

FILM REVIEW

The film under analysis is called *The Flowers of War* and highlights the period of the Second Sino-Japanese War during which a set of horrible events, such as the Rape of Nanking and plight (Zhang 2012). The main hero of the movie John Miller is a former mortician who accidentally joins the group of innocent schoolgirls residing in the Roman Catholic cathedral. Later in the movie, a group of prostitutes joins the church to escape from the battles of war and struggle with the horrors surrounding them outside the church. The movie impresses the viewers with the richness of scenes, impeccable play of the actors and created atmosphere. Moreover, *The Flowers of War* seeks to go beyond cultures and nations to demonstrate the confrontation of two powers – humble civilians and cruel armies of Japanese and Chinese imperial leaders.

On the one hand, it is difficult to single out separate themes that the author seeks to convey through the movie because the heroes combine both negative and positive features. For instance, the protagonist of the story, John Miller, is a mortician who lacks nobleness and strength to oppose the detrimental effects of the war. On the other hand, the plotlines of the picture are confined to simple but eternal themes, such as fighting for human rights, depiction of the brutality of war and heroism of humble people. According to Tookey (2012), “Zhang’s central themes are selflessness and heroism, and he find the good in characters that seem irredeemable” (n. p). The director also manages skillfully demonstrate the invasion from the viewpoint of both the residents of the church and the supporters of the Japanese army. While discussing the extent to which the themes have been revealed in the movie, the role of John Miller requires specific attention because the struggle between the good and the evil, as well as between the feelings of selfishness and self-sacrifice are vividly depicted through the evident transformation of Christiane Bale’s character. However, Hale (2011) notes, “Miller’s conversion from opportunist to savior may be another stock element of this sort of movie, but

the scene meant to showcase his transformation is rushed and ineffective” (n. p.). The latter statement seems to be reasonable because the shifts in the hero’s perception occur simultaneously and inconsistently.

Zhang’s *The Flowers of War* is accurately placed in historical context of the Second Sino-Japanese War. The camera manipulations have been represented through the sequence of occasional scenes that motivate action and persuade the viewers that the movie is a historical war drama. The emphasis on the historical context is revealed through the scenes when a lone officer draws Japanese soldiers from the cathedral to reveal his heroism and self-sacrifice. Display of the Japanese violence and brutality during the war complements the entire picture of the historic events. The reality of the movie is also evident because of the true facts representation. Although Zhang proposes a fictionalized story, there are a number of realistic references. Specifically, there is a close correlation between the events of Nanking massacre occurred in 1937-1938 and the atrocities depicted in the movie. The violence against the civilian population makes reference to the recorded events occurred in the Chinese history (French 2012). Aside from historical evidence, there is also strong reliance on rich and ancient culture of the Chinese community. In the story, the main characters, particularly those representing Chinese society, embody the distinctness of people’s traditions, customs, rituals and behavior. As an example, it is possible to refer to the depiction of the Chinese courtesans who were ready to sacrifice their lives for the innocence of the schoolgirls.

The genre of the movie – historical drama – was skillfully combined with the techniques and conventions that the director employs while delivering the main problems and themes in the picture. Due to the fact that the key event described in the picture is the Nanking Rape, the director refers to the unconventional technique while representing the historical facts by introducing the Western representatives, such as John Miller (Gritten

2012). Specifically, the role and significance of the hero is ambiguous and inconsistent, particularly for the Chinese viewers who are interested in watching the movie because of the representation of the part of their history. On the other hand, the appearance of the Hollywood character could be regarded as a marketing approach to attract the Western audience. However, this decision is not justified from the viewpoint of the purpose of cinematography and movie structure. At the same time, most Asian characters have been represented as the desperate fighters for peace and freedom in the country, such as a Chinese hero Major Lee whose participation in the struggle was genuine and relevant.

In conclusion, the movie has its both strengths and weaknesses in terms of themes, contextual assessment, and techniques and conventions employed. From the viewpoint of themes representation, the director has managed to disclose a palette of important historical and moral themes, such as the struggle for equality and freedom, as well as self-sacrifice of humble Chinese population. The analysis of the contextual background depicted in the movie is also successful because the film represents both the historical and cultural dimensions. In particular, the historical context is the display of the brutality of the Japanese soldiers and the event of the Nanking Rape. A cultural paradigm is also represented through the conveyance of traditions and behavioral patterns of the Asian people. Finally, the genre and techniques used by the director deviate slightly from the accepted norms of represented Chinese picture because most of the scenes borrow the Hollywood approaches to movie screening.

Reference List

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