



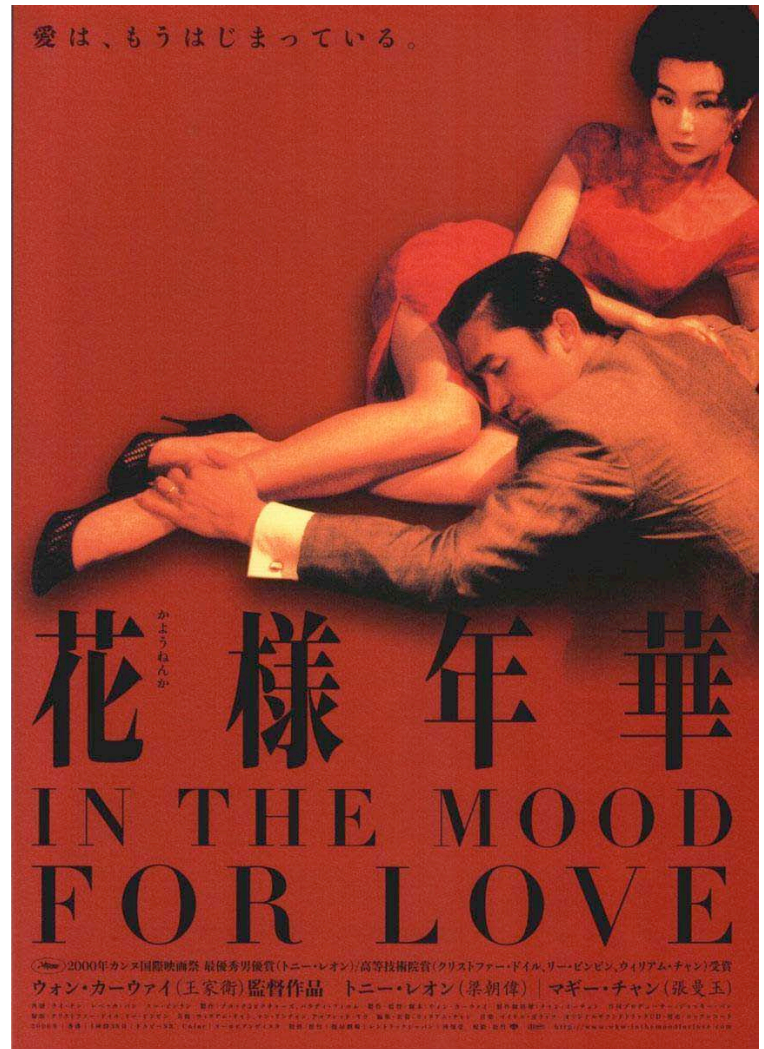
**Produced, directed and written** by Kar Wai Wong  
**Film Editing** by William Chang  
**Cinematography** by Christopher Doyle and Pin Bing Lee

**Maggie Cheung**...Su Li-zhen - Mrs. Chan  
**Tony Leung Chiu Wai**...Chow Mo-wan

**WONG KAR-WAI** (17 July 1956, Shanghai, China) has directed 19 films, some of which are *Dung che sai duk redux/ Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), *There's Only One Sun* (2007), *My Blueberry Nights* (2007), *2046* (2004), *The Hire* (2004), *Six Days* (2002), *The Follow* (2001), *Fa yeung nin wa/Hua yang nian hua/In the Mood for Love* (2000), *Chun gwong cha sit/Happy Together* (1997), *Duo luo tian shi/Doh lok tin si/Fallen Angels* (1995), *Dung che sai duk/Ashes of Time* (1994), *Chung Hing sam lam/Chung King Express* (1994), *A Fei zheng chuan/Days of Being Wild* (1990), and *Wong gok ka moon/As Tears Go By* (1988).

**CHRISTOPHER DOYLE** (2 May 1952, Sydney, Australia) has shot nearly 50 films, some of which are *Dung che sai duk redux/ Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), *Downloading Nancy* (2008), *Meeting Helen* (2007), *Lady in the Water* (2006), *2046* (2004), *Lü cha/Green Tea* (2003), *Ying xiong/Hero* (2002), *Six Days* (2002), *The Quiet American* (2002), *Fa yeung nin wa/Hua yang nian hua/In the Mood for Love* (2000), *Chun gwong cha sit/Happy Together* (1997), *Si Mian xia wa/Four Faces of Eve* (1996), *Duo luo tian shi/Doh lok tin si/Fallen Angels* (1995), *Dung che sai duk/Ashes of Time* (1994), *Chung Hing sam lam/Chung King Express* (1994), *A Fei zheng chuan/Days of Being Wild* (1990).

**MAGGIE CHEUNG** (20 September 1964, Hong Kong) has appeared in almost 90 films, some of which are *Dung che sai duk redux/ Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), *2046* (2004), *Clean* (2004), *Ying xiong/Hero* (2002), *Fa yeung nin wa/Hua yang nian hua/In the Mood for Love* (2000), *Yi jian zhong qing/Sausalito* (2000), *Le Bel hiver* (2000), *Augustin, roi du Kung-fu/Augustin, King of Kung-Fu* (1999), *Chinese Box* (1997), *Tian mi mi/Comrades: Almost a Love Story* (1996), *Dung che sai duk/Ashes of Time* (1994), *San tung gui see doi/Conjugal Affair* (1994), *Ching Se/Green Snake* (1993), *Shen Jing Dao yu Fei Tian Mao/Flying Dagger* (1993), *Chai gong/Ji Gong* (1993), *Chik geuk siu ji/Bare Footed Monk* (1993), *Se diu ying hung ji dung sing sai jaul/ The Eagle Shooting Heroes* (1993), *Zhan shen chuan shuo/Moon Warriors* (1993), *Zhui nan zi/Boys Are Easy* (1993), *Zhen de ai ni/True Love* (1992), *Bai mei gui/Blue Valentine* (1992), *Ging chaat goo si 3: Chiu kap ging*



*chaat/Supercop* (1992), *Shuang long hui/Twin Dragons* (1992), *Jia you xi shi/All's Well, Ends Well* (1992), *Haomen yeyan/Party of a Wealthy Family* (1991), *Zhi zai chu wei/Today's Hero* (1991), *A Fei zheng chuan/Days of Being Wild* (1990), *Ren zai Niu Yue/Full Moon in New York* (1990), *Gun gun hong chen/Red Dust* (1990), *Jian yu bu she fang/Haunted Jail House* (1990), *San ren xin shi jie/Heart Into Hearts* (1990), *Ji dong ji xia/The Iceman Cometh* (1989), *Liu jin sui yue/Last Romance* (1988), *Ging chaat goo si juk jaap/Jackie Chan's Police Story* (1988), *Wong gok ka moon/As Tears Go By* (1988), *Fei mao liu lang ji/Fat Cat* (1988), *Qiu ai gan si dui/How to Pick Girls Up* (1988), *Shuang fei lin men/Double Fattiness* (1988), *Ying zhao nu lang 1988/Call Girl '88* (1988), *Yue liang, xing xing, tai yang/Moon, Stars & Sun* (1988), *'A' gai waak juk jaap/Jackie Chan's Project A2* (1987), *Huang se gu shi/The Game They Called Sex* (1987), *Ging chaat goo si/Jackie Chan's Police Story* (1985), *Ching wa wong ji/Prince Charming* (1984), and *Yuen fan/Behind the Yellow Line* (1984).

**TONY LEUNG CHIU WAI** (27 June 1962, Hong Kong) has appeared in 80 films, some of which are *Chi bi/Red Cliff* (2008), *Dung che sai duk redux/ Ashes of Time Redux* (2008), *Se, jie/Lust, Caution* (2007), *Seung sing/Forlorn City* (2006), *Han cheng gong lue/Seoul Raiders/Tokyo Raiders 2* (2005), *2046* (2004), *Dei gwong tit/Colour of Sound it* (2003), *Mou gaan dou III: Jung gik mou gaan/Infernal Affairs III* (2003), *Hung wun chiu yun/My Lucky Star* (2003), *Mou gaan dou/Infernal Affairs* (2002), *Ying xiong/Hero*



(2002), *Tian xia wu shuang/Chinese Odyssey 2002* (2002), *Yau ching yam shui baau/You qing yin shui bao/Love Me, Love My Money* (2001), *Hap gwat yan sam/Xia gu ren xin/Healing Hearts* (2001), *Tung gui mat yau/Fighting for Love* (2001), *Fa yeung nin wal/Hua yang nian hua/In the Mood for Love* (2000), *Dong jing gong lue/Tokyo Raiders* (2000), *Mooi tin oi lei 8 siu see/Your Place or Mine* (1998), *Hei yu duan chang ge zhi/Chinese Midnight Express* (1998), *Chun gwong cha sit/Happy Together* (1997), *Tou tou ai ni/Blind Romance* (1996), *Xong xing zi: Zhi jiang hu da feng bao/War of the Under World* (1996), *Liu mang yi sheng/Doctor Mack* (1995), *Chung hing sam lam/Chungking Express* (1994), *Shen long du sheng zhi qi kai de sheng/All of the Winners* (1994), *San lau sing woo dip gim/Butterfly & Sword* (1993), *Feng chen san xia/Tom, Dick and Hairy* (1993), *Se diu ying hung ji dung sing sai jau/The Eagle Shooting Heroes* (1993), *Xin nan xiong nan di/He Ain't Heavy... He's My Father* (1993), *Yi yu zhi mo lu ying xiong/End of the Road* (1993), *Ti dao bao/Lucky Encounter* (1992), *Lat sau san taam/Hard-Boiled* (1992), *Qian wang 1991/Great Pretenders* (1991), *Sha Tan-Zi yu Zhou Shih-Nai/The Royal Scoundrel* (1991), *Die xue jie tou/Bullet in the Head* (1990), *Zhong yi qun ying/Seven Warriors* (1989), *Yan man ying hung/People's Hero* (1987), *Din lo jing juen/The Lunatics* (1986), *Qing chun chai guan/Young Cops* (1985), and *Forced Vengeance* (1982).



**WONG KAR-WAI, *World Directors*. Stephen Teo. bfi Publishing, London, 2005.**

Wong Kar-Wai was born in 1958 in Shanghai. He moved to Hong Kong when he was five years old. According to an interview Wong published in the New York-based *Bomb Magazine*, his father was an ex-sailor, who later worked as a nightclub manager, and his mother a housewife. From what can be discerned in *Days of Being Wild* and *In the Mood for Love*, both films that could be described as roughly autobiographical, scenes of nightclubs, gossiping housewives playing mahjong and living the life of a sailor drifting from one place to another, are the kinds of experiences of growing up that are etched in Wong's creative subconscious. In addition,

Shanghai is also an important and distinctive presence in these films, representing a community that spoke an utterly different dialect from the Cantonese.

The Shanghainese who poured into the territory before and after the Communists took over China in 1949 brought with them not only their capital and skills in all kinds of industry but also a way of life. As Wong has said: 'They had their own cinema, their own music, and their own rituals.' The Shanghainese cinema is actually a reference to the Mandarin film industry in Hong Kong, which, in the 1950s, tended to produce ersatz Shanghai films as is the industry was still centered in Shanghai pre-1949, with stories set in its environs, and characters who exhibited a lifestyle and fashions that underlined their homesickness for the city. Typical of this style are the films of Zhou Xuan, a Shanghainese singer and actress who made several films in the territory between 1947 and 1949, and who is invoked as an iconic presence in *In the Mood for Love* through the use of old standards (Zhou's song 'Huayang de Nianhua', which she sang in a 1947 movie, is actually the Chinese title of Wong's film and is heard briefly on the radio in a scene) and the wearing of the *cheongsam*, the tight-fitting dress worn in gorgeous harmony on the person of Maggie Cheung and a fashion associate with the women of Shanghai. Here, Wong's memory of his mother (who died before he made his first film) has probably played an informative role, as borne out by his remark that he didn't have to do any research for Cheung's *cheongsam* wardrobe, 'because our mothers dressed like this'.

While the Shanghainese attempted to build a Shanghai in Hong Kong, Hong Kong eventually asserted its own reality and assimilated the Shanghainese. By the 1960s, the Mandarin cinema had made a transition from a conscious nostalgia for Shanghai to a fuller integration with Hong Kong and its environment. The Mandarin film industry had by this time been taken over by two overseas Chinese moguls—Loke Wan Tho and Run Run Shaw—who did not feel attached to Shanghai because they came from Southeast Asia (though Shaw had Shanghai connections, he had been based in Singapore and Malaysia for some time). The characters in Mandarin films increasingly acknowledged Hong Kong not as a place of exile but a destination to put down roots.

Wong has spoken of feeling isolated as a Shanghainese child living in Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong, and it may be said that this perception has translated into his status as a maverick filmmaker in the Hong Kong film industry. On the other hand, like most mainland migrants who grew up in Hong Kong, Wong has assimilated into Hong Kong Cantonese society, and his films also reflect this condition. Part of the pleasure of watching a film like *Days of Being Wild* is aural—hearing the spoken Cantonese of 1960s' Hong Kong characters incarnated by Leslie Cheung, Maggie Cheung, Jackie Cheung and Andy Lau, all of whom speak in natural conversational tones caught in synchronous sound recording (a practice that only became the norm in the Hong Kong film industry in the 1990s; prior to that, the industry had mostly employed post-synch dubbing). The Cantonese milieu is as natural to Wong as his Shanghai background, but other elements that contributed to his formative character in this period can also be glimpsed from the aural construct of *Days of Being Wild*—namely the Latin music, the Philippines connection. Hong Kong was and remains a compendium of many communities and cultures. The Latin beat that sounds pervasively in *Days of Being Wild*, *Happy Together*, and *In the Mood for Love*—all three films forming a 'Latin trilogy'—is an offshoot of the Hong Kong Filipino band culture as well as the popularity of Latin American pop music filtered through

Hollywood and the global reach of American music corporations.

Southeast Asia is a lingering presence in Wong's films (besides the Philippines in *Days of Being Wild*, there is a Singapore and Cambodia in *In the Mood for Love*), which I believe is his way of representing the multicultural reality of Hong Kong. Southeast Asia also represents a search for cultural identity, partly manifested by the theme of drifting. In *Days of Being Wild*, unable to fulfill his love for Maggie Cheung, Andy Lau gives up his job as a cop to become a sailor and ends up in the Philippines; in *In the Mood for Love*, Tony Leung plays a roving journalist, a sailor of sorts, drifting from place to place after experiencing a similar unfulfilled love for Maggie Cheung; and in *Happy Together*, Leslie Cheung and Tony Leung are a pair of modern wanderers in Argentina. All of this may be associated with the fact that Wong's father was a sailor, which he alludes to in a number of interviews without going into too much detail. *Fallen Angels* contains a revealing depiction of a father-and-son relationship as an easygoing and sentimental mutual attachment, which probably has parallels with Wong's real-life relationship with his father. According to Wong, his father (who died after Wong made his second film) wrote two scripts that he might shoot one day: one of the scripts is based on his father's experiences as a sailor.

The painstaking methods Wong employed in creating the Hong Kong of the 1960s in *Days of Being Wild*, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* betray a certain regression to his childhood in more than an impressionistic form. In fact, they denote a certain obsession with the past and an indication that the 1960s continue to resonate in his psyche. The latter film was an accurate portrayal of Wong's cramped living quarters, with 'neighbors living next door ... on the other side of the wall ... And there was a lot of gossip and it was fun.' In this context the Hong Kong of the 1960s, which has practically vanished today, is the 'disappeared space' alluded to by Abbas as a strategy of representing the *déjà disparu*, with its attendant political connotations of mutations in society and values lost.

*In the Mood for Love* stops in 1966 in its current version, but it was originally meant to end in 1972. Wong shot some scenes that took place in 1972, but finally deleted them from the film. From this we might conclude that the 1970s appear not to resonate in the same way as the 1960s in Wong's consciousness, and he has not referred specifically to the decade in any profound way in his interviews or films. It was probably an uneventful period when he would have gone through primary and secondary schooling, but nevertheless it is a gap that could justify the writing of a proper biography of Wong in the future.

Wong graduated in 1980 from the Hong Kong Polytechnic, where he studied graphic design. His professional life began the following year when he joined TVB, Hong Kong's premier TV station. Having received training in writing and directing, he was put to work, under the tutelage of Kam Kwok-leong, as a writer and production assistant on two TV series. By 1982, he had joined the film industry as a scriptwriter. Wong contributed ideas in a collective way to a script rather than as an autonomous writer. He worked in all kinds of genres, including romance, comedy, horror crossed with comedy, cop thrillers, gangster pictures and fantasy adventure—the sort of 'mass entertainment' that Bordwell identifies as Wong's lineage.

Wong's working style as a director is a product of this lineage—the fact that he generally liked to combine genres and to start shooting films without a completed script. Patrick Tam states that Wong never finished a script when he was a scriptwriter, and

that the nearest he came was the screenplay of *Final Victory* (1987). But even here, Tam asserts, the script was actually finished by Tam himself in collaboration with Winnie Yu, his associate producer, when Wong failed to keep to the deadline. Tam achieved a rapport with Wong as a writer, but seldom had intellectual discussions with him about Tam's own films: 'Wong was more of an instinctive creative person given to emotional bonding.' *Final Victory* was the first collaboration between the two men. Tam would go on to edit *Days of Being Wild* and *Ashes of Time*. While it is tempting to trace how the creative partnership between the two men might have been seeded in their work on *Final Victory*... Tam discourages any parallels between Wong's work and his own. Rather, it would seem that their association was more a case of an older professional acting as a mentor to a younger, upcoming professional, offering him a guiding hand within the industry, and introducing him to the literature of Manuel Puig and Raymond Chandler (whose influence informs the noir sensibility of Wong's BMW short film *The Follow* [2001]).

Wong's other partnership in this early stage of his career was with Jeff Lau. Their paths crossed in the mid-1980s when they were both moving in and out of various production companies (Century, D and B, Wing Scope, In-Gear) and writing scripts on a regular basis with the aim of becoming directors. Lau made the transition to directing in 1987, apparently with Wong's mentorship, and he became known for his farcical comedies such as *All for the Winner* (1990) and *The Top Bet* (1991), which were huge box-office hits. While Wong appears to be Lau's polar opposite, he has continued the relationship by writing a few scripts for Lau, the most striking of which was the action fantasy *Saviour of the Soul* (1991). But even though their films are radically different, they share a complementary rhythm and a peculiar obsession with time and space. Lau has even produced his own responses to Wong's films by making versions of *Days of Being Wild* (Lau's version being *Days of Tomorrow* [1993]) and *Ashes of Time* (his versions being *The Eagle Shooting Heroes* [1994] and *A Chinese Odyssey, Parts One and Two* [1996]). A sense of mutual indebtedness is inherent in the relationship, and Lau facilitated Wong's debut as a director by convincing Alan Tang, a former actor turned producer, to invite Wong Kar-wai to become a partner in the newly formed In-Gear film company. It was for In-Gear that Wong made *As Tears Go By* in 1988, the film that launched his directing career.

### **Betrayed by Maggie Cheung: *In the Mood for Love* (2000) The Beginning of the Affair**

Of all Wong's projects, *In the Mood for Love* has one of the more complicated and fascinating evolutions. By piecing together various accounts of what Wong has said in interviews, his next film after *Happy Together* was a story called *Summer in Beijing*. Wong referred to this project as early as April 1997, during an interview to publicise *Happy Together* published in *City Entertainment*, in which he said he had planned to finish *Summer in Beijing* before the 1 July deadline for Hong Kong's handover to China. This suggests, first, that he was already in the middle of shooting the film (perhaps even as he was working on *Happy Together*), and second, that he had conceived the project as another pre-97 work along the lines of *Happy Together*. However, Wong hinted that he was unlikely to finish the project by 1 July, and that it would therefore signify 'a new beginning' in his works, one that would touch on the Hong Kong-China relationship post-97.

To this end Wong began scouting locations in Beijing itself. At some point during the process, the project transmuted into a

futuristic story about Beijing and was given a new title, *2046*, but retained a definite connection to the 1997 issue (2046 marking the end of the fifty-year period during which Hong Kong's economic and political system, as China had promised, would remain unchanged). *Summer in Beijing* (with its original pre-97 framework) was now an abandoned project, but *2046* still appeared tentative, because Wong could not get permission to film in Beijing. He then took the project to Macao, but by this time (around mid-1998), it had further evolved into three stories under the title 'A story about Food', involving an affair between Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung set in a world of restaurants and noodle shops. The project eventually ended up being shot in Bangkok, and while Wong was working on the story that became *In the Mood for Love*, originally intended as one-third of the movie, he decided to discard the other two episodes. Thus, *In the Mood for Love* became a separate project that evolved out of several other projects: 'Summer in Beijing', 'A story about Food' and '2046'.

*2046* survived as an ongoing project, one that he had committed himself to making during the shooting of *In the Mood for Love*. In the fifteen months that it took Wong to make the latter film, he was also shooting scenes for *2046* back to back. In what has now become his own inimitable style of making movies, Wong decided to merge the two films, 'so maybe in future when you see *2046* you will see something of *In the Mood for Love*, and when you see *In the Mood for Love* there will be something of *2046*.

Since the release in 2000 of *In the Mood for Love*, *2046* has consumed Wong like an obsession, compelling him to shoot in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Macao on top of the original footage that he shot in Bangkok during the making of *In the Mood for Love*. As a result of these extraordinary circumstances of evolution and production, *In the Mood for Love* inevitably suffers from its nature as an extended segment rather than a story originally conceived in its own right, an argument to which I will return later. However, these circumstances are fully in keeping with Wong's impromptu method of film-making inspired by the fragmentary scrapbook structures of the novels of Puig and Cortázar. This method consolidates Wong's tendency to conceive and write his stories according to the short-story format, which determines an elliptical and minimalist narrative style that distinguishes all of the director's films to date (Wong's films are best seen as a series of interconnecting short stories even within a single film, with chapter headings divided by characters rather than whole, single and separate stories).

*In the Mood for Love* returns to the atmosphere of Hong Kong in the 1960s that Wong described so well in *Days of Being Wild*. Hence, there is a temptation to view the film as the unofficial second part of *Days of Being Wild*. The connection with Wong's second movie is also emphasised by Maggie Cheung's appearance. Cheung plays a married woman with the maiden name of So Lai-chen, the same name as her character in *Days of Being Wild*. Did

Wong intend the two characters to be one and the same? If so, then Lai-chen has obviously evolved from being the lovesick, single young woman of the first film into a more mature, if still emotionally vulnerable, married woman in the later film. Given that ten years divide the two works, Cheung's appearance—though ageless—has a poise and sophistication that matches her new role. In terms of the chronology of the two films, two years separates the events: *Days of Being Wild* begins 1960, while *In the Mood for Love* starts in 1962; and it may be said that the transition of So Lai-chen from young fledgling to graceful swan does appear somewhat implausible. Despite the correlation between the two films, it is probably best to see them as separate works. The differences of



theme and subject matter set the two films apart: one deals with the wildness and insecurity of unmarried youth, the other with settled adults approaching middle age.

The story of *In the Mood for Love* rotated around marriage and the premise (or perhaps the illusion) of fidelity—a theme that in fact makes the film closer to *Ashes of Time*,

where Wong depicts the psychological effects that various real, pseudo and de facto marriage relationships have wrought on his characters. There is also a connection with *Happy Together* in that both films share the central theme of lovers coming together and breaking apart. So Lai-chen and Chow Mo-wan (Tony Leung Chui-wai) are neighboring tenants in rooming apartments. They each suspect that their respective spouses are having an affair, as they have both gone on a long trip to Japan. Their suspicions are confirmed when Chow invites Lai-chen to tea. . . .

Thus begins Chow Mo-wan's and Lai-chen's own affair, but it is a liaison handled with typical Chinese reserve and repressed desire. As a romantic film with a moral-ethical dimension, it recalls a long line of distinguished films: Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945), Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small City* (1948), Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) and *Imitation of Life* (1959), or the film versions of Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*. There are also echoes of the melodramas of Japanese director Mikio Naruse: *Repast* (1951), *Floating Clouds* (1955), and *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* (1960). Wong himself was particularly struck by the early sing-song melodramas of the Hong Kong cinema featuring singer-actress Zhou Xuan, *An All-Consuming Love* (1947) and *Song of a Songstress* (1948): the Chinese title of *In the Mood for Love* is in fact the title of song, 'Huayang de Nianhia', sung by Zhou Xuan in *An All-Consuming Love* which is also heard in Wong's film. However, the one film that it most resembles in terms of plot and style is *Spring in a Small City* (remade by Tian Zhuangzhuang, who entitles his version *Springtime in a Small Town*, released in 2002). *Spring in a Small City* is the seminal work that sets the aesthetic and moral standard for the kind of romance melodrama that *In the Mood for Love* evokes: the friend of a woman's sick husband visits; he turns out to be the wife's ex-lover; old feelings are rekindled, but



the man and woman pull back from the affair; the husband realises what is going on and attempts suicide; he survives and reclaims the affections of his wife; the friend leaves; his affair with the woman is temporary and impressionistic, never fully consummated, like Chow's affair with So Lai-chen.

Wong has barely mentioned *Spring in a Small City* in his interviews. To foreign journalists, he cited the influence of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), describing *In the Mood for Love* as being 'all about suspense', while also claiming that he was influenced by Bresson and Antonioni....

As in Hitchcock, Wong introduces role-playing into the affair between Lai-chen and Chow. In one scene, Lai-chen plays the wife confronting her husband (a role assumed by Chow), demanding to know whether he is having an affair with another woman, and rehearsing a possible confrontation for real. In another scene, Chow confesses that he has fallen in love with Lai-chen: they rehearse their separation on the basis that Lai-chen will never leave her husband, but this role-playing is much too real for Lai-chen to bear and she breaks down, sobbing on Chow's shoulder, while he comforts her with the words: 'It's only a rehearsal.' ...

The motif of role-playing proved to be a difficult task for the actors. According to Wong, he had 'big arguments' with Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung over how to play their characters. As Tony Leung describes it, he and Maggie Cheung were playing 'double roles': "On the one hand, we were playing a husband and wife, and on the other hand, we were playing a paramour and his mistress. In the beginning, we didn't know that our partners were having an affair, our identities were a husband and wife married to others. Then we developed a relationship and we became a lover and his mistress, which were the roles of our partners! We were playing two roles at the same time. This makes it different from all our previous roles." ...

Leung's performance won him the Best Actor award at both the 2000 Cannes Film Festival and the Hong Kong Film Awards, while Maggie Cheung was overlooked at Cannes but recognized by the Hong Kong Film Awards. . . .

Wong compounded his actors' difficulties by instructing them to 'reveal themselves', to 'play as you are' and not just play the roles of the 'other half'. In other words, Wong wanted a third dimension to the double roles. Infidelity was an excuse for Chow and Lai-chen to release their 'dark sides', as Wong put it. But both players were perhaps too decent to show their 'dark sides', and it remains a moot point as to how far they were able to realise Wong's vision. Leung may have attempted to play Chow as a vengeful man seeking payback for his wife's infidelity by having an affair with So Lai-chen, but the result is more of a sympathetic wimp and loser: the archetypal weak

male hero in the tradition of Chinese romantic melodrama....

Wong, however, was not interested in making moral fable in the manner of Fei Mu in *Spring in a Small City*: 'I would rather have my actors go through both sides of an affair,' a comment that rationalises, to an extent, the concept of role-playing. But Wong's idea of counteracting the role-playing through his demand to 'play as you are' imposes a constrictive coating on his actors, like the *cheongsams* that Maggie must wear (which require a slim silhouette and erect posture to carry off)....

Wong's development of the whole concept in *In the Mood for Love* entails a convoluted cycle of the actors playing roles (as husband and wife, as paramour and mistress) and then subsuming these roles to be 'themselves' (whatever that means), a technique that Wong claims to have learned from Julio Cortázar. Be that as it may, identities tend to become muddled and the affair assumes qualities of the pseudo-metaphysical. The combined effect of all these layers produces an underlying enigma, a core of mystery and ambiguity, the ostensible secret that Chow whispers into the hole in the wall of the Angkor Wat ruins at the end of the film....

On mood and nostalgia, Wong in fact takes as his aesthetic model the stories of the novelist Liu Yichang, who is, like Wong himself, a Shanghaiese living in Hong Kong, though at least two generations removed (Liu was born in 1918 and came to Hong Kong in 1948).....Wong quotes several passages from Liu's story as epigraphic intertitles. These passages refer to the old man's nostalgia for Shanghai and his regrets for the past as he sits inside a Malaysian restaurant (he also reminisces about his past life in Singapore, the original inspiration for Wong's Singapore-set scenes). Liu's novel is essentially without plot and written as a mood piece in the stream-of-consciousness manner, denoting his character's memory and nostalgia. One of Liu's themes is time. ['Time is never tired, the long needle hopelessly chasing after the short needle, and happiness is a wanderer, pacing back and forth behind the equal signs of an equation.'] As Liu sees it, it is Time rather than any human agency of change that makes change perceptible and emotional....Wong derives from Liu the idea of nostalgic mood and of time as a denominator of change. Wong's original idea, which he discarded, was to chart the changes over a ten-year period from 1962 to 1972. As it is, he decided to end his film in 1966, a time when Hong Kong



was thrown into chaos as a result of riots inspired by China's Cultural Revolution (to which there is a reference in the film). Wong noted that he was interested in the idea of showing change through the changes in the characters themselves. Hence, repetition as a signifier of change becomes a motif throughout the film, where once more Wong reinforces the notion that every repetition is not the same: "The music is repeating all the time, and the way we see certain spaces, like the office, the corridors, it's always the same.

We try to show the changes through minor things, like the clothes of Maggie...details in the food, because of the Shanghainese community, it's very precise food at certain seasons. Actually, the food is telling you that it is May, it is June, or that it is July.'...

But the real theme behind all that food is nostalgia: the different types of food being eaten at different times and seasons mark not only time but a remembrance of time.... Maggie Cheung stepping out in high heels and *cheongsam*, handbag over an arm, hair perfectly coiffured, is the single most evocative image of nostalgia in the film. She is iconic, representing wife, lover, mistress, and even a mother figure.... Cheung's dizzying array of *cheongsams*, ranging from plain to flowery and colourful, is the most aesthetic marker of time ever seen in cinema...The film simply revels in an ecstasy of elegant design (here again, the hand of William Chang is evident). Even the colours (Wong here working with a new director of photography, Mark Lee Ping-bin, who took over after Chris Doyle shot about a third of the film) are much more refined and subdued, unlike the hyped colours of *Happy Together*. The film has the look of the Shanghai posters of the 1920s and 30s that were used as calendars or advertisements for a variety of products, ranging from face powder to cigarettes, and featuring girls in flowery *cheongsams*....

We do not finally see Maggie climbing up to the first floor...after some preliminary dialogue, Tony says, 'I didn't think you'd come' to which Maggie replies, 'We won't be like them. See you tomorrow.' She walks down the corridor, as the camera pulls back to emphasise the red curtains. Then she stops in a kind of mock-freeze, a stylistic device to signal the entry of the waltz from 'Yumeji's Theme' (the theme associated with Maggie and Tony) and the transition to the next sequence—a montage of scenes showing Maggie and Tony happy together inside room 2046, the only time we see them in a state of near bliss. But happiness is a wanderer, pacing back and forth behind the equal signs of an equation.



**Stephen Teo: Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love*: Like a Ritual in Transfigured Time (Senses of Cinema, 2001)**

### **In Dream Time**

It is by no means coincidental that the two most celebrated Chinese-language films of the last two or three months - Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000) - hark back to old genres and times past.

Some grand design of time has brought the films about. Both directors and their films recollect childhood memories of pleasures induced from going to the cinema. Both men are roughly of the same generation (Lee was born in 1954; Wong in 1958), and have come of age as directors at about the same time: this, above everything else, appears to have informed their choices of genre. In the case of Ang Lee, the director's own memories of watching martial arts pictures spawned boyhood fantasies of a China "that probably never existed." Watching the pictures of the *wuxia* (sword and chivalry) genre throughout his formative childhood days evoked a dreaming time for Ang Lee - his film being in his own words, "a kind of dream of China". Both Ang Lee and Wong Kar-wai, each in their own ways and working in radically different genres, have tried to duplicate this kind of "dream time" in their respective movies.

Wong's *In the Mood for Love* is a romance melodrama, which tells the story of a married man (played by Tony Leung) and a married woman (played by Maggie Cheung), living in rented rooms of neighbouring apartments, who fall in love with each other while grappling with the infidelities of their respective spouses whom they discover are involved with each other. The two protagonists are thrown together into an uncertain affair which they appear not to consummate, perhaps out of social propriety or ethical concerns. As Maggie Cheung's character says: "We will never be like them!" (referring to the off-screen but apparently torrid affair of their respective spouses). The affair between Cheung and Leung assumes an air of mystique touched by intuitions of fate and lost opportunity: is it a Platonic relationship based on mutual consolation and sadness arising out of the betrayal of their spouses? Is it love? Is it desire? Did they sleep together? Such ambiguity stems from the postmodern lining of the picture (its look as processed by Wong's usual collaborators, the cinematographer Chris Doyle and art director William Chang), which is more in line with Wong Kar-wai's reputation as a cool, hip artist of contemporary cinema.

However, there is a conservative core to the narrative that is quite unambiguous, clearly evident in the behaviour of the central protagonists, both of whom act on the principle of moral restraint. In this regard, the film reminds me of the 1948 masterpiece *Spring in a Small City*, directed by Fei Mu, the plotline of which is slightly mirrored in Wong's film. In *Spring*, a wife meets her former lover and flirts with the possibility of leaving her sick husband. In the end, she falls back on the principle of moral restraint. The director Fei Mu was reputed to have ordered his players to act on the dictum "Begin with emotion, end with restraint!" As a result, the film ends on a note of moral triumphalism colored by a sense of sadness and regret, reinforcing the inner nobility of the characters - a theme which Wong regurgitates with the same sense of brevity and cast of subtlety. The soulful nobility of the characters in both films is a touching reminder of the didactic tradition in Chinese melodrama, where the drama serves to inspire one to moral behaviour - and when the actors are as beautiful as Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung, the note of restraint is all the more poignant and all the more ennobling (the attractiveness of the characters preying on our own natural inclinations or baser instincts building up a kind of suspense but finally leading to an anticlimax that is as close to a philosophical statement as Wong Kar-wai has ever got his audience to).

Whether or not one sees *In the Mood for Love* as a film about sexual desire or alternatively, about moral restraint, there isn't that much more to the plot. It lives up to its English title as a

veritable mood piece, and is essentially made up of rather passive and variable substances: the characters and their interchange of feelings that are nothing more than fleeting moments of time. Added to all this is Wong's dense-looking *mise en scène* that combines the acting, art direction, cinematography, the colours, the wardrobe, the music, into an aesthetic if also impressionistic blend of chamber drama and miniature soap opera. Wong's key elements - what older critics might call "atmosphere" and "characterizations" - are thus grounded in abstraction rather than plot, and it's hard to think of a recent movie that offers just such abstract ingredients that are by themselves sufficient reasons to see the picture. But it is precisely this quality of aesthetic abstraction that makes up an ideal dreamtime of Hong Kong, which is Wong's ode to the territory.

### The Melodrama of Mood

The English title itself, of course, strikes the key to the picture, suggestive of foreplay or a kind of mind-massage. What Wong Kar-wai does for an hour and a half is to butter up his audience for two or three levels of mood play: a mood for love, to begin with; but even more substantially, a mood for nostalgia, and a mood for melodrama. In Wong's rendition of the melodrama, we have a romance picture that works mainly as a two-hander chamber play, illustrated by contemplative snippets of popular music that also help to recreate the ambience of Hong Kong in the 1960s. The elements of nostalgia and melodrama that play on our feelings are Wong's way of paying tribute to a period and to a genre. The Chinese melodrama (known in Chinese as *wenyi pian*) is traditionally more akin to soap opera - a form that assumes classic expression in the '60s with the rise of Mandarin pictures from both Hong Kong and Taiwan (particularly adaptations from the literary works of the author Qiong Yao, often starring Brigitte Lin).

The terminology "wenyi" is an abbreviation of *wenxue* (literature) and *yishu* (art), thus conferring on the melodrama genre the distinctions of being a literary and civilized form (as distinct from the *wuxia* genre, which is a martial and chivalric tradition). Wong seizes on the literary or "civilized" antecedence of the genre to water down the soap opera tendencies that were characteristic of '60s melodramas. Wong's interest in the genre is not so much narrative as associative. For instance, he equates the melodrama with the '60s, a period that for the director, yields manifold allusions to memory, time, and place. "I was born in Shanghai and moved to Hong Kong the year I was five (i.e. around 1963). For me it was a very memorable time. In those days, the housing problems were such that you'd have two or three families living under the same roof, and they'd have to share the kitchen and toilets, even their privacy. I wanted to make a film about those days and I wanted to go back to that period.", Wong says.

The melodrama genre itself becomes an apt metaphor for the '60s, with many films of the period dealing with just such housing problems and families living under the same roof as Wong speaks of. The invocation of *wenyi pian* carries a sense of period and place. The Chinese title, *Huayang Nianhua* (translated in the subtitles as "Full Bloom" but more accurately meaning "those wonderful varied years"), is more suggestive of period nostalgia and the Shanghai association, pointing to an iridescent, kaleidoscopic age of bygone elegance and diversity (and it is actually the title of a Chinese pop song from the '40s which we hear played on the radio, sung by the late singer-actress Zhou Xuan who popularized the song in a 1947 Hong Kong Mandarin movie). In Wong's hands, the genre itself and the period of the '60s is a stage of transfigured time that isn't fixed diachronically. His '60s happens to coalesce around

other synchronic recollections of the memorabilia of earlier periods (such as the '40s or the '50s), through the evocations of popular culture as a whole that largely recalls the glories of Shanghai: in music (citing the songs of Zhou Xuan, for example), in fashion (the *cheongsam*), novels (the martial arts serials that Tony Leung writes with input from Maggie, that recall the methods of the "old school" writers of martial arts fiction in '30s and '40s Shanghai), and the cinema (the unstated allusion to *Spring in a Small City*).

In watching the film unfold, the audience itself is partaking in a ritual in transfigured time (to borrow the title of a 1946 Maya Deren film, and each member of the audience, depending on their ages, could in theory go as far back in time as they wish to the moment that holds the most formative nostalgic significance for them. Of course, Wong's skill in recreating Hong Kong of the '60s seems so assured and so transfixed to those of us born in the post-war baby-boom years who grew up in the '60s that it is more than enough to recall nothing but the '60s (with the rise in our consciousness at the time of Western culture and *accoutrements*, plus the efforts to blend East and West, as evoked by the references to Nat King Cole's Spanish tunes, Japan, electric cookers, the handbag, Tony Leung's Vaseline hair, eating steaks garnished by mustard, and eating noodles and congee in takeaway flasks).

So successful is Wong's recreation of the past that we tend to forget that he has only shown us the bare outlines of Hong Kong in 1962 (the year when the narrative begins). Wong has created an illusion so perfect that it seems hardly possible that the director has got away with really just the mere hints of a locality to evoke time and place (the film was shot in Bangkok rather than in Hong Kong with the feeling perhaps that the former could better convey the idea of transposed time, and not so much to capture 'authentic' details of the seedy alley ways and sidestreets, through which the protagonists pass or meet each other, that have supposedly vanished from modern Hong Kong). In other words, Wong Kar-wai has successfully transfixed his audience in a dreamtime without the necessary big-budget frills so that it actually seems a bit too dissociative to think of *In the Mood for Love* as a dreamtime movie. It doesn't, for example, indulge in the kind of overt symbolism such as one may associate with Dali's famous painting "The Persistence of Memory" where we see time pieces melting in a desert-like landscape, symbolizing time lost. I mention Dali's painting because in Wong's films, we do see persistent shots of clocks in what has now become the characteristic style of Wong Kar-wai (being so persistent, they actually invoke a surreal sense of time melting away, as in the Dali painting): those scenes in *In the Mood for Love* where the camera dollies down from a giant Siemens clock hanging overhead in Maggie Cheung's workplace to catch Maggie in a pensive moment. In Wong's deliberative manner, this is exactly the moment that would conjure up the '60s in his body of work, with the same motif and the same actress (indeed, essentially the same character) from Wong's key work in the early phase of his career *Days of Being Wild* (1990), also set in the '60s.

### A Literary Vision

Such visual motifs are the obvious affirmations of Wong's style, denoting his preoccupations with time and space. However, in keeping with his theme of moral restraint, Wong himself appears to show a much more restrained hand in delineating his visual style, which seems less semaphoric and more attuned to the purposes of a narrative, however slight that narrative may appear to be. The film may function basically as a mood piece, with much to wonder at in terms of visual splendours, but there is no visual motif that goes



astray. *In the Mood for Love* is a virtual *cheongsam* show, for example, and who among the Chinese of the baby-boom generation could fail to be moved by the allusive and sensual properties of the body-hugging *cheongsam* (or *qipao* in Mandarin)? The array of *cheongsams* worn by Maggie Cheung is Wong's cinematic way of indicating the passage of time, but Wong also milks it for its erogenous impact on the mind and soul. Maggie Cheung clad in the *cheongsam* is surely every Chinese person's idea of the eternal Chinese woman in the modern age, evoking memories of elegant Chinese mothers in the '50s and '60s (when the gown was still in fashion) as well as memories of the Chinese intellectual female still bonded to tradition (recalling the image of the writer Eileen Chang, or Zhou Yuwen, the character played by actress Wei Wei in *Spring in a Small City*).

Much more significant, in my opinion, than all these visual configurations is Wong Kar-wai's predilections for covering his ground with literary references. It is often forgotten that Wong is a highly literary director, and part of the magic that he wields in movies like *Days of Being Wild*, *Chungking Express* (1994) and *Ashes of Time* (1994) is the consummate way with which he induces his audience to auscultate to his narratives. The monologues and voiceovers of those films are some of the most literary pieces to be heard in Hong Kong cinema. Of late, Wong has taken to inserting passages from books as inter-titles studding the course of the film, somewhat in the manner of silent movies, or in the manner of epigraphs in essays - a practice seen in *Ashes of Time* (where he quotes passages from the book by noted martial arts writer Jin Yong that was the source of his screenplay), and now in *In the Mood for Love* where he quotes lines from a 1972 novella, *Intersection*, by Liu Yichang, a Shanghainese expatriate writer living in Hong Kong. Gone is the voiceover narrative or the multiple monologues that he ascribes to each of his characters (finding classic expression in *Days of Being Wild*). The story of *Intersection*, the Chinese title of which is *Duidao*, tells of the way in which two characters' lives - strangers to each other - appear to intersect in ways apparently determined by the nature of the city, and the structure of the novella provides a direct form of inspiration for Wong's use of the intersecting motif in *In the Mood for Love*.

The influence of Liu Yichang's story cannot be underestimated - so taken by the story has Wong been that he has actually put out an ancillary product in the wake of the film's release in Hong Kong last year: a book of photographs and stills from the film illustrating an abridged English translation of Liu Yichang's story. It's a curious kind of book, seemingly without any theme or focus, which actually contains a hidden title *Tête-bêche: A Wong Kar-wai Project*. Wong explains the significance of the title in a foreword:

The first work by Liu Yichang I read was *Duidao*. The title is a Chinese translation of *tête-bêche*, which describes stamps that are printed top to bottom facing each other. *Duidao* centres round the intersection of two parallel stories - of an old man and a young girl. One is about memories, the other anticipation. To me *tête-bêche* is more than a term for stamps or intersection of stories. It can be the intersection of light and colour, silence and tears. *Tête-bêche* can also be the intersection of time: a novel published in 1972, a movie released in 2000, both intersecting to become a story of the '60s.

*Tête-bêche* - the intersecting motif that makes up Wong's narrative style in other films, notably *Days of Being Wild*, *Chungking Express*, *Ashes of Time*, and *Fallen Angels* (1995), which are

narratives of parallel stories, finally finds its mature expression in *In the Mood for Love* where the motif assumes a diacritical mode. The poetic nature of Wong's images and his style stems from this literary conceit, and the serial-like connotations of Chinese literature where the chapters intersect with one another (the *zhang hui* form) to build up the suspense of "what happens next". Wong's literary sensibility makes him unique among modern-day directors who would probably not have conceived of an ending whose spirit is basically literary in nature, embedded in storytelling and myth. This ending, taking place among the ruins of Angkor Wat (subconsciously calling to mind the ruins of *Spring in a Small City* which similarly endow a sense of melancholic nobility to the chief protagonist), is one of Wong Kar-wai's more conclusive and heart-stopping moments, filled with secrets that must never be revealed in a kind of compact between the director and the viewer, and finally infused with a sense of regret and Zen-like magnanimity.



**INTERVIEW: The "Mood" of Wong Kar-wai; the Asian Master Does it Again. by Anthony Kaufman /indieWIRE / 02.02.01**

It's only February, granted, but Wong Kar-wai's **"In the Mood for Love"** may very well turn out to be the best movie of 2001. Winner of a special technical jury prize at last year's **Cannes Film Festival** (for its production designer **William Chang**, and cinematographers **Christopher Doyle** and **Li Ping-Bing**), "In the Mood for Love" makes a strong case for making movies on celluloid in the new millennium. Wong Kar-wai's 7th feature film is a wonder to behold; sumptuously designed, gorgeously colored, profoundly sad -- this is a movie you can simply drown yourself in.

After already staking a claim as the most exciting filmmaker on the planet, Wong just keeps getting better. With a series of near or total masterpieces to his credit -- **"As Tears Go By," "Days of Being Wild," "Ashes of Time," "Chungking Express," "Fallen Angels,"** and **"Happy Together"** -- the Chinese director continues to explore



themes of solitude and desire with "In the Mood for Love," a love story set in 1960s Hong Kong about two neighbors whose respective spouses are having an affair with each other. **Tony Leung** (who won a Cannes prize for Best Actor) and **Maggie Cheung** play the somber neighbors, living in a claustrophobic apartment house where every gesture and movement conveys a thousand repressed emotions. USA Films, who acquired the film at the Cannes Film Festival upon seeing merely a promo reel, will release the film this Friday in New York and in select cities on Feb. 16. In Cannes, Wong Kar-wai spoke elusively about '60s Hong Kong, repetition, art cinema, suffering, and his next film, "2046."

**indieWIRE: How did you conceive of the story?**

**Wong Kar-wai:** We started the film in a different way. At first, we called the film "A story about food." The story of "In the Mood for Love," in fact, is actually one of the stories about these two people, neighbors, who are buying noodles all the time. Later on, I realized that the reason I wanted to make this project is only this story, so I expanded it. It was supposed to be a quick lunch and then it became a big feast.

**iW: Much of this film was sort of constructed along the way. Did you build the film more in the editing room compared to your other films?**

**Wong:** At the beginning, I thought this is an easy film, because we had two characters and the whole film is about these two persons, and then I realized it was much more difficult than my previous films with 10 characters, because we had to put a lot of details in it. We shot the film [following the characters from] 1962 to 1972 and in the editing room, I think the film stopped at 1966, which is the film you see now.

**iW: Lots of things were left out?**

**Wong:** Maybe some days later, we will have another version.

**iW: Why Hong Kong in the early 60s?**

**Wong:** I always wanted to make a film about this period, because it's very special in the history of Hong Kong, because it is right after 1949 and a lot of people from China are living in Hong Kong and they still have their dreams about their lives back in China. So like the Chinese communities in the film, there are people from Shanghai and they have their own languages and they don't have contact with the local

Cantonese. And they have their own movies and music and rituals. That is a very special period and I'm from that background. And I want to make a film like this, and I want to recreate that mood.

**iW: Why the title, "In the Mood for Love"?**

**Wong:** I always wanted to call this film, "Secrets" or something about secrets, and Cannes said, "No, there's already so many films with Secrets." So we had to find a title. We were listening to the music of **Bryan Ferry**, called "In the Mood for Love," so we call

it "In the Mood for Love," why not? Actually, the mood of the film is what drives these two people together.

**iW: Regarding the mood, what about the Latin influence? The suffering seems more Latin than Asian. Does that come at all from your shooting in South America on "Happy Together"?**

**Wong:** I like Latin American literature a lot and I've always thought Latin American, and Italian people are very close to Chinese, especially the women -- jealousies, passion, family values, it's very close. The Latin music in the film was very popular in Hong Kong at that time. The music scene in HK was mainly from the Filipino musicians. All the nightclubs had Filipino musicians, so they have the Latin influences. It's very popular in restaurants at that time. So I decided to put this music in the film to capture -- this is the sound of that period. And also, I especially liked Nat King Cole, because he's the favorite singer of my mother.

**iW: You're most known for your free-wheeling style in "Chungking Express" and "Fallen Angels." Here, it's quite the opposite. Did you feel restricted? Or did you feel liberated because you were trying something new?**

**Wong:** We get used to certain types of style, and people say this is your label or your trademark. And we get used to it. It becomes very boring. We tried to do something else. For this film, because Chris Doyle is away shooting, we used another cameraman, that means I cannot be so lazy as before. Because in the past, I can rely on Chris for lighting and frame. But this time I had to control

everything myself. This is a process where I can control more of the film and the style of the film is more attached to the content.

**iW: Can you talk about the art direction? And all those gorgeous floral prints?**

**Wong:** I have a very good art director, **William Chang**; he's worked with me since my first film. Basically, we are from the same background, so he knows everything by heart. We seldom discuss the film, because the way we work together is very organic. He's not serving me; he's trying to create his own ideas. I capture all of it in the film. He's also the editor of the film. So sometimes he cuts the things he doesn't like.

**iW: You also have many things obstructing the camera? It creates a sort of claustrophobic space.**

**Wong:** We always wanted something in front of the camera, because we wanted to create a feeling that the audience becomes one of the neighbors. They always observe these two people.

**iW: The costume design is also very**

**important. Maggie changes constantly.**

**Wong:** In fact, we had 20-25 dresses for Maggie for the whole film. Because we cut the film short, it becomes like a fashion show; she changes all the time. My purpose at first was to try to show the film in a repetitious way. Like, we repeat the music, the angle of a location, always the clock, always the corridor, always the staircase. Because I want to show nothing changes, except the emotions of these two persons.



**iW: What do you think about the arrival of Asian cinema in the U.S. lately? Do you think it's a rebirth or just western audience finally discovering what was already there?**

**Wong:** We all need stories. What happens in our daily lives changes our stories. You can see the Italian cinema and the French new wave, in the 60s, the first generation after the second world war, so they have a lot of things to say and a new perspective. For these two years, Asian cinema, like Korean cinema, and even Thai cinema, they've become very, very strong, because they have their problems and new stories in their life. So they are not repeating the same old stories. I think the young filmmakers, their thinking is more global, so their films are more accessible to the Western audience.

**iW: You've spoken about your influences, Antonioni, Godard, Truffaut? Did they help form your style?**

**Wong:** In Hong Kong in the '60s, going to cinema was a big thing. We have cinemas for Hollywood films, local productions, European cinema, but there was no [label of] art film at that time. Even **Fellini** was treated as a commercial film. So as a kid, I spent a lot of time with my mother in the cinemas. And we didn't know which is an art film, which is a commercial film; we just liked to watch the cinema. At that time, we went to cinemas because of the film itself. As far as influences, we like what we see. And the sensations just stay.

**iW: You are that person to a lot of young filmmakers out there; what do you say to them?**

**Wong:** It's about patience. You have to be very patient. You have to wait.

**iW: Can you talk about your next film, "2046"?**

**Wong:** The film is about promise. In 1997, China's government promised 50 years of change. And I think, well, I should make a film about promises. Have things really changed in 50 years? So the film is set in the year 2046; it is a futuristic film, but it's not a science fiction film. It's not like "**The 5th Element**." It has three stories, and each one is adapted from a Western Opera, **Madame Butterfly**, **Carmen**, and **Tanhausan**.

**iW: Is financing your films any easier than it was, since you know have quite a reputation.**

**Wong:** It's not so easy as you expect. Normally, if you want to work with European distributors, or joint-ventures, they want to have the script. And we don't have scripts, so that's a problem. And you have to find someone who understands your work and has confidence in you. Otherwise, it's very difficult.

**iW: This film was very difficult to make, you've said, and was emotionally difficult for the actors. I wanted to ask you a bigger question: is making art worth the suffering?**

**Wong:** This is a good question we keep asking ourselves. Because when you're making a film, there's a lot of people suffering with you, you know? You're away from home, and you always think things are waiting for you, but it's not, they keep going. And for "In the Mood for Love," it's the most difficult film of my career, because we made this film for almost two years, and during the production, we had the Asian economic crisis, so we had to stop production, because the investors all had problems and we had to find new investors. We kept working on it and we knew we could make this film forever, because we fell in love with it. And so, we decided to put the film into Cannes, because that meant a deadline for the film.

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