

MASTER'S THESIS

Modernist aesthetics in the films of Wong Kar-wai

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ABSTRACT

Wong Kar-wai is a premier avant-garde auteur of Hong Kong cinema. In the existing research, postmodernism is considered as a predominant approach to shed light on Wong's aesthetics, poetics and politics. Being the iconoclastic 'poet of time,' Wong Kar-wai is extolled as a leading figure for his postmodernist style of visually unique and emotional resonant film works. Recurring motifs, such as alienation and rejection, time and memory, pursuit and loss, are regarded as representations of cultural and political anxieties of Hong Kong people in the context of 1980s and 1990s. Wong's characteristic exoticism and cosmopolitanism in his films also distinguishes him from other Chinese-language directors.

However, when we expand the scope of the postmodern terrain, we find modernism and its attendant aesthetics are just as relevant and important as postmodernism to the understanding of Wong's oeuvre. This thesis evokes a comparative perspective of modernism proposed by Eugene Lunn as an aesthetic approach, with an illustrative analysis by using David Bordwell's and Kristin Thompson's work on non-Hollywood cinema. This approach emphasizes four major directions of the social and cultural aspects influenced by modernism in art. Using this approach requires researchers to find cinematic representations of modernism in terms of aesthetic self-consciousness, juxtaposition of time, ambiguity and dehumanization within the film.

This research takes Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time Redux* (2008) as a case study to explore the alternative interpretations beyond postmodernism. The investigation of Wong's uses of modernist approach involves the analysis of his experiments of conventional film techniques and strategic employment of the *mise-en-scene*, camera

angles, lenses, lighting, and music, which constitute his pictorial world. My assertion is that Wong's juxtaposition of time and space creates an elusive and ambiguous fictional world in response to his reflection on the dehumanization of an integral individual subject in the modernized world.

Key Words: Wong Kar-wai, Modernism, Modernity, Film Aesthetic, *Ashes of Time*

Redux

中文提要

王家衛是一位優秀的香港先鋒導演。在以往的研究中，後現代主義通常作為主要的理論和方法，來分析王的電影美學、詩學和政治訴求。他被譽為「時間詩人」，他的電影也具有鮮明的後現代影像和情感特徵。他的作品中經常出現的母體，比如疏離和拒絕，時間和記憶，追求和失去等等，都被認為是反映香港八十和九十年代人們的文化和政治焦慮的最佳代表。王家衛作品中強烈的異域情調和世界性特點，也讓他從其他華語電影導演中脫穎而出，與歐美電影大師齊名。

但是，如果我們能夠擴大後現代主義的研究範疇，我們會發現，現代主義及其所代表的電影美學跟後現代主義壹洋，對我們理解王家衛的作品有著同洋相關性和重要性。本文就將以美國史學家 Eugene Lunn 提出的現代主義美學比較觀作為主要研究理論和方法，結合 David Bordwell 和 Kristin Thompson 的關於非主流電影的觀點作為論述補充。這個研究理論和方法概括了現代藝術作品中的四大特點。運用此方法要求研究者探索電影中所體現出的藝術自覺反思性、對時間並置的處理、對曖昧和不確定性的表現、以及對顛覆對完整人性的現代主義社會和文化思潮。

本文將選取王家衛最具爭議和顛覆性的電影作品《東邪西毒》（導演版，2008）作為案列，嘗試對其電影作品進行後現代主義之外的分析和解讀。對王家衛電影的現代主義研究將包括：他對電影技術的反傳統實驗和精湛地使用場面調度、拍攝角度、鏡頭、燈光、音樂等組成電影的各種手段和技巧。我認為，正是通過對傳統和主流電影的有意識的顛覆和創新，對電影時空的並置和重建，王家衛在他的迷離又曖昧的電影裏，深刻地表達了其對現實社會的現代主義的思考，和揭示了現代社會對人性的否定和現代性在人們生活中無處不在的滲透和侵蝕。

【關鍵詞】王家衛，現代主義，現代性，電影美學，《東邪西毒》
(2008)

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