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Dahong Denglong Gaogao Gua Raise the Red Lantern Zhang Yimou

People's Republic of China/Japan, 1991,
126 minutes
Colour/35mm

Production Company: ERA International (HK)
Ltd./China Film Co-production Corporation

Executive Producer: Hou Hsiao-hsien

Producer: Chiu Fu-sheng

Screenplay: Ni Zhen, from a book by Su Tong

Cinematography: Zhao Fei, Yang Lun

Editor: Du Yuan

Art Director: Qao Jiuping, Dong Humiao

Music: Zhao Jiping

Principal Cast: Gong Li, Ma Jingwu, He Caifei,
Qao Quifen, Jin Shuyuan

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Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* is as finely crafted as a piece of Ming china: delicate, beautifully proportioned, refined, and visually exquisite. It is as spare and as convoluted as Zhang's previous film *Ju Dou*, revelling in the twists and turns that human fate can take, following the labyrinthine complexities that divide the four wives of an aging patriarch. It is study of feudal Chinese marriage customs. "I'm not suggesting that people still live this way, only that they still think this way," explains Zhang. "I reveal my ideas toward society, toward marriage, toward life in China, through one Chinese family." The beautiful Gong Li, star of both of Zhang's previous films, *Red Sorghum* and *Ju Dou*, plays the daughter of an impoverished family, who is married to an older, wealthier man. As his fourth wife she is accorded all the privileges and rights of the other three wives, including her own house and servant girl, but it soon becomes apparent that the other three wives, with time on their hands, pass their days plotting to gain the attention of their shared husband. The husband has red lanterns lit and hung outside the house where he chooses to spend the night, and this elaborate and beautiful ritual presages the schemes and manipulations of which he is the victim. As the new wife, Gong Li's eyes are opened to a new world of plots and deceptions, where the steely wills of the three, almost powerless women, compete to gain the upper hand. She has no choice but to join the game. Zhang imposes a hypnotic mood on his story, capturing the shifting fortunes of the four wives with a finely judged subtlety. His camera casts an entrancing mood over the film and his acute visual sense for formal beauty sustains this haunting and unforgettable experience.



Zhang Yimou was born in 1950 in Xi-An, China. He was 16 years old when the Cultural Revolution began and, as a young intellectual, he was sent to work as a farmer, a shepherd, and finally as an unskilled

worker in a textile factory. In 1978, having won prizes for his still photography, he enrolled in the newly re-opened Beijing Film Institute. In 1982, Zhang worked as a cameraman on *One and Eight*, which came to be known as the first of the fifth generation films. He has been working as a cinematographer and director ever since. His first feature film, *Red Sorghum*, won the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin film festival in 1988. Feature films are: *Red Sorghum* (88), *Ju Dou* (89), *Raise the Red Lantern* (91).

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