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# NEW YORKER FILMS 1995

Zhang Yimou

## JU DOU

Zhang Yimou followed up his impressive *Red Sorghum* with this tautly plotted, exquisitely filmed fable of passion and retribution. The basis of *Ju Dou* is a story as lurid and harrowing as anything by James M. Cain. Jinshan, the miserly, impotent owner of a rural cloth-dyeing mill, has a bad habit of torturing his wives to death, while his downtrodden foster-son, Tianqing, does all the work. When Jinshan acquires a young, ripe-bodied bride, Ju Dou, whom he abuses atrociously, Tianqing falls in love with her, she seduces him, and gives birth to a son, ostensibly the master's but actually Tianqing's. In the first of a series of ironic reversals, the ties of convention prove stronger than those of biology: the fierce, silent boy bonds with Jinshan and turns against his natural parents, becoming a remorseless instrument of social justice. Zhang illuminates this benighted romance with flashes of mordant humor, preciously fleeting bursts of ecstasy, and slow-burning erotic tension, leading inexorably to a stunning, fiery finale. Above all, *Ju Dou* displays a rigorously beautiful style whose like has not been seen since Bresson and Tarkovsky – a breathtaking mastery of rhythm, sound, and color that invests this sensual tale with the grace and precision of poetry. Although set in the 1920s, the film's anti-traditional theme and incendiary conclusion proved too controversial for the post-Tiananmen Chinese government, which banned the film and tried unsuccessfully to block its Academy Award nomination.

"The most intelligently gorgeous film since *The Last Emperor*."  
– Richard Corliss, *Time Magazine*.

China, 1990. 93 mins. Color.  
In Mandarin with English subtitles.

Rental: Apply.

