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What We're Watching



Greetings from The Paley Center for Media's Education Department!

Teen Transmitters Takeover!

For eight weeks, What We're Watching is being taken over by the Paley Center's Teen Transmitters internship cohort!

Each week a different pair of interns will share their thoughts on the 2023 media landscape along with personalized recommendations. This week we hear from two of our lead interns, Ella Smith, who will be entering her freshman year at Northwestern University in the fall, and Kenneth Gao, a senior at Stuyvesant High School. Enjoy this unique educational opportunity to hear directly from young voices about media that impacts them!

As always, if you have any questions, thoughts, or ideas, don't hesitate to reach out to us at eduny@paleycenter.org.

Happy viewing,
Rebekah Fisk, Director of Education
Carlos Pareja, Manager of Education
Joseph Cupo, TT 2023 Summer Educator

What We're Watching: Hong Kong Cinema

In the mid-20th century, Hong Kong's economy boomed, experiencing increased activity in business, tourism and film industries. By the 1980s, the city became home to the third largest film market in the world. This followed commercial success and the critical acclaim of the Hong Kong New Wave, a movement which persisted through the handover of British Hong Kong to Mainland China.

Hong Kong's "New Wave" film movement started in the late 1970s and extended into the early 2000s. New Wave films were the brainchildren of a generation of Cantonese filmmakers who grew up in British-occupied Hong

Kong, received education overseas, and previously worked in television. Over time, the movement became self-referential, as directors who grew up on early New Wave films had their own shot at creating media. Characterized by depth and modernity of their thematic content and experimentation in technique, New Wave films subvert traditional expectations of Hong Kong culture, especially in regards to their depictions of women and queer people. These films offered audiences a chance to appreciate slower and more romantic takes on the human condition at a time when the industry had become saturated by the action films of the likes of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan.

This Week's Recommendations:



Lan Yu

Stanley Kwan's 2001 film *Lan Yu* is an unabashedly queer piece of New Wave cinema. The film follows the titular Lan Yu, an undergraduate prostitute looking for extra money. He enters into a sexual relationship with Chen Handung, a wealthy client who takes on Yu as a fling. The film navigates their turbulent relationship as their principles and attachment changes over the course of a decade. *Lan Yu* is adapted from "A Story from Beijing," a 1996 web novel that was instrumental in establishing an online space for gay men in China whose relationships were often derided as "hooliganism." Subversive in its nature, *Lan Yu* also uses the political situations of 1980s China to underscore the forces that push Handung and Yu together and apart time and again.



In the Mood for Love

New Wave's most famous director, Wong Kar Wai, released his Martin Scorsese-inspired crime drama film debut *As Tears Go By* in 1988. Since then, Wong has developed a rich filmography, with his most famous and critically acclaimed works being *Chungking Express* (1994), *Fallen Angels* (1995), and *In the Mood for Love* (2000). He is known for an iconic visual style crafted with cinematographer Christopher Doyle and constructing stories with nonlinear usage of time. While New Wave directors are known for the modernity of their filmmaking techniques and subject matter, several of Wong's films look to the past to evoke feelings of nostalgia for the colonial Hong Kong he grew up in. *In the Mood for Love* is emblematic of the patterns and characteristics of New Wave films throughout its romantic plot. Chow Mo-wan and Su Li-zhen are neighbors who discover that their spouses are cheating together and the two become closer over time as they are the only ones who understand the predicament the other is in. Costumes and score remind the viewer of the film's 1960s setting, as Li-zhen's wardrobe is full of cheongsams while scenes of romantic yearning are synced with songs popular in the mid-twentieth century.

Wong's work remains an enduring artistic influence on creators worldwide. The most recognizable example of this phenomenon is 2022's *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, whose sequences in the "Kung Fu Dimension" are underscored with the bittersweet tones that characterize Wong's filmography. His influence even goes past film. Wong and Doyle's visual style has recently become adopted into music video productions of the K-Pop industry. An example of this trend being Suzy's "Yes No Maybe" music video which

recreates the look of *Fallen Angels* to perfection. Last year, designer Marc Jacobs and Wong Kar Wai collaborated on a clothing line featuring famous lines and shots from his iconic New Wave movies.



Shaolin Soccer

Although he is not a New Wave director, director and actor Stephen Chow has a filmography similar to that of Wong Kar Wai's as their films adhere to the idea of the past. Chow rose to international acclaim in the 1990s for his blend of absurdist humor and Cantonese wordplay (known as *mo lei tau*), as well as his sharply choreographed sequences. Chow's most acclaimed work, *Shaolin Soccer* (2001) is presented as a feel-good story about downtrodden men finding success in the game of soccer. The story follows Sing, a homeless martial artist and disgraced soccer player "Golden Leg" as they attempt to build a team of soccer players that will catapult them into fame and glory. *Shaolin Soccer's* narrative embraces the Western influence of its New Wave background using archetypes observed in Joseph Campbell's monomyth. However, *Shaolin Soccer*, like many of Chow's films, rely on tradition to oppose antagonistic forces of their stories. The film depicts the use of Shaolin Kung Fu, a customary style of the martial art, to reinvent a modern sport and fix the ails of everyday living. Other Chow films, such as *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004) and *God of Cookery* (1996) romanticize the past either through the setting or the journeys their characters must go through.



Infernal Affairs

Infernal Affairs (2002) is a post-handover piece of Hong Kong New Wave cinema codirected by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak. It is one of countless Hong Kong movies whose main subjects are the police and delivers the message of how reunification affected the production of films made during the time. The film follows two men: Lau Kin-ming, an undercover triad member tasked with infiltrating the Hong Kong police force, and Chan Wing-yan, an undercover cop spying on the triad. After ten years of acting as double agents, both men grapple with identity and moral crises that come with their high risk and mentally demanding jobs. The characters' personal struggles mirror the clashing identities that Hong Kong citizens were facing at the time of the film's release and still exist today as a result of the adoption of "One Country, Two Systems" ideology. *Infernal Affairs* is also a case showing how the handover of Hong Kong to mainland China changed what social and political commentary directors were able to communicate through their work. The film's original ending did not comply with Chinese Film Administration regulations as it could be interpreted as promoting criminal activity thus leading to an alternative ending being shot and released in mainland China.

Hong Kong's New Wave marked an era in contemporary Hong Kong cinema in which filmmakers took bold and creative risks with the content and style of their work. Directors like Wai and Kwan represented the complicated ways in which humans bond with one another, while directors such as Chow remixed traditional genres in order to bring new flavors to existing forms of entertainment. Moreover, the movement's occurrence during a transitional point in Hong Kong's history is exemplary of the media's complicated

relationship with the world it cinematically depicts. However, these films' relationship with the larger social, cultural, and political atmosphere they were made in—and specifically how they address them—are worthwhile additions to your watch list.

Additional Hong Kong Cinema Recommendations:

The Illegal Immigrant (1985)

An Autumn's Tale (1987)

The God of Cookery (1996)

Suzhou River (2000)

[Vox Borders: "How 156 Years of British Rule shaped Hong Kong"](#) (2018)

Enjoy,

Ella and Kenneth

Photos—*Lan Yu*: Yongning Creative Workshop; *In The Mood for Love*: Jet Tone Production; *Shaolin Soccer*: Miramax, *Infernal Affairs*: Paramount Pictures



Saturday, August 26, 2023; 1:00 – 4:00 pm

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