



Fakulti Seni Gunaan dan Kreatif

IDENTIFY *WENYI PIAN*

SIA MENG FEI

Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honor
(Cinematography)

2015

IDENTIFY *WENYI PIAN*

SIA MENG FEI

This Project is one of the needs for
Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honor
(Cinematography)

Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest appreciation goes to my supervisor Mr. Yow Chong Lee who giving me fully support from both emotionally and academically. I also would like to thank to my fellow friends Tan Boon Ming and Edward Lai as they play as a supportive role along this paper had be written and willing to accompany and support when I desperate time in writing this paper. It is extremely kind of Mr Yow Chong Lee, Tan Boon Ming and Edward Lai to have carefully read my drafts and provided invaluable help with language correction. Other than that, many thanks to my friends who company, and support in different ways.

Last but not least, I would like to thank to my beloved parents as they had support and sponsor my study in UNIMAS for these 3 years, without them I would not to able to have chance to finish study and this paper.

Abstract

Wenyi pian is a master genre of Chinese film in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. But, there had not been a proper academic research done on this genre. Thus, in this paper the researcher would try to determine the definition and element of *wenyi pian*.

Keywords: wenyi pian, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, element

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

What is *wenyi pian*? In Mandarin, it refers to *wenxue yu yishu pian* and namely *wenyi pian* (literature and art film) in short. *Wenxue* (literature) presents typical image or philosophical ideas, while *yishu* (art) contain ideas and themes, and it has the task to present the typical images into the film (Teo 1997). *Wenyi* (literature and art) contains an ideology and art form to be represented into the film. According to (Cai 1985, cite in Han, 2014), *wenyi pian* is a form of film that express emotion, sentimental, family relationship, ethic value and romances.

The earlier film industry was competitive as Europe countries hold the film market in China as early as 1920. Ming xing (Star Motion Picture Company) founded by Zheng Zheng Qiu started produce films about Chinese culture, traditional ethical values because wanted to avoid domination of western film in China film market (Yu, 2006). The close relationship between literature and the early China film came from a background of the literary writers to cooperate with butterfly fiction writers to produce family drama since the mid-1920s (Zhen, 2004).“Orphan Rescues Grandfather” was one of the famous family dramas that depicts social problem, such as gambling, theft robbery, corruption and patriotism (ZDZ 1996b). The term *Yuanyanghudiepai* refers to Mandarin Duck and butterfly in Chinese language, it was popular in 1910s to 1920s. This is because butterfly fiction was adapted into the films and TV shows and also influenced the

development of modern Chinese literature (Han, 2014). As mentioned as earlier, Zheng's family dramas common with butterfly fiction such as "Orphan Rescues Grandfather". Butterfly fiction focused on various emotions or sentiments (*qing*) (Zhang, 1997 as cited in Zhang, 2004). The characteristic of Butterfly fiction and May Fourth Movement was borrowed from the fiction literature and focused on the expression of emotions and sentiments that both related to the social problem at that era. The most important thing was the literary writer and the filmmaker must cooperate in improving the film and the filmmaker accepts the significant of the script as the basic idea of the story and art in film (Zheng, 1990).

"Spring in a Small City" *Xiao Cheng Zhi Chun* (1948), was the masterpiece of *wenyi pian* directed by Fei Mu. The prime element in this film was rhythm, with pause and timing as the dramaturgical elements. According to Teo (1997), *wenyi* convention summaries in the adage "begin from emotion, end in humanity" (*fa hu qing, zhi hu li*). In other word, desire should be bound by ethic. Most of the *wenyi pian* are related to ethical, tragedy, loss, romance and social problem.

In the era of 60s and 70s, some of the filmmaker from China like Zhu ShiLin, Li PingQian, QinTao, and Evan Yang produced *wenyi pian* in Hong Kong. The themes are related to history, social, ethic of family and romance as the basic idea of *wenyi pian* and art film (Yu, 2006). Compared to other Hong Kong film genre like comedy and *dong zuo pian* (action film) in 1960s and 1970s, *wenyi pian* not really prominent at that time. But the basic idea to produce the *wenyi pian* exists. *Wenyi pian* in Hong Kong has the most influence in the 1980s and 1990s, most of the films produced by new wave filmmakers such as Wong Kar

Wai, Stanley Kwan, Ann Hui, Yim Ho and Chan Gor. The new wave film creative in terms of theme and image, more artistic and different style compared to other film genre in Hong Kong (Yu, 2006). Filmmaker in Hong Kong followed their *wenyi* tradition.

In Taiwan, the term of *wenyi aiqing pian* (romantic films of art and literature) has emerged because of Qiong Yao's romance stories started in 1965. The term *aiqing* refers to the love between a man and a woman (Lin, 1999). The theme of Qiong Yao's romance stories involved love and the differences in dramatization of genders, generations and social classes, but mostly about the romantic couple's emotion in their relationship. Qiong Yao's romances are thematically linked to Zheng Zheng Qiu's family drama in 1920s where are sentiments fluctuation in familial love, humanity, representation of social problem and traditional ethical value (Zhang, 2004). Thus, Taiwan's *wenyi pian* is much influenced by the ideas of Qiong Yao's romance. *Wenyi pian* emerged in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the same period between 60s and 70s.

The root of the *wenyi pian* in China was come from literature adaptation. The term "*wenyi*" used by writer to emphasize the importance of art and literature. The theme of the Butterfly fiction and May Fourth movement was influential in family drama. In 1920's, most of the writings on Chinese *wenyi* were primarily concerned with ethical of family and artistic integrity. The film concerned about the embodiment of sentiment, emotion and humanity. Although *wenyi pian* in different countries expressed the same emotional aspect, but the characteristic of

wenyi pian are varied because of the difference in history, culture and social background of the country.

1.1 Problem statement

Wenyi pian is the master genre of Chinese language cinema in China. However, till today the elements used to describe *wenyi pian* are vague and unsure. One of the reasons are most of the scholars did not gone through the words *wenyi* thoroughly, but only gone through brief explanation on what is *wenyi*. They did not explain further about the relationship between *wenyipian* and *wenxueyuyishu*. Researcher believed that *wenxue* and *yishu* is the elements that describe *wenyi pian*. Literature (*wenxue*) and art (*yishu*) emphasized the values of literary and the artistic quality that incorporated into the film. Elements such as theme, camera work, and background music of the *wenyi pian* are different in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. As early in 1985, Cai Guo Rong mentioned that film of this genre used contemporary society as a backdrop of the story and added elements such as human emotion and lyrical. Most of the films have relation in terms of the expression of the emotion, humanity, ethical or family relationship, thus it was very difficult to describe what kind of film is called *wenyi pian* and what element that can be categorized as *wenyi pian*. The making of *wenyi pian* in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan are based on different ways, backgrounds, cultures and social issues. The difference in period, country and filmmaker will create different *wenyi pian*.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the definition of *wenyi pian*?
2. What are the elements of the film that best describe the *wenyi pian* in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To define the definition of *wenyi pian*.
2. To identify and analyses the elements of the film that best describes the *wenyi pian* in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

1.4 Scope of Research

This research focuses on identifying the element of the film in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan that best describe the *wenyi pian* in terms of thematic motifs, camera work and background music that may differ from a director to another. The function of these three stylistic features remains remarkably constant in the *wenyi pian* produced in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

1.5 Conclusion

Wenyi pian is very influential and important in China film industry. *Wenyi pian* can be a mode of the production to the filmmaker to produce the film and increase the quality of the art film. Until the present day, *wenyi pian* is still very difficult to describe and to be explained in film industry because all art form, theme, culture and ideology are differing in different period, country and filmmaker.

Chapter 2: Literature Reviews

2.0 Introduction

Wenyi pian is the master genre of Chinese-language cinema. In a sense, *wenyi pian* was a complexity in Chinese cinema. *Wenyi pian* was difficult to be identified and classified in terms of theme, film style, and culture. Thus, in this chapter, the researcher will define and analyze the element of *wenyi pian* in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan to identify the best way to describe *wenyi pian*.

As early in 1985, Cai Guorong mention the concept of *wenyi pian*,

Chinese *wenyi* melodrama generally developed along two lines: those work that deal with family relationship and ethics, and those that depict romances. First, films of this genre use contemporary or recent society as a backdrop. Second, they deal with human emotions and are therefore lyrical to an extent (Cai Guorong as cited in Zhang, 2004).

From statement above, one can understand that *wenyi pian* is expression of human emotion and lyrical to an extent from an art form and also emphasize the family relationship and ethics. Apart from Cai, Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh also raised similar issue. For Yeh (2009), *wenyi* emphasizes the literary and artistic values were highly valuable in interpreting Chinese film. In Chinese films there are elements of *wenyi*, *wenxue* and *yishu* to interpret *wenyi pian* (Yeh, 2009). It is high in value because *wenyi* have the literary value and artistic taste to be represented.

The word *wenyi pian* means literature (*wenxue*) and art (*yishu*), with the combination with film (*pian*). *Wenyi* had been a regular term to emphasize the importance of arts and literature in the film to the society (Yeh, 2006). According to Zhang (1990), the director's tasks apart from his commands on the cinematic

techniques to represent literary value in the film, director also responsible for his film of the artistic quality. Director is responsible to elevate the artistic quality of the film through the combination of literature and art. According to Zheng (1990), if the term value has been used, it is not the value of literature because literature is art of language. The words represented in the literature are used to express aesthetic tastes and feelings towards objective existence in the real life. Art (*yishu*) in the *wenyi pian* is also important because it contains aesthetic value such as music, sculpture, dance, and painting, although using different representative devices. All the art such as language, performance, modeling, sound and real objects can be define as the values of aesthetic (Zheng, 1990). According to Zheng (1990), director must pay attention to the original literary value and adapt the script from the literature into the film to improve the Chinese films (Zhang, 1990). The root of *wenyi pian* in film industry's sourcing stories was from literature. The success of feature-length film in China like "Orphan Rescues Grandfather" (*Gu er jiu zhu ji*) was adapted by a kind of popular fiction known as Mandarin Ducks and butterflies (*yuan yang hu die pai*).

The story will be more about the standard narrative of modern Chinese literature such as the classical style love stories that are the traditional symbol of Mandarin Ducks and butterfly (Huang, 2009). Script is the basic idea of literature and art in film, but the important role is literary writers in improving the film with the filmmaker. This is because there are very close relationship between literature and art in Chinese-language cinema. Both fundamental of element was the root to produce the *wenyi pian*. Literature and art plays a very important role in development of the aesthetic film. The story in film is similar to the original literature because the director has to retain the value of aesthetic film.

Mingxing (Star Motion Picture Company) was the most influential studio founded in Shanghai by Zhang Shichuan, Zheng Zhengqiu, and Zhou Jianyun in 1922s. Most of the films are about patricide case to reflect a real life but it was unacceptable by the audience and was reportedly banned afterward (ZDZ 1996a: 403, 1520 as cited in Zhang, 2004). After that, Zheng Zhengqiu proposed to produce the family drama “Orphan Rescues Grandfather”, Mingxing had financial problem. The company overcame the financial problem after the appearance of “Orphan Rescues Grandfather”. Furthermore, it has also helped to establish a pattern of Mingxing production and popularity in the film industry of China (Zhang, 2004). In the period butterfly fiction arrived, the early cinema in that period focused on various emotion and sentiments (*qing*) between family relationship and romance story (*aiqingpian*). Since Zheng Zhengqiu cooperate with the butterfly writer to produce the family drama, he highlights the traditional morality and ethical codes in the period 1920s (Zhang, 2004). According to Huang (2009), the plot of “Orphan” is the identification of the story as melodrama and most melodrama produced by Mingxing production made the character experience in the mood of twist or confusion to enhance the dramatic effect. But according to Zhang (2004), “Orphan Rescues Grandfather”, as a family drama also a “Chinese” genre in early 1920s. He also explained the family drama is to identify with the maturing of Chinese film as a narrative cinema, and the structure of this genre is a linear plot of conflict, climax and the resolution. For researcher, melodrama and “Chinese” genre’s family drama are almost identical because the characterization between two genres are about emotion fluctuations and emotion intensity as pointed out by Huang and Zhang before. The cultural significance of the aesthetic, ideological, or political level has

become closer and it comprises literary and film research, gender studies and other approaches to address the melodrama by a growing scholarship.

Wenyi pian denotes the melodrama in Chinese cinema. When writing on the *wenyi pian*, one's needs to go back to the origin of the *wenyi pian*. According to Teo (2006), *wenyi pian* have the relationship with the *wenming xi*, literally as "civilized drama" in twentieth century when the Chinese began making film in China. In early 1900s to 1920s, the early short film and *wenming xi* was wedded and at that time *wenming xi* was namely traditional theater (*jiuju* or *xiqu*) (Yingjin Zhang, 2004). According to Teo (2006), the form of the *wenming xi* is opposed to opera and plays performed in the traditional theatre for some improvisation based on the prescribed text. *Wenming xi* was similar with the Japanese *shimpa* ('new drama'), because both dramas are melodramatic form of modern theater that represents the sentimental. *Wenming xi* is modern play with melodramatic that emphasize love affairs, and mostly related to sentimental. 'Modern play' is a film set in contemporary life, based on a sensational real-life case in which similar to the fiction of social exposure (Zhang, 2004). *Wenming xi* was popular in Shanghai because it incorporate with the Shanghai's film industry to produce variant of realism out of *wenming xi* as exemplified in *Gu'er jiu zu ji* "Orphan Saves His Grandfather" (Zheng, 1923).

After the war in 1940s, the term *wenyi pian* was used to refer to the crop of films produced by the production company Wenhua (established in 1946), most of the films were drawn based on artistic literary sources such as the literary writer's Cau Yu to write and direct film. Wenhua production focuses on humanistic values,

artistic visions and dedicated to sponsor small or no profit art film (Zhang, 2004). The term *wenyi pian* sometimes used in the art film and the word *wen* also means 'civil', but nowadays, *wenyi pian* are used to denote the melodrama in Chinese cinema and melodrama are originated from the Greek word, *melos* (music) and drama. (Teo, S. 2006). According to Bordwell (1981), art film defined as realistic cinema. In this kind of film, it shows the real location (Neorealism, the New Wave) and real problem. The part of realistic includes sexuality, as the aesthetic and the commerce of the art cinema but an eroticism that violate the production code of pre-1950 Hollywood. From the previous study, the art film is differ with *wenyi pian* because art film use "realistic" that include character's psychologically complex. But *wenyi pian* emphasizes the expression of emotion, sentimental and the family relationship. In addition, *Wenyi pian* also about human feelings like parental love, compassion and mercy, it not only limited to romantic or sexual emotion. Again, *Wenyi pian* is different from art film and *wenyi pian* should not be used to refer to art film (Bordwell, 1981; Han, 2014; Teo, 2006; Yeh, 2006).

2.1 The element of the *wenyi pian* in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

After the Second World War, Chinese cinema produced the example of *Wenyi pian*, "Spring in a Small Town" (*Xiao Cheng Zhi Chun, 1948*) by Fei Mu. He developed *wenming xi* as a form of modern drama that its theme could reflect contemporary live in China. Fei Mu realized a new genre when he made the 'Spring'. The film remains a significant example of the *wenyi pian*, partly because it has two fundamental elements of *wenyi pian*, which are theatrical and literary qualities of the film (Teo, 2006). From Lee Sun Feng's vision, to elevate the

popular culture into serious artwork (film), the film must have the fulfillment of the 'pure' literature and art (Yeh, 2006). From the study mentioned above, one of the elements of *wenyi pian* was adaption from literature, novel or prose.

Next, researcher would like to illustrate how these films had been adapted from literature and point out the theme of *wenyi pian* was about emotion and sentiments (*qing*) between family relationship and about the romance story. In Hong Kong, Wong Kar Wai directed the film "In the Mood for Love" adapted from a 1972 novella intersection. In mandarin namely "*Duidao*" by Liu Yichang, a Shanghai expatriate writer living in Hong Kong. Actually, in the film "In the Mood for Love", it quoted some lines from the story in "Intersection"(*Duidao*). The story of "Intersection" is about how two strangers live to each other and appear in the ways that determined by the nature of the city. Wong had developed the story himself based on his experience such as chosen location or was inspired by condition to be feel similar by the actors. "Intersection" was the basic idea for Wong to produce "In the Mood for Love" (Chung, 2003). Secondly, Stanley Kwan directed the film "Everlasting Regret" on a mood and nostalgic which was adapted from the novel, "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow" (*Changhen ge*, 1995) by Wang Anyi, a contemporary Chinese writer. The novel was awarded with Mao Dun Literature Prize, but Kwan changed the storyline of the fate of Jiang Lili, which drew her relationship closer with the main character, Wang Qiyao. The difference in storyline was that Kwan emphasized more on the sentimental of people's separation and reunion, but in the novel, it shows the plight's Jiang Lili. The first *wenyi pian* "Rouge / *Yanzhi Kou*, 1989" by Kwan, also adapted from the novel Lee Pik Wah with the same name as the writer. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the

original story of Lee Pik Wah has the element of mainstream film, but Kwan emphasized on the relationship between Leslie Cheung and Anita Mui to show the male's weakness and female's strength and how they fall in love to each other but at the end they separated. However, when Mui had pass away after 50 years, her soul reunion with Cheung again. Kwan also followed Hong Kong's *wenyi* tradition. For example, "Rouge/*Yanzhi Kou*" recognized as the sexual archetypes in the tradition of *wenyi pian* (Teo, 2006; Teo, 1997; &Yue, 2010;).

In Taiwan, the first two films, "Four Loves" (1965) and "My Silent Wife" (1965), were directed by by Li Xing, a Taiwanese dialect film director from Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC). Those films were adapted from the Romance fiction writer Qiong Yao, (also named Chen Che). At that period, Qiong Yao was a well-known person in Taiwan because most of the film was adapted from Qiong Yao's fiction. Director Bai Jingrui also adapted Qiong Yao's fiction in the 60s. For example, "Because of Love" (1968), was one of the most acclaimed Qiong Yao's adaptations by Bai in the 60s. Bai contributed to local film industry especially when Hong Kong has been dominated by imported martial art film and established Taiwan popular cinema in mandarin film market. Before the dominant "*wenyi aiqing pian*" (romantic films of art and literature), Qiong Yao's genre emerged as the trend of "*wenyi pian*" and it is about the struggle between lovers and parents, and emphasized the sentimental relationship between man and woman. Film critic, Cai Guorong defines that *wenyi* was related to affection between man and woman, familial love and the sentimental of humanity or nature. Qiong Yao's genre represents an aspiration toward nature of the lovers expressing their love. Although most of the films were adapted from Qiong Yao's novels, but the storyline is

different in the film. The film pointed out the culture of modern society, the value of traditional and the conflict between the people from different generation. However, the novel only presents the love story among lovers, relationship with parents and attribution on the centrality of women. In addition, directors such as Zhang Meijun, Cheng Honglie, Gao Shanlan, Chen Yaoqi and Lui Lili were the second wave directors that adapt Qiong Yao's novels. From 1965 until 1983, around 50 Qiong Yao's "*wenyi aiqing pian*" has become prominent in Chinese language cinema. (Lin, 1999; Huang, 2014; Yeh, 2006).

The golden age of Taiwan's film production was mainly Qiong Yao's genre. The genre provided vast resources for the adaptation in the film. However, Qiong Yao's genre could not sustain their popularity during the period of 1980s. Taiwan's leading studio CMPC sponsored the movement of Taiwan New Cinema (1982-1987) to change the mode of the Taiwan film and culture since they recognize the need of the audience and would like to update their expression on film. Outsider and oversea Chinese directors reactivated the *Wenyi* style in Taiwan film before the Taiwan New Cinema directors like Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-Hsien to represent the symbolic of an aesthetic Taiwan national cinema. One more thing is to draw the cultural in the capital of Taiwan, which emphasized on aesthetic refinement and historical uniqueness. The film "A One and a Two" (*Yi Yi*) directed by Edward Yang, was awarded with the best director prize in Cannes Film Festival and some prestigious awards in the United States. Furthermore, *Yi Yi* has the *wenyi* narrative style dominant in Taiwan cinema. The story is about troubled family that facing common issue which challenged the lives of different ages in Taipei. Yang's films mainly show the traditional family which ties has been broken down, the separation

between the lover and the family members. It is a kind of bittersweet melodrama that emphasize sexual, paternal, career and existential. In addition, the culture tradition has been challenged because of the influence of Confucianism in Taiwanese society (Yeh, 2006; Chris Berry, 2006).

Anyhow, most of the films directed by Hou focus on personal histories and family ties. His films are closely related to the traditional culture such as using different languages in the film; Taiwanese, Mandarin, Cantonese, and sometimes Japanese. Tam and Dissanayake (1998) pointed out the impact that language have on Hou's identity "The Time to Live and the Time to Die" (1985), "A City of Sadness" (1989), and "Good Men, Good Women" (1995) was directed by Hou. The story of the film mostly represents the political history as the background, which perfectly explains the relative weakness of Taiwan. Hou tries to show Taiwan's identity by using history as the background. But the director did not forget to highlight the relationship and sentiment of the family. (Tung, 2008; Chen, 2006).

According to Yeh (2006), *Wenyi* (literature and arts) is the term used in Taiwan to refer to melodrama of all kinds, such as family-ethical, romance, sing song and comedy. As mentioned in the previous section, since Hou and Yang led Taiwan's New Wave Cinema, the *wenyi* narrative style is different from Qiong Yao's genre. Moreover, the film in the period of New Wave Cinema was not adapted from any novel fiction but the theme of the film was related to the *wenyi pian*. In addition, the New Wave directors did not transcribes any literary devices into film. They create an aesthetic mood that makes the film more comparable to music than to literature. *Wenyi pian* in China and Hong Kong also contain music or

song. Director Tian Zhuangzhuang remade the film “Spring in a Small Town” in 2002, which is quite similar to the original plot of the previous version by Fei Mu in 1948. Apart from Fei Mu’s film “Spring in a Small Town”, it has the literature value of the narration, theatrical nature, and contains several music and song in the film. When the film was made in 1948, these songs were culled from the existing folk melodies rather than the newly popular songs. Thus, song and music act as the convention of *wenyi pian* today and these songs are able to depicting emotions realistically. Both melody and lyrics have considerable importance on the music in Chinese film. The lyrics for the songs in Chinese cinema are distinctive for the part of melody. The music are mostly composed by using one instrument and slow-paced to allow audience contemplates on the objective of the visual.

According to Nochimson (2010), the film “In the Mood for Love” (Fayeungninwa, 2000) by Wong Kar Wai also set richly melodic music in a minor key to associate in Western music with melancholy. In addition, the various sources of traditional, modern Chinese and Western styles sound and music to uses in Chinese film production. The music was slow-paced similar with the action and creates the aesthetic mood in *wenyi pian*. Moreover, he raised the popularity of Zhou Xuan, classic rendition of the song ‘Huayang de Nianhua’ also can be heard in the film and that song became culled in that period. Composed popular song is considered as the practice of *wenyi pian* today. Furthermore, it also functions as a medium to depict emotions realistically in Chinese’s family life. Most of the music and song appears as an occasional in Chinese film to express the emotion that “erupts” when necessary in the film. (Nochimson, 2010; Teo, 2006; &Verstricht, 2011).