A Life of Its Own: Musical Discourses in Wong Kar-Wai's Films

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内容提要

Provides an essay that proposes that music, rather than images, is perhaps the key in accounting for the charm of film director Wong Kar-Wai's oeuvre. States this is because music performs a discursive function in his work, which makes his films stand out. Notes Wong's most celebrated film *Chungking Express* features a number of Western pop songs that animate the film's unique style. Mentions music not only unveils the mysteriously hypnotic quality of Wong's style, it also reveals ways of making meaning through music. Comments analysis of the role of music in Wong's films thus points to a new way of conceiving film style that can hardly be encompassed by singular national characteristics; instead, Wong's films come from a synthetic audiovisual context which Wong himself helped to create, develop and benefit from. Includes notes.

全文文献

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Hong Kong cinema is perhaps the most "globalized" Asian cinema today. With numerous magazines, websites and even academic work increasingly devoted to Hong Kong's film culture, it has achieved a status that is rare in other national cinemas. Even Hollywood is cheerfully co-opting some of Hong Kong's most successful formulas, actors and directors. Among various well-known auteurs with roots in the SAR, Wong Kar-Wai is among the most recognizable, along with John Woo, Tsui Hark and Jackie Chan. In the six films he has made to date (As Tears Go By [1988], Days of Being Wild [1990], Chungking Express [1994], Ashes of Time [1994], Fallen Angels [1995], and Happy Together [1997], Wong's directorial signature has amazed global audiences. Intricate narrative structures, eccentric and thoughtful voiceover narration, filtered lenses and exposure, claustrophobic camerangles and chic production design have become Wong's trademarks as the Hong Kong art film director.

This trademark has even been recognized and appropriated by a multinational corporation. Wong's 1996 award at the Cannes film festival won him a contract with the mobile phone division of Motorola. He was commissioned to make a commercial introducing a new Motorola product called "StarTAC." In this commercial, entitled "Opening the Sky of Communication," Wong features Hong Kong pop queen Faye Wong (who had appeared in Chungking Express) and the Japanese actor Asano Tadanobu (who appears regularly in Iwai Shunji's films). These two people intimately mingle in a series of closed spaces

hong kong director wong kar-wai.

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with almost no verbal communication. According to the spokesperson for the Motorola company, hiring Wong to direct the commercial film emphasizes the company's 'hip' quality. As the spokesman points out, this 'hip' quality that differentiates Motorola from the many other cellular phone manufacturers can only be represented by Wong's reputation as a 'hip' director (City Entertainment 1997). This raises an interesting question for Chinese film studies: what makes such an "arty" film director appealing to a manufacturer of telephones? If the answer is his "internationally acclaimed" reputation, what exactly makes his films popular in art theaters and video stores in Tokyo, Singapore, New York, and Los Angeles? Why are his films appealing to film audiences who are outside of the Hong Kong cultural circuits? Do they somehow tap into discourses of "global consciousness"? Is this something to do with a film style that speaks to the imagination of "globalaudiences"? Or is Hong Kong perhaps exceptional in its microcosmic status, as a synecdoche for global markets? Providing responses to these questions might contribute profitably to current debates on global mass culture and global cinema.

It is common practice now for a non-Western film to inherit the art cinema style developed by the European New Waves since the late 1950s. For filmmakers who want to see their work accepted in art houses and international film festivals, this is perhaps just the ticket. Non-Western cinema, particularly Asian cinema, often resorts to ethnographic icons and sound in order to fit into preordained criteria for "national cinema." This is one form of discursive placement in cross-cultural situations. One could cite any number of examples from the films of Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Ang Lee, Clara Law and many others who have tried to imitate them. Informed by Edward Said's seminal book Orientalism, Chinese critics did not hesitate to point out the orientalist tendencies of films that are popular in the West. However, we have not yet seen criticism of Wong Kar-Wai based on notions of Orientalism. This is an interesting point since Wong is one of the most celebrated Chinese directors abroad, both to critics and to general audiences. What makes his films different from other Chinese-language directors? What rescues him from the usual suspicion of hawking Orientalism while making him an international director at the same time?

This article proposes that music, rather than images, is perhaps the key in accounting for the charm of Wong Kar-Wai's oeuvre. This is because music performs a discursive function in his work, which makes his films stand out. Wong's most celebrated film Chungking Express features a number of Western pop songs that animate the film's unique style. The sixties anthem "California Dreamin'" along with Faye Wong's cover of the Cranberries' hit song "Dreams" that mark the film most distinctively as a memorable audiovisual work of art and commerce. Music not only unveils the mysteriously hypnotic quality of Wong's style, it also reveals ways of making meaning through music. Analysis of the role of music in Wong's films thus points to a new way of conceiving film style that can hardly be encompassed by singular national characteristics. Instead, I will argue that Wong's films come from a synthetic audiovisual context which Wong himself helped to create, develop and benefit from.

SECTION I.Listening Across the Boundaries: Chungking Express

In Theorizing tire Moving Image, film theorist Noël Carroll gives a useful account of the relationship between film image and music. In a short article called "Notes on Movie Music," Carroll introduces the term "modifying music" to explain how music works discursively in the movies. Music, as Carroll says, is a "highly expressive symbol system" (141). He explains that the generating mechanism of music's symbolism is that it "projects qualities describable in anthropomorphic, 

1 Among a number of films that have been charged with selling oriental or Orientalist fantasy are Chen Kaige's Farewell, My Concubine, and ZhangYimou's Judou and Raise the Red Lantern. For English criticism written by Chinese scholars, see chapter three of ReyChow's Primitive Passions and Esther Yu's article, "International Fantasy and the 'New Chinese Cinema.' For Chinese criticism by Chinese scholars, see Zhang Yiwu's "Quanqio hua yu dalu dianying de eryunxing fazhan" [Globalization and the binary development of mainland Chinese cinema] and Ying Hong's "Guoji
yujingzhong de zhongguo dalu dianying" [Mainland Chinese films in the international discourse]. I think the issue here is not whether these films are meant for the Western audiences, but the stakes of their international success. The films' success established a representational and narrative formula for other directors to look up to. As film is a commodity everywhere, the copying of marketable, profitable, and rewardable models is always welcome to producers and attractive to filmmakers. Many cheap and crude imitations of Zhang Yimou films subsequently appeared in the early 1990s. Similarly, Wong Kar-Wai's style has now been much copied in Hong Kong films and commercials.

2 It is worth noting that the Chinese press in Hong Kong and Taiwan seems to have an ambivalent attitude toward Wong Kar-Wai. The press always likes to focus on Wong's odd working style—shooting without a script, always improvising and behind schedule. On the other hand, Wong is also suspicious of the press. In a phone conversation with Iwai Shunji set up by Taiwan's film magazine Premiere, he kept telling Iwai: "be careful about the journalists." See Premiere (May 1997): 42.

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emotive terms" (141). However, to say that music is expressive in emotive terms does not necessarily indicate music's representational quality. Here Carroll cautions that there are limits to music's expressive quality:

At the same time, it is often noted that nonvocal music—orchestral music—though quite effective in expressing a broad palette of emotions, is not the ideal means for particularizing the feelings it projects. That is, a piece of nonvocal orchestral music may strike us as sorrowful or even more broadly as 'down' but we generally cannot specify much further the kind of dolor or dumps the music projects.... That is, nonvocal music standardly lacks what music theorist Peter Kivy calls emotive explicitness. (141)

Music's lack of explicit, direct, and unambiguous expression gives Carroll an opportunity to probe semantic relationships between movies and music. "Modifying music" refers to music that directs spectators to some expressive quality. However, this expression alone is not capable of granting meaning. It needs to be associated with characters, with action, and with the psychology of a sequence in order to produce meanings. In other words, (nonvocal) music provides an affect (what Carroll calls the modifier) which is linked or focused on an appropriate source by other cinematic means (which Carroll calls the indicator). Thus, a musical system and a cinematic system work in a complementary fashion: music provides expressive but imprecisely referenced material; cinema fixes that material to an appropriate object by means of visual cues and recorded sounds. This is the way most score music (nonvocal, orchestral music), written exclusively for films or otherwise, functions.

A similar argument can be found in the idea of "added value" proposed by the French sound theorist Michel Chion. By "added value," Chion means that in cinema, sound occupies an essential place for the enrichment of images in relation to the overall impressions one has of them. This added value becomes the "immediate and necessary relationship" between image and sound. This leads us to look at sound-image relationships in a new light; it releases the unequal bondage of sound to image. Instead, this is a partnership of equilibrium: sound always works side by side with images. Chion cautions against confusing "added value" with "additive value" because the latter turns the meaning into an additional, extra element that sound imposes on visual material. What he argues is that sound fuses with images to produce new meanings not possible before, and this partnership is what he calls the "audiovisual contract." Once this contract brings them together, sound and images cannot be disassociated.
The theoretical account of sound-image relationship given by Carroll and Chion is primarily based on music that does not have explicit vocal expression. Popular musical forms, particularly popular songs, on the other hand, function in a somewhat different way and thus require an explanation different from score music. Given its long history, popular music has established itself as a distinct field; in other words, it has a life of its own, outside of the film in which it appears. This is not to deny that popular music, like orchestral scores, also works as a modifier to images. Indeed, most popular music we hear on movie soundtracks is used to enhance narrative strands, or to supplement visual expressions. Aside from these more conventional uses, it appears that the signification of music works on a broader range than we normally assume. Some studies on popular music in film emphasize music's primary role in the narrative (Romney and Wootton; James). These works suggest that music's own qualities, including its generic specificity, its lyrics, and its cultural and historical meanings, have influenced the choice of and ways of incorporating music into film.

The way popular music produces meaning can be summarized thus: meaning depends first on the literal meaning of the lyrics (e.g., "California Dreamin"); second, on commonly accepted perceptions of the musical genre, in this case, 1960s west coast folk-rock; and third, on the arrangement of the music, in this case the original Mamas and Papas' hit from 1965 (as opposed to, say, a supermarket Muzak rendition of the same song). Last, and most importantly, popular songs in film rely on individual associations with the songs outside of the filmic context (the nostalgia, real or imagined, of 1960s California). As Carroll suggests, music is always expressive, but it also can lend a stronger indicative meaning, just as visual images do. Popular songs have sharper meanings than modifying music. When they are juxtaposed with film images, they point to new, unexpected significance thanks to the audiovisual contract. Therefore, music does not just function as the modifier but can directly indicate, or point to, explicit meanings.

My primary concern in this article is the direct, indicative capacities of popular songs. The song "California Dreamin" as used in Chungking Express, for example, serves as an indicator in the film text. Chungking Express has two narrative threads, each of which occupies about half of the film. The stories are told in succession, although there are a few teasing hints of the second injected into the first, and there are strong thematic and stylistic links between them. The first narrative concerns a brief encounter between a lovelorn Cop (played by the Japanese-Taiwanese actor, Takeshi Kaneshiro, a/k/a Jin Cheng-wu) and a drug trafficker/assassin (played by the Taiwan-born actress Brigitte Lin Chinghsia) who is desperately searching for Indian couriers who disappeared with a load of heroin. This part features techno musical pieces (composed for the film) entitled "Chasing the Metaphysical Express" and "Fornication in Space" that accompany Lin's desperate searchand flight from her boss.3

The second part of the film is about a woman named Faye (played by Faye Wong, a/k/a Wong Faye or Wang Jing-wen in Chinese) who secretly falls in love with a neighborhood cop (Tony Leung Chiu-Wai). The identity of this Cop is an allusive continuation of Takeshi's character in the first part--they are linked by a common longing for romantic and interpersonal connections. Faye works as a temporary helper at her cousin's fast food stand, the Midnight Express. The Cop, known only as #663, is a regular customer. (The narrative motif of a young woman helping out in her cousin's restaurant is a direct quotation from Wong's first film As Tears Go By. This motif, however, also has an earlier echo in Jim Jarmusch's 1984 film Stranger than Paradise.)
One day 663's flight attendant girlfriend appears at the Midnight Express and asks that a letter be given to the cop. Realizing that this is a "Dear John" letter, Faye is sympathetic, and gradually becomes intrigued by and very obliquely affectionate toward the Cop. Somehow in her own mind, she begins to weave a love story around the clueless Cop. As her feelings towards him grow stronger, she uses the key returned in the "Dear John" envelope to enter the Cop's apartment. In his apartment, she begins to act like a woman who shares the place: she cleans, changes his sheets, puts new labels on the food cans, and replaces "What a Difference a Day Makes" with "California Dreamin'" in his CD player. This scene is exemplary of the discursive use of music in Wong Kar-wai's work, and will be discussed in detail below.

As indicated above, while the film's storylines are generally distinct, there are brief foreshadowings of the second in the first. In part one, Faye briefly appears as she emerges from a toy shop with a huge Garfield doll. She is not formally introduced to us until the opening of part two, when "California Dreamin'" blares from the boom box at the snack bar, obliterating the principal characters' conversation. Her first real contact with Cop #663 comes when he asks her to turn down the volume since the loud music prevents him from ordering food from her. And after he belatedly discovers

3 These song titles are taken from the film's soundtrack, Chungking Express, released in 1995 by Cinepoly Records.

her occasional visits to his apartment, he comes back to the snack bar to return her CD, indicating his awareness of her trespassing.

This opening scene of part two sets out the importance of music in two respects: 1) music has a "screening" function that keeps distances and hides intentions; 2) music can have a strong indicative function that describes states of mind. Thus "California Dreamin'" is not just a pop song used to enhance the atmosphere the way extradiegetic music usually functions in movies. In Chungking Express, it directly represents Faye's dreams and thoughts. Her dream, as she tells 663, is to save enough money to go to California, the real golden state on the other side of the globe instead of the restaurant called California across the street from Midnight Express. Her state of being is with sunny beach town California; what helps her transcend the real time and space where her physical being resides is The Mamas and Papas' recording. It is through the same music that 663 is finally able to speak to Faye in her own "words." Music not only represents her state of mind but alsoemphasizes her as a subject who prefers music to words as a way of expression and communication.4 This connection between Faye's subjectivity and music is further intensified in the choice she makes to resolve her immediate situation. After 663 finally asks her for a date, she decides to become a flight attendant herself and flies away to see the "real" California, the place of her dreaming. When she returns, 663 has taken over the snack bar and is himself listening to "California Dreamin.'"

The places in Chungking Express where "California Dreamin'" presides are perhaps, from a music fan's point of view, the most wonderful moments of the film. The scenes of Faye's visits to the apartment use the song to lead the action. Music works as the dominant, and with the ensemble of aggressive camera movement and montage, creates a fluidity and ballet-like rhythm in these housecleaning sequences. Following the lead of the song, Faye moves around

in chunking express, faye wong sneaks into a cop's apartment. inside the space and smell of the man to whom she is too shy to express her affections. Thanks to music, the sense of transgression and intrusion in the "other's" space is replaced with ease, spontaneity, improvisation and control. Music's function here takes a
step further; it works as a "screen" between her dream world and the reality. As it takes two to complete an "audiovisual contract," the song here finds its visual companion. The rubber gloves that Faye wears as she cleans the apartment work as a prophylactic against unwanted contamination and a device that allows an intimate, sensual contact. These two screens, one visual (the rubber gloves), one sonic ("California Dreamin"), give her the prerogative to intrude and explore, and at the same time, protect her privacy and security. If music serves as the patron saint in Faye's simulated love affair with a man, music also functions as an intermediary between the filmic world and the spectator.

4 In a recent article, "Buying American, Consuming Hong Kong: CulturalCommerce, Fantasies of Identity, and the Cinema," GinaMarchettiprovides an insightful analysis of female subjectivity in ChungkingExpress.

How does music direct our attention? How does music animate action? How does music and sound take on a discursive role? The audiovisual contract allows the possibility--one which is rarely realized in narrative films--for music to "undo" images, i.e., to enjoy autonomy by soliciting responses not available solely or primarily through visual channels. Because the film soundtrack is not additional, but added-value and a hybrid audio- vision, music can alter, dilute, or intensify the spectator's perceptions. Music is then capable of creating a filmic discourse of its own, depending on the type of listening it asks of spectators. In short, it transforms the cinematic space.

Michel Chionintroduces three listening modes in his book Audio-Vision: causal listening, semantic listening, and reduced listening (25). Causal listening is a common phenomenon in the audiovisual experience of film. It "consists of listening to a sound in order to gather information about its cause (or source)" (25). Semantic listening "refers to a code or a language to interpret a message: spoken language." (28) This mode of listening epitomizes the fact that cinema, as Chion argues, is first and foremost a verbo-centric medium. The difference between causal and semantic listening is easily illustrated by accented language. As competent listeners, we can easily separate meaning from the wide variations in the way an utterance is pronounced. An Australian accent (thanks to causal listening) does not prevent us from understanding the speaker's meaning (semantic listening); furthermore, the ability to identify the source for a certain accent often becomes a connotative, or second order semantic listening. In listening to speech, causal and semantic listening often overlap and shade into one another.

The third mode, reduced listening, "focuses on the traits of the sound itself, independent of its cause and of its meaning.... [It] takes the sound--verbal, played on an instrument, noises, or whatever--as itself the object to be observed instead of as a vehicle for something else" (29). A live concert of a vocal ensemble often drives our auditory attention to a state of reduced listening. In order to gather the subtle differences between each vocalist, listeners tend to close their eyes to shut out all the visual interference in order to focus on aural information.

What roles do these three modes of listening play in Chungking Express? Chion's schematization might help us understand how film spectators are woven by music into the narrative. First, causal listening, the most basic linkage between sound and its source(s), is used to distinguish music's diegetic function. In this case, we immediately register a relationship between music originating inside the fiction and characters going about their business in the story. In Chungking Express, the introduction of Faye through the loud presentation of "California Dreamin" within the diegesis establishes Faye's "dreaming" personality. Because this is her space and her music, her self-expression through this song is evident. Drawing on the spectator's
causal listening abilities, the film specifies source and cause of the musical sound. Because Faye is hearing this song, so are we. Later, this musical association is embellished by her switching of the CD in the disc player. Dinah Washington’s “What a Difference a Day Makes,” a song connected with 663’s flight attendant lover, is replaced by “California Dreamin’,” Faye’s song. Here the song draws on semantic codes that give clues to the unspoken message. Metaphorically and metonymically, Faye “replaces” the flight attendant when she switches to “her” song.

In Chion’s argument, reduced listening is the least conventional sound practice in film because reduced listening depends on a rigorous exclusion of extraneous sounds. For example, think of lab experiments which try to determine pitch thresholds for different subjects. By paring away all but the target sound, reduced listening creates a direct physical effect on the spectator. Despite its rare appearance in film, reduced listening is a helpful concept to explore in terms of the relationship between popular songs and film spectators. In the scenes in which Faye cleans 663’s apartment, “California Dreamin’” functions as an invitation to reduced listening for the film spectator. It creates a somewhat exclusive aural field. The ambient noises that we normally hear in a “realistic” scene are mostly excluded, with the exception of the sound of her movements from time to time. Because we do not hear most of the ambient sounds, or even Faye’s breathing, we experience a more direct connection with the song, and with her. As a result, another, more desirable space is opened, created solely through the reduction of our listening by the suppression of other sounds. “California Dreamin’” in this way goes beyond the conventional modifying task of film music. It transforms 663’s apartment into the space of Faye’s daydreaming. Music here becomes a vital indicator of a somewhat claustrophobic, but playful feminine sensibility.

In an interview conducted by the Taiwanese film magazine Premiere, Wong Kar-Wai revealed some ideas about his music’s indicative quality. Regarding the synthesis of image and sound, he described “the smell” of his film music:

As part of our life [in Hong Kong], music has become an indication telling us where and when we are. In my own films, I first try to figure out what kind of environment this is, including its geographical area and what kind of noise this place would have. What kind of smell? What are the identities of people in this environment? What do they do there? But sometimes I start with music in mind. This is hard to explain. My instinct is that this film must have a kind of atmosphere that matches a certain time period. Chungking Express, for instance: I knew from the beginning it must be “California Dreamin’”—innocent and simple, like summer time in the 1970s. During the planning stage, I did not have a script. When Chris Doyle (my cinematographer) asked me what this film was about, I played “California Dreamin’” to him. (47)

SECTION II.A Short History of Chinese-Language Cinema: A Dialogue Among Different Margins
If music works as a primary factor in Wong’s films, how is this audiovisual style related to the idea of "transnational" and "transcultural" Chinese cinema? Does this style directly influence the reception of the films? It is helpful to look at Wong’s place in Chinese-language cinema before we go into a more detailed discussion of these questions.
Hou Hsiao-hsien (who enjoys a master's status in Japan and the West but suffers from political and commercial criticism at home). Are these distinctively P.R.C., Hong Kong, and Taiwanese directors? Given the development of their respective careers, the work of these filmmakers gradually has moved from within their national boundaries to a new terrain: "transnational Chinese cinemas." "Transnational Chinese cinemas" is a term/concept introduced in a recently published anthology of the same name. The general goal of the work is to map out a new definition of "Chinese cinemas" that is sensitive to contemporary global economic and cultural transformations. In the introduction, Sheldon Lus suggests that "it seems that Chinese national cinema can only be understood in its properly transnational context. One must speak of Chinese cinemas in the plural and as transnational in the ongoing process of image-making throughout the twentieth century" (3). Luo observes that Chinese cinema, from its beginning, was always transnational. This valuable assessment is based on the relationship between Chinese cinema and its precursors such as American, European, and Japanese cinema in the 1920s and the 1930s. As mainland Chinese scholars have pointed out, Chinese cinema in its primordial stage was preoccupied by the incorporation of Western narrative models and representational modes into the making of Chinese films specifically for the urban Chinese audience in Shanghai (Cheng; Lu; Yong). Studies of early Chinese cinema by mainland Chinese scholars indicate the borrowed, hybrid, and "inauthentic" nature of Chinese cinema, which now seems to fit well with the concept of the transnational. According to Lu, the current version of transnationalism has occurred for the following reasons: 1) the multiple political entities of "China"; 2) co-productions, with their accompanying distribution of Chinese-language cinemas in the global film circuit; 3) changing representations of Chinese nationhood; 4) challenges to formations of Chinese national cinema in cultural criticism (Lu 3). These four points form the definition of transnational cinema and the basic structure of the book.

However, defining the transnational is an ongoing, long-term, piecemeal task, particularly in the wake of the Hong Kong handover; while the introduction to the anthology eloquently addresses emerging issues of the transnational, most of the essays do not. In some cases there is an old-wine-in-new-skins flavor. While Lu's observations on recent changes in film production, representation, and criticism are correct, one important area is neglected: style. What brings pleasure to audiences? What makes a film comprehensible and appealing to audiences besides its thematic/cultural/national particularities? We need to pay attention to style and look closely at exactly what constitutes a film style that can be described as "transnational" and hence, attract a "global" audience whose film literacy is so overdetermined by Hollywood. The neglect or
exclusion of style is a serious oversight in the understanding of any cinema that can be described as transnational. Yet this issue goes unmentioned in Lu's introductory mapping. As a result, with a few exceptions, the anthology as a whole cannot provide a convincing account of transnational Chinese cinemas.⁸

Certainly an explication of the style of transnational Chinese cinemas is not an easy task. What I have been doing so far is to suggest that music might be a way to open a discussion on this topic and furthermore, raise questions about Chinese-language cinema in the network of globalization and global entertainment.

Historically, sound design has been the most underdeveloped area in Chinese film production. Despite the recent attention to sound effects and soundtrack music (movie and soundtrack album as one commodity package for instance), sound production overall has been neglected. Some might argue that sound's much ignored role in Chinese language cinema has started to change, especially in connection with the use of music. Directors like Zhang Yimou,

⁵ For his most recent production, Chen Kaige is said to have raised an initial capital investment of around 1.5 billion Taiwan dollars (about US$5 million) from Japanese, U.S., Chinese, and French sources. Entitled Killing the First Chinese Emperor, (Tsi Ching, translation mine) the film stars Gong Li and involves the construction of a gigantic set in China almost the size of eight baseball stadiums. See the film journal published by Taipei Film Archive, Film Appreciation 16.1 (1998): 94.

⁶ Within the other "Chinese" context, the postwar film relationship between the Taiwan and Hong Kong film industries demonstrates a similar relationship. Five hundred or so Mandarin films were made in Hong Kong during the 1950s and the 1960s. These films not only served the domestic market but also were exported to Taiwan, where Mandarin is the official language, and to Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, where there are large communities of Chinese. Hong Kong studio director Lee Hang-hsiang quit the Shaw Brothers during the mid-1960s and founded his own production company Lian-pan ("Grand Pictures") in Taipei. Lian-pan was short-lived but during a five-year period, Lee and his collaborators produced the best Chinese films of the decade. For details regarding the history of Lian-pan, see Kai-penli-shih te wu-nien [The five years that changed the history] edited by Chiao Hsiung-p'ing. Another Hong Kong director, King Hu, was invited by another independent company One International Film Production to make films in Taiwan. Hu made Dragon Inn in 1968 and Touch of Zen from 1969 to 1974. The latter won a prize at Cannes in 1975, the first Chinese film to receive a major international award. The film was shot on location in Taiwan and its production relied on Taiwanese actors and actresses. But the film's nationality as an entry to Cannes was listed as Hong Kong. There are many other examples that demonstrate the "interface" of Taiwan and Hong Kong film history.

⁶ A recent and famous example is Chen Kaige's Farewell My Concubine, which shared the Palme d'Or with Jane Campion's The Piano in 1993 as a Hong Kong entry. The film however, is generally regarded as the first "Chinese" (Chung-kuo) film ever to win a prize at Cannes. This situation was reversed when Wong Kar-Wai took the best director award in 1997 with his Hong Kong/Japan co-production Happy Together, which is the real first Hong Kong film to receive the award at Cannes. These examples reflect the long history of intra-national/regional and international/regional collaborations and exchanges. Moreover, with the increasing numbers of co-productions among the three major Chinese film industries, and with other deals involving these and other countries, the question then becomes: assuming Chinese cinema is and has been "transnational," how does transnationality manifest itself in ways beyond the shuffling of capital, crew, artists, stars, locations, and directors across different regional/national boundaries?

⁷ Please see my review essay of New Chinese Cinemas: Identities, Forms, and Politics (Jump Cut). My main criticism is that the book, given its good intention to overcome the "cross-cultural" gap between Western critical analysis and non-Western texts, does not address issues of identity politics circulating among Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the P.R.C. A
tacit blindness to the active rewriting of history in Taiwan and Hong Kong films consigns the definition of Chinese cinema to a corner designated by the One-China ideology.

With some exceptions, the book as a whole rarely touches on the issue of the transnational based on reception and analysis of style. The exceptions are Gina Marchetti's article on Xie Jin's *Two Stage Sisters*, in which she describes the close relationship between socialist aesthetics and Hollywood melodrama; Steve Fore's article on the global marketing and reception of the films of Hong Kong megastar Jackie Chan; and Anne T. Ciecko's article on John Woo's style and the reception of his films in the U.S.

Chen Kaige, Edward Yang, and Hou Hsiao-hsien have tried to explore the narrative capacities of music. But strictly speaking, their application of music remains conventional. It is true that the Peking Opera music in Zhang Yimou's films contributes tremendously to their Chinese national quality (*chung-kuo ming-zu hsing*). American popular songs of the 1950s in Edward Yang's films address the postcolonial complexities of Taiwan as a U.S. subcolony during the immediate postwar period. It is also exciting to learn that Hou Hsiao-hsien has begun to pay serious attention to music since the first epic of his Taiwan Trilogy, *City of Sadness* (1989). And recently he has become more thoughtful and rigorous about the use of music in his films. His film *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1997) uses punk music produced by local songwriters to depict the raw passion and inexhaustible energy of the gangster culture portrayed on screen. Yet none of these talented directors has paid serious attention to the indicating potential of music. Nor do they seem to be keen on the exploration of sound beyond its conventional uses. In sum, they still see music as supplementary to visual images and use it for its modifying capability, namely, utilizing music's expression as a yoke or harness for character, action, and the emotional and psychological ramifications of a sequence. Wong Kar-Wai stands out as an exception in Chinese-language cinemas precisely because he is clearly aware of music's indicating potential. In this regard, his films are a crucial example in studying the relationship between film music and a film style that can be characterized as transcultural and transnational.

SECTION III.A Transcultural/National Film: Fallen Angels
For a Chinese-language director to be described as transcultural and/or transnational, s/he needs to deal with cultural materials from at least two levels. The first is "cross-regional": the ambiguous cultural borders among various local situations, i.e., Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Mainland, and the Chinese diaspora. Another level is the increasingly permeable boundaries between each local situation and the rest of the world, the "international" and "global" communities. Wong Kar-Wai seems to be a perfect example of someone who comfortably ranges across these levels in terms of his use of music. Within the "cross-regional"

or, as some might suggest, the "intra-national" level, Wong is definitely transcultural. He uses music not only from Hong Kong, but also from Taiwan. In terms of the "international" context, Wong also proves himself transnational. *Fallen Angels* features a wide range of musical selections. from the British band Massive
Fallen Angel #1 and #2: Bodies, Emotions, and Urban Networks

In *Fallen Angels*, the first part of the film tells of the bizarre sexual/professional relationship between a contract killer named Wong Chi Ming (played by Hong Kong pop idol Leon Lai, a/k/a Lei Ming in Chinese) and his eccentric partner (Michelle Reis, a/k/a Lee Ka Hing) who handles the "bookings." Their relationship is intimate and at the same time distant. The only way she can feel close to him is by cleaning his apartment and examining the trash he discards every time a job is done, or by visiting a bar where he is a regular and sitting at his favorite spot. From time to time, she masturbates in his apartment, pretending to share an orgasm with him. When he decides to quit the business in order to lead a "normal" life, she asks him to finish the last contract. Knowing the last booking is meant for him, Angel #1 still accepts it and offers his life up to her discretion. After Angel #1 is killed, Angel #2 never takes another partner. At the end of the film we see her meeting Fallen Angel #3, who has just participated in a fistfight in an eatery. He then takes her home on his motorbike. As we see them disappearing into one of Hong Kong's tunnels, we hear Angel #2 in voiceover saying, "even though the ride was short, I felt some warmth for the first time that winter." Again, this is a typical Wong Kar-Wai ending: we do not know whether the meeting of two people signals a beginning of a promising relationship, or is just a casual encounter between two lonely city vagabonds on a cold winter night.

Tunnels exist for the purpose of transportation/exchange/enrichment. Hong Kong tunnels exist especially for linking the city through mountains and under the ocean as a kind of organic, cardiac system. If transportation takes on different forms, carrying disparate kinds of content, *Fallen Angels* can be seen as a metaphor for transportation. After the film's first scene introducing the first two Angels, the film cuts to Angel#2 walking through the ground area of an MTR station, riding the escalator, getting on the train, and entering Angel#1's apartment, which is located next to a motorway and an MTR track. A few minutes later, we see the same arrangement of mise-en-scene depicting Angel#1 at the same subway stop on his way back to his apartment. In the first journey facilitated by Hong Kong's major mass transportation system, the sound effect of Angel#1's rapid footsteps anchors the progression of the visual track. Sound is again foregrounded in the second sequence. As the shot cuts to the same location with Angel#1 entering the scene, we hear the first four beats of his theme music. Adapted from Massive Attack's "Karmacoma," these abrupt musical notes introduce the Angel, especially his identity as a killer. The music then seems to animate his movement as we see him getting on the escalator. The rhythm of the music, and the flow of the escalator--shot with wide angle lens--are orchestrated to provide the audience a mobile and rich audiovisual experience. At first glance, it seems that these two sequences are characterized by the visual depiction of movement, be it human, mechanical, or cinematic. But it is music and sound effects, rather than verbal language or written words, that gives life to this movement and, in a way, directs our attention.

For anyone who is familiar with getting around the urban space of Hong Kong, it is not uncommon to realize that human movement throughout the SAR is always subject to the flow and planning of mass transportation, with the exception of some remote mountain and rural areas of the New Territories. Transporting human bodies is one concrete expression of humanity in the modern arena, but what about transporting less concrete human conditions
The music of *Fallen Angels* provides a key to answering this question. In the first scene of Angel#2's masturbation in her partner's apartment, Laurie Anderson's song “Speak My Language” occupies a crucial place. This seems a displacement from the previous scene in the bar, where the narcotized Angel#2 selects jukebox music to begin her sexual hallucination. The music, then, does not begin simultaneously with the scene but works as a sound bridge between scenes. As the music leads the film to the next scene, we see Angel#2 lying on the bed, masturbating. The low angle, close-up cinematography, and the costume design direct our attention to her hand, her legs in black fishnet stockings covered by a bright red leather skirt, and most consciously, the place in between. While the images provoke a shocking visual impression, the enchanting, psychedelic, synthesizer-driven music works towards the synthesis of Chion's audiovisual contract. First, it works to balance the shock generated by the visual representation of an auterotic act. Second, its emphasis on feminine enunciation (we both Angel#2's moaning and Laurie Anderson's voice in the soundtrack) foregrounds a female subjectivity. Like Faye Wong, the flight attendant, and the drug smuggler in *Chungking Express*, Angel#2 represents a feminist politics which allows her to make her choice and to indulge herself in her (borrowed) enclave. This audiovisual contract, the "value added" by the music here, on the one hand, alleviates the alienation that one might feel in relation to these images. It also works as a powerful indicator of a woman's uninhibited sexual expression.

**Fallen Angel#3: Music, Place, and People**

Fallen Angel #3 is also a peculiar young person. Ho Chi Woo (the same name as Cop#223 in *Chungking Express*'s first story and played here by the same actor, Takeshi Kaneshiro) stopped talking after he had eaten an expired can of pineapple at age 5 (an oblique reference to Cop#223's consumption of 30 cans of pineapple on his birthday to get over his lovesickness). One night Ho is the owner of a pork stand; another night, he forces a man and his whole family to finish a whole truckload of ice cream. The daily ritual of breaking into different shops gives him a "free enterprise"

*fallen angels uses laurie anderson's music to depict female orgasm.*

It is worth noting that there is a discrepancy between the music used in the film (i.e., Laurie Anderson's "Speak My Language," from her 1994 album *Bright Red*) and the piece entitled "Sheng Jiao" ("Spiritual Intercourse") that appears on the movie's soundtrack album released in 1995. "Sheng Jiao" sounds similar to Anderson's "Speak My Language," but apparently it is not the music that we hear in the film.

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to operate. Thus, like many people in Hong Kong, he not only owns a business, but also a work routine and identity which he cannot acquire otherwise. Ho's father is a Taiwanese immigrant who manages a hotel in Chungking Mansions. One day Ho decides to settle down with a Japanese restaurant. Seeing his Japanese boss Sato videotaping himself for his son in Japan, Ho also wants to tape his father. Soon after the videotaping, his father suddenly dies. Ho casts about aimlessly, hoping to start a relationship with someone. Toward the end of the film, after fighting at random in a restaurant, he picks up Angel#2, and they ride off together into the tunnel and the final credits.

An old Taiwanese pop song entitled "Missing You" (Si-mu t'e jen) occupies the soundtrack of the sequence where Ho Chi Woo videotapes his father. Like many sequences in the film, this one is composed of odd, obliquely angled shots photographed with a lurching hand-held camera. The camera movement and positions
actually correspond to the body movement of the son shooting the embarrassed father, who constantly tries to shy away from the camera. As the son chases and comes the father in the cramped interiors of Chungking mansions, "Missing You" helps to localize the meaning of the sequence. Since the son does not speak to express his feelings, he uses photography as a means to reveal his love to his father. But from the filmmaker’s point of view, the visual discourse alone is not adequate to portray a scene of a subtle father-son relationship, and thus music comes into play to stabilize the meaning. Here this nondiegetic song acts as his thoughts, delivered not through speech, but through music to the audience. One might protest that the use of music in this way actually marks Wong’s lack of confidence in the audience to catch the subtlety of the scene. However, without the music, the scene would not be as fluid and lively in appearance, emotional resonance, and significance. Paradoxically, as soon as the father is "preserved" by a video camera, he suddenly dies one night. In a scene in which Ho repeatedly watches his father on a TV screen, music enters to express the son’s yearning for his father to come alive. The non-diegetic music thus becomes the inner thoughts of Angel#3 and constitutes the meaning of the diegesis.

The fact that the song is a Hokkien pop tune also indexically signifies the father’s identity as a Hokkien immigrant in Hong Kong. However, for the Taiwanese audience, this song may seem out of place in this narrative context because it is a love song originally written in a Japanese style in the 1950s. Is this a mistake by Wong’s longtime music designers Jackie Chan and Noel Garcia? Taking into consideration the overall deployment of music in this film, one can discover that there is throughout a careful mapping of regional, cultural/linguistic, as well as "national" differences by means of music. Cantonese opera is heard as the ambient sound in tea restaurants and the dim sum eatery where Angel#1 executes his assignment. The association of Cantonese opera (the most traditional and pre-colonial music in Hong Kong) with traditional cuisine in places full of "local" color (the wide-angle shots particularly emphasize the mosaic, black and white floor tiles used in many tearestaurants in Hong Kong)\(^\text{10}\) highlights the particularities of the place and the culture. In the bar scene the music changes to Western pop, particularly to indicate a bar culture that is obviously "foreign" but at the same time, close to home given who the characters are.

Finally, the use of the more contemporary arrangement of the Hokkien song, rather than the original, shows a careful fulfillment of the audiovisual contract based on the concept of a global mass culture. As suggested above, to a Taiwanese audience, the selection of this song to connote father-son intimacy may seem odd because it is a romantic love song, and because the version used in the film is a rock’n’roll remix of the song released in 1994.\(^\text{11}\) Sung by Chyi Chin, a veteran Mandarin singer/songwriter whose earlier interest was to incorporate rock’n’roll within

\(^\text{10}\) Hong Kong is full of these "tea restaurants," which are devoted mainly to serving afternoon tea. The most favored food and drink for patrons are eggcustard and milk tea. This shows a "creoling" aspect of Hong Kong culture, which is essential to a sense of local color that seems equally exotic to non-Hong Kong Chinese and non-Chinese.

\(^\text{11}\) "Missing You" is one of the hit songs from ChyiChin’s album called *Dim Moon*, released in 1994. A veteran Mandarin singer/songwriter who suffered a commercial decline in the early 1990s, Chyi is sought to revitalize his career by singing Hokkien songs. The fusion of rock’n’roll with a Taiwanese song from the occupation period did help him reclaim his position in the business. His interpretation of the song is an example of a significant tendency in Taiwan’s popular music of the 1990s. As the native identity movement gained popular support, Taiwanese pop gradually transformed into a manifold entity combining both Mandarin and Hokkien songs. During this period, many Mandarin singers have crossed over to Taiwanese pop, a genre considered retrograde before the 1990s. Chyi Chin is one of these crossover performers.
Taiwanese pop, "Missing You" represents the internationalization of indigenous pop. Chyi's contribution to Taiwanese pop with this song is to replace its original Japanese enka flavor with the more common language of international pop. The double appropriation (traditional Taiwanese song and rock'n'roll) has opened a space for this Taiwanese song to enter Wong's cinematic world. And it is precisely because the musical style is indebted to contemporary American popular music that it is an appropriate indicator in the film. With the help of the song, and the home video footage of the father, Fallen Angels becomes the most moving representation of a father-son relationship in Chinese-language cinemas.

There are two sides to this. On the one hand, the meaning of the scene is so incisively "Chinese" in its emphasis on the often contradictory, nonverbal expression of parental love. On the other hand, it is also global in the way that the Japanese restaurant owner who represents the Asian diaspora, uses video to express his feeling toward his son. Video and popular songs have substituted for verbal language and become a more vital way of expression in transnational communication.

SECTION IV. Where is the Global in Wong Kar-Wai's Films?

Some might suggest that Wong Kar-Wai's international appeal exists in his incorporation of a music video-influenced style. And an "MTV" style, as we all know, has become a defining language in the network of global electronic communication. As the term suggests, MTV is a form of combination, hybridization, and experimentation with distinct media. In other words, it is a style that is highly self-conscious. Common features of the MTV style include: nonlinear, mostly fragmented, narratives; multiple diegeses (e.g., the physical presence of musicians vs. thematic or fictional worlds); rapid-fire, often discontinuous editing dictated by musical rhythms; a broad mix of

wong kar-wai and faye wong in the motorola commercial. photographic and video textures and graphic material.

When we look at Wong's film language, the influence of music video is obvious. However, when an MTV style is everywhere, invading even our public spaces and architecture, this observation about Wong's films loses its focus and validity. If MTV style is so ubiquitous, in what respects are Wong's films indebted? More importantly, in what respect can Wong's films be seen as global? If the secret of Wong's success is MTV, does this mean that Wong is embedded within what Stuart Hal calls "the global mass culture"? Or does Wong have his own way of inflecting and interpreting the global?

Diaspora, especially the Chinese and (to an extent) Asian versions, is a recurrent fascination for Wong Kar-Wai. From his second film, Days of Being Wild, through his recent film Happy Together, Wong centers his stories on such motifs as "leaving," "arriving,"

"moving ahead," and "waiting." These abstract motifs nonetheless constitute traveling in the most practical and mundane sense. Each time the character leaves his/her lover, it also marks a new hope, the beginning of a new relationship, or at least the beginning of something else. Thus, it is these circular stories of longing for, searching for, switching, and leaving lovers that have made his films seem astonishingly different from other Chinese-language films. This is the case in Days of Being Wild, in which all the characters suffer either from frustrating relationships or the lack of any to begin with. Similarly, in the martial arts western Ashes of Time, there is a geographically spacious but interwoven world populated by a number of couples who are either
unable to love or prefer waiting for "true love" to accepting substitutes. Exile becomes their mode of existence and a metaphor for their submission to the governing laws of life. As time washes away their youth and the desert takes away their lives, they are left with memories, nostalgia, and monologues in voiceover.

With *Fallen Angels* the diaspora theme is expressed more through the choice of music. Tentatively assuming that transnational Chinese cinema is an appropriate descriptor of Wong's films, *Fallen Angels* can be seen as a good example. Regional and cultural markers of people and places are clearly signposted in the narrative. The alienation of the individual within the postindustrial information explosion is also spelled out carefully in the tone of the music. Also, the emphasis on music shows Wong's alliance with current trends of global communication culture. This, in turn, makes Wong an attractive choice for global communication companies seeking media representation in new, international markets.

It is therefore not surprising to see the release of *Happy Together* after *Fallen Angels*. This film certainly can be read as Wong's reply to the 1997 handover (after all, as the residents of Hong Kong would tell you before the handover, they were sick and tired of being asked their thoughts on the 1997 issue, so why not make a film to answer, in advance, the all-too-familiar question about Hong Kong?). *Happy Together* travels as far as Buenos Aires and a place called "the end of the world," away from home and importunate British/American cultural domination. There are three characters in the film--two Hong Kong gay men with an unstable relationship and a Taiwanese man whose sense of hearing is superior due to a childhood eye illness. The film's soundtrack includes no music that labels these characters as "Hong Kong," "Taiwanese," or "Chinese." Instead, the music of *Happy Together* (entitled *Buenos Aires* in the Japanese market) signifies geographic place, as well as the moods and movements of the characters. A full discussion of the tango and its cultural resonances (the music of Astor Piazzolla is featured), as well as those of American popular-experimental music by the likes of Frank Zappa, would take us far afield. But we might tentatively note the associations of seduction, conquest, betrayal and *machismo* with the music that takes such a prominent place in the film.

*Happy Together* can also be read as Hong Kong's take on the postcolonial. The world seems smaller and more familiar and yet at the same time as large and strange as ever. Nowhere can be as strange and intimate as home, even in Buenos Aires. With the relocation of the three Chinese men, the "local" color of Hong Kong changes to another "local" color, that of a former Spanish colony embarked on a "national" adventure for close to 190 years. After extended wandering, the character who is the loser in the relationship, Lai Yau Fai (Tony Leung Chiu-wai), travels to Taipei, sightsees at a night market, and tries out the city's newly installed MRT train. This reminds us of the similar ambivalent ending of *Fallen Angels*--is he is going to settle down with another partner, or is he ready to take off, and start another journey?

In the film's constant shifting of geography, culture and desire, the Asian diaspora is redefined and relocated. It seems endlessly portable, but its channels of transmission

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burrow ever deeper, ever more reticulated, intimate and refined. This brings us back to Wong's Motorola commercial. In the ad, with portable phones as an indicator of Hong Kong's "advanced" capitalist and telecommunications system, the act of communication seems to have dispensed with verbal language. The commercial is about two people--one Japanese, one Chinese--who are put into various cramped interior spaces but do not talk to each other at all. This is the message of Motorola: no message, just Motorola. Where there is diaspora, there, necessarily, is the (portable) global. In other words, we carry the global with us.