciousness of the main character Tu 'a Jia in the film, and lays the groundwork for his wicked plan. Unusually, the traditional concept of red mostly represents joy, power, and enthusiasm, but in *The Orphan of Zhao*, red on behalf of killing is cruel indeed. The collision of black and red in the film fully embodies the theme of revenge. This reflects the implication of color for content and the shaping of atmosphere.

In *Farewell My Concubine*, a classic film, color also plays a crucial role. In *Beijing Opera*, color is the most direct and objective way to distinguish the ugly images. In the film, the use of blue, black, and red highlights the collision of colors incisively and vividly. The color change of the stage with jewelry shows the atmosphere. The switch between warm and cool colors makes the characters' emotions more distinctive and characteristic, which sets the tone of the film. Colors not only hint at the characters' emotions but also provide a good description of the historical background. It can be seen that in the use of color, Kaige Chen has its unique visual aesthetic. This also makes his film style unique. The bold use of large areas of color also sets off the picture atmosphere of the film to the extreme.

### 3.2 The Structural Color Thinking of Western Film Directors

Different from the color freehand style of Chinese directors, Western directors choose different colors for their films according to different themes, pay more attention to the structure and realistic style of colors, and reduce the appearance of contrasting colors. The structure is reflected in the

application of color montage and the emphasis on the multiple connections between color and plot. In this regard, the film compositions of former Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski and Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci are particularly representative.

### 3.2.1. Kieslowski's Realistic Style of color

The former famous Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski is known as "the last European film writer". His representative work in *Blue, White, and Red* makes him one of the most eminent directors in the world. The three films are named after the main color of the film, and take Paris, Warsaw, and Geneva as the creative background, reflecting the director's unique conception and worldview. The three colors of blue, white, and red correspond to the colors of the French national flag, respectively publicizing the concepts of freedom, equality, and fraternity, which also makes the "Three Colors" series truly become French films. Kieslowski skillfully created an artistic space between documentary and performance with three kinds of solid colors, presenting the powerlessness of the characters in the dilemma under special circumstances.

Gabriel said: "All the physiological and psychological experiments have demonstrated that we feel more about the value of color than the color itself" [6]. In the film *Blue*, as a visual element repeatedly used by the director, blue constantly appear in different time and space, blue rooms, blue crystal chandeliers, blue folders, blue candy paper, blue swimming pool... The story unfolds slowly in the silent, closed, and depressing atmosphere created by blue. Blue is the shackle that Julie desires to get rid of painful memories and the cage where she pursues freedom. The ubiquitous blue symbolizes Julie's fatigue from escaping from reality and seeking freedom. Blue also plays a role in promoting the development of the plot structure. For example, the depth of the swimming pool water has changed four times: deep-shallow-deep-shallow, suggesting Julie's four different stages of mental state: From excruciating pain to attempting to escape, to failing to escape, and eventually to relief. Although she once lost her husband and daughter in a car accident, Julie has found the pain meaningless in the face of her husband's betrayal and the revealed secrets. She is capable of getting out of sadness and regaining her life at last. Freedom beckons to her ahead in the future. The well-known photographer Storaro once said: "Color is part of the language of film. We use color to express different emotions and feelings, just like using light and shadow to symbolize the conflict between life and death". In the whole film, Kieslowski reused the visual element of blue to strengthen the expression of the character's emotions. Blue is the color of sadness and pain for Julie, and it also assists the director to express his understanding of the theme of freedom: Human freedom is not complete, and we are far from real freedom.

As the name of the film *Red*, red is a representative symbolic color. Red originally symbolizes enthusiasm and vitality, but in French movies, red represents fraternity and warmth. This kind of fraternity comes from the loneliness and desire for love in the depths of the heart, fraternity can save people's hearts, which is also the director's intention. Red is everywhere in the film, red jacket, red jeep, red billboard, red telephone, red dance room... The director used the red tone of the blockbuster to explain the living environment and personality characteristics of the male and female protagonists. The first scene at the beginning of the film is a close-up of an old-fashioned telephone, and then the shot explains Auguste's room with a dark red background, laying a melancholy and cold tone. The male protagonist hangs up the phone and walks out of the room. The show follows him and turns to the female protagonist Valentine's home surroundings. The red satin under the phone is swaying in the wind and the furnishings in her home are also mainly red, embodying that Valentine is full of passion for life and work. Then, the story continues to unfold in the warm atmosphere created by red. The director constructs a fortuitous connection between a female college student who is in love and a career and an old judge who is lonely and has suffered from the betrayal of love. The different reactions of the two people to the injury of the dog indicate the difference in their empathy ability. Valentine's heart is full of enthusiasm and warmth, while the old judge keeps his inner sentiments closed for a long time and is keen on peeping at others' lives to understand the ways of the world. Therefore, red not only plays a role in setting off the atmosphere, but also a psychological structure, representing the kindness and love in Valentine's heart. She imperceptibly purifies and saves the old



judge's soul, enabling him to try his best to put down his loneliness and hatred. Valentin is red, beautiful, passionate, and bright, which is also proved by her integration with the red background in the freeze frame at the end of the film. Red is also the color of blood and the symbol of the birth of life. Valentine appears on the right side of the picture at the end, while her left side is a large piece of red as if she is watching the red earnestly. She longs for fraternity and all the admirable qualities in the world. Meanwhile, the four protagonists in Blue and White also survive the shipwreck. Red also means that no matter what pain and suffering people have experienced in the past, their souls will eventually be saved, a past life has ended, and a new one is about to begin [7].

### 3.2.2. The Color Structure Style of Bernardo Bertolucci

Bernardo Bertolucci (March 16, 1941-November 2018), born March 16, 1941, in Parma, Italy, is an Italian director, screenwriter, and producer. Bernardo Bertolucci's work is known for its epic grandeur and strong class-analytic content, elevating erotic content to considerable artistic heights. Once it has been said, he is the director of a not easily let a person happy, his movies often let a person produce nostalgia and melancholy mood, narrative, the story always reflects the sorts of social content and provide life, which also tends to have the delicate inner world of characters and eyes full of metaphor or actions. As a director full of curiosity about Oriental culture, he has shot many films related to Oriental culture, among which the most famous is *The Last Emperor*.

It was the first feature film to be shot inside the Forbidden City with permission from the Chinese government, and the first Western film about China to receive full cooperation from the Chinese government since 1949. Bernardo Bertolucci was fastidious in his use of color to better illustrate the breadth and depth of Chinese culture. For scenes inside the Imperial palace, Bertolucci tried to recreate the use of color in the palace itself. The film follows the life of Aisin Gioro Puyi, the last emperor of China, spanning 60 years from the time he became emperor to the time he finally became a private citizen. However, the color changes in *The Last Emperor* are mainly reflected in the changes in light and shade. From vermilion, indigo, and bright yellow, these traditional Chinese colors made up the legendary life of Emperor Pu Yi. The director used the colors of traditional Chinese culture, rather than the universal color standard. The appearance of these colors quickly brings the audience into the complex and turbulent period of the Qing Dynasty, as if they had experienced it themselves, and also better reflects the changes in human feelings under the change of colors.

In the whole film, the impact of color is the most violent vermilion. From Puyi ran through the long Forbidden City corridor to pursue the nurse, but was eventually imprisoned in the deep palace, to ride a bicycle through the vermilion corridor to mourn his mother, see the closed vermilion door heart helpless and resentment, finally in his wife Wanrong was picked up to a mental hospital, Puyi chased out after the vermilion door. The three times the appearance of vermilion seems to be a shackle, in the continuous Puyi heart lock. Vermilion disappeared in this deep palace, instead of the endless cage and powerlessness. As the main color of the Forbidden City, vermilion also implies the misfortune and sorrow of the people in the palace. They are imprisoned and bound, and even their souls are not free. Bright yellow is also widely used. As a historical figure biography type film, with the emperor of China as the protagonist, the most indispensable is bright yellow. In ancient China, the Qing Dynasty stipulated that only the emperor, Empress Dowager, and empress could wear bright yellow court clothes, even the imperial concubines who were only subordinate to the empress. This shows the importance of bright yellow to the royal family. In the film, the use of bright yellow is also very meaningful. Bright yellow is everywhere from clothing to the palace of the dragon Chair. The use of the most typical fragments is Puyi in childhood just throne wearing bright yellow dragon robe by the door of a large bright yellow curtain attracted, go out to see kneeling a large civil and military Baiguan. Bright yellow represents the royal power, and this is the first time Puyi was attracted by bright yellow, which also hinted at the beginning of his legendary emperor's life. The second time he appeared was when his younger brother dressed in bright yellow and practiced calligraphy with him. In Puyi's idea, bright yellow is the emperor can wear clothes, but this time, the appearance of bright yellow represents the fall of imperial power. The comparison of the use of bright yellow before and after represents different circumstances and social status quo, which is cruel but realistic. From the

film art, people can see that the color and layout of clothes can directly affect the tone, character characteristics, and psychological emotions of the film, enhance or weaken the atmosphere effect of the film, and also have an impact on the rhythm of the film [8].

In the use of color, the director Bertolucci is also very exquisite. There is a clear contrast of light and dark tones in the film. In the foreign teacher, Johnston came to the Forbidden City to teach Puyi knowledge, In the film, the whole tone is relatively bright, and the picture has bright eyes. In the use of tone, the audience can also understand that this is Puyi's most happy time. When he married Wanrong, the whole picture was full of red, a symbol of love and passion. Red is the main color in traditional Chinese weddings. After Puyi left the Forbidden City, the tone of the whole picture began to become dark, color saturation decreased, and the main color also changed to blue, symbolizing the transformation of the character and mood.

In *The Last Emperor*, the director goes much further into the details of tone and color. As the most classic representative work of Bernardo Bertolucci, *The Last Emperor* fully demonstrates the use of color in an excellent film for the audience. The change of color also represents the change of characters and the change in society, and the color is the most basic but indispensable part of the film.

### **3.3 Differences in the Use of Color Between Chinese and Western Film Directors**

Through the above analysis, both Chinese and Western directors are experts in introducing color into film narratives and exerting various functions of color in the film. In terms of color selection and application, there are some similarities and prominent discrepancies between the two. Specifically, Chinese directors, such as Yimou Zhang, are best at using bright red, and their color style tends to be freehand and symbolic. Conversely, Western directors, such as Kieslowski, tend to choose different colors for films according to different themes, which is determined according to the atmosphere that the film needs to create, and they pay more attention to the realistic style of color.

#### **3.3.1. Color Selection**

First of all, in terms of color selection, the red that Chinese director Yimou Zhang is best at using almost runs through most of his works in his creative career. The red in *Red Sorghum* symbolizes the scorching vitality and the perseverance of the Chinese nation, especially the large tracts of red sorghum that give people a strong visual impact; in *Raise the Red Lantern*, red is the lantern, the bridal gown, and the costume of the third wife. It is also an attempt to conceal the stale atmosphere and silent resistance to feudal forces; red in *My Father and Mother* is Di Zhao's red cotton-padded jacket, headband, and scarf, which is Di Zhao's persistent waiting for Teacher Luo; in *Not One Less*, the teacher in red is running on the road to find students, and red is stubborn; red in *Hero* is the robe of Flying Snow, a strong desire and anger... There are two reasons for Yimou Zhang's preference for red: Firstly, red is the most representative color in Chinese traditional culture. Under the exclusive customs of China, red has the meaning of festivity, auspiciousness, marriage, and other happy events. Yimou Zhang has widely used the highly nationalized red color in his compositions and has also achieved a high degree of integration with the national cultural spirit. Secondly, Yimou Zhang's application of red was based on the background of the times and the social status quo at that time. His early works mostly told stories that happened in rural China. Due to the limitations of regions and creations, the colors would be relatively simple. At that time, China's rural areas usually used red as the main color of various cultural customs, so Yimou Zhang would naturally prefer it [9]. However, Kieslowski is different from Yimou Zhang in color selection. He chose different colors as the main colors for the "Three Colors" series. In *Blue*, there is no large area of color blocks, but local embellishments, such as blue crystal chandeliers, blue folders, and candy paper. Blue is also the color that carries Julie's memories and sorrow; In *White*, the white furnishings in Carole's house and the white wedding dress worn by Domini are both in line with the psychological state of the characters at that time; in *Red*, the furnishings in Valentine's home are mainly red, which is also the embodiment of Valentine's inner passion and hope. Kieslowski's choice of colors was also based on the ideology of Western society at that time, with highly developed material civilization and rich spiritual life.

Various color elements were filled in people's daily life, so compared to Yimou Zhang, Kieslowski's choice of colors was more extensive [10].

Chinese director Kaige Chen likes to use a large number of tones that are consistent with the historical and geographical background of the time to display his film pictures. In *Yellow Earth*, the most common yellow in the northwest region is used as the main color to describe the plot; in *The Orphan of Zhao*, red and black are employed to reveal the cruelty of historical events; in *Farewell My Concubine*, the unique colors of Peking Opera are applied to manifest that glorious and lonely era of war and chaos. Western director Bernardo Bertolucci will also grasp the tones according to the distinctive colors of the venue. For example, bright yellow and gray-green in *The Last Emperor* are exclusive colors in ancient China. The utilization of these colors in the film is more conducive to the audience's substitution and empathy for that era. This is exactly the commonality between the two directors in the application of color.

### 3.3.2. The Use of Color Style

Secondly, there are essential differences between Chinese and Western directors in the use of color style. Yimou Zhang's treatment of red is more exaggerated and bold, but it will not be completely divorced from reality. Red Sorghum, for example, part of scene images with high saturation of big red, including the total solar eclipse at the end of the film, big red condition become a spectacle, burning into the audience's eye momentarily, let a person feel when against Japanese aggression the Chinese nation's strong determination, although such color use at ordinary times there are differences between the visual experience with people, but it doesn't feel particularly exaggerated; *Raise the Red Lantern* shows a courtyard full of red lanterns in stark contrast to the surrounding black bricks and tiles, and the emotional color reaches its peak at that moment. In contrast, Kieslowski's use of colors is more based on the actual situation, such as blue folders and swimming pools, white wedding dresses, red dance classrooms, etc., which are very close to the colors of things or scenery people usually see, so it is not easy to produce abnormal feelings. Therefore, Yimou Zhang prefers the freehand style in color processing, while Kieslowski prefers the realistic style, which coincides with the difference between Chinese and Western painting art, indicating that the difference in color use style between the two directors may also be influenced by the different painting styles.

### 3.3.3. The Contrast of Colors

In the films directed by Kaige Chen, opposite colors are often used to aggravate the emotions of the protagonists and promote the development of the story. For example, in the film *Yellow Earth*, a lot of red was used in the shooting of the "wedding reception in the court". Red is the most festive color in this section of the use of irony but helplessness. In *The Orphan of Zhao*, red represents cruelty and bloodshed. The color red in *Farewell My Concubine* represents revolution and the secular world. This bold use of color constantly impinges on the audience's audiovisual experience. This bold use of color is unexpected but reasonable and strengthens the picture meaning of the film. Bernardo Bertolucci, on the other hand, uses the picture based on the environment of the picture itself, which will not violate the picture characteristics of the film itself. For example, in *The Last Emperor*, when the hero is sad, the whole color tone of the picture will turn blue. Shooting the bridal chamber will use dark red, show its ambiguous warm environment, and its mood changes in line with the character. In the director's film, *The Sky is Covered*, the scene shot in the Sahara Desert is yellow and warm, which vividly shows the emotional changes of the hero and heroine. The difference in color style between Chinese and Western directors often demonstrates the cultural distinction between Chinese and Western colors.

## 4. Conclusions

The emergence and development of the color film have gone through a long time and process, and its major reformation is one of the greatest breakthroughs in world film history. Many Chinese and foreign film and television works reflect the different functions of color in films, and directors will

follow the diverse characteristics of color in the process of color application. Different color concepts and thoughts result in distinct use styles of colors by Chinese and Western directors, bringing people entirely divergent visual experiences. There is a certain similarity between the two. Both Chinese and Western directors are skilled in adopting a large number of tones that fit the times, history, and geographical background for screen display; whereas, there are numerous divergences between the two: regarding color selection, Chinese directors such as Yimou Zhang prefer to use the same color and give it a variety of meanings. For instance, red is widely used for it is the most representative color in Chinese traditional culture and due to the background of the times and social status quo at that time; Western directors such as Kieslowski prefer to apply multiple distinct colors, which also originates from the ideology and spiritual life of Western society at that time. In terms of color application style, Chinese directors, such as Yimou Zhang and Kaige Chen, are more exaggerated and bold in their treatments of color and use a lot of contrasting colors, but they will not be completely divorced from reality and prefer freehand style; Western directors, such as Kieslowski and Bertolucci, use color more according to actual scenes and plots, attempt to conform to people's daily visual experience, and prefer the realistic style. In this paper, there are still some limitations in the comparative research of the use of color by Chinese and Western directors. Only some representative directors have been compared and analyzed, and more literature should be read or other research methods should be adopted to dig into their similarities and discrepancies. In today's era of rich film visual art, although the color concepts of Chinese and Western film directors are different, they also need to draw lessons from each other to a certain extent to achieve the effect of integration, catering to the aesthetic trend of the audience without losing its characteristics, so that outstanding film compositions with oriental charm and western innovation can release dazzling light in the world. This paper provides some research value for future scholars in the field of film color so that they can fully understand the advantages and disadvantages of the use of color by Chinese and Western directors, and it plays a crucial role in analyzing how future film directors can improve the choice of color and innovate the used style of color.

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