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Far East on Film

Rich Johnson

Week 4

SMALL STORIES

Presenting a number of (melo) dramas, the talk will focus on more low-key 'affairs'. Use of cinematography and the art of cinema in particular will be discussed including the quiet moments most often associated with Far Eastern films. Crossover with other regions and countries, including transnational productions will also be highlighted.

Main films:

Japan

***Tokyo Story* (1953)**

Director(s): Yasujirō Ozu

Studio(s): Shochiku Ofuna Studio

Hong Kong/France

***In the Mood for Love* (2000)**

Director(s): Wong Kar-wai

Studio(s): Block 2 Pictures / Jet Tone Production / Orly Films / Paradis Films

South Korea

***Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* (2003)**

Director(s): Kim Ki-duk

Studio(s): LJ Film / Pandora Film

China/Hong Kong

***Farewell My Concubine* (1993)**

Director(s): Chen Kaige

Studio(s): Beijing Film Studio



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Taiwan

Eat Drink Man Woman (1994)

Director(s): Ang Lee

Studio(s): Ang Lee Pictures / Central Motion Pictures / Good Machine / Xiongfa Film Company

Notes:

Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953) is the epitome of subtle filmmaking and the opposite to Western sentimentalism.

It is as much about the contrast between the 'old ways' of living and the city (modern life style) as it is family.

Yasujirō Ozu (1903-1963) began his career in the silent era making short comedies, Last films were in colour during the early 1960s. Other crucial works include: *Late Spring* (1949) and *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962).

In the Mood for Love (2000). Romantic drama written produced and directed by Wong Kar-wai (aka WKD). Co-production between Hong Kong and France. Portrays the relationship between a man (Tony Leung) and a woman (Maggie Cheung) whose spouses are having an affair together.

WKD films have an immense sense of longing. He will often improvise and go off script while filming. In the film it appears that the fantasy drives their affair.

WKD films are best seen as interconnected shorts in the way they are shot.

A Blu-ray box set is available on Criterion UK. Start saving!

Wong Kar-wai often collaborates with cinematographer, Christopher Doyle and actor Tony Leung who is, essentially, his 'Robert DeNiro'. Doyle is Australian born and a Hong Kong citizen.

His colours are often lurid reds, greens and purples heightening the emotion.

WKD often sited *Vertigo* (1958) as a key influence. The colours and Hitchcock voyeurism.

Ke Huy Quan – Short Round in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) – was actually a assistant director for WKD on *2046* (2004).

Maggie Cheung is a former multi-award-winning Hong Kong actress. Retired from acting in 2004 having felt as though she had fulfilled her acting potential and wanting to pursue painting and composing music. Multilingual due to her upbringing in Hong Kong and England and ten years' stay in Paris.

Other notable Wong Kar Wai films include: *Chung King Express* (1994), *Fallen Angels* (1995), *Happy Together* (1997) and *The Grandmaster* (2013).



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Tony Leung is one of Hong Kong's most recognised and versatile actors, having won numerous awards. He is also a singer. Prior to filming Wong Kar-wai's *Days of Being Wild* (1990), he had lost interest in acting but in seeing a scene from the film, changed his mind.

From *Mood* to the MCU. Leung played Marvel villain, Wenwu (The Mandarin) in *Shang-Chi and The Legend of The Ten Rings* (2021).

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring (2003) is a South Korean film directed by Kim Ki-duk, who also plays the adult Monk.

Barely any dialogue – minimalistic – perfect example of 'show not tell'.

Set around a floating ministry on a lake. Each season representing the part in the life of a Buddhist monk.

It tells the story of a young Buddhist apprentice mentored by an aging monk at a secluded monastery in the Korean wilderness. When he is a teenager, the apprentice encounters a girl who arrives at the monastery seeking assistance with her health. He falls in love with her, tempted away from his spiritual existence, unprepared for the modern ways of life.

A serene and tranquil film. Every shot counts, painting the perfect picture of the seasons changing.

Farewell my Concubine (1993) is named after an original Chinese opera.

Showed for two weeks then was pulled for censorship. It was subsequently banned for portrayals of homosexuality and violence perpetrated by the communist party during the cultural revolution. Ironically it brought back for China's bid for hosting the Olympics due to an outcry from the international community.

An even more difficult film to watch, considering what happened to Leslie Cheung as it deals with suicide and homosexuality throughout. As openly bisexual, he believed an good actor to be androgynous and ever changing.

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A 'small epic'. Chen Kaige's Chinese/Hong Kong co-production, *Farewell my Concubine* is set in 1924. A young performer, Cheng Dieyi (Leslie Cheung) - who specialises in playing female roles - trains at the Beijing Opera House. Here he meets Duan Xiaolou (Fengyi Zhang) who, in contrast plays dominant male roles. Pretending to be in love with Duan onstage, Cheng begins to develop romantic feelings for his co-star offstage, which are not reciprocated. Over the next 50 years, the two men maintain a complicated friendship as China undergoes turbulent changes.



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Won both the '94 Palme d'Or and BAFTA for best foreign language film. Lavish production design and staging. Again, every shot counts.

Another notable Chinese/Hong Kong co-production is Yi-Mou Zhang's Academy Award-nominated *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), starring Chinese actress Gong Li.

Eat Drink Man Woman (1994) is Ang Lee's third feature. He is, perhaps to Western audiences, the most well known Taiwanese filmmaker.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000) was not only his breakout film in the West but elevated (and reinvigorated) the martial arts genre with its higher budget due to being a East/West co-production.

Ang Lee has gone onto have one of the most versatile careers directing anything from drama to a Western, superhero movie and gay romance.

Another notable Taiwanese film is Hou Hsiao-hsien's drama *Daughter of the Nile* (1987) available through Eureka Entertainment.

Also, Taiwan/Japan co-production, *Yi Yi* (2000), written and directed by Edward Yang. The title in Chinese means 'one by one', meaning 'one after another'; the story about three different generations.