

EUROPEAN POSTMODERNITY IN ASIAN FILMS
-A THEORETICAL INVESTIGATION IN TSAI, MING-LIANG'S
AND KIM, KI-DUCK'S FILMS
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ABSTRACT

The works of Tsai Ming-Liang and Kim Ki-Duk, two directors in contemporary Asian cinema, qualify as postmodern films transgressing the hegemonic dominance of classic text, aesthetic and structure manifested in the blockbuster Hollywood films that are overwhelming in Asia.

The characters in Tsai's and Kim's films are social marginal and outcast excluded from mainstream society. They seem to be disengaged from their past and future, simply floating in different presents as a carrier of desire. One difference between is that the major figures in Tsai's films are marginal young men and women presenting a sense of alienation and solitude among the residents of the city, and their intimate behavior is portrayed in enclosed spaces. Kim's films, the major figures are abandoned by and isolated from society, either brutal men or solitary prostitutes.

Tsai and Kim always make ample use of the residual in everydayness in order to produce the incessant different present-becoming. These becoming-presents are constituted by unpredictable contingency without the association of cause and effect between event and event. Therefore, for Tsai and Kim, time depicted in the cinematic temporality is enunciated by the permanently present discourse, which is absent from its past and is still unknown for its future, but only produces the infinite moment. In other words, this temporal prolongation is ahistorical, lacking depth and merely progresses in action linking action. Thus it also becomes a fragmentary and not a linear development for its lack of commencement and an end, being an endless present-becoming.

There is no connection between narrative spatiality in Tsai and Kim's films. This has become detached from its related and logical linkage prescribed in the classical narrative structure, but randomly, coincidentally and unforeseeably merged together, imbedded with the linguistic system of scission revealing no beginning and end but only providing the characters, Taipei and Seoul residents, like nomadic

tribes wandering around without indicating the direction of their coming and going. In other words, these spaces in both post-colonial cities can be regarded as temporary and transitional spaces and create the ephemeral mirage of a playground. Tsai and Kim's cinematizations of the urban spaces of Taipei and Seoul respectively have been constituted by the present discourse, which makes the spatial marking, to which personal memory as well as collective history attaches, vanish.

These are the most salient traits in the postmodern text and structure, which can be viewed from both directors' masterful works among Asian cinema. Moreover, their non-historical discourses, non-moralistic and non-ethical and dehumanized and dystopian text in describing social life as well as non-linear and non-classical narrative structure in constituting cinematic text also make Tsai and Kim's films catch the international gaze. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of a full postmodern exploration of both directors' works. This has motivated me to construct a passage from European postmodernity to Asian postmodern films.

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