

Fallen Angels in the Forest of Hong Kong  
The Theme of Rejection in Wong Kar-wai's Cinema

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People widely regard Wong Kar-wai's *Days of Being Wild*, *In the Mood for Love*, and *2046* as an informal trilogy, known as the love trilogy or the Su Li-zhen Universe. All of these films share a common character, a woman named Su Li-zhen. However, the character in each film is not the same Su Li-zhen, but the different variations of the same person instead. Though not explicitly connected, Wong Kar-wai implicitly links the different variations through a variety of elements such as the name of the characters and the numbers or items related to that character. This is not the only time that Wong Kai-wai incorporates such element in his films; he also creates another cinematic "universe," the He Zhiwu Universe, comprising of the movies *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels*. Both of these films consists of a character named He Zhiwu, played by Takeshi Kaneshiro. Beyond the same name, the two characters are also connected by their relationship to canned pineapple and the number 223.

Unlike the Su Li-zhen Universe, the movies that make up the He Zhiwu Universe share the common theme of rejection on multiple levels. Both *Chungking Express* and *Fallen Angels* revolve around people who gets rejected and who rejects others; the He Zhiwu in *Chungking Express* gets rejected by his ex-girlfriend, and Wong Chi-Ming rejects both his ex-girlfriend and his partner in crime. Along with the rejection from or towards an external individual, the characters in these films also tend to reject their internal feelings, such as He Zhiwu and officer 663 in *Chungking Express*. Beyond the rejection that exists between characters and themselves, the plot of these films as a whole is an example of the rejection towards conventionality. In both movies, Wong Kar-wai refuses waste time on conventionality. Instead, he focuses on exploring parts of human identity that are often overlooked by society.

Before diving into the more complex roles that rejection plays in Wong Kar-wai's films, the cases of rejection between characters should be explored first, focusing specifically on *Fallen Angels*. In this film, there are three major rejections. The first two are Wong Chi-Ming rejecting his ex-girlfriend and his partner in crime, and the last one is He Zhiwu being rejected implicitly by Charlie. Before rejecting Punkie later on in the plot, Wong Chi-Ming also rejects his partner in crime at the bar. Despite the drastically different reactions to the rejection, the two cases are surprisingly similar to each other. From Wong Chi-Ming's perspective, the reason why he rejected both of them is because he does not see a future with either of girls. In terms of Punkie, Wong Chi-Ming has no love for her. He could not even remember that he used to date her. It is more complicated in terms of his partner in crime. To Wong Chi-Ming, his partner in crime represents a risky life style that he is trying to escape from. Ever since he got injured from the one time that he is collecting protection fees, Wong Chi-Ming has been wanting to escape the dangerous life style of a killer. Therefore, he knows that he does not have a future with his partner in crime. In order to end their fruitless relationship, Wong Chi-Ming rejects his partner in crime in advance. This is very common theme among Wong Kar-wai's films. In fact, it is once explicitly mentioned in his earlier work, *Ashes of Time*. In the film, Hung Qi states, "the best way to avoid being rejected is to reject others first." (*Ashes of Time*) In this case, Wong Chi-Ming is rejecting his partner in crime first before she refuses to change her life style.

Another worth noting rejection is the rejection of He Zhiwu by his ex-girlfriend May. In this case, He Zhiwu refuses to believe that his relationship with May has truly ended, as shown by his continuous attempt to validate her feelings for him through checking his message box. Instead of trying to reach out to May, he chooses to wait passively. He Zhiwu's reaction to

rejection is cowardliness and wait. As mentioned by Nai Kang, the wait after rejection is increasingly despairing as He Zhiwu watches the canned pineapples approaches the expiration date (Nai, 122).

The way that He Zhiwu handles his emotions is rather uncommon. Unlike many female characters in these two films, who actively and explicitly engage with their emotions, He Zhiwu dodges and rejects his emotions. When he truly takes in the fact that May has dumped him, He Zhiwu refuses to cry. He runs on the track to burn off the excessive water in his system and pretends to be cool by saying “I won’t cry, May always says that I am cool.” (*Chungking Express*) As mentioned by Xin Jiang, this is a very “manly” staunch and self-deception (Xin, 72). The similar type of rejection of self-emotion can also be found within officer 663. For him, he refuses to admit that he is feeling sad about the fact that he got dumped by his previous love affair. The way that officer 663 rejects his emotions is by projecting the emotions that he rejected onto everyday items. Everyday objects cannot reject nor betray (Nai, 134). Therefore officer 663 can gain a sense of solace from talking to these items (Nai 134). In addition, officer 663 is pretending that it is those items that are feeling sad, and not him. In such a way, the items become an outlet of his emotions while at the same time, he is able to pretend to be tough by playing the role of a comforter.

As mentioned by Nai Kang, both men in *Chungking Express* refuses to talk to anyone about their emotions. Instead, they choose to talk to a pile of cans and objects in the apartment. Both officer 663 and He Zhiwu are incredibly romantic (Nai, 125). Indeed, unlike the masculinity in many other movies, the men in Wong Kar-wai’s films are often sensitive and passive. On the other hand, the women in his films are almost always straightforward and active.

Unlike officer 663 who talks to his soap, Charlie cries out loud, explicitly showing her emotions. Instead of leaving hints for his loved one like Wong Chi-Ming, Punkie actively shows her affection and her need for attention towards him. On top of the rejections that happened between the characters in the film, Wong Kar-wai is also rejecting the common gender role. Instead, he shows the audience a different side of people that is unorthodox. By doing so, Wong Kar-wai is able to evoke the part of self in the audience that is hidden because of the social norm. Men are able to use the men in his film as an outlet for their sensitive thoughts while women could be supported by the women in the film to be active and brave in their pursuit of love unaltered by the judgements of others.

### Works Cited

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