



FOCUS HONG KONG: UK PREMIERE

Love Unto Waste

Love Unto Waste

Director: Stanley Kwan
Production Company: Pearl City

Producer: Vicky Leung Lee
Screenplay: Tai An-Ping Yau
Story: Kit Lai, Kam-Hung Yip

Editor: Seung-Gang Chau
Art Director: William Chang
Music: Johnny Koo

Cast:
Tony Leung Chiu-wai (*Tony Cheung*)
Irene Wan (*Billie Yuen Bui-Yee*)

Ts'ai Chin (*Chiu Suk-Ling*)
Chow Yun Fat (*Detective Lan*)
Elaine Jin (*Liu Yuk-Ping*)
Hong Kong 1986
98 mins
Digital (restoration)

In Stanley Kwan's lovingly crafted, multi-layered masterpiece, romance and murder mystery underpin a poignant and haunting look at modern life. Against the hedonistic backdrop of 1980s Hong Kong, a rich playboy involved with several women finds himself under suspicion when one is discovered murdered. Though the police investigation initially drives the narrative, Kwan playfully subverts genre conventions as he explores themes of regret, identity and isolation. The 2K digital restoration further emphasises the beauty of Kwan's achingly romantic film.

Stanley Kwan in profile (February 1990)

Stanley Kwan [Guan Jinpang in Mandarin, Kwan Kam-Pang in Cantonese] was born in Hong Kong in 1957. He grew up in the years that saw the city transformed from an overcrowded colonial port into a fully functioning technopolis. He studied film for two years (1976-78) in the Communication Arts department of Baptist College, but at the same time trained as an actor and production assistant with the television station TVB, and formally signed with the station in 1978. He did not stay long in television. When a large group of young directors left the industry to make independent feature films in 1979, Kwan followed and began working as an assistant director on movies. As such, he worked with several of the most prominent directors of Hong Kong's putative 'new wave', including Peter Yung, Ronnie Yu, Patrick Tam, Yim Ho and Leong Po-Chih. By his own account, his most formative experiences were gained when he worked for Ann Hui on *The Story of Woo Viet* (*Hu Yue de Gushi*, 1981) and *Boat People* (*Touben Nu Hai*, 1982).

He began directing in 1984, and has completed four features to date: *Women* (*Nuren Xin*, 1985), *Love Unto Waste* (*Dixia Qing*, 1986), *Rouge* and *Full Moon in New York* (*Ren Zai Niu-Yue*, 1989), the latter shot entirely on location in Manhattan. After making *Love Unto Waste*, he briefly reverted to the role of assistant to help two friends with their films: Eric Tsang (the original director, later fired from the film) on Jackie Chan's *The Armour of God* (*Long Xiong Hu Di*) and Tony Au on *Dream Lovers* (*Meng Zhong Ren*). In 1988, he produced and supervised a first feature by his own former assistant director, Paul Cheung: *Hearts, No Flowers* (*Shaonu Xin*, released 1989).

Many of Kwan's contemporaries in the Hong Kong film industry have career outlines that look like this: little or no formal training, stints in the television and film industries, relatively early opportunities to direct. (By contrast, most of the slightly older 'new wave' pioneers studied at film schools in England or the US and began directing for TV before moving into films.) Unlike most of his contemporaries, though, Kwan sidesteps the gimmickry and sloppiness that afflict much Hong Kong production. Virtually all Hong Kong movies are still star vehicles; many are little more than scriptless improvisations around the established personae of their stars. Kwan's films are also star vehicles, in that they are conceived and written with particular actors and actresses in mind, but with two crucial differences from the norm. First, he chooses the best available actors and works with them to produce structured scripts with cogent characterisations. Second, he roots his films in his own experience and thinks them through in terms of their emotional development and credibility, not in terms of genre conventions.



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Focus on Hong Kong:

UK Premiere: Love Unto Waste + intro

Tue 6 Feb 18:15

Chinese New Year: UK premiere: Father + Q&A with director Deng Wei, producer Wenlan Peng and host, Professor Chris Berry, Kings College London

Sat 10 Feb 15:10

Valentine's Day: Casablanca

Wed 14 Feb 14:30

Valentine's Day: Portrait of a Lady on Fire

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu

Wed 14 Feb 18:15

Valentine's Day: Moonlight

Wed 14 Feb 20:40

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Wed 21 Feb 20:40

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Nicholas de Pencier, Edward Burtynsky);

Tue 20 Feb 20:40

Watermark

Sat 17 Feb 18:10 (+ Q&A with filmmakers Jennifer

Baichwal, Nicholas de Pencier and Edward

Burtynsky); Fri 23 Feb 20:40

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The result is a burgeoning filmography not unworthy of a latter-day George Cukor or a less cynical Fassbinder. Kwan's films typically centre on women. Their plots are conundrums of desire, infatuation, boredom and disillusionment, invariably founded on questions about the strength and durability of emotional commitments. *Women* and *Love Unto Waste* were drawn directly from observation of problems in the lives of friends: the first is about the separation of a couple and the wife's deepening involvement with a group of divorcees, the second about the effect of a shocking and arbitrary death on the small knot of people who considered themselves the dead woman's best friends. *Rouge* was the first of Kwan's films to be based on an existing literary source (a novel that he intensely disliked, as it happens) and it pushed his work forward by forcing him to reach for larger perspectives on the material. Kwan's first two features 'discovered' themselves as they went along, but *Rouge* starts from clearly defined perceptions of Hong Kong life (then and now) and locates its worries about fidelity and commitment in a sense of the way that social factors shape and determine the characters' lives. Kwan has built on this achievement in his fourth feature, *Full Moon in New York*, which sustains a 'political' reading as a commentary on the relationship between China, Taiwan and Hong Kong while charting the development of a friendship between three Chinese women in Manhattan.

The Hong Kong film industry may well be the last in the world in which a career like Kwan's is possible. Its output remains prolific, it comprises both major companies and enterprising independents, and it has a huge and generally reliable audience at home, in Taiwan and in the vast Chinese diaspora around the world. It is not a unionised industry (although its levels of pay are now respectable to excellent), and so it is not crippled by restrictive practices. Equally, it is not dominated by agents, packagers or ad-men. Its stars are still jobbing actors, many of whom respond to the opportunity to undertake ambitious and challenging work. Above all, it is an industry that has repeatedly shown itself willing to risk untried talents.

In theory, any number of other young directors could have carved out careers for themselves in the way that Kwan has done. The industry's insatiable demand for novelty is such that no director's career need hang on the commercial success of his or her last film, and so there are plentiful opportunities (now all but extinct in the film industries of Europe and North America) to learn by making mistakes. In practice, though, Kwan is unique in having turned this situation to his creative advantage by making films that meet the needs of his producers while also posing aesthetic and thematic challenges for himself and his collaborators. Kwan's commercial fortunes have been chequered: *Women* and *Rouge* were substantial box-office successes in Hong Kong and elsewhere, but *Love Unto Waste* (his most 'personal' film) earned little but the odd critical plaudit. But the important thing is that as long as he continues to tackle stories within the grasp of his producers and audiences – and to work with popular stars – Kwan can expect to go on directing at least one film a year for the foreseeable future. The particular character of the Hong Kong film industry gives him all the foundations he needs.

Tony Rayns, 'Love Unto Waste', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, February 1990