

# Visual Analysis

## Starting from Wong Kar Wai's International Award-winning Film

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### ABSTRACT

Wong Kar Wai is a unique presence in Hong Kong, a film and television industry that values business over art. Wong Kar Wai's unique aesthetic perspective and expression in the film are amazing and regarded as a classic. In Wong Kar Wai's films, light, shadow, and color have become the most important way of his narration and his unique film symbol. However, the characteristic of Wong Kar Wai neglected by the public is the cross-cultural nature of his films. At the same time, he has won lots of international film rewards. This paper will analyze the local and postmodern manifestations of Wong Kar Wai's films that have won international awards from a cross-cultural perspective.

**Keywords:** *Wong Kar Wai, Film Analysis, Postmodernism, Localization*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

All the movie from Wong Kai Wai has certain localization.

Hong Kong, which brings together the essence of Chinese and foreign culture, is famous worldwide for being known as Oriental Hollywood.

As of today's international metropolis, Hong Kong has been like a wanderer at the end of the world for a hundred years. The blood of the Chinese nation connects it, but it extends to Western civilization with a humiliating attitude. This unique urban situation has also created the "rootless" attribute of Hong Kong's culture for a long time - both economy and culture are foreign interference, and there is no own consciousness leading and trend. People regard this state as freedom. In fact, what is displayed in the spiritual core of this city is alienation, marginalization and no sense of belonging. Such an environment has also created a space for the free development of the Hong Kong film market and the Cross-Cultural nature of Hong Kong films. The Cross-Cultural refers to having a full and correct understanding of cultural phenomena, customs and habits that are different or conflict with the national culture. On this basis, accepting and adapting with an inclusive attitude. In addition, there are few indigenous residents in Hong Kong, which can be seen from the composition of early filmmakers in Hong Kong. Shaw came to Hong Kong from Shanghai to create his own film era. Shaw's four

directors, Li Hanxiang, Hu Jinqian, Zhang Che and Chu Yuan, are all "immigrants" from the mainland. Therefore, if we carefully observe the so-called mainstream film model in Hong Kong at that time, we will find that these mainstream films in Hong Kong do not belong to the city itself. The ancient costume "Huangmei tune" type film represented by Li Hanxiang follows Chinese traditional culture; The martial arts films represented by Zhang Che have a mixture of Japanese samurai films, American Westerns and Chinese chivalry; Then to the later gun battle hero films represented by John Woo, we can see the taste of American "gangster films". All these are caused by Hong Kong's 100 years of experience.

Wong Kar Wai is also a generation of immigrants from the mainland to Hong Kong. In the 1980s, postmodern ideology began to appear in Hong Kong. Hong Kong's special economic development mode and diversified cultural background greatly impacted Wong Kar Wai. Therefore, he showed through the lens that Hong Kong also has a unique "city" emotion with the cross-cultural sense involved. This emotion contains strong Localization and Postmodernism. To put it simply, localisation means when we think from the perspective of globalization, we should emphasize local characteristics [1]. Postmodernism originated from modernism but rebelled against modernism. It is not only the criticism and Deconstruction of the way of thinking that deprives people of subjectivity and feeling richness, integrity, centrality and identity in the process of modernization, but also the criticism and Deconstruction

of essentialism, fundamentalism and "present metaphysics" of traditional western philosophy. The main representatives are Richard Rorty of the United States (1931-2007), Jacques Derrida of France (1930-2004) and Jean Francois Liotta (1924-1998) [2].

Taking his representative work "*Chungking Express*" as an example, it expresses the rootless fate, emotional alienation and unspeakable loneliness of men and women in the city. It shows the current emotional situation of modern people who are confused and anxious, eager to be loved and afraid of injury, indifferent and sensitive. It is also the beginning of Wong Kar Wai's representative works of the ingenious integration of locality and postmodernism.

Chungking in "*Chungking Express*" refers to the Chungking building in Hong Kong at that time, which was a chaotic shopping mall with mixed scum and villainy. This is the place where the story happened, and the director wanted to highlight the social situation and the relationship between people in Hong Kong at that time through the integration of these two concepts.

In the film, after confirming his lovelorn, Takeshi Kaneshiro seeks spiritual comfort with the help of continuous phone calls; And Tony Leung tries to prove through his dialogue with household products: even without a girlfriend, I think I can still live well. They all hope that they can release the darkness, loneliness, loneliness, and loss in their hearts through these actions. It also implies the hardships of living in a metropolis. Lin Qingxia, in the play, always wears sunglasses and raincoats. When Takeshi Kaneshiro asked her, "why do you wear sunglasses all day?" Lin Qingxia replied coldly, "just in case". This scene expressed the alienation and loss of human relations in Hong Kong at that time.

In this film, Wong Kar Wai describes contemporary urban youth's emotional paranoia and concentration through personal monologues and time changes and shows the urban people's erratic emotional relationship and inner confusion. The film reflects the state of postmodern life, and the theme can be summarized as that the work of art is no longer an interrelated organism, which is also an important feature of postmodernism [3].

The collision between Hong Kong's urban attributes and modern people's emotional situation in Wong Kar Wai's light and shadow world is a throb that touches the audience's soul. At a certain moment, the audience is no longer just spectators in front of the screen, but Experiencers in the world created by Wong Kar Wai on the screen. This is also the spiritual core of Wong Kar Wai's films. It is this spirit that has also made his films favored by international awards: In 1997, "*Happy Together*" won the best director award of the 50th Cannes International Film Festival and became the first Chinese winner of this award at Cannes International Film Festival; "*In the Mood for Love*" won the 13th European

film award global screen award, the 26th French film Caesar Award Best Foreign Film Award, the 51st German Film Award Best Foreign Film Award, the 4th British Independent Film Award Best Foreign Language Film Award, and the 67th New York Film Critics Association Award Best Foreign Language Film Award European Film Award; "*2046*" won the 17th European film award global screen award and the 40th National Film Critics Association Award for best foreign language film; "*The Grandmaster*" won the best film award and best director award of the 8th Asian Film Awards, and the top five foreign language films award of the 85th National Review Association Award.

## **2. VISUAL IMAGES SHOWS CHARACTERISTICS OF WONG KAR WAI'S FILM**

In most of his works, Wong Kar Wai perfectly combines the locality of Hong Kong films with postmodernism with his skilled skills, profound expression and unique perspective, and has become a unique landscape in the Chinese film industry. Moreover, through the charm of light, the implication of color and the Oriental beauty of props, his films tell us the cross-cultural connotation of Hong Kong, a unique city. Next, we will analyze some of Wong Kar Wai's films from the aspects of light, color, clothing, and props that have won international awards.

### **2.1. THE USE OF LIGHT**

Wong Kar Wai's international award-winning films are full of postmodernism. Symbol, metaphor, light and shade, contrast and many other elements are used in Wong Kar Wai's films, giving a unique meaning similar to black films. Among them, the use of light and shadow has always been Wong Kar Wai's specialty. As early as in "*Ashes of Time*", many people remember the picture of the rotation of the birdcage and the wave light and shadow of the lake. However, in "*In the Mood for Love*", his use of light and shadow is more mature. His unbridled inspiration and attempt to show off are restrained, and light and shadow completely serve the characters and plot, resulting in a more stable aesthetic feeling.

In many scenes of "*In the Mood for Love*", we can see that one-third to two-thirds of the picture is dark. Only one light source illuminates a small area, and the characters move in the bright area or stand, sit, or come from the dark and go into the dark. The use of darkness, the omission of space and the strong contrast between light and shade make the picture have a strange character. In addition to allowing the audience to focus all their attention on that small bright place, darkness can always grow some unstable emotions, the feeling of being squeezed and a deeper sense of space. This is reminiscent

of Rembrandt's prints. Their style of dealing with light and shadow is almost the same.

In addition, in this night scene dominated film, light and shadow projected on the wall through the fence often appear. On the one hand, the dim light at night describes the dark feelings between two people, a feeling of escaping from normal relations, which is destined to be furtive; On the other hand, the fence formed by light and shadow has become a symbolic metaphor, and the projection of the fence has become a fence and obstacle in the relationship and psychology of the hero and heroine, which is a trapped feeling. In the colourful background of life, emotion is suffering in such an environment. The visual contrast forms a psychological contradiction. The dark and narrow space creates a decadent and helpless atmosphere of despair, coinciding with the theme that although there is a weak light, there is no future. Through the art of light and shadow, Wong Kar Wai tells the lonely postmodern feelings of the characters in the city.

## **2.2. THE USE OF COLOR**

As mentioned above, Wong Kar Wai's films combine individuality and commonness. It can show the Nativity of Hong Kong and draw out the universal emotion across regions. It not only has many characteristics of postmodernism but also has a warm light on human nature. In Wong Kar Wai's films, color is well used to express the combination of individuality and commonness.

Take the film *"Happy Together"* directed in 1997, which won Cannes International Film Festival's best director award.

At the beginning of the film, Ho Po-Wing leaned against the head of the bed to smoke and looked at the waterfall lights, blue walls and blue sheets in front of him. Lai Yiu-Fai stood in front of the wardrobe mirror. At this time, the picture was color. Then the camera turned, and the scene switched to the time when Lai Yiu-Fai and Ho Po-Wing were lingering in bed. After that, the tone of the film turned black and white again. The strong contrast and great change made people instantly understand that the beautiful love between the two people had become an unforgettable past.

Black and white films account for the first third of the film. In the color film part, the film has two basic tones of blue and red and their mixed tones. The blue streets and lakes are permeated with a sense of silence and calmness, while the red rooms and bars are filled with radicalism, enthusiasm and uneasiness. This is the current situation of Hong Kong society at that time. People are blankly intertwined and collided in indifference and radicalism, and their emotions are also alternating in this exciting red flame and cold blue world.

Lai Yiu-Fai always shrank in a thick black coat, while Ho Po-Wing was full of beauty. Later, Ho Po-Wing was injured, and Lai Yiu-Fai took full care of them. Their relationship took a turn for the better. Lai Yiu-Fai changed into bright red clothes. But it won't last long. With the emergence of estrangement, Lai Yiu-Fai returned to his previous cold tone clothes. Their distinct colors are determined by their character and destiny. The color and black-and-white changes of the whole film *"Happy Together"* is carried out four times. The male protagonists are separated, met and separated in the journey one stop after another. In Wong Kar Wai's lens, these urban strangers are a group of lonely and sad ordinary people. It made us find resonance in them.

For the use of color, film theorists Martin Marcel said in his book *Le Langage Cinématographique* that "the real invention of film color should be calculated from the day when directors understand the following facts, that is, color does not have to be true, that is, it is completely consistent with reality, and color must be used according to the values of different colors, such as black and white, psychological and dramatic meaning, cold and warm colors." [4]. Stanley Kauffmann also said, "let color become a character in the show" [5]. The color in Wong Kar Wai's works is also closely related to the character's psychology, character, and destiny. With extreme stylized visual images, post-modern expression and a keen grasp of the spiritual temperament of urban people, he has successfully constructed a unique "Wong Kar Wai style" film aesthetics that integrates the regionality of Hong Kong and post-modernism.

## **2.3. THE FETTER OF ORIENTAL BEAUTY**

The essence of the cheongsam is the external expression of culture. Through the prop of cheongsam, Wong Kar Wai shows the unique things - People's emotions and thoughts in Hong Kong, a prosperous city with special historical opportunities, cultural and social environment, and reveals people's loneliness, helplessness and loss in the postmodern context. [6]

Cheongsam, for Hong Kong culture, contains profound historical implications. In the 1950s and 1960s, many Shanghai craftsmen came to Hong Kong to make a living, including many tailors with exquisite handicrafts and their apprentices. The exquisite and considerate service made the "Shanghai tailor" famous in Hong Kong.

At that time, the cheongsam was influenced by the trend of Western clothing. The body of the cheongsam was tight and narrow, emphasizing the slim waist, the skirt was narrowed, and the collar was raised. As a result, the cheongsam appeared its unique and elegant "curve beauty". Wearing it, it has a sense of beauty.

As a common dress of middle and upper class women, Cheongsam not only shows women's beauty but

also has important cultural symbolic significance: it is a symbol of human society from barbarism to civilization; It is a remarkable sign of people's social role and identity. Wong Kar Wai brought the classic aesthetics of wearing cheongsam onto the screen and gave it different meanings. He uses the color expressiveness and style of cheongsam to reflect the development of the plot and the emotional changes of the characters, making it a unique force to promote the plot of the film and express the emotional development and changes of the characters. At the same time, through the carrier of cheongsam, the locality of the film and postmodernism are better integrated, showing the unique cross-cultural nature of Hong Kong films.

The story of "*In the Mood for Love*" took place in Hong Kong in the 1960s. At that time, most people's living environment was narrow. The small grey attic fully showed people's lonely inner world. Inside the attic, except that the bedroom is a real private space, the kitchen, living room and corridor are all public. Personal space has been compressed to the extreme, and individual emotional space has also been greatly suppressed.

In the film, Maggie Cheung changed into more than twenty cheongsams. At that time, cheongsam was characterized by self-cultivation and highlighted the curvaceous beauty of women. But at the same time, it is also like a moral yardstick set on Maggie Cheung. There is no looseness, and a little indulgence and cheating are not allowed. Therefore, Maggie Cheung on the screen is always cautious in her words and deeds, steady in her gait and following the rules.

With the help of the color patterns of cheongsam and the narrowness of the environment, Wong Kar Wai shows Maggie Cheung's helpless mood of being bound by the moral yardstick and living environment.

The film shows many times that after Mr. Chan leaves, Su Li-zhen will change into a dark tone cheongsam with simple and elegant color; Many times, Su Li-zhen wears a dark striped cheongsam to buy noodles. In these scenes, cheongsam everywhere reflects the low and gloomy disappointment of the characters. When her husband Mr. Chen, came back, she went to pick up the plane and accompanied her to play cards. They were all dressed in bright colored cheongsam with complex patterns, which conveyed her inner joy from the perspective of film clothing. One of the most impressive cheongsams is a green ink cheongsam worn by Su Li-zhen at work. The color of the cheongsam is integrated with the color of the environment, giving people a deep romantic beauty. In the film, cheongsam is also closely and skilfully combined with the environment, plot and characters. Different scenes or different moods need different cheongsam to show, which complement each other, Mutual perfection. This is also the reason why the audience can't forget the exquisite and unique cheongsam when they think of "*In the Mood for Love*" [7].

Compared with Maggie Cheung's noble, elegant, gentle and intellectual nature in "*In the Mood for Love*". Zhang Ziyi, in "*2046*", which has a time difference of more than 100 years, seems to have a careful opportunity to show her figure relying on cheongsam and hope to change her fate. But the only constant is the narrow space and the sense of loneliness and rootlessness in this city and the fate that, although unwilling, is still bound by the general environment of the times.

With the help of cheongsam, Wong Kar Wai made people feel the unique charm of Oriental women and analyzed the inner world of Oriental women at that time - the lonely way of life bound by cheongsam. It also shows the final prosperity and elegance of the era (represented by Shanghai and Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s) when the surface is prosperous and orderly, and the essence is broken and rotten.

What is different between these two films is Wong Kar Wai's "*The Grandmaster*". Because of the background setting of the film, the cheongsam (color and style) in the film is very different from the sexy, gorgeous and charming cheongsam "*In the Mood for Love*" and "*2046*". The design is completely close to the style of the Republic of China, with simple and neat cutting, rigorous stand collar and word buckle. The color adopts plain color and similar plain color dim patterns, thus shaping different character characters.

Cheongsam was once popular in the Republic of China. At that time, many scholars and the media believed that in the early Republic of China, due to the influx of western culture and ideas, young people with advanced ideas actively studied the west, especially women, bravely pursued liberation, which was unprecedented in the history of Chinese feudal society. Therefore, to seek the independence of thought and the liberation of women's rights, women need to imitate men wearing robes.

Ms. Ailing Zhang wrote in "*The Changing Clothes*": "After the republic of five ethnic groups, women all over the country suddenly adopted cheongsam, not for allegiance to the Qing Dynasty to promote the restoration movement, but because the women deliberately imitated men. They were new to Western culture. They are immersed in the idea of equal rights for men and women, but the surrounding situation is too far from ideal. Under shame and anger, they reject everything that is feminine and want to kill the roots of women. Therefore, the newly born cheongsam is cold Founder, with Puritan style." [8]

Mr. Wang Yuqing holds this view: "cheongsam, which has been popular for more than half a century, turned out to be a by-product of women's struggle for women's rights and equality [9].

There are two crucial female roles in "*The Grandmaster*", which are the epitome of the female image in society.

Gong Er, the Eight-Diagram tactics man, played by Zhang Ziyi, often wears a long black cheongsam with a loose style, which looks sharp and capable. At the same time, she vaguely reveals the female beauty hidden in her heart suppressed by black through the cheongsam, vaguely showing the toughness of the role and the beauty of women's "perseverance". To express Gong Er's hardness, softness and deep inhibition of emotion. Another female role is Cheung Wing-sing, the wife of Ip Man, played by Song Hye Kyo. Although it is a plain cheongsam similar to Zhang Ziyi, it is more elegant and soft. Her cheongsam is mostly composed of elegant lines and soft fabrics in pure soft colors, or a cheongsam with the integration of lace, broken flowers and wave dots, which not only retains Song Hye Kyo's unique and pure girlish temperament but also makes her more soft and beautiful than Zhang Ziyi when she wears a plain cheongsam. Its cutting is also more in line with women's curves, highlighting the beauty of women's necks. The same plain cheongsam fully shows the different personality colors of the two people and makes the audience have a more intuitive visual feeling with aesthetic techniques [10].

### 3. COMPARISON

Compared with mainland directors in China, such as Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou are more suitable for storytelling, photography, and the color tone to reflect their own level. Zhang Yimou once graduated from the Department of Photography of Beijing Film Academy. Wong Kar Wai will show people's inner world through the colors, light and shadows, and props mentioned above. This is exactly why Wong Kar Wai can win more international awards. It shows the sense of separation between people through people's inner world and echoes the thought of Postmodernism [10]. This is where Wong Kar Wai's success lies.

### 4. CONCLUSION

As a part of Chinese films, Hong Kong films play an indelible and important role in the development history of Chinese films. As a unique existence in the Hong Kong film industry, Wong Kar Wai enjoys a high reputation in the world with his many excellent film works and is one of the representatives of Hong Kong filmmakers. The unique postmodern aesthetic vision saves Wong Kar Wai's films from the shackles of traditional aesthetics and modern aesthetics, reinterprets the film connotation of classical beauty, sad beauty and implicit beauty, and creates a unique film background, alternative emotional expression and diversified film lens language to form Wong Kar Wai's film aesthetics.

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