

UNIVERSITY
OF OSLO

Master thesis

Unfamiliar but Real:

On the Construction of Slowness through Long Takes in the Films of Tsai Ming-liang

Kaiyu Xu

Master's thesis in Chinese Culture and Society

KIN4595 30 Credits

Department of Cultural Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS)

University of Oslo

Spring 2023



Abstract

In recent years, boasting an appealing sense of slowness, slow cinema has emerged as a distinctive trend in film production and attracted considerable attention within film studies. Often taken to be a key figure within this trend, the Taiwan-based filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang uses various tools and techniques to construct such slowness in his films but is most well-known for his frequent employment of long takes. And the aim of this essay is to provide a comprehensive study of the latter within the context of, on the one hand, the history of and the controversy about slow cinema in general, and on the other hand, the life and thoughts of Tsai himself as a person and as a filmmaker. I will also try to show how two seemingly contradictory effects of the long take, i.e., its ability to preserve reality on the one hand and to defamiliarize it on the other, come into an interesting interplay in two of Tsai's representative works from different periods of his careers, and how such use of technique not only contribute to an aesthetic sense of slowness but also conveys Tsai's own reflections on the social reality of his time.

Foreword

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Professor Halvor Bøyesen Eifring, for his invaluable support and insights that have greatly enriched my research journey. The completion of this master's thesis would not have been possible without his continuous encouragement and patient mentorship.

I am also grateful to my friends, who have stood by my side throughout my years of study. Their encouragement has been a constant source of motivation. In particular, I am deeply grateful to my boyfriend for his dedicated efforts in reviewing and providing feedback on my thesis.

Lastly, thanks should also go to my parents in China who are always there for me when I am in low spirits.

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	2
<i>Foreword</i>	3
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Chapter 1. Slow Cinema in its Context</i>	7
Section 1. Slow Cinema: A Debate about its Nature	7
Section 2. The Origin of Slow Cinema and its Appeals	10
<i>Chapter 2. Tsai Ming-liang and the Slow Cinema</i>	13
Section 1. Tsai's Personal Experiences	13
<i>Chapter 3. The Construction of Slowness through Long takes in Tsai's Films</i>	18
Section 1. The Long Take and the Preservation of Reality	18
Section 2. The Long Take and the Defamiliarization from Reality	22
Section 3. Case Study: <i>Goodbye, Dragon Inn</i>	24
Section 4. Case Study: <i>Stray Dogs</i>	32
<i>Conclusion</i>	44
<i>Bibliography</i>	46

Introduction

This paper is a study of the trend of “slow cinema” in contemporary cinema, with a focus on its instantiation in the filmmaking of the Taiwan-based Malaysian director, Tsai Ming-liang. But it may also be said to be a study of the director Tsai Ming-liang from the perspective of the trend in question. That is, I will have something to say about the trend in general and the director in particular.

The term “slow cinema” here refers to a particular branch of art cinema that is often characterized by the following features: (1) the noticeable length of the shots (i.e., the employment of the long take); (2) a minimal and oblique narrative; (3) a focus on stillness and unnoticeable quiet moments in everyday life; (4) a soundscape dominantly created by diegetic sounds.¹ If handled properly, the interplay and the fusion between these features could somehow yield a salient sense of “slowness”, which could be so distinctly experienced by the viewers that the trend under discussion comes to be both named and defined in its name.

However, it is not always clear how the sense of slowness comes to emerge from these underlying features. In line with this, in this paper I will examine, on the one hand, how a sense of slowness gets fostered and constructed through the use of long takes in the films of Tsai Ming-liang, and on the other hand, how the use of long takes in turn affects other elements within his films (e.g., the narrative of the story, emotional expressions, characterizations, etc.). This study also seeks to discuss the interplay between the long take’s two seemingly contradictory effects: its ability to preserve reality and its ability to defamiliarize it. To conduct a detailed analysis, particular focus will be placed on two films of Tsai Ming-liang, namely *Goodbye Dragon Inn* (2003) and *Stray Dogs* (2013), both of which prominently feature long takes. Hopefully, this investigation will contribute not only to a deeper understanding of “slow cinema” in general, but to a better representation of Tsai Ming-liang’s filmmaking techniques and style as well.

¹ These four features listed here are collected, summarized, and synthesized from the lists by Flanagan 2008, Çağlayan 2018a, 7 and Çağlayan 2018b.

Also, it is quite clear that “slow cinema” is not something intrinsic to cinema from the very birth of the latter, but a trend that later emerged under some particular historical backgrounds. Similarly, its contemporary practitioners also come to follow this trend at some point, more or less because of their own backgrounds—e.g., their personal conditions, the social-historical contexts befalling them, and often the intermingling of both. For “slow cinema” stands not for (at least not essentially so) some particular filming techniques enabled by certain advancements in filming technology, but some particular ways in which the filmmaker comes to experience the world and tries to convey what she finds there to her audience. And in this respect, the case of Tsai is especially noteworthy: as a Chinese Malaysian filmmaker in Taiwan, a sexual minority living in a region with more conservative values, it is inevitable that Tsai’s perception of the world around him comes to be affected by these contexts, which may influence the ways of artistic expression in his films, including that of “slow cinema”. Therefore, it is meaningful to analyze how Tsai’s personal experiences have led to his choice of slowness, and how he reflects on the modern world through films.

Chapter 1. Slow Cinema in its Context

Section 1. Slow Cinema: A Debate about its Nature

Though we have said a few things about what “slow cinema” is in the introduction, as a current trend in filmmaking it would be better described and characterized in its own context, namely how it arises and is received in the film industry. However, before we dive into its history, which has been relatively obscure and unnoticeable until quite recently, it may be helpful to reflect firstly on an episode in its reception—in fact, the very episode that started to make “slow cinema” an increasingly well-known notion. For this episode consists of a public debate about the nature of the trend or notion in question, which is thus most informative of what “slow cinema” is from the perspective of those working in the industry or otherwise interested.

The debate kicked off in 2010, when Nick James, editor of *Sight & Sound*, published an editorial targeting slow cinema and the so-called “slow criticism” affiliated with it, which according to him are themselves the two aspects of passive aggression against Hollywood. James proved quite skeptical about the increasing dominance of slow cinema at film festivals at that time. He pointed out that this kind of film was “easy” (in a negative sense) for critics and programmers only because “such films are easy to remember and discuss in detail because details are few.”² And it was also easy for films of this genre to be popularized among the viewers: “(it is like the filmmakers gaslighting the potential viewers and shifting the burden of appreciation to the latter, saying that) it’s up to you to draw on your stoic patience and the fascination in your gaze, in case you miss a masterpiece.”³ As the central target of his attack, James refers to the Berlin Golden Bear winner *Honey*, noting that “there are times, as you watch someone trudge up yet another woodland path, when you feel an implicit threat: admit you’re bored and you’re a philistine. Such films are passive-aggressive in that they demand great swathes of our precious time to achieve quite fleeting and slender aesthetic and political effects: sometimes it’s worth it, sometimes not.”⁴ For him, the very nature of slow cinema is best represented by those woodland path walks, which cater to

² James 2010a, 5

³ James 2010a, 5

⁴ James 2010a, 5

overly self-esteeming cultural elites, but are actually of very limited aesthetic and political value.

Unsurprisingly, his views soon provoked fierce debates around the slow cinema. Harry Tuttle, author of the blog *Unspoken Cinema*, started his rebuttal by showing his great discontent with the name “slow cinema”, which he took to be a reductive (and hence pejorative) mischaracterization on the part of James of the trend in question, and proposed that it should be called “contemporary contemplative cinema (CCC)” instead. According to him, CCC “is not a formulaic trend that only produces masterpieces. It is an alternative way to make films, a new narrative mode, a different angle in storytelling, and it gives a new perspective to the audience. You can’t judge it with your subjective mainstream prejudices (lack of details, lack of events, slowness, boredom...)”⁵ In addition, he repudiated James’ dismissal of slow cinema as an “anti-intellectual, pro-entertainment inclination that plagues today’s film culture.”⁶

However, Steven Shaviro, an American film scholar, clearly declared himself to be more supportive of James than of Tuttle here. He argued that contemporary slow cinema lacked provocation and daringness compared to older contemplative works by masters such as Tarkovsky, and that slow cinema was regressive because it continued to make films in an old way and ignored the massive changes happening around, especially when the world was unprecedentedly changed by technology innovation, so that it can only be “a passive (instead of active and innovative) form of rebellion against Hollywood”, like James said.⁷

These are but some of the many figures partaking in the debates, but it already has become apparent that there are at least three controversial points about the nature of slow cinema that are being debated: (1) Firstly, is its nature reducible to some (plain) sort of “slowness”? (2) Secondly, placed in film history, is the trend a progressive innovation or passive regression? (3) Thirdly, is the trend merely enacted as a rebellion against Hollywood or does it have some other motivations of its own?

⁵ Tuttle 2010a

⁶ Tuttle 2010a

⁷ Shaviro 2010

In this section and the next, I will try to answer these questions in turn. Now regarding (1), one may notice that the recognition of “slow cinema” seems to presume the existence of some “fast cinema”.⁸ But how should we define fastness and slowness in this context? As a matter of fact, the tempo of a film as sensed by the audience is influenced by multiple factors, such as by the length of the shots, the cuts, sound and music, and the content of a story, all of which work closely with each other to attract the audience’s attention and create the ideal cinematic time on screen. Today, the fast pace seems to be the norm of mainstream films led by Hollywood. As David Bordwell has insightfully noted, the first strategy contributing to the intensified continuity of Hollywood is rapid editing: between the 1930s and 1960s, the average shot length (ASL) was between 8 and 11 seconds. In the 1970s, the ASL of most films varies between 5 and 8 seconds. This figure continued to drop in the following decades, and “by century’s end, the ASL of a typical film in any genre would run 3 to 6 seconds.”⁹ This is in stark contrast to the representative long takes favored by the slow cinema. Take, Tsai Ming-liang as an example: the ASL is 54.48 seconds in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (不散); 65.09 seconds in *What time is it there* (你那邊幾點); 70.92 seconds in *I don’t want to sleep alone* (黑眼圈); 90.11 seconds in *Face* (臉) and 115 seconds in *Stray Dogs* (郊遊).¹⁰ Besides this formal slowness, films categorized as “slow cinema” also have other characteristics in common, which also showcase some sort of slowness. For example, they commonly have a minimalist narrative, a focus on quiet moments of everyday life, etc., which can all be typically perceived with a sense of slowness.

Hence, it is fair to say that “slowness” could work as a decent summary of the distinctive features of slow cinema. But back to our question (1), it should be reminded that what best summarizes the features of something does not necessarily constitute the nature of the latter. And even if all the films tagged “slow cinema” are slow in every aspect, it will still not necessarily follow that the nature of “slow cinema” could be reduced to some sort of slowness. As we will see in the next section, the slowness in “slow cinema” is more like a means than an end; and even if slowness is the necessary means, the end of “slow cinema” could still be something other than slowness itself. Thus, it would be wrong to reduce the nature of “slow cinema” to certain slowness only because it is slow.

⁸ Çağlayan 2018, 7

⁹ Bordwell 2006, 121-122

¹⁰ Lim 2014, 10

On the other hand, there is nothing wrong about naming the trend in question as “slow cinema”, seeing that slowness is indeed the most typical and recognizable feature of films following this trend. For just as Çağlayan has noted, despite the often negative connotations of the description of “slow” in film criticism and its unclear meaning (i.e. it is unclear whether slowness refers to the camera, characters or their acting?), the label “slow” is still “the most fitting container” in that it captures the most striking feature of slow cinema, namely “its persistence in reducing the flow of temporality and pacing”, while the label “contemplative” (as featured in Tuttle’s name suggestion) is too general as it can refer to any kind of film that makes viewers contemplate.¹¹ And we just need to bear in mind that the name of something does not always reveal its nature, just as in this case. And to know more about the nature of “slow cinema”, we will need to know its end, which could be inferred from the motivations behind its origin and developments through time, as well as its place in the history of art cinema.

Section 2. The Origin of Slow Cinema and its Appeals

Admittedly, we cannot specify a certain time point at which the trend of “slow cinema” came into being, as it has various features each of which can be traced back to different moments in film history.

For example, Matthew Flanagan points out that the de-dramatization of slow cinema originates from “a cinema of walking”, a genre of European modernist cinema in the 1950s and 1960s, “where emotional restraint began to suppress dramatic incident and the themes of alienation, isolation and boredom usurped the weight of familiar conflict.”¹² According to Flanagan, this genre gets its name from its particular attention to filming the mere de-dramatized act of walking, which marks “a rupture in the organization of drama, and it assumes an even more prominent position in contemporary cinema.”¹³

¹¹ Çağlayan 2018, 6

¹² Flanagan 2008

¹³ Flanagan 2008

And with regard to the feature of temporal “slowness”, Çağlayan traces its tradition of slowness back to Italian Neorealist cinema in the 1940-50s, which tends to “displayed a slower tempo, drifting characters and a contemplation of everyday life in direct contrast to the extraordinary adventures experienced by Hollywood heroes.”¹⁴ Also, in the case of minimalist narrative, he notes that in avant-garde and experimental films represented by those of Andy Warhol, one can already find abandonment of causal links between events and episodes.¹⁵

Hence, as mentioned before, it is hard to locate the origin of the trend in time. For it is unlikely that all these practical features, with their different origins, suddenly converge and give birth to a new tradition at some point. Rather, the emergence of the slow film may be said to be a matter of perception: that is, at certain point people (both filmmakers and viewers) come to be more aware of and start to appreciate the collection and interaction of these features, to the extent that a paradigm or stereotype comes to be established through time. Hence, in our search for the nature of slow cinema, its appeal to such people may be more telling than its historical origin.

For example, Jonathan Romney, a film critic and also an editor of *Sight & Sound*, tried to evaluate the appeal of the slow cinema:

The last decade (the 2000s) certainly saw an increasing demand among cinephiles for films that are slow, poetic and contemplative — cinema that downplays event in favor of mood, evocativeness and an intense sense of temporality. Such films highlight the viewing process itself as a real-time experience in which, ideally, you become aware of every minute, every second spent watching.¹⁶

In other words, through the emphasis on temporality, slow cinema aims to bring about a real-time experience, allowing the viewer to be aware of the passage of time to the greatest extent possible.

¹⁴ Çağlayan 2018, 10

¹⁵ Çağlayan 2018, 10

¹⁶ Jonathan 2010, 43

On the other hand, if we look beyond the film industry, in recent years slowness itself has become a significant framework and strategy to help us to reflect on contemporaneity, or in Koepnick's words, to "be at once timely and untimely today" and "experience and read the now in unforeseen ways".¹⁷ According to him, slowness does not mean resistance to modern technology and mourning for the past, rather, it can be seen as a response to the high compression of present time and space that has greatly transformed our senses of presentness, and it enables us to hold our gaze at those unnoticeable moments and work with all those complexities in order to reshape our perception of the present.¹⁸

Similarly, Song Hwee Lim explores the concept of "slow" in slow cinema within the framework of the Slow Movement, a global trend focusing on decelerating the pace of daily life. Originating in the 1980s with the Slow Food Movement, which emerged as a reaction against the opening of a McDonald's in Rome, the Slow Food Movement champions the values of local and traditional cuisine, and advocates for sustainable food production and consumption.¹⁹ Lim argues that slow cinema resonates with the Slow Movement in that both of them try to "narrow the widening gap between the global and the local that [has been] created by rapid globalization".²⁰ In this respect, the tag "slow" in slow cinema exactly echoes the use of slowness as a medium to deal with temporality and it is also fair to say that slow cinema is a manifestation of slow movements extending to the realm of film.

Under this context, it would be interesting to look at the case of the Malaysian-Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang, not only because of his transnational background, but also because he has a unique understanding and experience of slowness. And with the example, we come to know why he has chosen slowness, as well as how he internalizes slowness in his style of filmmaking.

¹⁷ Koepnick 2014, 6

¹⁸ Koepnick 2014, 7

¹⁹ Krajcsó 2015

²⁰ Lim 2014, 5

Chapter 2. Tsai Ming-liang and the Slow Cinema

Section 1. Tsai's Personal Experiences

Born into a noodle-selling Cantonese family with 6 other siblings, Tsai Ming-liang grew up in Kuching, Malaysia. While all his siblings lived with their parents, Tsai alone spent most of his childhood with his grandparents, whom both enjoyed watching films. Under their influence, he paid frequent visits to the local cinema, where he had access to Chinese, Hong Kong and Hollywood films. At that time there were almost no other forms of entertainment, and Tsai called his childhood the “golden age for movies”.²¹ And during his youth in the 60s-70s, driven by two film companies Shaw Brothers and Cathay Pacific, Chinese-language films reached their heyday in Malaysia.²² These commercial films represented by Shaw Brothers pay more attention to the box office by conforming to the taste of the audience, and in accordance with this, they produce films that are intended to be entertaining and popular.²³ Although such an idea is the very opposite of Tsai's later idea of “not pleasing the audience”, certain features of these films left a deep impression on him, which could be seen from his comment on various films he saw during this period:

養鴨人家 (*Beautiful Duckling*, 1965) is like prose. I watched many drama films when I was a child, but when I saw something relatively simple, I was touched by it. I also remember 大醉俠 (*Come Drink with Me*, 1966). Apart from the beautiful characters, it made me feel that martial art films could have a certain rhythmic beauty and incorporate the concept of fighting and dance in Beijing Opera. The same goes for 龍門客棧 (*Dragon Inn*, 1967), which made me feel that martial arts films have a sense of reality, not an illusion. The reason these films are still celebrated today, unlike entertainment films, is because of the aesthetic concept of art, which was achieved so well at the time.²⁴

In view of this comment, it may be fair to say that his childhood perception of films from this period already foretells some of his aesthetic views in maturity: the pursuit of a realist style and the preference for a simple narrative. However, it would be an exaggeration to say that he learned his style from these films; for as has been mentioned, most of these films are more

²¹ Culp, Coburn and Tsai 2003

²² Zeng 2020, 47

²³ Huang 1997,25

²⁴ Wen 2021, my translation

commercial than artistic in nature and do not have much in common with Tsai's own highly artistic style. Rather, many of his aesthetic traits, especially the sense of "slowness" that is in question, seem to result from his childhood experience of slowness in the real life around him and the contemporary society at large:

When I am over 60, I miss the 60s very much. There were neither too many things nor too few things at that time. Life was simple. Now there are too many, and I don't know how to choose. The rhythm at that time was indeed very different from today's, and I miss the slow pace very much. (...) Technology was not as fast as it is, but there was a slow pace of progress. There was no rush. Compared to today's life, not only is the pace different, but so are the interpersonal relationships. Back then children in the community would play together after school and they were all friends, but nowadays technology is bursting with indifference and when we look back at the 1960s, there was a very strong intimacy between people.²⁵

Unsurprisingly, the sentiment shown in this comment can be related to the strong sense of nostalgia in his works. For example, in his *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, we see representations of an old theatre, an old film and an old Chinese song from his childhood, with his expressed intention to have these things preserved and their life prolonged through his images. And naturally, the so-called "slowness" of life from that time, which he endears and cherishes, is also about to be somehow represented in his films, which may have been an important motivation for his affinity to "slow cinema" in filmmaking.

His early stage as a filmmaker goes back to his college days in the 1980s in Taipei, during which he started a student experimental theatre with his fellow students. In this student theatre, he directed three plays: "速食炸醬麵" (*Instant Fried Sauce Noodles*, 1981), "黑暗裡打不開的一扇門" (*The Door Which Cannot be Opened in Darkness*, 1982) and "房間裡的衣櫃" (*The Wardrobe in the Room*, 1983).

Instant Fried Sauce Noodles portrays a passionate filmmaker apprentice who spends all of his savings on films and subsists on instant noodles. However, nobody understands his fervent passion for film, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for him to communicate with others. In this play, Tsai attempts to reflect on modern people's decreasing ability to

²⁵ Wen 2021, my translation

communicate, not only the apprentice himself, but also other roles in the play, all of whom show an unwillingness to communicate.²⁶ This reflection on human relationships continues into other works.

In *The wardrobe in the room*, the conundrum in question is further escalated. The protagonist receives a phone call from his former lover saying that she is about to get married. After this crushing blow, he thinks someone is hiding in the wardrobe, and he starts to mumble to his wardrobe.²⁷ In addition to the phone call, the appearance of voices and images of other people such as the voice of the landlady and the weird host on TV do not alleviate his loneliness, but rather accentuate the intensity of his loneliness.

The absence of communication and isolation is institutionalized in *The Door which cannot be Opened in Darkness*. It contains no lines throughout the play, and it shows a deep sense of gloom and helplessness through the characterization of a gay couple in prison.²⁸

In general, his early plays have a gloomy and somber atmosphere, and focus on the inner world of the characters. This is related to his experience of studying alone in Taipei, where life is more fast-paced, and people are more detached from each other. The rapid development of the modern city makes him more aware of personal loneliness, and also drives him to pay more attention to the marginalized groups in the city, both of which are reflected in his early plays and became recurrent themes in his later work.

It is pertinent to note that the early 1980s when he wrote these experimental plays marked the beginning of the 'New Wave' in the Taiwan film industry. During this period many creators emerged as major figures in the history of Taiwanese film, including the now well-known Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien. Their works usually pay close attention to the lives of Taiwanese normal people by adopting a calm and restrained narrative style. Despite the fact that most of their works were criticized as catering only to the cultural elite and ended up as box-office disasters, due to its unique aesthetic style, Taiwan New Wave proved to be a successful attempt at reflecting on history and examining contemporary social problems.²⁹ In

²⁶ Dong 2004, 43

²⁷ Dong 2004, 43; Wang 2000, 13

²⁸ Wang 2000, 13

²⁹ Wilson 2015, 5; Çağlayan 2018, 106

addition to the thematic turn, these filmmakers also made important stylistic contributions. As Davis has pointed out, due to tight budgets directors of Taiwan New Cinema favor nonprofessional actors, and they often use long takes to “depress time and allow improvisation, chance, and contingency to emerge”, focusing on “spatial setup (often landscape and rural locations), temporal duration and incidental detours”.³⁰ The legacy of the Taiwan New Wave is widely reflected in Tsai’s works. As a consequence, he is considered a member of the Second New Wave from the 1990s to 2000s. Unlike the previous generation, these directors no longer have an obsession with Taiwanese history, and they break away from the shackles of collective memory, focusing instead on the representation of the inner world of some random individuals.³¹ They also enjoy more freedom in creation thanks to the lifting of martial law in 1987. Recalling this transformational period, Tsai said:

You know God arranged for me to come to Taiwan in the late 1970s, when Taiwan was still very closed: there were banned films, banned songs, and you would not see important things. (...) The great thing about Taiwan is that in the 1980s – when I was in college, (...) there were no films in Taiwan at that time (it was very rare), and someone wrote an article called “Taiwanese films are dead”. (...) Taiwan films were in decline and were replaced by Hong Kong films. I began to understand that business can be replaced and that what is in line with the taste of the public will be popular, so Brigitte Lin went to Hong Kong to find her second spring. In this way, a group of young directors such as Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, and Chen Kun-hou appeared in Taiwan. At that time, I was still a college student studying theatre and film, and I strongly felt that Taiwanese film had changed. It raised a new possibility, that is, creation. (...) Another influencing factor is the lifting of martial law and the opening-up of society. There were many foreign things that we had never seen before. The Golden Horse Film Festival had begun to have screenings of foreign films. These things flooded in, like films containing scenes of nudity and banned films that were usually not allowed to be watched, but they could be seen at film festivals. They had a great impact on both Hou’s and my generation. A thing that had never been found in Taiwanese film began to emerge, that is, free creation.³²

It is undeniable that the transformation of the social climate contributed to the rebirth of Taiwanese films in the 1980s. And under this context, compared with his predecessors young Tsai enjoyed more freedom to explore a series of audacious and controversial topics such as

³⁰ Davis 2012, 134-35

³¹ Jiao 2002, 5

³² Tsai 2016, my translation

queer and desire, as we can see in his Taipei Trilogy *Rebels of the Neon God* (1992), *Vive l'Amour* (1994), *The River* (1997). Paying attention to both social issues and artistic approaches, he gradually became the Taiwanese representative auteur after Yang and Hou.

Chapter 3. The Construction of Slowness through Long takes in Tsai's Films

Section 1. The Long Take and the Preservation of Reality

The long take, also known as sequence shot or continuous take, can be defined as an uninterrupted shot of long duration. Whether a take should be counted long depends on the ratio between the individual shot length and the overall editing pace of the film itself or generally contemporaneous films, which means that the concept of “long” is always relative, and it depends on the reference used for comparison. As mentioned earlier, it is certain that the average shot length of mainstream films has been on a steady decline throughout film history. This makes the growing trend of slow cinema more conspicuous, as it features a prominent employment of the long take. To better understand the function of this special stylistic approach, it may be helpful to first consider its theoretical root in film history.

The most influential work concerning long take is French film critic André Bazin's “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”, as well as his “The Evolution of Film Language”, both published around the 1950s and included in his book *What is Cinema?* in the 60s. In the first essay, he argues that photography is different from painting in that it is inherently objective, making images of the world free of human intervention.³³ He then writes,

The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference from the thing to its reproduction.³⁴

Therefore, for Bazin, the basic principle of film aesthetics is to reproduce the originality of things through film. Based on this realistic point of view, in the “Evolution” essay, he distinguishes cinema from the 1920s to 1940s into two opposing trends ---- “those directors who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality.”³⁵ In the former, the “image”, according to Bazin, refers to “everything that the representation on the screen adds

³³ Bazin 2005, 13

³⁴ Bazin 2005, 13-14, emphasis by Bazin

³⁵ Bazin 2005, 24

to the object there represented”, including montage and a series of formalistic approaches focusing on visual effects.³⁶ For him, through various kinds of juxtapositions of shots, montage has the ability to transform the meaning of the original image, therefore “the meaning is not in the image, it is in the shadow of the image projected by montage onto the field of consciousness of the spectator.”³⁷ In contrast, by “faith in reality” he means the tendency to preserve the integrity of the event, which he believes can be achieved through the long take. For example, in Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922), when shooting Nanook hunting the seal, he shows us “the actual waiting period”, so “the length of the hunt is the very substance of the image, its true object.”³⁸ Similarly, he adds “one could easily imagine as a matter of fact a film by Stroheim composed of a single shot as long-lasting and as close-up as you like.”³⁹⁴⁰

Of the two trends, Bazin clearly favors the latter, and long take can contribute to the ideal narrative style that Bazin advocates ---- “a film form that would permit everything to be said without chopping the world up into little fragments, that would reveal the hidden meanings in people and the things without disturbing the unity natural to them.”⁴¹ In stark contrast to his pursuit of fully expressing the actual time and the process of events, the editing style of Hollywood belongs to the first trend, for it

“(…) breaks down the profilmic into spatial fragments in order to subordinate it to the dramatic and psychological logic of the fiction; yet it does impart a convincing illusion of spatiotemporal continuity, a kind of virtual image of a time and space that had never before existed.⁴²

Long takes do not exclude ambiguity while preserving the integrity of events in the continuity of space and time. In fact, the two often coexist in long takes. In Bazin’s view, the combination of the long take and the in-depth shot brings ambiguity into the image, and leaves space for spectators to take an active part in the structure of the image and to make

³⁶ Bazin 2005, 24

³⁷ Bazin 2005, 26

³⁸ Bazin 2005, 27

³⁹ Bazin 2005, 27

⁴⁰ Another technique that Bazin thinks also contributes to the authenticity of the event is in-depth shot. Despite the occasional overlap of in-depth shot and long take, in practice, the two does not have to be used at the same time.

⁴¹ Bazin 2005, 38

⁴² Rosen 2004, 4

their personal choices of apprehension.⁴³ As Rosen points out, “a recognition of the indefiniteness, the ambiguity, of reality with respect to the meanings that human inevitably pose for it, is the mark of a more authentic engagement of the real. The vicissitudes of this engagement, this realist impulse, ground the history of cinema.”⁴⁴

Bazin’s pursuit of objective reality was soon taken up by a group of film enthusiasts later known as the French New Wave. Instead of focusing on conventional storytelling, as is typical of Hollywood, filmmakers from this group such as Francois Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard were more concerned with cinematic language, namely the way the story was being told. By widely employing the long takes, they have explored the representations of continuity of space and time.

The transition from French New Wave to slow cinema has seen a change in the function of the long takes. They no longer faithfully serve the narrative theme, but venture outside the established narrative framework, reducing the narrative elements drastically while further lengthening the duration. In the words of de Luca, “rather than ensemble performances and busy mise-en-scène, the long take in contemporary cinemas elicits rarefied, silent and minimalist images.”⁴⁵ This break from the established narrative framework makes it possible for the audience to reconstruct the film on their part. And through an almost aimless and free wandering among these images, one is entitled to freely select key details within the scene at her own will so that she becomes an active participant in the picture. As Matthew Flanagan comments on slow cinema, “during long takes we are invited to let our eyes wander within the parameters of the frame, observing details that would remain veiled or merely implied by a swifter form of narration.”⁴⁶

Tsai Ming-liang, in his use of the long take, has proven to be very much in line with the idea just mentioned. While this may be apparent to his audience, he himself also confirms in an interview:

The long take is the most basic concept of “viewing”. Now mainstream movies have become narrative-based. I worked with a French photographer when I filmed *What Time Is It there*, he told

⁴³ Bazin 2005, 36

⁴⁴ Rosen 2004, 5

⁴⁵ de Luca 2014, 21

⁴⁶ Flanagan 2008

me at the end of the film that he used to shoot *dialogues*, not *images*. As I said earlier, we have to make the audience realize that they are “watching a movie”, but only through the persuasive power of *images* can we make them think they are human beings, not *actors*. For example, Lee Kang-sheng does not act in my long take but finds himself in real life through some of my prompts. (...) My films are based on thinking in images, not narrative. The long take is also based on this.⁴⁷

This text has featured several pairs of opposites: images vs. dialogues, images vs. narratives, human beings vs. actors. For him, the latter item of each opposite, namely dialogues, narratives and actors all contribute to a certain kind of representation that bars the audience from direct contact with reality. On the other hand, the former item of each opposite, namely images and human beings preserve the details of the real-life picture as much as possible so that they also have the potential to establish a direct contact between the audience and the reality as it is. Admittedly, the opposition between humans and actors may be a bit difficult to understand at first, but Tsai’s idea here proves quite simple: Human beings, as opposed to actors, may be said to have the virtue of non-acting, or conversely, he is clear of the vice of “actness”. By non-acting I mean several qualities of the actor. When an actor is acting in a non-acting manner, he not only has his facial expressions presented in a thoroughly relaxed and natural way, but he also removes his self-consciousness as a professional actor, so that he follows his instincts and allows unexpected factors to work in his performance, just as people in real life do.⁴⁸

While this sounds great, the expected effect can be realized only if the images do have the persuasive power Tsai assumes them to have. And unfortunately, as some critics have pointed out, images can often prove to be without such a power. For it is often the case that the extended duration of the long take lead to boredom and dullness on the part of the spectators, especially in slow cinema where elements of storytelling are simplified to a minimum. The spectator cannot help being distracted from the images because as a critic harshly remarks, the “visual fields that can seem not to justify or reward the attention they receive.”⁴⁹ And to some degree Tsai also fails to escape this dilemma. As early as the 1990s, Tsai’s early work *Vive l’Amour* was criticized due to the long take’s inability to achieve richness in imagery, and that “the monitor-like long takes have exhausted the audience’s patience and drained

⁴⁷ Tsai 2017

⁴⁸ Tu 2021, 67

⁴⁹ Gibbs and Pye 2017, 21

their imagination, failing to connect with audience's psychological mechanism."⁵⁰ And more recently, after I watched Tsai's *Your Face* (2018) at Centre Pompidou with my friend, who is a typical common viewer without much foreknowledge or experience of slow cinema and especially Tsai, he complained that "there is clearly an imbalance between all those formal techniques and designs (by which he meant the features of slow cinema) and the poor and thin content, and the director must have been self-indulged enough to be unaware of this."⁵¹

Although the images of slow cinema sometimes fail to achieve the persuasive effect they should, we must accept this inevitable weakness. For it is not because the idea of slow cinema is so difficult to realize that there are defects in practice, rather, the idea of slow cinema is in line with the truth of life that life is full of boredom and uninteresting moments. And as it has promised, slow cinema provides us with an opportunity to observe real life by encountering these moments. The ideal audience of slow cinema should likewise immerse themselves in the film and approach the images as if they are engaging in their own life.

Section 2. The Long Take and the Defamiliarization from Reality

Even though slow cinema intends to have the audience attend to all the details of real life, it by no means tries to submerge the viewer within its mundaneness of it. Just the opposite, it tries to defamiliarize the audience with the images of life they experience. The perspective shaped by the long take fixes the viewer in a designated spot, at which the viewer becomes a bystander and gazer of other people's life, since this kind of gaze is rare in real life.

The effort to introduce defamiliarization in slow cinema is triggered by the fact that the viewer finds it unattractive to watch something familiar on the screen. As mentioned earlier, according to Bazin, the aim of long-take photography is to preserve the spatial-temporal continuum so that the viewers are involved as much as possible as the duration of the long take is synchronized to the real-time that the viewer is experiencing. However, in practice, an average viewer may be either unable or unwilling to have her real-time experience to be synchronized. In order to sharpen the viewer's sensibility towards art, Viktor Shklovsky, one of the Russian formalists, developed the theory of Defamiliarization. Formalism is an influential school of literary criticism, which prevailed in Russia from the 1910s to the 1930s.

⁵⁰ Huang 1997, 15

⁵¹ I am quoting from my memory of the dialogue but have also double-checked with the speaker.

It sought to explore the nature of literature by focusing on the critical role of form in our aesthetic process. In Shklovsky's key manifesto "Art as Technique" in 1917, he coined the word "остранение" (ostranenie), which was later translated into "defamiliarization" or "estrangement" in English. He writes,

Art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important...⁵²

According to him, art was created specifically to make one feel free from mechanization, for once the way of perception becomes habitual, it becomes mechanical, making people focus only on the main characteristics of an object, rather than the entirety of it.⁵³ And defamiliarization is a method of escaping from this mechanization by restoring the richness and subtlety of the senses. As a matter of fact, although defamiliarization as a concept in literary creation was originally proposed for the language of poetry in the arts, it has been widely applied in other artistic fields. In the case of slow cinema, film scholars have pointed out that defamiliarization serves as an important aesthetic process in slow cinema, in terms of how it "subverts previously established conventions and representations of everyday life."⁵⁴ As the most distinctive device of the slow cinema, the long take does reflect the effect of defamiliarization.

As we discussed earlier, the long take challenges the audience's tolerance with its long duration and ambiguous focus. However, it also has the potential to shape the audience in a specific way. According to Kopenick, during the process the audience can be transformed into a "wondrous spectator". By this he means "a viewer probing the durational as an aesthetic laboratory to reconstruct our sense for experiencing things at first sight."⁵⁵ Similar to the mechanism of defamiliarization, this kind of viewing aims to dispel our presuppositions about familiar things and sharpen our senses. Kopenick considers this

⁵² Shklovsky 1965, 4

⁵³ Shklovsky 1965, 4

⁵⁴ Çağlayan 2018, 29

⁵⁵ Kopenick 2017, 22

process wondrous, and it is also a rebellion against past conventions and standards, as well as a challenge to a series of stereotyped reactions. Wonder, according to him, focuses on the very first experience of something peculiar that we have no previous knowledge of. In the words of Philip Fisher,

For the full experience of wonder, there must be no description beforehand that will lead us to compare what we actually experience with what we are told, or even with the level of expectation raised by the one who told us to close our eyes. The object must be unexpectedly, instantaneously seen for the first time.⁵⁶

In the next section, I will choose one of Tsai's films to instantiate the use of the long take. And in my analysis, I will also focus on the effect of defamiliarization.

Section 3. Case Study: *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*

In this section, I will use Tsai's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) as an example of his use of long takes, with a focus on how long takes help construct a distinct sense of temporality. Although Tsai's films in his earlier career had already been perceived to be obscure and elusive, the minimalism of expression in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* may be said to be even greater. With as little dialogue and storyline as possible, and with there being almost no direct connection or interaction between the characters, what dominates the film boils down to a sentimental passage of time within an old theatre.

The film takes place in an old theatre in Taipei (Fu Ho Theatre) on the last day before its closing and demolition. On this day, it is haunted by different kinds of characters who are in one way or another related to it. We see an audience during the screening of *Dragon Inn*, an old film from 1967 in an almost mysterious manner. The audience sometimes appears larger, sometimes smaller, and sometimes even altogether invisible. Then emerging from the audience there is a Japanese tourist (Kiyonobu Mitamura) roaming the theatre with suspicious intentions. Out of the auditorium, a limping ticket vendor (Chen Shiang-chi) is dragging her feet through the corridors, stairs, and attic of the theatre, driven by her care and love unspoken for a young projectionist (Lee Kang-sheng), who seems to be hiding from her.

⁵⁶ Fisher 1998, 17 (quoted in Koepnick 2017, 13-14)

Instead of orienting the reader throughout the episodes of the film (if they do count as episodes), I would rather retrieve a few things from different parts of the film, which I take to be salient examples of Tsai's long take technique.

If selected in the chronological order of the film, the first example is the scene in which the ticket lady limps down a corridor (Fig. 1). In this shot, there are two spaces: one is the toilet on the right of the screen, and another is the corridor illuminated by faint lights. The shot begins with the ticket lady standing still, cleaning a glass in the toilet. After a few seconds, she finishes cleaning and walks out of the toilet to the corridor. Then her right foot can be seen unnaturally turning inward, with her body in an unstable equilibrium. She has to keep her balance through a pronounced sway of her waist as she lands on each footstep. The swaying of the waist also brings about a swaying of the whole body from side to side, and only in this way can her unbalanced body maintain stability while walking. The difficulty of walking and the heaviness of her body are gradually magnified as time passes. However, the depth of the lens has suggested that it is a long path, and viewers have to follow her footsteps. While limping is not an uncommon sight in everyday life, the audience's perspective of watching the complete process of her limping is unusual and activates the effect of defamiliarization. In this shot, it can be said that the effect is mainly reflected in the form rather than in the content of the scene.



Fig. 1 *Goodbye Dragon Inn*: The ticket lady limps down the corridor

In addition to the dark corridor, Tsai's long take also takes viewers to some corners of the theatre that usually attract little attention. One of these corners is the men's toilet. In this long

take, two men (one of whom is the Japanese tourist) are urinating side by side at first, then a third man enters the frame, standing automatically and expressionlessly next to one of the men, and also begins to urinate. Then, with the sound of the water flushing, a man comes out of the toilet and goes to wash his hands, leaving a gap in the door. After a while, someone bangs this door and locks it from the inside. Then an old man walks into the frame and straight to where the three men are urinating, and takes a cigarette and lighter from above the urinal. As we see in the picture below (Fig. 2), the approach of the old man makes the Japanese man turn his body slightly to avoid contact with him, and the other two men both cast a look at the old man's outstretched hand.



Fig. 2 *Goodbye Dragon Inn*: Men stand side by side to urinate at the toilet

In the case of this perplexing long take, a series of questions can be raised: Apart from the Japanese tourist, where do the other men come from? Why do they suddenly gather in the toilet? Is this a coincidence or is it intentional? Is one of the toilets occupied by a real person, or is it intended to confirm what the Japanese tourist said about this movie theatre being haunted? With curiosity about these questions, we crave hints and answers, but as time passes in the uncompromising long take, we are soon disillusioned, and a strange sensation is produced due to the disconcerting shot duration. On the one hand, this scene continues as the shot keeps offering the audience new information: the third man comes in and starts urinating, then an old man returns to get his cigarette and lighter, and another man comes out of the toilet and washes his hands. This succession of daily activities is what the audience can experience in their everyday life, making what is going on in the toilet real to the audience. On the other hand, the longer-than-usual duration of urination, the gradual crowdedness of the toilet in contrast to the emptiness of the auditorium, and the mysterious person/ghost all

contribute to a distortion of reality, and the distortion is even magnified and upgrades to something surreal as the real-time passes by. At this point, the common toilet is defamiliarized and becomes something beyond our understanding.

This scene is undoubtedly a break with narrative development, as it has little connection with the overall narrative structure. As Lin has noted, compared to a coherent narrative system, the long take here serves as a fragment of little narrative value, and it is not elevated to the status of the story and the meaning, therefore retaining a certain degree of autonomy and independence.⁵⁷ However, it is these fragmented pieces of life that are difficult to define and understand, that constitute the distinctive aesthetic of Tsai's films, which Rapfogel calls "overwhelming physicality".⁵⁸ And these isolated parts of life confirm the idea of slow cinema that real life is not a well-designed linear story, but is surrounded by indescribable and irrelevant elements.

The sense of reality is also constructed in the constant repetition of daily work, as we see the long take filming the ticket lady cleaning the toilet. In the static long take, we see her limping as she opens the toilet door one by one to check for cleaning. And just as we thought this was a familiar routine, she suddenly stops in front of one toilet door to think, then instead of opening the doors and having a quick cleaning as she did earlier, she walks past them and heads for the next one. Before she finishes cleaning up and walks out of the frame, she turns around and walks back to the two closed toilets and hesitates before finally leaving. Then we see in the seemingly empty toilet, the toilet door that had not been opened, suddenly opens and stands slightly ajar, and the shadow of the swaying door is cast on the dark wall of the toilet (Fig. 3). Similar to the shot of the men's toilet, this scene is also puzzling: Why is she reluctant to open the door of the two toilets, leaving them uncleaned? Why does she walk back to them and cast a glance at them before she leaves?

⁵⁷ Lin 2018, 34

⁵⁸ Rapfogel 2004, 26



Fig. 3 *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*: The mysterious women's toilet

This long take records the monotony of quotidian reality, but unlike a simple recreation of everyday life, Tsai cunningly adds an element of mystery to remind us of the distance between us and the object, as if we are experiencing a supernatural phenomenon and stepping into a space between the real and the fictional. The question why the door is suddenly opened remains a puzzle that rejects interpretation, yet it does trigger a heightened state of perception in the viewer. For the space itself is not merely a transparent entity, but also a subject that has its own secrets, stories, and possibilities.

One of the most famous long takes is set near the end of the film, which lasts for a total of 5 minutes and 20 seconds. At the beginning of the shot the few audiences have already left the auditorium. During the first half of the shot, the ticket lady walks into the auditorium through the side door with a broom and dustpan in her hand. When she slowly walks to a spot with steps, she bends down, puts her hand on her left knee, and relies on the strength of her left leg to raise her body so that her damaged right foot could touch the ground. While climbing the stairs, she tries to pick up some trash nearby by bending down to a lower level. Instead of walking through rows of seats, she slowly walks down to another aisle of the auditorium. In this process, something drops and she has to turn around and bend over again to clean it. Then she drags her feet down the aisle until she leaves the frame.

In the second half of the long take, the cinema is left empty for over 2 minutes after the ticket lady finishes cleaning and walks out of the frame (Fig. 4). This forces the viewer to gaze at the empty space and become aware of “the spectatorial process”, as noted by de Luca, “the

empty seats remind the viewer of her own viewing position.”⁵⁹ In this way, the auditorium transforms from a large container into a subject with its own memories and stories. The impending demolition of the theatre adds to the sense of unfamiliarity that the viewer experiences. The long take captures the moment when a familiar object becomes foreign to us in real life, such as when we move out of a place where we have lived for a long time, and the space that was once familiar becomes empty again, leaving behind a sense of unfamiliarity as if there was no trace of living before. Here the extended duration of the shot enhances the experience of defamiliarization, and underscores the development of subjectivity of the auditorium, similar to the scene of the men’s toilet. However, while Tsai here excludes the use of the surreal element, he successfully captures the moment when an object becomes alien to us and takes on its own life in reality. As Tsai himself states, “It is really a film about the memory of this movie theatre, which is the main ‘character’ of the film”.⁶⁰



Fig. 4 *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*: The empty auditorium at the Fu Ho Theatre

This noticeable duration and the palpable stillness of the long take also make the scene of the empty auditorium an ambiguous area between the two fields of film and photography.⁶¹ On the one hand, the only person in the frame has already left, and the second segment of the long take does not contain any movement or sound, which means that the image excludes any human intervention and is a reproduction of a cinema space.⁶² And on the other hand, this image is presented after the ticket lady limps and clears the garbage, reminding us that it is a

⁵⁹ de Luca 2017, 166

⁶⁰ Rapfogel 2004, 28

⁶¹ de Luca 2017, 167

⁶² de Luca 2017, 167

continuation of the previous scene.⁶³ This kind of ambiguity gives this long take both cinematic and photographic qualities, what Peter Wollen calls “the former flickering through predetermined sequence and time (hence ‘movies’ or ‘flicks’), the latter cryogenically preserving a moment for contemplation in unlimited time.”⁶⁴ The second part of the long take can also be read as a freeze-frame, as no movement is detected and the moving picture is thus converted into a still photograph for a certain period of time, so that this moment is highlighted, and “allows the eye of the spectator, temporality released from the narrative trajectory, to roam, contemplate, or investigate the still image.”⁶⁵ Whether the long take is more cinematic or photographic, here Tsai has made his intention clear: not only to lament the disappearance of cinema, but also to give the audience the opportunity to think about changes in life, as he commented on this long take in an interview.⁶⁶

Some commentators have pointed out that Tsai intends to mourn the death of the cinema with this long take.⁶⁷ The numerous vacant seats at Fu Ho Theatre serve as a symbol of the decline of cinema-going as a social activity, as well as of the experiences and details of life that were once associated with it. Prior to this long take, there are a few scenes capturing the few remaining viewers in the theatre: a lady comfortably putting her feet on the unoccupied seats in the front row and eating melon seeds, a young boy with popcorn in his hands, a Japanese gay person who spends much of his time looking around as if looking for something. The only viewer who is absorbed in the film is an elderly person, played by Shi Juan, who himself plays the leading role in *Dragon Inn*. These shots are in stark contrast with the opening scenes of this film when the cheerful sounds of suona and drums from the film being screened envelop the packed theatre. However, before Tsai directly shows us the great number of the audience in several wide shots from different angles, he films *Dragon Inn* screening in the auditorium through the gap between the swaying curtains (Fig. 5). This unique perspective resembles a peek inside, and it deliberately creates a sense of distance, reminding us that this is not a view of today’s Fu Ho Theatre, but rather a scene from the past, when the *Dragon Inn* was screened in 1967.⁶⁸

⁶³ de Luca 2017, 167

⁶⁴ Wollen 2003 (quoted in Wells 2005)

⁶⁵ Wells 2005

⁶⁶ Rapfogel 2004, 29

⁶⁷ Lim 2014,70; de Luca 2017, 166

⁶⁸ Lin 2013

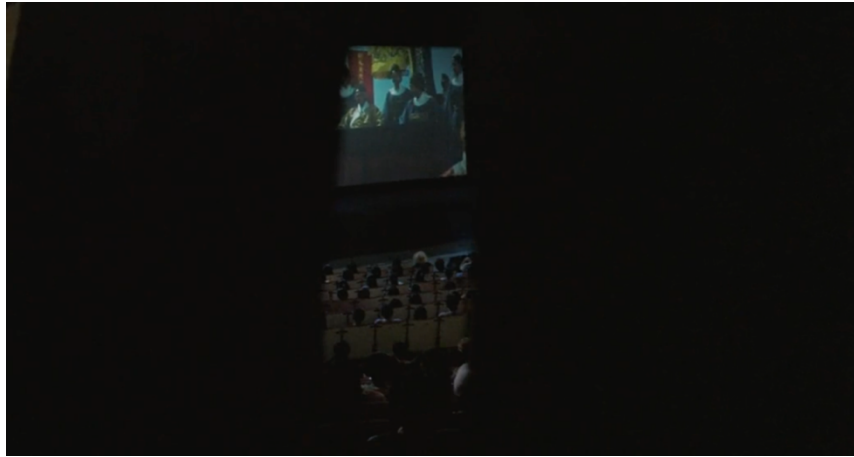


Fig. 5 *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*: A peek through the curtains into the auditorium

This series of cinema-going images is based on Tsai's childhood memories of the 1960s and 1970s, a time when Chinese-language films were prevalent in his hometown. *Dragon Inn*, which was being screened in the episode of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, not only topped the list of blockbuster films in Taipei in 1967, but was also popular in Southeast Asia and later became known as a masterpiece of martial arts films.⁶⁹ In terms of the capacity of the movie theatre, while today's cinema rooms can usually seat two to three hundred people, old-fashioned theatres like Fu Ho Theatre can hold up to a thousand people. It is not difficult to imagine the packed theatre when it was first screened, and the screening of *Dragon Inn* almost became a public event. As such, it stands for a tradition of cinema-going as an indispensable part of people's collective experience at the time, prior to the time when the grand theatre was replaced by more individualized forms of film-viewing such as video, DVD, and mobile phone.⁷⁰ And this tradition also includes the aforementioned various viewing positions. As Tsai himself recalls, the audience in the theatre was not always engrossed in the film, and absent-minded viewers are also parts of his vivid memory:

The theatre remembers, for example, times when a lot of people were there together watching, or when only a few people watching. It's not necessarily the case that *Dragon Inn* is actually being screened there, it's really a kind of memory of when it had been playing there. Likewise, there are memories of people eating in the movie theatre, especially the part about eating watermelon seeds, which is a very deep memory for Chinese audiences.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Lin 2018, 27

⁷⁰ Lin 2018, 27

⁷¹ Rapfogel 2004, 28

However, Tsai is opposed to such an audience, because he believes they lack a fundamental ability of “viewing”. He becomes more critical in his late period, as he tries to challenge the audience’s habit of watching films through more extreme long takes. *Stray Dogs* is one such example.

Section 4. Case Study: *Stray Dogs*

If *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* displays the old world being abandoned, *Stray Dogs* shows the ruins of the old world and the people who wander in them after its destruction. As Tsai said himself, “*Stray Dogs* is actually filming ruins. There are many ruins, but everyone has their own ruins in their hearts, and there is a lake in the ruins.”⁷² In other words, the lake symbolizes a tranquil and peaceful peace in spite of the surrounding ruins, such as the quiet beach where the family walks in the film.

As mentioned, *Stray Dogs* has a much more radical and experimental aesthetic style, in his use of the long take, his rejection of linear narrative, and his deliberate blurring of the identity of the characters. In the words of Tsai,

Stray Dogs, from the script and shooting to editing, the biggest challenge is how to reduce the narrative, and abandon the so-called plot. There is no direct connection between the scenes and a feeling of no beginning and no end, but it produces a broken and instantaneous emotional presentation that is very much alive. Each shot is the completion of an actor’s action and the passage of real-time. Meanwhile, it captures the flow of natural light and shadow, and the changes in ambient sound. I think it is very good. The structure of the film has no beginning and no end.⁷³

The English title *Stray Dogs* seems to be a metaphor for the homeless family featured in the film. The family consists of a middle-aged father (played by Lee Kang-sheng), who earns a living by holding up real estate advertising placards.⁷⁴ His children do not attend school and spend their time alternating between supermarkets and wandering through forests. When the father is not working, they roam the streets together or spend time by the seaside. At night, they wash up in a public bathroom and live in a small room. The mother of the children can

⁷² Tsai 2014

⁷³ Tsai 2014, 319

⁷⁴ Since most of the characters in *Stray Dogs* do not have names, I will refer to them by the names of the actor and actresses for ease of reference.

be one of the three female characters in the film: the first woman (played by Yang Kuei-mei) appears in the opening scene as she quietly brushes her hair next to the children's bed; the second woman (played by Lu Yi-ching) works at a supermarket, rescues stray dogs, washes the girl's hair in the supermarket restroom, and takes children away from their drunken father on a rainy night; the third woman celebrates the father's birthday with the children, helps with their homework and listen to the girl's story. At the end of the film, the third woman (played by Chen Shiang-chyi) stands alongside the father in front of a mural inside a dilapidated building.

In contrast to the English title *Stray Dogs*, the Chinese title jiāoyóu 郊遊 (Outing) seems to relate more directly to the content of the film. “jiāo” (郊) means countryside as opposed to the city, and it also implies marginality. Although the family in the film is geographically in the city, they are on the fringes of urban life. “yóu” (遊) denotes a short trip in search of relaxation and tranquility, and it also includes a sense of aimlessness, as we see the family often wander the streets.

Though they do not have a specific aim, they always go from one place to another during their wanderings. A natural question then is where is their destination? This can be a place for the family to chat and relax, such as the beach by the sea. But the most symbolic and also the most emotionally evocative destination of all the characters, is a mural in the ruins depicting countless stones piled under the towering mountains.

The mural makes its first appearance in the middle part of the film. After feeding a bunch of stray dogs on the first floor, the second woman goes upstairs and unexpectedly comes across this painting. She becomes engrossed in it, spending a considerable amount of time staring at it, seemingly unwilling to leave. As she is standing still, there is no discernible movement for almost three minutes in the shot, until she squats down to urinate in the same location. This act serves as a direct and authentic expression of her physicality in that moment. It symbolizes a departure from the routine and a return to a more primal and instinctual state, especially given her uniform and her stylized job in the supermarket.

In the final scene, the mural takes on significant importance as Lee and the third woman silently stand in front of it for nearly 15 minutes (Fig. 6). Throughout the duration, there is no

verbal communication between them. Lee occasionally raises a wine bottle to drink, while Chen gazes at the mural and sheds tears. Eventually, Lee finds solace by resting his head gently on Chen's shoulder. The prolonged focus on the mural in the concluding shot suggests that it serves as a symbolic destination where individuals strive to embrace and reconcile. However, despite the extended duration of the scene, they ultimately part ways instead of staying together.



Fig. 6 *Stray Dogs*: The mural in the last scene

The mural that makes some of the characters speechless and cannot look away, entitled *Taiqi/Back*, is one of the installations from Taiwanese artist Kao Jun-Honn's *The Ruin Image Crystal Project*.⁷⁵ This project is a historical survey including the following process: find old images of the ruins, sketch on the walls of ruins based on the old photos, and find people to perform in the ruins, by doing so, he focuses on the forgotten relics and people in the context of modern Taiwan from the colonial period to the neoliberalism period.⁷⁶ This mural is based on a still photograph of the cobbles of the Laonong River and two indigenous Siraya children sitting on the cobblestones, taken by the Scottish photographer and geographer John Thomson when he landed in Taiwan in the spring of 1871, and the photograph was subsequently published in the famous French weekly newspaper *Le tour de monde: nouveau journal des voyages* as a part of Thomson's travelogue *Voyage en Chine*.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Taiqi* is a shorthand of Taiwan Qiche Keyun Gongsi (Taiwan Motor Transport Co., Ltd.)

⁷⁶ Taishin Arts Award Archive 2014

⁷⁷ Sun 2014, 86

As Sun Songrong has pointed out, the painting embodies an imagination of a return to a time when the natural landscape predates the arrival of Thomson in the mountains of Taiwan, and clearly, such an attempt to reveal a landscape that no one has seen before and to highlight a time and space that has not yet been interfered with and destroyed by human beings, is utopian in nature.⁷⁸ While on the other hand, the process of redrawing the image in an abandoned complex is also dystopian: undoubtedly it is impossible to restore the ancient space, and only the brutal consequences of modernization are present in front of us.⁷⁹ Notably, the cobblestones in the mural seem to extend into reality, merging with the rubble on the floor of the ruined space to form a larger expansive space. Once a person steps into the space, one is at once surrounded by rubble and dilapidated ceilings, while the contrast between the smallness of the body and the largeness of the panoramic mural emphasizes the sense of not being able to escape from the ruins. Unlike the original work by Thomson which aimed to explore the exotic landscape, Kao wants to emphasize the traumatic experience of living in the present by looking back at history, through the interaction between people and the ruined space as a “crystal”. In his words, “We reproduce the images, which are considered as historical fragments, in the same ruined space that is considered as historical fragments, and see this process as a display of the permanent lost, permanently violated remains of modernity.”⁸⁰

Although the artist’s insights are partly helpful to explain why Tsai was fascinated by the painting, Tsai had no previous knowledge of Kao’s intention and the nature of the painting. This leads to that Tsai and the artist’s perception of the painting may not be the same. For Tsai, it was an inadvertent discovery in the Shulin district of New Taipei City when he was scouting around for shooting sites of *Stray Dogs*. He later recalled how he felt when he saw the mural and the surrounding scene for the first time:

I was in the abandoned Taiqi factory in the Shulin district, frightened and shocked. The whole wall was like a huge mirror. In the mirror was a typical primitive landform of Taiwan, with cascading mountains, pebbles and streams. In front of the mirror, there were ruins all around: mottled walls, crumbling ceilings, and a broken concrete floor, what is reflected in the mirror? Is it the memory of the entire cement building? Standing in front of the mirror, I cannot see myself, as if I am

⁷⁸ Sun 2014, 88

⁷⁹ Sun 2014, 88

⁸⁰ Kao 2015, 96

looking at a dream or a disillusionment. I think everyone will stand for a long time when they encounter this painting. It is the last take (of *Stray Dogs*) and then it is a wrap.

..... I thought at the time, this should be the longest take I have ever shot, and I would not cut it.⁸¹

As mentioned earlier, the mural depicts the primitive landscape of Taiwan and it is a representation of the past nature. However, the exclusion of human figures in the painting means that people are no longer part of the representation and have lost their place in nature. This provokes one to think about the reality in which one finds oneself at the moment. This sense of unreality is also reflected in what Tsai calls “dream” and “disillusionment”: the former suggests something unreal and distant, while the latter symbolizes the fact that she is not aware until this moment that what was once deeply connected to herself is far away, reminding the viewer where she is now.

The traumatic experience that Kao tries to focus on is enlarged in *Stray Dogs* when Chen and Li stare at the mural in silence and their presence accidentally replaces the two indigenous children in the original work. In doing so they are not simply in the position of viewers admiring the mural, but more importantly, considering the setting of the painting, it is a metaphor for the fact that they have no choice but to be swept up in the turbulent course of history, becoming nameless characters marginalized and abandoned by the times. In terms of the painting itself, the pre-industrial landscapes of rolling hills and tranquil lake, drawn in charcoal, are so far removed from the real world that they have only survived in the images of history.⁸² At the same time, as Sun has noted, their real lives are turning into fresco relics and the countdown to death is approaching, especially when Tsai removed all the ambient sound at the end of the film, which further highlights the danger of the real-world degrading into a world of decaying ruins.⁸³

The positioning of the two characters in front of the mural, which almost occupies the entire wall, creates a setting reminiscent of an audience in an art gallery. Like a person standing motionlessly before an artwork, they are transfixed in their positions. Interestingly, their backs seem to merge with the mural, blurring the boundary between the characters and the

⁸¹ Sun 2014, 89 (quoted from Kao 2015, 97) my translation

⁸² Sun 2014, 90

⁸³ Sun 2014, 90

artwork itself. Similarly, the audience of the film adopts a similar role to that of gallery-goers, silently devoting time to experiencing the film as if contemplating artwork. The extended duration of stillness in the scene begins to dissolve the confines of traditional filmmaking, leading Tsai to explore the idea of incorporating *Stray Dogs* into an art gallery setting. According to him, “film is merely a medium that can be made into art.”⁸⁴ And the concept of “viewing” in the film is exactly the same as the concept of the art gallery.

However, this does not seem to be able to fully justify the extremely long duration of the shots, Tsai has another reason for this:

The long take is not deliberately lengthened, it just restores the original time. I want the audience to regain the ability to “view”. In today’s society, people have lost this ability. When you go to a museum to look at a painting, you just take out your phone and take a picture instead of “viewing”. Even a few hours are not enough if you really know how to observe. Emotional outbursts require time. What is time? A long take will tell you. The length of a shot is up to me, whether it is long or short has its own necessity.⁸⁵

Some people might think that my films are unnecessarily long, but to me it feels necessary to have this realness and richness through the process of patiently observing the unexpected happenings in front of the camera. It’s almost like putting a painting in an art museum. But in the museum, [viewers] can control how long they’ll look at a painting, while as a director, I get to choose how long they get to look at a scene, unless they choose not to participate and close their eyes.⁸⁶

As Tsai has pointed out, emotional outbursts and genuine understanding require the investment of time, and the duration of a long take can capture the authenticity and depth by patiently observing the events unfolding in front of the camera. His view is well exemplified by several long takes in *Stray Dogs*.

The first example is a nearly 6-minute long take in the film recording the protagonist reciting *Full River Red* (滿江紅 Man jiang hong) (Fig. 7), a well-known poem from the Song Dynasty. Positioned at an intersection beneath a viaduct, the protagonist Lee stands while holding up a placard. The placard is incessantly swaying in the strong wind, and the plastic

⁸⁴ Lin 2011, 72

⁸⁵ Fermi 2014, my translation

⁸⁶ Girish 2021

raincoat clings tightly to his face. Wearing a somber expression, he unexpectedly starts reciting the poem in a low voice. After reciting once, he proceeds to sing it again:

Poem to be Sung to the Tune of “Full River Red”

滿江紅

My hair bristles in my hamlet.
Standing by the balcony as the rain shower stops,
I look up to the sky and loudly let Heaven know
The strength of my passions.
My accomplishments over thirty years are mere dust.
I traveled eight thousand li with the clouds and the moon
Never taking time to rest,
For a young man’s hair grows white from despair.

怒髮沖冠，
憑闌處，瀟瀟雨歇。
抬望眼，仰天長嘯，
壯懷激烈。
三十功名塵與土，
八千里路雲和月。
莫等閒，
白了少年頭，空悲切。

The humiliation of the Jingkang period
Has not yet been wiped away.
The indignation I feel as a subject
Has not yet been allayed.
Let me drive off in a chariot
To destroy their base at Helan Mountain.
My ambition as a warrior
Is to satisfy my hunger with the flesh of the barbarians,
Then, while enjoying a rest,
Slake my thirst with the blood of the tribesmen.
Give me the chance to try again
To recover our mountains and rivers
Then report to the emperor.⁸⁷

靖康恥，
猶未雪；
臣子恨，
何時滅？
駕長車，
踏破賀蘭山缺。
壯志
飢餐胡虜肉，
笑談
渴飲匈奴血。
待從頭，
收拾舊山河，
朝天闕！

⁸⁷ Yue Fei, translated by Ebrey 1993



Fig. 7 *Stray Dogs*: Lee recites *Full River Red*

Initially, during the first recitation of the poem, Lee appears to have control over his emotions. However, when he sings it for the second time, a shift occurs. Tears well up in his eyes, and as he reaches the line “I look up to the sky and loudly let Heaven know/ The strength of my passions”, he could not contain his emotions and tears stream down his face. His voice becomes even more sorrowful and pitiful. This emotional transformation is significant when considering the background of the poem itself. The original author, Yue Fei, was a renowned general in the Southern Song Dynasty, driven by strong ambitions to make substantial contributions to his country. The poem is laden with emotions, encompassing a fervent desire to serve the country faithfully, resentment towards enemies, unwavering confidence and fearless optimism. However, juxtaposed with Lee’s circumstances, this ambition only serves to underscore his profound loneliness and vulnerability as a marginalized individual.

The changes in emotions are also vividly portrayed in the nearly 10-minute long take involving the cabbage. One night, while inebriated, Lee discovers a cabbage placed beside his pillow, adorned with a drawing of a woman’s face by his children. Initially, he scrutinizes it, then closes his eyes and gently presses his head against the cabbage’s face, as if hugging it. However, after a brief moment, a sudden realization seems to strike him. He abruptly gets up, gazes at the cabbage with anguish, then slowly reaches for the pillow beside him, as if gathering strength. In a surge of intensity, he launches himself at the cabbage, fiercely attempting to suffocate it. Then he grasps the cabbage again, furiously gnawing at it, spitting out some portions, and even resentfully stabs his finger at the painted eyes. After over 4 minutes of desperate gnawing, the face painted on the cabbage is completely disfigured and

the cabbage itself nearly disintegrates, leaving behind countless shattered leaves. At this moment, looking at the broken cabbage, Lee succumbs to bitter sobs, cradling it in his arms (Fig. 8), and eventually collapses on the bed in helpless wailing.



Fig. 8 *Stray Dogs*: Lee bitterly cradles a cabbage in his arms

The symbolism of the cabbage as Lee's absent wife is evident in this scene, serving as a conduit for his emotional release. In the almost ten-minute-long take, the brewing, turning, bursting, and falling of his emotions are all clearly presented. Initially, there is a fleeting tenderness that arises from longing, but it quickly gives way to growing anger. Dissatisfied with his initial attempt to suffocate the cabbage, Lee resorts to frenzied gnawing, seeking a sense of vindictive pleasure. This marks the pinnacle of his anger and resentment. However, this destructive outburst ultimately proves futile, leaving Lee overwhelmed by a profound sense of despair, leading him to cry in helplessness.

The Images of the Ruins

As mentioned earlier, ruins are the main character of the film. Long takes show the audience a variety of ruins, including the dark, cramped house where the family live, the burnt house in the second half of the film, and the abandoned building where the mural is being seen.

Despite being a place of depression and desolation, ruins have long been a source of fascination. In a much-cited article, Simmel saw ruins as much more meaningful than other fragmented works of art such as poetry, painting and music, because in ruins "there has emerged a new whole, a characteristic unity" of the dying art and the new forces and forms of

nature.⁸⁸ The ruins also embody a tension between the natural force and the human spirit: “What has led the building upward is human will; what gives its present appearance is the brute, downward-dragging, corroding, crumbling power of nature.”⁸⁹ And this power of nature, according to him, never ceases to exist, and always enjoys “a rightful claim to this work.”⁹⁰ For Simmel, “The ruin creates the present form of a past life, not according to the contents or remnants of that life, but according to its past as such.”⁹¹ However, in contrast to what Simmel views as classical ruins in which nature overpowers human destruction, modern ruins seem to go beyond this dichotomy and present a unique quality in their temporality. Specifically, they embody “a suspended temporality that brings past, present and future into a complex interplay.”⁹² This is because, unlike classical ruins which decay slowly, contemporary buildings can be destroyed in a short period of time. There are even buildings that were not intended to last when they were constructed in the first place, and without being given that chance of becoming ruins, they will be demolished and rebuilt to meet people’s needs again, which reflects “the constant desire for the new, planned obsolescence” in hyperconsumption.⁹³

This is exemplified by the sample room Lee wanders into in *Stray Dogs*. As a place destined to cease to exist, it reminds us that the comfortable stay is only a fleeting illusion. This sense of unreality is also accentuated by the layout of the sample rooms, such as the wall full of rectangular mirrors of different sizes along the staircase leading to the room, and the spiral staircase shaped like a fluttering white ribbon. The whole picture seems to be divided by stairs, and the camera is tilted at a certain angle when shooting, which makes the start and the end of the staircase invisible, as if hanging in the air horizontally. Such an angle also makes Lee’s walk and ascent seem like a dislocation and brings a strong sense of instability, which corresponds to the precarious state of this space.

⁸⁸ Simmel 1965, 260

⁸⁹ Simmel 1965, 261

⁹⁰ Simmel 1965, 262

⁹¹ Simmel 1965, 26

⁹² Wu 2012, 272

⁹³ Lucas 2013



Fig. 9 *Stray Dogs*: Lee walks into a sample room

In the film, the ruins become living spaces for the homeless, providing a brief escape from the busy world for them as a utopian existence, despite being able to meet only the most basic needs for survival. Such ruins do not have the grandeur of classical architectural monuments that can arouse romantic feelings, nor can they be compared to the neat and well-planned modern commercial housing. In the film, the large supermarket chain Carrefour, where the children roam, epitomizes this kind of modern housing, with the interior space of the mall well-planned and the merchandise arranged in an orderly manner. And such housing is a reasonable demand in a modern society, as Edensor puts it, “the rationalization of the home as a purified domestic sphere is paralleled by a quest for a modern spatial order within the city, whereby a seamless, rationalized urban space is flooded with transparency and light.”⁹⁴ The living spaces in the film, whether it is a shabby room that need candle lighting or a burnt house with black marks on the wall, all deviate from the order of modern space and become a heterogeneous existence in a reasonable urban space.

In the second half of the film, the burnt house becomes the crying house in Shiang-chyi’s telling:

Xiaoyi: Why has the house become so dirty?

Shiang-chyi: Well, secret.

Xiaoyi: Tell me.

⁹⁴ Edensor 2004, 83

Shiang-chyi: One day it rained, and it kept raining and raining, but because it was raining so hard, the water seeped in, and then the house started crying, and it just kept crying. Do you see many tears up there?⁹⁵



Fig. 9 *Stray Dogs*: A close-up of the texture of the burnt house walls

Unlike the slow decay of the abandoned factory site, disasters show a faster rate of destruction, often reducing buildings to rubble in a matter of moments. The house in the film has survived a fire, with little sign of the life they once have, but the remains of the disaster still exist, as we see the slow-moving close-ups capturing the detailed texture of the walls, and it has become what Shiang-chyi calls “the crying house”. The origin of the house is unknown to us, but instead of being abandoned after the disaster, it provides a shelter for the forgotten people in the city. This means that the ruins are still active and dynamic, with ongoing decay as well as the traces of the family’s life as time passes. As we see in the film, there is some new furniture in the house, an electronic massage chair where Lee lies, and a table and chairs where the children do their homework. According to Hsu, this type of house is quasi-house, which refers to a family space that mixes various symbols, while showing a melancholy modernity of “a home is not a home”.⁹⁶

In particular, these various symbols in the ruins create what Edensor calls “a continuously shifting collage of fragments”, as each of them carries the memories and traces of different people and products that have passed through it at different points in time, with some of the traces randomly being removed while others are preserved.⁹⁷ For Edensor, this has resulted in

⁹⁵ Tsai 2013, my translation

⁹⁶ Hsu 2021, 71

⁹⁷ Edensor 2004, 834

memory in the ruins not being a series of chronologically developed stories, but “knotted, intertwined threads of memory”:

This clutter produces an excess of meaning, a plentitude of fragmented stories, elisions, fantasies, inexplicable objects, and possible events which present a history that can begin and end anywhere. Here, memory is elusive, dependent upon conjectures about the traces of the overlooked people, places, and processes which haunt ruins.⁹⁸

This non-linear time and the elusiveness of memory in the ruins are represented in the film by the presence of three possible mothers. The first woman only appears briefly at the beginning of the film and does not have any intersection with the father; the second woman saves two children from father who attempts suicide on a dark and stormy night; immediately after this scene, the third woman together with the two children sing happy birthday to Lee in a dark house, which becomes a rare warm family life scene throughout the film. There is no continuity in the plot between the three women, and the order of their appearances is still open to question. Another possible interpretation is that the mother does not exist, and the image of her is just a fantasy of the children, as she is absent in most of the scenes, and only Lee alone can be seen wandering with two children. This intentional ambiguity about the identity of the three women echoes Tsai’s comment that the film seems to have no beginning or end.⁹⁹ It also highlights the floating state of existence of the family, who live in ruins as marginalized members of modernity, belonging neither to the past and nor to the future.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I investigated the effects of the long take as a defining element of slow cinema, especially as portrayed in the films of Tsai Ming-liang. While slow cinema encompasses various shared characteristics in different aspects, the long take stands out as the most distinctive device. For a better understanding of the use of long take in films, I traced back to its theoretical root and examined its aesthetic value. It can be found out that the long take has the potential to preserve the integrity of the events shown in the films, and it enables the audience to engage with and observe the film image in intricate detail.

⁹⁸ Edensor 2004, 834

⁹⁹ Tsai 2014, 319

Meanwhile, the utilization of long takes in slow cinema can sometimes trigger the effect of defamiliarization, which aims to help the audience to sharpen their senses and rediscover the unnoticeable details in familiar moments in life. Through an analysis of two films of Tsai Ming-liang, namely *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and *Stray Dogs*, it becomes evident how these two effects of long takes interact with each other and contribute to the construction of slowness.

In *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, the long takes capture the monotony of everyday reality while infusing a sense of mystery, effectively defamiliarizing the familiar. The film's climactic long take, centered on an empty auditorium, establishes the space itself as the protagonist, symbolizing Tsai's lament for the decline of cinema. Similarly, in *Stray Dogs*, the static long takes highlight the ruins as the main character, painting a bleak picture of modern society. The extended shot length also facilitates the portrayal of character's emotional changes.

Notwithstanding the small number of cases, the study highlights the significant role of the long take in the construction of slowness in the films of Tsai Ming-liang. Further research is required to explore more closely the relationship between other features of slow cinema.

Bibliography

- Bazin, André. 2005. *What Is Cinema?: Vol. 1*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.
- Bordwell, David. 2006. *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Çağlayan, Emre. 2018. *Poetics of Slow Cinema: Nostalgia, Absurdism, Boredom*. 1st ed. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Science Business Media.
- Cai, Wensheng 蔡文晟 and Qi, Li 李奇. 2014. “Tsaimingliang: jiaoyou shi pai meigeren xinli de feixu 蔡明亮：郊游是拍每个人心里的废墟” [Tsai Ming-liang: *Stray Dogs* is filming ruins in everyone’s heart] <https://www.time-weekly.com/post/24577> Accessed May 6, 2023.
- Culp, Samantha, Coburn, Tyle and Ming-liang, Tsai. 2003. “An Interview with Tsai Ming-Liang.” trans. Ken Chen et al., *Wake: A Journal of Contemporary Culture*, Fall 2003, <http://tylercoburn.com/tsai.html>. Accessed November 25, 2022.
- Davis, Darrell William. 2012. “Second Coming.” In *A Companion to Chinese Cinema*, 133-50. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- de Luca, Tiago. 2014. *Realism of the Senses in World Cinema: the Experience of Physical Reality*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Dong, Gao-zhi 董高志. 2004. “Liqunsuoju xiandai ren sikao caimingliang dianying zhong de xiandaixing” 離群索居現代人---思考蔡明亮電影中的現代性 [Reclusive modern people: reflections on modernity in Tsai ming-liang’s films] MA thesis, National Chengchi University.
- Ebrey, Patricia Buckley, ed. 1993. *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. New York: Free Press.
- Edensor, Tim. 2005. “The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space.” *Environment and Planning. D, Society & Space* 23, no. 6 (2005): 829-49.
- Fermi. Paradox (@Fermi.Paradox). 2014. “When there’s nothing to do, look at the moon” Douban, March 12, 2014, 7:34 a.m. <https://movie.douban.com/review/6583792/> Accessed May 19, 2023
- Fisher, Philip. 1998. *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Flanagan, Matthew. 2008. “Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema.” *16:9*, http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11_inenglish.htm. Accessed November 19, 2022.

- Gibbs, John, and Douglas Pye. 2017. *The Long Take: Critical Approaches*. Palgrave Close Readings in Film and Television. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Girish, Devika and Ming-liang, Tsai. 2021. *Interview: Tsai Ming-liang*. <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-tsai-ming-liang-days/> Accessed May 19, 2023
- Goodbye, Dragon Inn* 不散, directed by Tsai Ming-liang 蔡明亮, 2003, film.
- Hong, Ren-xian 洪仁賢. 2019. “lai meishuguan yu Tsaimingliang yiqi jiaoyou ---- tan dianying zoujin meishuguan de kenengxing 來美術館與蔡明亮一起郊遊 ---- 談電影走進美術館的可能性” [Come and enjoy *Stray Dogs* with Tsai Ming-liang ---- A discussion about the possibilities of having movies in museums] https://ed.artegov.tw/uploadfile/periodical/3695_設計美感來美術館與蔡明亮一起郊遊.pdf. Accessed May 10, 2023.
- Hsu, Wen-ya 許文雅. 2021. “Lun Tsaimingliang dianying de feixu yu shenti tujing: yi dianying jiaoyou weili” 論蔡明亮電影的廢墟與身體圖景：以電影《郊遊》為例 [The study of ruin and body scenery in Tsai Ming-liang’s films: focusing on the case of *Stray Dogs*] MA thesis, National Tsinghua University.
- Huang, Ren 黃仁. 1997. “Shaoshi gongsi de tese he yingxiang” 邵氏公司的特色和影響 [The characteristics and influence of Shaw Brothers]. *Dangdai dianying* 當代電影 3 (1997): 23-29.
- Huang, Yin-fen 黃櫻棻. 1997. “Jiushiniandai taiwan dianying de meixue bianzheng 九十年代台灣電影的美學辯證” [The aesthetic dialectics of Taiwanese films in the 1990s] *Dianying yishu* 電影藝術 1: 12-21.
- James, Nick. 2010. “Editorial: Passive Aggressive.” *Sight and Sound* (London) 20, no. 4: 5.
- Jiao, Xiong-ping 焦雄屏. 2002. *Taiwan dianying jiuling xinxin langchao* 台灣電影 90 新新浪潮 [New new wave of Taiwanese cinema in the 1990s] Taipei: Maitian chubanshe.
- Kao, Junhoon 高俊宏. 2015. *Tuoluo: chuangzuo yu rangsheng* 陀螺：創作與讓生 [The gyro: creation and letting alive] New Taipei: Yuanzu wenhua.
- Koepnick, Lutz Peter. 2014. *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*. Columbia Themes in Philosophy, Social Criticism, and the Arts. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Koepnick, Lutz. 2017. *The Long Take: Art Cinema and the Wondrous*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Krajcsó, Nelli. 2015. “Is it Possible to really Slow Down in our Everyday Lives? the New Challenges of the Slow Movement and Why has the Slow Food Movement Approach been Exceeded?” *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae.Social Analysis* 5 (1): 97-106.

- <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/is-possible-really-slow-down-our-everyday-lives/docview/1764649073/se-2>. Accessed May 26, 2023
- Lim, Song Hwee. 2014. *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Lin, Song-hui 林松輝. 2011. "Ni bixu xiangxin dianying youyige zuozhe ---- zai lutedan fangwen Tsaimingliang." 你必須相信電影有一個作者 —— 在鹿特丹訪問蔡明亮 [You have to believe that the film has an author ---- Interview with Tsai Ming-liang in Rotterdam]. *Dianying xinshang* 電影欣賞 147: 69-76.
- Lin, Wen-chi 林文淇. 2013. "Dashi yingpian pingxi: Tsai Ming-liang de busan 大師影片評析：蔡明亮的不散." Analysis on Tsai Ming-liang's *Goodbye Dragon Inn*. July 5, 2013. <https://funscreen.tfai.org.tw/article/5898> Accessed November 2, 2022.
- Liz, Wells. 2005. "Cinema and Photography." In *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*, edited by Lenman, Robin and Angela Nicholson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lucas, Gavin. 2013. "Ruins", in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, edited by Paul Graves-Brown, Rodney Harrison, and Angela Piccini, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199602001.013.035>. Accessed Apr 16, 2023.
- Rapfogel, Jared, and Ming-liang, Tsai. 2004. "Taiwan's Poet of Solitude: An Interview with Tsai Ming-liang." *Cinéaste (New York, N.Y.)* 29, no. 4 (2004): 26-29.
- Romney, Jonathan. 2010. "In Search of Lost Time." *Sight and Sound (London)* 20, no. 2: 43-44.
- Rosen, Philip. 2001. *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Shaviro, Steven. 2010. "Slow Cinema Vs Fast Films." *The Pinocchio Theory*. <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891>. Accessed September 5, 2022.
- Shklovskij, Viktor. 1965. "Art as Technique." In *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, 3-24. Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press.
- Simmel, Georg. 1965. "The ruin." In *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, edited by Wolff Kurt H. New York: Harper and Row, 259-281.
- Stray Dogs* 郊遊, directed by Tsai Ming-liang 蔡明亮, 2013, film.
- Sun, Song-rong 孫松榮. 2014. *Rujing chujing Tsaimingliang de yingxiangyishu yu juajie shijia* 入鏡 | 出境：蔡明亮的影像藝術與跨界實踐 [Tsai Ming-liang's film art and interdisciplinary practice] Taipei: Wunan chuban.
- Taishin Arts Award Archive. 2014. *The Ruin Image Crystal Project: 10 Scenes*. <http://artsawardarchive.taishinart.org.tw/work/id/205> Accessed March 5, 2023

- Tsai, Ming-liang 蔡明亮. 2017. "Tsaimingliang tan VR: ruhe zai xuni shijing zhong yizhan changjingtuo meixue 蔡明亮谈 VR: 如何在虚拟实境中一展长镜头美学?" [Tsai Ming-liang talks about VR: How to show the aesthetics of long takes in virtual reality?] <https://cinophilia.net/60296/> Accessed December 13, 2022.
- Tsai, Ming-liang 蔡明亮. 2016. "Zhaohui xinlangchao de jingshen 找回新浪潮的精神" [Bring back the spirit of the New Wave] https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_9843685 Accessed November 23, 2022.
- Tu, I-pei 涂倚佩. 2021. "Tsaimingliang yingxiang de shikong goucheng" 蔡明亮影像的時--空構成 [The spatial-temporal construction in Tsai Ming-liang's images]. PhD thesis, Taipei National University of the Arts.
- Tuttle, Harry. 2010a. "Slow Films, Easy Life (Sight&Sound)." *Unspoken Cinema*. <https://unspokencinema.blogspot.com/2010/05/slow-films-easy-life-sight.html>. Accessed September 5, 2022.
- Wang, Yu-hui 王友輝. 2000. "Taiwan shiyan juzhan yanjiu" 臺灣實驗劇展研究(1980~1984) [The Festival of Taiwan Experimental Theatre (1980~1984)] *Yishu pinglun 藝術評論* 11 (2000) :199-224.
- Wenwen Kai 溫溫凱. 2021. "Dashi kuangxiangqu caimingliang zhuanfang shang dang guoji dadao douzai paishe tongnian zhiyou ta zhuanzhu dangxia 《大師狂想曲》蔡明亮專訪 (上) 當國際大導都在拍攝童年, 只有他專注當下" [Master Rhapsody: An interview with Tsai miang-liang (part 1: when internationally famous directors are filming childhood, only he focuses on the present)] <https://crossing.cw.com.tw/article/15401> Accessed November 26, 2022
- Wilson, Flannery. 2015. *New Taiwanese Cinema in Focus: Moving within and beyond the Frame*. Traditions in World Cinema. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Wollen, Peter. 1984. "Fire and Ice." In *The Photography Reader*, edited by Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003), 78. Originally published in *Photographies* 4 (April 1984): 118-120.
- Wu, Hong. 2012. *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Yang, Nai-nü 楊乃女 and Jianguang, Lin 林建光. 2018. *Hou renweng zhuanxiang 後人文轉向* [A turn to post-humanism]. Taichung: National Chuang Hsing University Press.
- Zeng, Yizhou 曾一洲. 2020. "Malaixiya huayu dianying de lishi yu xianzhuang" 马来西亚华语电影的历史与现状 [The History and Present Situation of Malaysian Chinese Films]. *Zhongguo dianying shichang 中国电影市场* 8 (2020): 57-62.