A Companion to Wong Kar-wai

With 25 essays that embrace a wide array of themes and perspectives including intertextuality, transnationality, gender representation, repetition, the use of music, color, and sound; depiction of time and space in human affairs, and Wong's highly original portrayals of violence. At a Companion to Wong Kar-wai is a singular examination of the prestigious director known around the world for the innovation, beauty, and passion he brings to filmmaking. This collection, edited by Martha P. Nochimson, brings together the most cutting-edge and interesting scholarship on arguably the greatest living Asian filmmaker. The essays are written by a multinational group of established and rising film scholars and critics. The essays cover many topics, including the traditions of the jiang hu in Wong's films, overlooking Wong's films, not in terms of gender but through the artist's binomial, the phenomenological Wong. Wong's intertextuality, America through Wong's eyes, the optics of intensities, thresholds, and transfers of essays in Wong's cinema, and the dramatic presence of some cities from Shanghai in Wong's Hong Kong. They delve into the political, historical, and sociological influence of Wong and his work, and examine his films from modern, postmodern, and postcolonial perspectives, and from the heritage points of queer theory. Also included are two appendices, which discuss Wong's work in Hong Kong television and commercials, and a biography of the award-winning director and serves as an essential reference for film scholars, critics, and devoted moviegoers looking for a deeper understanding of Wong's fascinating body of work.

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ISBN 978-1-118-42424-7

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"Pity about the furniture"

Violence, Wong Kar-wai Style

Karen Fang

The topic of violence in the films of Wong Kar-wai may at first seem incongruous. Although his oeuvre includes wuxia and kung fu films (Ashes of Time and The Grandmaster), a gangster drama (As Tears Go By), a hired assassin (Fallen Angel), and numerous bar fights and murders (As Tears Go By, Days of Being Wild, Chungking Express, Fallen Angel, and Ashes of Time), this recurring thematic aspect is often forgotten in favor of the yearning, romantic scenes that are probably most widely remembered as his films' dominant mood. Unlike the male-centered, action-driven plots and characters of films by other Hong Kong luminaries, such as John Woo and Tsui Hark, for example, Wong's movies are known for blending dreamy male and female characters whose primary physical characteristic seems not to be bodily power but rather brooding erotic desire. Violence is not an obvious element of this ethos, a propensity of Wong's filmmaking that Rey Chow describes as the "finesse of languor" (2007, 75). Indeed, a significant proportion of the films the director has completed over a quarter of a century as filmmaker, including many of those released at the peak of his international fame, such as Happy Together, In the Mood for Love, 2046, and My Blueberry Nights, contain little that might be considered violence at all, thereby discouraging any recognition of violence as an aspect of the filmmaker's palette, particularly in contrast with his fellow Hong Kong auteurs.

Yet to describe Wong's films as indifferent to screen violence and the cinematic imagery of assault and physical suffering with which Hong Kong film is widely associated is also misleading, employing a relatively monolithic notion of violence, both in terms of what qualifies as its cinematic manifestation as well as how it impacts the film viewer. As Gerald Prince observes, studies of screen violence are too often limited to debates regarding represented action and viewer response, which various accounts alternately claim cause viewers to become incited towards violence or desensitized to the behaviors portrayed on screen (Prince 2003). A far less common—but no less important—approach to the topic examines how screen violence manifests as a purely formal or artistic category, deployed by artists and filmmakers to convey their individual artistic vision, and in ways that connect with viewers in more subtly physiological responses where emotional experience supersedes the visceral sensations typically associated with screen violence. Wong's rare but intriguing moments of violence would seem to belong to this latter category, and perhaps this accounts for the relative dearth of serious scholarly studies of screen violence in his work. Because Hong Kong film is widely recognized for its dynamic, often graphic uses of screen violence in characteristic genres like gunplay and martial arts, Wong's occasional, highly romantic engagement of such local motifs is easily overlooked. For example, as a leading scholar of screen violence, Marsha Kinder, notes in an essay on "Violence American Style," Wong's more commercial compatriots such as Woo, Jackie Chan, and Chow Yun-fat have been able to cross over to Hollywood precisely because their original stardom was "already synonymous with an orchestration of violent attractions," meaning the spectacular uses of violence at the center of Hollywood's globally lucrative action genres (2001, 83). In this fashion, broaching this thesis Kinder, whose acuity in comparatively exploring non-Hollywood film violence was established by a seminal study of violence in Spanish cinema (Kinder 1993), still equates Hong Kong screen violence with the kind of spectacular, explicitly physical and highly conventional versions of graphic action that Hollywood favors. Thus, although astutely recognizing how one highly familiar kind of screen violence facilitates transnational recognition of Hong Kong cinema, Kinder's characterization overlooks the many other genres, directors, and film styles by which Hong Kong cinema also manifests screen violence—the very kinds of screen violence that are located in Wong's films, and which despite the oversights of Kinder and many others also have significant precursors in local film.

Indeed, of all these local predecessors and influences upon Wong Kar-wai's use of screen violence there may be no more important a figure than Patrick Tam, a celebrated Hong Kong New Wave director and art filmmaker who also edited two of Wong's films. Although Tam's legacy upon Wong is often recurring subject of scholarship, few commentators have specifically focused upon violence as a crucial element of the filmmakers' shared aesthetic practice. Yet Tam's equally lapidary oeuvre is also distinguished by an odd mix of genres and aesthetic styles that use violence for moments of erotic and romantic sensation. His critically acclaimed but somewhat less well-known corpus provides an important lens by which to understand Wong's, both in terms of how the filmmakers use screen violence to provoke emotional responses incongruous with the represented action and especially how these local auteurs cultivate their unconventional style of screen violence within motifs utterly familiar to Hong
Kong’s highly commercial film industry. Understanding Wong’s affinities with Tam – as well as many other local contemporaries – thus does more than contribute to longstanding questions regarding the director’s purportedly singular vision (such as the respective contributions of Christopher Doyle in cinematography and William Chang Suk-ping in art and production design), or whether the Shanghai-born, Hong Kong trained, and internationally acclaimed director is more appropriately conceptualized as a local or cosmopolitan filmmaker. More pointedly, by looking specifically at how violence is an instrumental part of Wong’s romanticism, we can see how this decapitated and defamiliarized screen violence – a signature cinematic motif that Wong develops in affinity with and some cases under the direct influence of Patrick Tam – reflects an idiosyncratic mode of cinematic storytelling that dramatically illuminates the affective power for which Wong’s films are justly celebrated.

Social realism, the Hong Kong New Wave, and its precedents for Wong’s screen violence

Although the popularity of local action films has never obscured critical awareness of the Hong Kong New Wave, it may have helped obstruct recognition of a more subtle but no less important role of violence in that important vein of Hong Kong filmmaking in which a generation of filmmakers who were born in the territory came of age in the transformative 1970s, capitalizing upon their training and education to make sophisticated films that reflected their own distinct culture and identity. Ann Hui’s first film, The Secret (1979), for example, is about the investigation of a horrific double killing, and although widely praised for its psychological richness and detailed depiction of local culture, the generic pretensions of murder mystery that the film loosely shares with other, more conventional products is rarely acknowledged. Similarly, Alex Cheung’s Man on the Brink (1981), a realistically gritty tragedy of an undercover cop, climaxes with the protagonist trapped and killed by an angry mob who mistakenly believe him to be a child molester, in a compelling portrait of social disorder that derives much of its dramatic power from physical suffering. Indeed, even Allen Fong’s Father and Son (1981), a quasi-autobiographical sentimental melodrama about filial relations that is also commonly cited as one of the best of the Hong Kong New Wave films, includes sudden, intense and injurious force as an organizing trope in its otherwise nostalgic depiction of Hong Kong history and its emerging tradition of local film. An early scene in the movie has the young protagonist (Fong’s alter ego) beaten by his father for accidentally setting the family bunk afame while playing with pre-cinematic devices like shadow puppetry. The real and implied violence of beating and fire then recurs in another crucial sequence later in the film, when a massive conflagration – presumably the horrific Shek Kip Mei fire, which occupies an important place in Hong Kong history – besets the entire family, briefly separating father and son, and by thus imperiling them restoring the family bonds that the previous episode of paternal violence endangered.

As Li Cheuk-to describes in an important essay on these and other New Wave films, the New Wave filmmakers were “violent” directors in the sense that they do not deploy violence in generically conventional ways but instead use such imagery to “distance themselves from ‘tradition’” (1994, 173). In notable contrast with the strong, self-reliant, and often impossibly infallible heroes typically presented in later action movies, the New Wave dramas portray individuals enmeshed in and affected by interpersonal and social connections, and often in scenarios that realistically acknowledge the economic and corporeal vulnerabilities that such situations expose. This realistic and rational approach in Hong Kong New Wave films to the social origins of violence has a significant precedent in the traditions of social realism that have characterized Cantonese filmmaking in Hong Kong since the 1950s, and although the elliptical and often highly stylized filmmaking of some New Wave filmmakers such as Ann Hui may not obviously be described as “realistic,” violence is usually treated in New Wave films with a social and ethical interest that arguably has more in common with the themes of romance, connection, and mutual understanding typical of local melodrama and social realism than it does with the issues of individual honor, loyalty, ambition, and vengeance common in the martial arts-inspired hero plots typically associated with Hong Kong screen violence. Thus, Tsui Hark’s sensational violence and controversial Dangeros Encounters of the First Kind (1981), for example, although not typical of the nuanced social dramas widely associated with the New Wave films with which it is contemporary, might still be recognized for exhibiting a shared ethos in its approach to screen violence. Despite shockingly graphic, nihilistic images of violence that include animal torture, suicide pacts, severed limbs edited for black humor, and a teenage terrorist driven mad by witnessing the systemic hunting down of his friends, violence in the film is motivated by a relentless strain of social commentary. As implicit in the movie’s embattled release history – in which local laws designed to protect the government and foreign relations were cited first to initially ban the film from exhibition and then released the movie only after significant cuts – the film portrays the disaffection and nihilism inhabited by Hong Kong youth, chafing against both traditional patriarchal family relationships and the race-based power asymmetry of the colonial system.

Such narrative interest in violence as a device for emotional character study that is likely influenced by a long tradition of social realism and which can be found in the New Wave films provides useful comparison for film violence by Wong Kar-wai. Although his earliest films (As Tears Go By, Days of Being Wild, Chungking Express, Ashes of Time, and Fallen Angel) are all movies with elements obviously deriving from genres in which violence plays an important part, the unique artistic vision with which the films announced the arrival of a talented director lies in the ways in which the films depart from those generic conventions, including particularly their use of violence. When it appeared in 1988, for
example, Wong’s first film, *As Tears Go By*, was readily categorized as a gu wuk jui or “young triads” film, a variant of the gangster and crime movies that had become an increasingly dominant form in local box office since the mid-1980s. True to convention, the film – whose breakout commercial success ensured the debut director subsequent industrial and critical attention – portrays the reckless and often haphazard lives of those choosing the illicit path of crime. The two young rascals in the film, played by Andy Lau and Jacky Cheung, veer from conflict to conflict with little control over their bodies or fates, and ultimately die in a tragically unnecessary skirmish with cops when the hotheaded, impulsive character played by Cheung incites his fatal shooting by the police and Lau’s character – bound by the rules of brotherhood so romanticized in the triad genre – must vainly attempt to avenge his mate’s death.

This climactic death scene is shot in the slow-motion step-printing that has since become a Wong Kar-wai signature, as are previous fight scenes in the film, but both the fact of the film’s generic hybridity and its popular success suggests that such scenes of violence within the film ultimately are subordinate to the throat-swelling moments of romantic bliss by which the film underscores the needless violence of triad life. Ackbar Abbas, for example, names a scene much earlier in the film, when Andy Lau and Maggie Cheung embrace in a telephone booth, as “one of the most erotic scenes in Hong Kong cinema” (1997, 35). Such hyperbolic praise of the film’s romantic imagery demonstrates the relative unimportance of violence in this quasi-triad film, a movie subgenre in which violence otherwise usually plays an important part. More tragic opera than crime story, the film’s Chinese title of *Mong Kok Carmen* or *Carmen of the Streets* may reference Bietz’s classic romantic tragedy set amidst the criminal underworld, but it also, more generally, uses opera – and probably specifically *La Bohème*’s tale of a tubercular love interest, similar to Maggie Cheung’s character in Wong’s film – to emphasize gang violence less as a genre-defining plot element than as a subordinate plot device by which to motivate fate and therefore tragedy, the prevailing affect with which the film is concerned.

This thematic and narrative propensity to use physical violence to precipitate psychological introspection continues in *Days of Being Wild*, the film Wong completed immediately after *As Tears Go By*, as well as the first of a trio of films that the filmmaker concurrently developed during these early years. As often noted, *Days of Being Wild* is loosely but obviously related to the “Ah Fei” tradition of films specific to Hong Kong cinema. The film’s Chinese title is *Ah Fei zheng chuan* – literally, *The Story of Ah Fei* – and like that local film tradition, which emerged in the 1960s to depict the restless modern youth who personified a population unsatisfied with contemporary society, Wong’s 1990 movie casts a nostalgic gaze back to this formative era in local history through sensuously scored and photographed details regarding the dress, interior environments, automobiles, and music of the era. At the same time, however, this sensory luxuriation in the signifiers of the Ah Fei tradition’s 1960s origins also illustrates Wong’s characteristic dismantling of the very genre his movie

Figure 11.1 Lobby card for *Days of Being Wild* (1990), directed by Wong Kar-wai, produced by Rover Tang, showing the fight in the Manila café. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA), Sun Sing Theatre Collection.

otherwise seems to invoke so explicitly. Although violence is often a crucial plot element of classic Ah Fei films such as Lung Kong’s *Teddy Girls* (1969) and Chor Yuen’s *Joys and Sorrows of Youth* (1969), where youthful rebellion is portrayed by delinquency, criminal affiliation, and social, institutional, and familial efforts to restrain, discipline, and punish such actions, Wong’s take on the genre imbues its brief moments of Ah Fei-style struggles with a dreamy lyricism that is less physical than psychological. An early scene in which the protagonist, played by Leslie Cheung, abruptly assaults his adopted mother’s lover, for example, seems incongruous with the character’s earlier presentation as a seductive and coolly uncommitted character. That scene, as well as an episode much later in the film in which he and another character (played by Andy Lau) find themselves caught in a melee with toughs in a Manila café, are shot with a stylized detachment that seems less concerned with capturing the physical sensations of physical assault and endangerment than in projecting how Cheung’s narcissistic character might react according to his perception of such a situation (Figure 11.1).

Stephen Teo, describing another of Wong’s films, but in terms that accurately describe *Days of Being Wild*, notes that “such a violent response is not out of character [for the protagonist], but it is meant effectively as a touch of irony signaling the romance” that is always the dominant mood in Wong’s films (2005, 22). Such an observation illustrates the affective nature of Wong’s films, which elicit powerful responses in viewers not through traditional cinematic means of mimesis and reaction but rather one in which the onscreen and diegetic action is often at odds with viewerly sensation. Violence and the scaffolding
of Hong Kong’s trademark action genre are frequent sites of this peculiarity of Wong’s evocative, generically evacuated style. In striking contrast to the “delirious kinetic exhilaration” that David Bordwell believes to be the hallmark of Hong Kong film action, where “force of the movement and its onscreen presentation would stir in the viewer’s body a palpable echo of the actor’s gesture,” Wong’s movie violence is oddly aestheticized and distanced, conveying not action but the tumult of interior emotions that a person might feel in such situations (2001, 90, 91). Indeed, in further illustration of the unusual, inverted, or second-order invention of Wong’s filmmaking, it could be argued that the protagonist in Days of Being Wild acts not in accordance with the quasi-violent action one might expect in Hong Kong’s Ah Fei genre but rather as if he (or the director) has internalized too many Ah Fei movies.

One way of conceptualizing violence’s subtle but important role in Wong’s cinematic style thus is the way that violent action and imagery specific to film genre migrates, in his treatment, from the genre to the director’s own aesthetic. This generic and aesthetic reinvention—realized in indelible cinematic moments such as the incongruous, almost after-the-fact nature of the scuffles in Days of Being Wild or the searing, overexposed lighting by which the kiss in the telephone booth is captured in As Tears Go By—i s typical of Wong’s rapturous visual style, and is characterized by how those representational decisions depart from the more conventional tendencies of the genres and film traditions that the movies otherwise invoke. Similar scenes also occur in Chungking Express, Fallen Angel, and Ashes of Time, the trio of movies Wong developed after the two previously discussed, but given the intertextual relationship of Days of Being Wild to In the Mood for Love and 2046, it may be more useful to jump straight to those films made at the peak of his local and international fame to see how they reiterate his variations upon the violence associated with Hong Kong’s rich film tradition of social realism.3 Through a tight temporal progression that begins in 1962 or 1963 (the setting of Days of Being Wild), proceeds to 1965 (the setting of In the Mood for Love), and concludes in 1966 and 1967 (when 2046 takes place), a number of Wong’s films dwell in a momentous era in local history, when a growing restlessness and dissension among the Hong Kong population marked the emergence of a new and distinctly local culture. The hold of this era on the director’s imagination and in his films is often explained autobiographically, as it was in 1963 that Wong, still a child, relocated with his family from Shanghai to Hong Kong.

Such autobiographic accounts of his films’ frequent return to the setting and imagery of the mid-1960s, however, fail to acknowledge the oddly unrealistic quality of his images, which are often hermetically isolated upon a handful of characters presented in interiors devoid of other people. It also overlooks another likely connection of this setting to cinematic social realism and its treatment of screen violence, a particular reference that such cinematic interest in the 1960s might otherwise invite. In fact, the latest and final film in this de facto trilogy, 2046, explicitly images this history as violence, in the form of several fleeting scenes early in the film that depict the street riots that paralyzed Hong Kong in both 1966 and 1967, and in which many residents were killed and injured (Figure 11.2). Portrayed in grainy black-and-white newreel footage and overlaid with Tony Leung’s voiceover reference to how in these years “the city was disrupted by riots,” these momentary but nevertheless explicit glimpses of historical context are striking, one of a just handful of moments in Wong’s oeuvre when news footage and voiceover broadcasts are used to historically situate the plot.4 That the subject of this extraordinarily unusual instance of detailed historical realism within Wong’s filmmaking is quasi-violent social protest only underscores how disinterested his films typically are in socially realistic depictions of violence. Instead, typical of the introspective contemplation of memory and irretrievable loss that pervades Wong’s movies, the brief glimpses in 2046 of the 1960s Hong Kong street riots exist not to historicize the film (which, after all, consists of a significant number of scenes set in the future). Rather, by privileging subjectivity and personal trauma, the images of the 1966–1967 riots in 2046 function as traces of Wong’s generic differentiation from that era and the traditions of cinematic social realism for which that era is known. Betraying the emptiness and narrative irrelevance of the violence those images portray, this most realistic instance of screen violence within Wong’s oeuvre paradoxically affirms the filmmaker’s prevailing concern with interior subjectivities and emotional experiences rather than physical suffering and injury.

This combination of estrangement and social realism within Wong’s films exemplifies his idiosyncratic use of screen violence, particularly in contrast to the social realism that is such an important contrast to the more extravagant representation of violence with which Hong Kong film is globally identified. In stark contrast to the romantic and highly stylized violence of action auteurs such as John Woo and Ringo Lam, Wong deploys more subtle, infrequent, and seemingly incidental moments of violence that nevertheless are deeply
rooted in local genres in which such outbursts of violence are subordinate to the social emphasis of the narrative. Wong's characteristic interest in romance and interpersonal relationships, however, also differentiates his films from the more social interests of other local predecessors such as Ann Hui, Allen Fong, Derek Yee, and even Tsui Hark, and accordingly manifests in an interestingly evacuated and even solipsistic use of screen violence not to figure social and physical suffering — as is typically used in social realism and the work of the Hong Kong New Wave — but rather as a formal device against which the intensity of emotional experience is heightened. Such use of cinematic violence is a significant departure from the social realist tradition that informed much of the Hong Kong New Wave, and might be understood as a phenomenon in which violence has migrated from cinematic representation to a violence upon the film practice itself. It suggests alternate contexts beyond social realism and the Hong Kong New Wave for understanding Wong's use of screen violence, particularly calling attention to the director's more commercial influences as well as his mentor Patrick Tam, whose idiosyncratic combination of commercial elements with auteur vision has important precedents for Wong.

Commercial filmmaking, Patrick Tam, and an alternative mode in screen violence

Perhaps the most obvious example of screen violence in Hong Kong cinema is the visceral, gut-wrenching action associated with the heroic bloodshed films by which local auteurs such as John Woo, Tsui Hark, Ringo Lam, and others helped popularize Hong Kong film among global audiences in the mid-1980s and 1990s. Because of ardent cult and critical attention won by movies such as The Killer, Full Contact, and Swordsman 2, popular knowledge of violence in Hong Kong film probably most commonly invites images of kinetic physical combat, bodies jerking with gunfire and ridden with bullets, and bloodstained heroes and villains baptized in the bloody consequences of their violent action. More nuanced and extensive knowledge of Hong Kong cinema may contextualize that imagery of assault and injury with the themes of loyalty and honor that those films inherited from the wuxia and kung-fu traditions of martial arts films long central to local cinema, and for which these ying yang pian or heroic bloodshed films were named, but the prevailing notion of violence in the local film industry during the years in which Wong established himself was dominated by these increasingly conventionalized aspects of violence in cinematic plot and imagery. These films also provide an important contrast with Wong's uses of screen violence. Like the martial arts films that are an important predecessor to — and an unmistakable contrast with — the unvarnished realism and social detail that characterize the Hong Kong New Wave, violence in the more commercial action and crime films of the 1980s and 1990s is a highly stylized, frequent, and often motivating aspect of the plot. To more effectively cast attention upon the scenes of corporeal assault and suffering, the physical setting in which violence occurs often is sketchy and evoked in the barest of details, and in further contrast with the New Wave and social realist tradition, the individuals upon whom its effects are visited are usually the only psychologically characterized characters of the story, where instead of arising as organic consequences of class struggle and domestic tension, violence and physical assault or suffering are prevailing elements of the plot.

Somewhat less familiar outside Hong Kong and cult film enthusiasts, however, but of considerable significance in contextualizing violence within Hong Kong film, are horror and other related genres depicting physical assault and suffering that might not obviously belong to the genres of action and crime. These films run the gamut of demon and ghost films based in Chinese spiritual traditions of the supernatural to overly exploitative movies such as the notorious Category III films which during the 1990s became an increasingly significant sector of the Hong Kong film market due to its calculated traffic in sex and gore. Violence in either of these commercial film traditions is also graphic, excessive, and spectacular, and reflects the hybrid and often extravagant nature of Hong Kong's frenetic, eager-to-please hypercommercial filmmaking. The hugely popular 1985 cadaver comedy Mr Vampire, for example, includes disemboweling of chickens and snakes, and although motivated in the plot as a practice of exorcism, the graphic imagery nevertheless might recall the much more inflammatory content of the rat and cat torture in Dangerous Encounter, and arguably is more shockingly incongruous precisely because it occurs in the midst of an irreverently campy genre mash-up rather than the nihilistic black comedy of Tsui Hark's saturnine vision. This capacity of Hong Kong film to deploy imagery of dismemberment and other forms of corporeal violence for purely titillating or spectacular purposes is also apparent in Naked Killer, local trash mogul Wong Jing's notoriously lurid 1992 tale about lesbian assassins. Although that film's plot and action involve threats of castration, an impaled body, apparently inexhaustible gunfire, and a body count borrowed from the contemporary fashion for gangster films, the movie's preeminent attraction is obviously its eroticism. Like Mr Vampire in its cynical use of screen violence, Naked Killer exemplifies one strand of highly commercial Hong Kong film. Unlike the gangster and triad films with which these films are contemporary and to which they posed perhaps their most significant box office competition, these highly commercial horror and Category III films traffic in very different forms of violence that invest those moments with little moral or dramatic importance.

These oddly evacuated examples of screen violence within Hong Kong's more commercial cinema are more relevant to Wong Kar-wai than they may at first appear. Like many filmmakers Wong often supplements his earnings by directing advertisements, thereby demonstrating his ability to oversee more commercial fare than the unconventional and occasionally challenging films upon which he has built his reputation. As Wong's fame has increased such
commisions have only grown more lucrative and prominent, and while many of these examples, such as the advertising spots and short films he helmed for BMW, Chivas Regal, Lancôme, Phillips, and Motorola, shamelessly reproduce elements of the critically acclaimed films that brought the director to the attention of those global brands, they also reiterate Wong's deep investment in the most conventional of narrative premises, of which suspense and violence are particularly prominent. Wong's short film The Follow, for example, hinges upon both the threat and revelation of violence for its narrative tension. The nine-minute spot, commissioned by German automaker BMW as part of a series of short films directed by a variety of leading world filmmakers such as Tony Scott, John Frankenheimer, and Ang Lee, stars cooly powerful British actor Clive Owen as a high-end private detective hired to tail a movie star's purportedly unfaithful wife. Anticipating Owen's later work in big-budget action thrillers like Children of Men or The Internationale, the film seems to threaten an outburst of violence with every swerve of the luxury sport vehicle that is both the advertisement's subject and motivation, until the detective discovers that the woman is fleeing domestic violence, and with this plot revelation the film abruptly reroutes violence into romantic liberation, as the formidable detective allows his object to complete her escape and he returns his fee to his employer with his own barely suppressed threat.

More generally, long before these highly visible examples of expressly commercial filmmaking, Wong began his career by building relationships with influential industry figures whose own uses of screen violence may have exerted significant artistic influence upon Wong. The director has long been close with Jeff Lau, a director, producer, and all around industry figure whose movies like Treasure Hunt, Haunted Cop Shop, and All for the Winner represent a much more commercial profile than Wong. The friends met during their apprenticeship and have worked together on a number of projects, with Wong providing scripts for several of Lau's early films, including Haunted Cop Shop and the stylish 1991 swordsman pastiche Saviour of the Soul, and Lau parodying his friend's more arty Ashes of Time with the farcical Eagle Shooting Heroes, an adaptation of the same Jin Yong story on which Ashes of Time is based, but which Lau completed far more quickly and released a year before Wong's film. As suggested by this short selection of Lau's collaborative history with Wong, the latter possesses a commercial flair whose awareness of contemporary trends may not be obvious in his own work. Although many of Lau's own films are genre mash-ups that merge comedy and other local genres and traditions in the eclecticism often typical of Hong Kong film, some of the more prominent films produced by Lau are directly in line with contemporary trends regarding screen violence. Coolie Killer, for example, a gripping 1982 actioner directed by Terry Tong but which Lau produced, is about a clean-shaven assassin (played by handsome leading man Charlie Chin) that is often retrospectively thought to inaugurate the "hero" movies that would later be associated with John Woo. The earlier film includes spectacular sequences of violent action, such as a band of roller-skating assassins ambushing a victim in his high-rise apartment, and though the movie has no direct connection to Wong through Lau, Coolie Killer's perceived anticipation of Woo's heroic films has important resonance for Wong, who more than a decade later would fashion his own detailed and unmistakably specific reference to A Better Tomorrow, Woo's breakthrough 1986 film.

In an early sequence in Fallen Angels, for example, Wong's 1995 character study of the dysfunctional and alienated emotional lives of an assassin and his female handler shows the killer—played by clean-cut heartthrob Leon Lai—double-barrel blasting his way into a restaurant's private dining room and successfully exiting while discarding his emptied guns and cartridges in the potted plants that line the restaurant corridor. The scene—an unmistakable allusion to Woo's famous restaurant killing in A Better Tomorrow, complete with welloffered assassin and potted plants incongruously associated with lethal violence—demonstrates Wong's ease with mimicking contemporary local uses of screen violence, even as he frames that imagery for very different ends. After all, Wong's film uses this overtly referential sequence of heroic gunplay in Fallen Angel not to romanticize or hagiographize his protagonist, as occurs in Coolie Killer and A Better Tomorrow, but rather to highlight the character's emotionally stunted psyche. Like Chungking Express, the film Wong made very quickly in the midst of Fallen Angel and Ashes of Times, and whose similar pair of contrasting stories is punctuated by violence (in the story of a desperate drug trafficker) but is succeeded with an entirely violence-free second story about romance between a beat policeman and a quirky food counter worker, Fallen Angel also bookends violence with an overarching concern with exploring emotional dysfunction. In Fallen Angel this idea is conveyed both immediately, in a somewhat comical scene immediately following the restaurant killing when the unflappable assassin is almost flummoxed by an unexpected encounter with a former schoolmate, as well as over the course of the film, which implicitly contrasts the meaninglessness and emotional alienation of the assassin with the rich emotional life of a deaf-mute, who despite his impairment has rewarding relationships with his father as well as the random customers he ambushes with guerilla tactics which only look violent but which instead build deeply rewarding emotional connections.

This wry and occasionally romantically comic treatment of screen violence in Wong's films is not limited to the filmmaker's friendship with Lau. Less personal and more specifically sited in business is Wong's relationship with Alan Tang, the longtime industry icon whose production company financed As Tears Go By and Days of Being Wild, and to whom Wong was introduced by Lau after Tang's investment in Haunted Cop Shop. Once a romantic leading man known for female-targeted romances and melodramas during the 1960s, Tang reinvented himself in the late 1970s and 1980s when he founded his production companies Wing-Scope and In-Gear, particularly honing in on the contemporary fashion for triad and crime genres by casting himself as a stately, self-possessed older gang leader or crime lord within these films, which were
oriented at a youth audience. Tang’s vehicles offered Wong unusual opportunities for creative development. As with Saviour of the Soul, the film Wong scripted for Lau and whose mysterious plot of stylish assassins ensnored in a romantic triangle is the subject of much fan ridicule, the scripts that Wong developed for Tang during this period exhibit a divergent take upon contemporary crime formulas that would flower in Wong’s own films. In the wonderfully titled 1987 film Flaming Brothers, for example, where Tang plays a paternal dai la (Cantonese for “older brother” and a triad convention for gang leader) fiercely protective of his younger mate since their days as street orphans, Wong’s narrative variation upon this evident attempt to exploit the recent craze for Woo-style hero films starring Chow Yun-fat mixes spectacular gunplay with homosexual repartee regarding the characters played by Tang and co-star Chow. Although the movie’s finale is a sustained and elaborately choreographed gun battle whose final image of the two men expiring their final breaths before each other’s faces presages Woo’s The Killer by two years, the first part of the film is rife with lighthearted homophobic ribbing among various characters and even by the men themselves, as if knowingly playing upon the homoerotic intensity of the male-male friendships that is an oft-noted aspect of Woo’s far more widely known films.

Although it might go too far to suggest that the slyly queer perspective underlying Flaming Brothers prefigures the gay love story of Happy Together, Wong’s Cannes-winning 1997 film about a tumultuous affair whose alternate scenes of romantic interludes and lovers’ fights has been described by Jeremy Tambling as “lovemaking indistinguishable from violence,” the earlier script demonstrates the ways in which the highly commercial employment that Wong found in his early career helped nurture his more idiosyncratic interests (Tambling 2003). This context of Wong’s commercial connections would merge with his New Wave influences through collaborations with Patrick Tam, the acclaimed filmmaker whose oblique uses of contemporary Hong Kong film forms is surely one of Wong’s most important precursors. It was Tam, after all, who introduced Wong to the work of Argentinean writer Manuel Puig, whose novel The Buenos Aires Affair inspired Happy Together. Trained initially as a cinematographer and known for his work as a film editor, by the mid-1970s Tam was already an award-winning television director at local network TVB, where he helmed critically acclaimed series such as Superstar Specials (1975), CID (1976), and Seven Women (1976). These well-known television programs are themselves an interesting example of socially conscious creative entertainment that has long been a factor of Hong Kong media and particularly the ways in which violence may appear on screen. CID was a serial policier developed in collaboration with the Hong Kong Police and specifically focusing upon the force’s Criminal Investigation Department. Both it and Seven Women, an award-winning miniseries whose seven programs separately focused upon the lives of individual female characters, were heavily researched series whose loosely fictional stories were often based on real cases and explored the injustices experienced by disempowered individuals such as women and the working poor. As Esther Yau describes the series, in an illuminating analysis of Tam’s “ciné-modernism” and the fetishistic power of art direction and mise-en-scene that has important reverberations with Wong’s work, sets and props in Tam’s movies evoke the “secret violence” behind status symbols and acquisition of contemporary life (Yau 2011).

This empathy for female subjectivity that informs Tam’s films is an important precedent for Wong, as well as the unconventional editing style that defines Tam’s work as film director. The similarities and influences between the internationally acclaimed filmmaker and his more senior mentor are multiple. Tam introduced Wong to Christopher Doyle, after having previously worked with the cinematographer in Tam’s own films Burning Snow (1988) and My Heart is that Eternal Rose (1989), and in Love Massacre (1981) and Nomad (1982). Tam also worked with William Chang Suk-ping, the art director often cited alongside Doyle as an instrumental contributor to Wong’s vision. My Heart is that Eternal Rose features a young Tony Leung Chiu-wai, since then the star of many of Wong’s most acclaimed films, in an early key role. Wong himself has explicitly acknowledged the parallels between Wong’s As Tears Go By and Tam’s Final Victory, on which Wong worked the year before as screenwriter (Teo 2005, 16). Gangster romances appearing in the midst of the hero fashion, As Tears Go By and Final Victory both build upon the intense human relationship and emotional feeling for which Woo’s films had been so influential, but instead of distorting them into the quirky homoerotic allusions of Flaming Brothers these films directly overseen by either Tam or Wong are squarely grounded in heterosexual romances that pit the gang members’ brotherly loyalties against their female love interest.

In Tam’s Final Victory, for example, Eric Tsang is a loyal and kind-hearted underling who finds himself falling for his dai lo’s wife. Although this premise of a subordinate torn between gang loyalty and his growing love for the leader’s gentle and entrapped moll is an issue that Tam would explore again two years later in My Heart is that Eternal Rose, Tam’s film after Wong’s As Tears Go By, for the purposes of this discussion what is particularly intriguing is how the fusion of romance and threat in Final Victory is portrayed by Tam through sequences that anticipate the most memorable scene in As Tears Go By. In Final Victory’s transfixing romantic sequence, Tsang and the two women playing the gang leader’s wife and mistress flee an opposing gang, who chase them with knives in the street. Commandeering a car, the more jaded mistress begins to flee with Tsang while his love, the wife, is alone, vulnerable not only to the raging gang leaders but also – in the extravagant action choreography so typical of Hong Kong film – to a huge semi-truck barreling down the roadway far too quickly to stop. The carefully choreographed and edited action in this sequence thus is a perfect dramatization of the film’s theme of criminal membership and the threat that it imposes to loving human relationships not based on violence, and Tam, like Wong, orchestrates the violence to augment the romance. In an
indelible climax to the sequence that anticipates Wong’s famous kiss inside the telephone box in As Tears Go By, Tam shows Tsang leaning precipitously out of the racing car, lifting the woman to safety at the last possible second in an outcome that simultaneously saves imperiled bodies from danger (the objective of tension-filled action) by swooning evocation of rapture (the goal of romance). Interestingly, the breathtaking climax of this sequence in Final Victory grows more luminous in its final moments, presaging the similar overexposure during the embrace in As Tears Go By, and providing a striking instance of aesthetic affinity between the two films beyond the more general aspects of their tone or mood. (Indeed, as if in further illustration of the uncanny similarities of viewer response that the filmmaker shares with Wong, Pak Tong Cheuk calls this specific scene in Final Victory “the most romantic” of all of Tam’s films (2008, 129).)

Although it is possible that such amplified brightness in the film image could have been attained on set through light changes and other photographic techniques, the exterior setting of the scenes in both films makes that assumption unlikely and instead suggests the aesthetic effects attained through processing, during the post-production phase that is a central part of Wong’s creative process. This emphasis upon editing — the discipline in which Tam was trained and for which he is famed — is not often accorded the same attention as are cinematography and art direction in the tool kit of techniques distinguishing Wong’s vision, but it is an important part of Wong’s style and one that might be specifically traced to Patrick Tam. Indeed, although Final Victory is the most obvious and frequently cited instance of affinity between the two directors, it is notable that Tam’s two earlier films also prefigure certain elements of Wong.

The Swind, for example, Tam’s first film, and a movie widely cited as a cinematic breakthrough typical of the innovations of the Hong Kong New Wave, is a period swordsman film that feels nothing like a traditional wuxia film in that its throbbing electronic soundtrack and frequent use of freeze frame and zoom convey a very modern sensibility. This style, a kind of deconstructed wuxia, is an obvious precursor to Wong’s Ashes of Times, which Tam edited for Wong, and although both swordsman films are relative exceptions in the otherwise reliably urban settings of both directors’ other films, Tam’s initial interest in the sword — an historically rich weapon of violence in local film tradition — returned in his second film, Nomad. In that film — another critical favorite and one whose Ah Fei-like study of the enmity and disaffection among the young is more typical of the director’s urban and contemporary sensibility — a sword appears in brief, extremely graphic scenes of fatal stabblings and decapitation arising in the course of a bizarre subplot involving a covert Japanese Red Army agent.

Investigating the bizarre mix of swordplay and Ah Fei in Tam’s Nomad is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the movie is still useful in illustrating how the violence usually associated with Hong Kong cinema’s most conventional and commercial forms is transformed by Tam not in their production, photography, or mise-en-scene but rather during editing, the craft in which Tam’s influence upon Wong is most directly apparent. In Tam’s editing of his own films, such as Nomad and Final Victory, moments of screen violence are always subordinate to the romance and psychological introspection that are the films’ dominant concern. In these films, bodily injury or the physical threat implied by violent events may be visually depicted, but its representation occurs amidst a kind of parenthetical or deliberately incongruous inclusion that evokes Tam’s primarily psychological interest and which is often achieved by unconventional editing. Nomad exemplifies this tension between graphic violence and emotional estrangement. In the sword attacks portrayed in the film, violence erupts abruptly, is vividly depicted, and then equally as quickly is abandoned by a visual and narrative return to the other surviving characters, with little attempt to portray the consequences of violence such as might be expected in almost any other narrative tradition. (After it happens, for example, no mention is made in the film of the sadistic, post-coital murder of one man, and the film’s climactic series of sword executions on an idyllic beach are portrayed deliberately open-endedly, with the traumatized survivors numbly drifting away in a luxury yacht.) The violent episodes thus take on an onerific effect that Nomad’s bizarre plot only heightens, in which bodies on screen seem less vulnerable to violence than the films themselves, which attain their unique mood and style through Tam’s innovative editorial technique of appropriating aspects of commercial cinema only to abruptly truncate them — as the director himself describes it, “telling a traditional story in an untraditional manner,” differentiating himself in a way that “revitalized or subverted the genre.”

This peculiarity of Tam’s style and its oft-noted but rarely documented influence upon Wong is readily apparent in Days of Being Wild, the first film of Wong’s that Tam edited, and hence a movie whose unusual use of violence is not only reminiscent of Tam’s films but also directly associated with his idiosyncratic editing practice. As is well known, Wong initially developed the film based on vague connotations imbued in the film’s Chinese title, which in the late 1960s was used in Hong Kong to market James Dean’s Rebel without a Cause, but although the film was eagerly awaited by both critics and fans due to the commercial success of As Tears Go By, Days of Being Wild proved a disappointment when moviegoers hoping to find a similarly transporting story of tragic romance were instead confronted by the film’s languid, dilatory stories of failed ambitions and unfulfilled desires. Emblematic of the film’s challenge to viewers was its mysterious final image, a nearly two-minute long sequence devoid of dialogue and introducing an unnamed, anonymous character barely glimpsed through a mirror and whose relevance to the previous plots in the film is never made clear. Wong’s subsequent films and the knowledge about his oeuvre that has grown around them has since illuminated this character, played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai, as one of the recurring figures that anchor the loose trilogy of Days of Being Wild, In the Mood for Love, and 2046, but it is important to retrieve the effect that this curious editing decision had upon Wong’s film. Instead of the climactic violence that defiantly concludes As Tears Go By, for example, in the manner of contemporary action films, Tam ends Days of Being...
clarity of these studio images and particularly the posed nature of the ensemble photo that includes Leung among all the film’s major characters certainly underscores the vast difference between this original vision of the film and its final product (as well as how distributors sought to market that final product by presenting a more commercial version of the film that in fact has little relationship to its actual content). By highlighting both violent action and other, more meditative imagery, these images, which have little to do with the film’s final product, demonstrate the vast transformations that are known to occur in the post-production process of Wong’s filmmaking, transformations clearly resulting from editing, the very same skill for which Tam’s films are famed and which, in this particular film, were directly implemented by Tam himself.

Violence, Wong Kar-wai style

In a brief but insightful essay on Patrick Tam, Mary Wong has explored the older filmmaker’s distinct visual style in ways that presage Wong Kar-wai. As the scholar describes Tam’s film and television work, the director’s characteristic focus upon “complex human relationships and moral ambivalence” is often carved from popular subject matter through formal and stylistic deviations, such as the “fragmented narrative,” “grayish ambience,” and unheroic protagonist of Tam’s would-be gangster drama, Final Victory (Wong 2004, 434, 435). For Mary Wong, the many such ways that Tam’s films “deviate from the usual commercial route” illustrate how the idiosyncratic filmmaker is inextricable from the many other figures within Hong Kong’s diverse and extremely commercial industry, and although Mary Wong does not mention Wong Kar-wai aside from acknowledging his involvement in Final Victory, her account is invaluable in understanding how the younger, equally unique filmmaker is also a product of his industry, particularly with regard to the screen violence that for decades now has become one of the most clichéd characterizations of Hong Kong film (435). As Mary Wong observes of the graphic sword assaults in Tam’s Nomad, “aesthetics comes before everything else” (432), and this insight is also true of Tam’s most famous protégé. Unlike either the studied social realism of violence in much of the Hong Kong New Wave or the hagiographic, highly romanticized weaponry and combat of more commercial action and crime films, Wong Kar-wai’s films strive to achieve a visual and emotional effect by an idiosyncratic use of screen violence that evacuates the imagery and action of much of its narrative or visceral realism.

Many of the most memorable images from Wong’s films can be characterized by this understanding. The vivid image of an abattoir’s blood-soaked floor in Happy Together might on some very general sense recall the crimson tide of murder and violence in horror movies like The Shining or Hong Kong’s own Untold Story, but in the context of that film’s love story are instead a stunningly literal visualization of the character’s interiority, in which his heart is breaking.
A key fight sequence in *Ashes of Times* begins with spear points barely visible over the horizon—a classic film convention to portray visual perception of imminent threat that *wuxia* borrows from westerns—but over the course of that sequence such visual clarity is displaced by blurring, slow motion, and extreme close-up that subjectively conveys the protagonist's deteriorating vision, and ultimately concludes with an aerial long shot which reinforces the pathos of the scene by showing the blind swordsman pathetically spinning in self-defensiveness when no threat is near. These unusual sequences of visual imagery loosely invoke indicators of violence only to redirect their association from logically corporeal experiences towards a more subtle, tangential relationship in which these formal signifiers of imminent or past violence metaphorically reflect back upon subjective interiority. Entirely distinct from their affective sensation, these forms communicate in a kind of displaced objective correlative similar to the "infinite promise" that Eugenie Brinkema imagines in a cinematic hermeneutics where "every other formal element...[can] be opened up to being read," in which precisely because some images are mere "structure rather than an emotional expression, new possibilities for reading signs of affective disturbance are set loose" (2014, 21).

As *Tears Go By*, *Days of Being Wild*, *Chungking Express*, and *Fallen Angel* all have similarly exquisitely edited and photographed moments of action and violence, but, as previously noted, those passages within the films pale in comparison to the movies' other parts, particularly those emphasizing romance and longing rather than bodily threat and defensiveness. Think, for example, of the scenes in *Fallen Angel* where Michelle Reis's character eats noodles in a daze, indifferent to the fight that breaks out behind her, as well as another scene, later in the film, where the mute and the blonde playfully brutalize a sex doll, in a comic but nevertheless cathartic rejection of the woman's previous passivity and objectification. In neither scene does what looks like violence physically affect the protagonists, either because the characters are emotionally numb (Reis's character) or because they (the mute and blonde) yearn to feel. In *Fallen Angel* this tension or dissonance between foreground and background, action and tone exists within the *mise-en-scène*, but it arises from an idiosyncratic cinematic vision that is realized in editing, and the unexpected insights created by juxtaposition and context. *Happy Together*, for example, at one time was intended to end with one character's suicide. Aside from the obvious poignancy that would have retrospectively arisen with Cheung's actual suicide in 2003, that erstwhile violence within the story survives in the aforementioned abbatior images, the earlier images in the movie of Cheung's characters bandaged hands, as well as the purely formal audacity of the film's famous final image of Hong Kong upside down, a gestural audacity that recalls Tam's bizarre open-ending of *Days of Being Wild*. Like the lobby cards for *Days of Being Wild*, these images of screen violence are mere vestiges and foreshadows of a more complex formal violence, and by enhancing and coexisting with moments of romantic contemplation they demonstrate how violence is a crucial element of Wong's filmmaking. Despite or precisely because of their seeming unimportance, the odd defamiliarization or weirdly non-visceral effect of moments of violence in Tam's and Wong's films only underscores the directors' signature interest in emotional, interior tumult.

Thinking about violence in Wong's films as a form of visual style deliberately evacuated of the symbolic or social content in which many of his contemporaries work thus is helpful in understanding the director's positioning within local film traditions and how the filmmaker manipulates those traditions and imbues them with his own idiosyncratic signature. The lush visual style of *In the Mood for Love*, for example, has been described by one astute commentator as distinguished for its unusual attention to walls, which obstruct the depth of field conventionally expected within narrative film and whose richly patterned and opulently colored wallpapers mirror the vivid cheongsams sported by Maggie Cheung's character that are such an unforgettable aspect of the film (Hillenbrand 2010, 397–398). This visual attention to walls—another attribute also present in Tam's films—arguably harks back to the tenement film tradition long central to Hong Kong film since the 1950s and 1960s, in which walls are a stark reminder of the limited physical spaces available to most Hong Kong residents. But it is also, more generally, a thematic reminder of the play between interior and exterior, surface and depth that is such a signature element of Wong's films. Violence, in Wong Kar-wai's hands, is another way of putting these issues into play. In Wong's films violence often functions in an unusual, defamiliarized way that assigns to formal surfaces the substantive materiality usually associated with bodies. Like a visual or thematic kind of negative space, Wong's screen violence tends to occur without significant visceral effect, precisely because by doing so it heightens its emotional, interior and often romantic content, attributes most commonly recognized as quintessential elements in a Wong Kar-wai film.

This primarily aesthetic and romantic approach to screen violence that distinguishes Wong Kar-wai's films is wittily summarized in *The Grandmaster*, a movie made after decades of local and international celebrity, and hence a film that distills many of the director's most admired tendencies. In a key fight sequence fairly early in the movie, when the film's protagonist, Ip Man, the famed martial arts instructor to Bruce Lee, squares off inside an upscale brothel with a female martial artist played by Zhang Ziyi, the female master coolly surveys their well-appointed surroundings and wryly expresses her "pity about the furniture." As a sound bite or quip uttered by a female the comment is striking for its inversion of the action genre's conventionally subordinate role of women in relation to men's role as the site of physical bravado, but the line is also interesting for pithily encapsulating the ways in which Wong's films deploy violence in a highly aestheticized way that is derived from its more conventional use in commercial Hong Kong film. Zhang Ziyi, after all, may be no more a martial artist than Tony Leung, but her role in the film is enhanced by her career-launching debut in *Crouching Tiger,*
Hidden Dragon, Ang Lee’s homage to swordsman films that helped launch the wuxia revival in Hong Kong film of the past decade. Similarly, The Grandmaster itself is but one of several films about Ip Man to have appeared in the half-decade surrounding Wong’s film, but which, unlike most of the other examples of the cycle, shows little interest in kung-fu realism or the martial arts lineage of Ip Man and Bruce Lee. Thus, when Zhang’s character Gong Er makes this memorable, somewhat humorous remark, the film is both engaging in the tradition of spectacular action punctuated with witty quips that is a hallmark of global action cinema, and also describing the way in which violence works in Wong’s films – that is, in a purely symbolic and notably physically inconsequential screen action that has no more corporeal sensation than the set dressing that is so lovingly detailed in Wong’s films.

In writing about the subject of violence in Wong Kar-wai’s films, this chapter’s title and subtitle play upon the prevailing characteristics by which assault, injury, and corporeal endangerment are adopted by this most evocative and visually rapturous of Hong Kong filmmakers. The title reproduces a quip from The Grandmaster to illustrate the dematerialized and purely conceptual role of physical combat within Wong’s films; the subtitle, as might be apparent from the opening references to Marsha Kinder’s important studies of screen violence within specific national cinemas, underscores the insights arising from a comparative approach to this most esoteric of Hong Kong filmmakers, whose visionary style is too often thought to aspire to a European or sui generis manner that has little or no relationship to the vibrant and prolific local industry in which he gained his start. By modifying Kinder’s national focus towards a single director, however, my subtitle emphasizes how Wong’s films appropriate and transform local cinematic traditions in order to create a new and original signature style. Wong’s mentor and occasional collaborator Patrick Tam is an important and yet often overlooked precursor for this idiosyncratic adaptation of local film conventions and trends, and by studying the way that Wong and Tam both use editing to complicate conventional modes of screen violence in Hong Kong film – sometimes in cases of direct collaboration between the two talents – we see how the incoherent and seemingly exceptional violence that occasionally surfaces in Wong’s films instead exerts a crucial role in shaping Wong’s distinct vision and particularly the ways in which his romantic contribution to world and Hong Kong film is best approached.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to the Museum of Chinese in America for their generosity in making possible some of the images in this essay.

Notes

1. As Tears Go By was the 32nd highest-grossing film that year, a remarkable ranking for a first-time director.

2. See also Brunette (2005), who calls the same scene “the most powerful, emotionally convincing one in the entire film” (13).

3. In the Mood for Love, for example, centers on the growing attraction between Su Li zhen and Mr. Chow, played by Tony Leung Chiu-wai, who joined Wong’s repertory of recurring actors in the mysterious final sequence of Days of Being Wild. 2046 extends this loose intersexuality within Wong’s oeuvre, as Leung reappears as an emotionally withdrawn writer unable to match the love he once felt for Su Li zhen, and just as Maggie Cheung’s casting as Su Li zhen in In the Mood for Love recalls her appearance under the same name in Days of Being Wild, 2046 reprises a character – the freewheeling but nevertheless longing party girl and dance club hostess Lulu – who first appeared in Days of Being Wild and is played by Carina Lau in both films.

4. Perhaps connectedly, two similar moments occur in the final sequences of Happy Together and In the Mood for Love. In Happy Together Tony Leung’s character glimpses a newcast announcing Deng Xiaoping’s death while he dines at the Taipei noodle stall. Similarly, the transition to Angkor Wat at the end of In the Mood for Love is introduced by footage of Charles de Gaulle’s 1966 visit to Cambodia. Although this insertion of historical imagery within In the Mood for Love underscores the film’s subsequent connection to 2046, it lacks the narrative reiteration that distinguishes the accompanying voiceover in the later film.

5. For a different reading of this scene that also explores the affective qualities of Wong’s films, see Chapter 5.

6. Although the homosexual pun works only in the film’s English title, the Chinese title, which roughly translates as ‘dragon-and-tiger fights in the jiang hu,’ still illustrates how central violence is to marketing of the movie. Thanks to Howard Choy for clarifying usage and translation.


9. For a literal or more conventional example of this kind of visual exteriorization of emotional interiority within Hong Kong film, see the final sequence of The Trial (Manfred Wong, 1993), in which a stalwart officer survives a gunshot only to bleed through his bandages when he realizes his little sister is in love.

10. For example Ip Man (Wilson Yip, 2008), Ip Man 2: The Legend of the Grandmaster (2010), The Legend is Born-Ip Man (Herman Yau, 2010), and Ip Man: The Final Fight (Herman Yau, 2013).

References


