

by the publisher as the first published response to the film by Native Americans. Colonese and his group bring a fresh perspective to the film that productively complements that of traditional scholars. For example, instead of wondering why Ethan changes his mind about Debbie, they wonder why Debbie suddenly changes her mind. When Ethan and Marty talk with her near Scar's camp, she tells them to go away, explaining that the Comanche are now her people. But then, a few scenes later, she abruptly agrees to go "home" with Marty. Presumably, Ford and 1950s America could not understand a white captive preferring to live with the Comanche rather than with whites. Colonese's study group also wonders why the Navajos who play the Indians in Scar's tribe speak Navajo rather than Comanche. Perhaps, as Lehman suggests, the questions provoked by the film are more interesting than any of the answers we might provide?

The best book on the making of *The Searchers* continues to be Ed Buscombe's BFI monograph (2000). The anthology edited by Eckstein and Lehman contains great original research (Eckstein, Kalinak) and reprints of seminal essays (Henderson, Pye), but it omits crucial pieces by Andrew Sarris, Joe McBride, and Michael Wilmington. The definitive essay on the film has yet to be written. That'll be the day.

JOHN BELTON is the author of *American Culture/American Cinema*. He edited a series of books for Columbia University Press.

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Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time*

By Wimal Dissanayake, with Dorothy Wong. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003. \$37.50 cloth; \$14.95 paper. 173 pages.

Wong Kar-wai is one of the most distinctive auteurs to emerge in contemporary international cinema. Fittingly, two of his films—1994's *Ashes of Time* and 1997's *Happy Together*—have already received scholarly treatment in Hong Kong University Press's new series of monographs, *The New Hong Kong Cinema*. To date, the series (under the general editorship of leading scholars of Hong Kong film and culture Akbar Abbas and Wimal Dissanayake) has also published books on John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), Tsui Hark's *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983), and Fruit Chan's *Dorian Durian* (2000). Beautifully designed, with covers that represent the name of the press in artist Xu Bing's trademark synthetic "square word calligraphy," these monographs assist in the canonization of exemplary Hong Kong film texts from the important period that began in the 1980s with the impending end of British colonialism and the "return" to China. Comparable to the British Film Institute's *Film Classics and Modern Classics* series, these short books by respected scholars of films offer intensive analyses deemed cultural landmarks. Further, as the series editors explain in their preface, *The New Hong Kong Cinema* texts recognize and historicize cinematic accomplishments comparable to those of early Soviet cinema, postwar Italian Neorealism, the

French New Wave, and the new German cinema of the 1970s. Dissanayake's volume, like Karen Fang's on John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow*, is an extremely valuable contribution to the scholarly study of Hong Kong cinema. (For the sake of shorthand, I hereafter refer to Dissanayake as the author of this book, although the plural pronouns "we"/"our" are used throughout, and Dorothy Wong is credited as having made a significant contribution to the volume as translator of some texts from the original Chinese.)

Organizationally, Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time* includes chapters on the film's background, story, characters, narrative structure, and style, as well as martial arts, and the themes of "time," "melancholia," and "fragmentation." The penultimate chapter focuses on the reception of the film, and appendices—including translated published interviews with director/screenwriter Wong Kar-wai, film editor Patrick Tam Kar-ping, art director Chang Suk-ping, and music composer Frankie Chan—follow a brief concluding chapter that ties together some key conceptual strands. The book opens with eight well-chosen color stills that are evocative of what Dissanayake calls "the most forbiddingly and uncompromisingly difficult among [Wong Kar-wai's] creations to date." Wong, of course, continues to make stylish and challenging films that garner international attention; during the period since the publication of this book, he has also directed the futuristic *2046* (2004) and a short called "The Hand" for the omnibus *Ess* (2004), together with Michaelangelo Antonioni and Steven Soderbergh. His latest project, sharing its title with a classic by another famous auteur, is *The Lady from Shanghai*, reportedly, at the time of writing, to star Nicole Kidman.

Wong's film *Ashes of Time* (*Dongye Xidu*) is based on the popular fiction by Louis Cha (a.k.a. Jin Yong) and, the director claims, was also inspired by John Ford's *The Searchers*. Dissanayake resists calling *Ashes of Time* an "adaptation" in a conventional sense, and throughout the volume deftly employs poststructural theories (e.g., Derrida on signature and counter-signature, Deleuze on time-image and movement-image) to discuss Wong Kar-wai's auteurist achievement. The prismatic approach of looking at the same film chapter-by-chapter vis-à-vis story, characters, narrative structure, etc., gets somewhat repetitive at times. There is also some loss of focus when it comes to the appraisal of the film's critical reception: the author's central point seems to be that *Ashes of Time*, while receiving negative and/or mixed reviews upon its initial reception, has been subsequently recuperated by Hong Kong film scholars, who have perceived its significance retrospectively in light of Wong's other work. *Ashes of Time* features a pantheon of familiar stars—including the two Tony Leungs (Chiu-wai and Kar-fai), the late Leslie Cheung, Brigitte Lin, Maggie Cheung, Carina Lau, Jacky Cheung—and the stunning cinematography of the director's longtime collaborator Christopher Doyle, as well as Wong's now familiar brooding sense of loss.

Dissanayake's book is indeed compelling—it makes a strong case for the rehabilitation of a maligned text in an important career. I have not seen *Ashes of Time* since a mid-1990s director's showcase where it was my (then) least fa-

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favorite of Wong Kar-wai's films, and I am convinced after reading this book that repeat viewings will yield rich intertextual insights when "we connect it to the earlier and later works" (14). Further, *Ashes of Time's* play with the syntax of *wuxia* (swordplay-focused narratives set in the past) is not only in dialogue with previous Chinese films but also prefigures the sensational international success of Ang Lee's transnational neo-*wuxia* film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), and Zhang Yimou's high-profile epic forays into the genre with *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004).

The "Background" chapter in Dissanayake's book, in my view, is one of its great highlights, as it provides fascinating information about the international texture of the funding and distribution of *Ashes of Time*—the way, for instance, casting was affected by contractual obligations to distributors. The story of Hong Kong critic/filmmaker/distributor Shu Kei's "rescue operation" of the film demonstrates an amazing intervention. And history repeats itself in the tale of Wong's postponements with the Venice Film Festival due to *Ashes of Time's* constant re-edits—foreshadowing the notorious challenges Wong's down-to-the-wire tendencies recently posed for scheduling at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. Given the convoluted narrative of *Ashes of Time*, the "Characters" chapter helps sort out who's who (aided by a diagram of their entanglements provided in Appendix 2).

More biographical background on Wong's formation as a filmmaker (and a full filmography of his works to date) would be a welcome addition to this book, as would further discussion of the collaborative aspects of his work and of the specific cinematic techniques of cinematography, editing, and sound he utilizes. The "Response" chapter offers a cross-section of some critical reactions to the film, as well as the summarized results of a survey of university students in Hong Kong conducted by the author. While the excerpted student responses are interesting to read, more contextual information about this study would make the data more meaningful. Nevertheless, despite this minor shortcoming, the students' words are reminders that this film is indeed worthy of study in an academic context, and deserves to be acknowledged alongside Wong's more celebrated works.

By all indications, the books in Hong Kong University Press's The New Hong Kong Cinema series seem to be achieving their objectives. Because of their attention to detail and depth of analysis, these monographs can work for readers before or after they have seen the films. However, my recommendation would be to read afterwards—as an inspiration to watch again.

ANNE CIECKO is an associate professor in the Department of Communication and the Interdepartmental Program in Film Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

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