

Berklee College of Music, Valencia Campus
Scoring for Film, Television and Video Games

A Subtle Variety

Theme Analysis of the Score to *Lust, Caution*

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Introduction

Lust, Caution (2007) is a dramatic thriller film based on a novella of the same name written by Eileen Chang and published in 1979. Directed by Ang Lee, the film was produced in the USA, China and Taiwan. Lee turned to Frenchman Alexandre Desplat to write the score. Despite the film being set in China during the second world war, Desplat wrote a traditionally western classic contemporary score. Using a fairly traditional orchestra, Desplat created a delicate, haunting, yet beautiful score that relies heavily on themes and variations of those themes. These themes, or leitmotifs, can be categorized into four major themes: the *Lust, caution theme*, *Wong Chia Chi's theme*, the *Resistance theme*, and the *Love theme*.

This paper will discuss the use of these themes; how they connect with what is happening on screen, how subtle changes and variations of the themes can expand the musical vocabulary of the score, and how becoming familiar with these themes can give the audience a deeper understanding of the story and its characters.

Synopsis

Lust, Caution follows six young university students in Hong Kong during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Frustrated by not being able to directly help their country in the war, they come up with the plan to murder a high-ranking official, Mr. Yee, who is in fact working for the Japanese puppet government in China. Their plan is to disguise one of their own, a young woman named Wong Chia Chi, as a high-class lady in order to infiltrate the Yee household. After successfully getting into Mr. Yee's wife's inner circle, Wong Chia Chi tries to seduce the heavily guarded Mr. Yee. Now posing as the well-to-do Mrs. Mak, she is very close to succeeding when Mr. Yee suddenly gets relocated to Shanghai, which forces the young activists to abandon their plan. As they pack up their things in a hurry, one of Mr. Yee's subordinates shows up in their apartment and realizes that Mrs. Mak is not who she claims to be. The students combine their forces to kill the subordinate before the horrified Wong Chia Chi runs away.

Three years later Wong Chia Chi is living life as a poor student in the war-ridden Shanghai of 1942 when she is approached by Kuang Yu Min, the leader of the now dispatched group of university students. Kuang, now working as an undercover agent for the KMT¹, convinces Wong Chia Chi to resume her role as Mrs. Mak in order to become Mr. Yee's mistress. Mr. Yee has become the head of a police department which is responsible for capturing, interrogating, and executing resistance agents such as Kuang. He is therefore under constant surveillance. Wong Chia Chi as Mrs. Mak is offered by Mrs. Yee to stay in the Yee household where she again catches the eye of

¹ KMT stands for *Kuomintang*, today known as the Chinese Nationalist Party, which tried fervently to overthrow the Japanese occupation in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Mr. Yee. Their first sexual encounter (of many) takes place at a hotel room where he violently rapes her despite her obvious willingness to have sex with him. However, the smile on her face at the end of their encounter is an indication of what is to come. As they spend more time together, it becomes evident that Wong Chia Chi is falling in love with Mr. Yee, all the while trying to get him assassinated. She finally gets the chance to have her colleagues kill him when they go unguarded to a jewelry shop where Mr. Yee has had a diamond ring made for Wong Chia Chi. As she puts it on her finger she succumbs to her feelings towards Mr. Yee and quietly tells him to run. He manages to escape with the help of his driver. That same day Wong Chia Chi and the other resistance group members are captured. The distraught Mr. Yee signs their death warrants and has them taken to a quarry where they are executed.



Home From Work

This is the film's first non-source music since the opening titles theme. Though the main melody itself is not heard right away, the fact that it is in the same e-minor dorian key as the opening titles makes this short cue sound and feel like a natural continuation of the opening theme. It starts off with pizzicato basses giving the music a stronger sense of rhythm as Mr. Yee's assistant watches him leave the workplace after their conversation ends. The music continues as Mr. Yee's car drives off and subsequently parks near Mr. Yee's home. Again it fades out as the film cuts inside the house when Mr. Yee walks in.



Seduction

As the film flashes back in time, the *Lust, caution* theme is not heard for more than forty minutes. Situated three years earlier, in Hong Kong, Mr. Yee is patiently watching Wong Chia Chi trying out a new dress at the tailor's. As she prepares to switch back to her normal clothes, Mr. Yee orders her to leave the dress on – and right after is where this aptly named *Seduction* cue starts. As an electric cello eloquently swoops in with the main melody, the film cuts to a fancy restaurant. Mr. Yee walks out of a phone booth towards a table where Wong Chia Chi sits, wearing the beautiful dress. The music softly fades out as they start their conversation.

Arguably the finest version of the *Lust, caution* theme on the entire soundtrack, it magnificently combines harp, glass harp, electric cello, solo violin, and a string

section. Sadly, the film cuts out the beautiful modulation that can be heard on the sample above and instead goes straight to the solo violin taking over the main melody – suggesting the scene was somewhat longer in its original cut.

The fact that the theme was not used for such a long time (mainly during when the group had not yet started their mission) and only resumes when Wong Chia Chi manages to be alone with Mr. Yee for the first time, suggests that the film's title theme is actually a leitmotif for the mission itself. However, as will be mentioned later on, the resistance group has another leitmotif of its own. Therefore it can be said that perhaps the *Lust, caution* theme is more specifically connected to Wong Chia Chi's role as Mrs. Mak in that mission, her torment and the danger she is putting herself in.



Moonlight Drive

That same night, Mr. Yee and Wong Chia Chi are being driven in his car to Wong Chia Chi's house, where the other group members wait anxiously for their chance to spring the trap. The music starts off with the main melody carried by a violin section. As the car approaches the house, the camera then moves to a watching group member on the balcony and the music suddenly becomes frantic as he warns the others of Mr. Yee's coming. It then changes back to its previous calm state when the film cuts to Mr. Yee and Wong Chia Chi getting out of the car and walking towards the house. This becomes a recurring theme as the music dances extremely accurately with the film's editing as it cuts back and forth between the panic of the young resistance members inside and the nervously calm couple outside.

The main theme takes over again when outside the front door, Wong Chia Chi flirtily tries to get Mr. Yee to come inside despite knowing he has an appointment. The music softly builds up as Kuang Yu Min watches the front door open from inside but stops when it becomes apparent that Mr. Yee had decided not to follow Wong Chia Chi inside.

One of the more important cues of the film's first half, it is built around the *Lust, caution* theme and expertly guided to hit the frequent cuts of the scene without sacrificing the quality of the music. Just as in the *Seduction* cue, the title theme is used prominently to underscore Wong Chia Chi's efforts to seduce Mr. Yee in order to get him assassinated.



Hotel Room

As the young activists mission falls apart in Hong Kong, the *Lust, caution* theme is again put on ice until Wong Chia Chi has resumed her role as Mrs. Mak three years later in Shanghai. It is heard again when Mr. Yee has her sent to meet him at a hotel room. This cue is almost identical to the *Moonlight Drive* cue², but without the frantic passages of the latter. It starts off when Wong Chia Chi informs Mr. and Mrs. Yee at the breakfast table that she has no plans for the afternoon. It continues as Mr. Yee's driver picks her up to take her to the hotel room, with a minor hit point when he hands her an envelope with the room number written on it – this is enhanced with a subtle modulation (the most notable change from the *Moonlight Drive* cue). The main theme

² As a result it does not appear on the official soundtrack, hence the full audio extract in the sample.

then reappears in the original key when Wong Chia Chi enters the hotel before it slowly fades out as she gets familiar with the hotel room.



Desire

In this unnerving cue the *Lust, caution* theme is heard like it has never been heard before. The cue starts as Wong Chia Chi learns that Mr. Yee has left town and continues as Mrs. Yee leaves the house as well. The title theme only appears however when Mr. Yee's car returns to the house, suggesting another intimate interaction between Mr. Yee and Wong Chia Chi is imminent. There is nothing flirtatious about the way the theme sounds this time though, which is no surprise given the nature of their last encounter.³ The theme is briefly played on tubular bells over atonal flute sounds and string clusters before it disappears again. The music stops when Mr. Yee enters Wong Chia Chi's room but starts again where it left off, right before the film cuts to the two of them having extremely passionate sex. The music continues in the same disturbing fashion with the *Lust, caution* theme briefly appearing again on the bells during their lovemaking, turning what could be an arousing experience for the audience into a very uncomfortable one. For all the passion in the scene, this music declares that this love is not right in any sense.

³ Mr. Yee raped Wong Chia Chi in the hotel room, which surprisingly only led to her becoming more emotionally attached to him.



Sacrifice

This sample starts in the middle of a long cue named *Sacrifice*, right as the film cuts to Wong Chia Chi and Mr. Yee again having passionately aggressive sex. This cue is very similar to *Desire* but even more alarming and atonal. The *Lust, caution* theme appears twice; just before Mr. Yee's first climax of the scene, and again when Wong Chia Chi notices Mr. Yee's gun whilst riding him. As Mr. Yee climaxes for the second time the music becomes more tonal. Unlike during his climax in *Desire* however⁴, the music does not revert to romanticism but instead keeps its dark character. As the heavily dramatic string chords linger on, Wong Chia Chi's torment becomes unbearable. She holds the love of her life, the man she simultaneously loves and hates, the man who she is willing to put her own life in danger to have assassinated, in her arms. Tears stream down her face as she knows this relationship is only leading to the death of either him, or herself.

The *Lust, caution* theme, though only heard briefly, is again used to remind the audience that despite the visible love between the two, it is a love that is built around her mission.



The Secret

After a romantic evening, Mr. Yee asks Wong Chia Chi to deliver an envelope to a certain man at an unknown address. (That man turns out to be a jeweler who subsequently crafts a diamond ring for Wong Chia Chi. The audience is led to believe

⁴ Which will be discussed in *The Love theme*

however that Mr. Yee is giving her some sort of mission or a test.) The previously romantic cue then becomes more mysterious, using the *Lust, caution* theme in a more familiarly tonal way than during the two sex scenes. The bass line of the theme starts by itself but a cello section swoops in with the main melody when Wong Chia Chi watches Mr. Yee's car drive off. The theme is left unfinished though, and the music fades out as Kuang Yu Min examines the envelope at the beginning of the next scene.



Nanjing Road

This cue starts as soon as Wong Chia Chi steps out of a café. She steps into Mr. Yee's car and asks Mr. Yee to take her to the jeweler's to pick up her ring. It has been made clear to the audience that the time to assassinate Mr. Yee has finally come and the jeweler's shop is where it happens. Wong Chia Chi is visibly nervous and Desplat helps create a feeling of excitement and anxiety by using fragments of the *Lust, caution* theme here and there over strong, rhythmic basses.

Wong Chia Chi's mission is at last about to come to an end and it is fitting that this scene is accompanied by the most hectic version of the *Lust, caution* theme yet.



The South Quarry

Mr. Yee managed to escape from the jeweler's thanks to Wong Chia Chi's warning. That same day his assistant informs Mr. Yee at his office that the entire resistance group, including Wong Chia Chi, has been captured. Mr. Yee signs their death

warrants before handing it to his assistant who leaves Wong Chia Chi's ring on Mr. Yee's desk. The music enters as the heartbroken Mr. Yee watches the ring wobble on his desk. The film then cuts to the South Quarry where the group is to be executed. Dissonant fragments of the *Lust, caution* theme are played on bells, making the atmosphere somewhat similar to *Desire* and *Sacrifice*, while the group members are forced to their knees. Next to Wong Chia Chi kneels Kuang Yu Min who gives her a look of complete disappointment and anger. As he looks at her the music calms down and the *Lust, caution* theme is played in its basic original form on harp over a tonic string drone. The camera then flies over the group and away to the sound of guns being loaded and the string section coming in with full force. The music connects the scene of their execution to Mr. Yee's house where he takes off his jacket and walks up the stairs to Wong Chia Chi's bedroom. It softly fades out on another tonic string drone as Mr. Yee sits down on her bed.

This tragic cue is the last time we hear the *Lust, caution* theme and it is a fine example of how it can be used in many different ways to portray a variety of emotions. The highlight of the cue is when the music is stripped down to just the harp, over a tonic string drone, playing the opening titles theme to the heartbreaking look Kuang Yu Min gives Wong Chia Chi.

Wong Chia Chi's theme

"Wong Chia Chi's theme I"



"Wong Chia Chi's theme III"

Musical score for "Wong Chia Chi's theme III" in G minor, 4/4 time. The score consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system has three measures: the first measure contains a whole rest in both staves, the second measure has a quarter note G3 in the treble and a whole rest in the bass, and the third measure has a half note G3 in the treble and a whole rest in the bass. The second system has four measures: the first measure has a quarter note G3 in the treble and a whole rest in the bass; the second measure has a half note G3 in the treble and a whole rest in the bass; the third measure has a quarter note G3 in the treble and a whole rest in the bass; the fourth measure has a whole rest in both staves. A blue bracket on the right side of the second system spans the last two measures.

"Wong Chia Chi's theme IV"

Musical score for "Wong Chia Chi's theme IV" in G minor, 4/4 time. The score consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system has five measures: the first measure has a whole note G3 in the treble and a whole note G3 in the bass; the second measure has a whole note G3 in the treble and a whole note G3 in the bass; the third measure has a whole note G3 in the treble and a whole note G3 in the bass; the fourth measure has a whole note G3 in the treble and a whole note G3 in the bass; the fifth measure has a whole note G3 in the treble and a whole note G3 in the bass. The second system has five measures: the first measure has a whole note G3 in the treble and a whole note G3 in the bass; the second measure has a whole note G3 in the treble and a whole note G3 in the bass; the third measure has a whole note G3 in the treble and a whole note G3 in the bass; the fourth measure has a whole note G3 in the treble and a whole note G3 in the bass; the fifth measure has a whole note G3 in the treble and a whole note G3 in the bass. A green vertical line is present at the end of the second system.



Wong Chia Chi's theme

To fully understand *Wong Chia Chi's* theme it is necessary to begin with the full version of the theme. For *Wong Chia Chi's* theme is not one theme, but four themes (one of which has a variation used frequently in the film) that are used separately or in various combinations throughout the film's score. Here they are named in order of appearance in this full version, which can only be heard during the end credits of the film – a very interesting fact given the importance of *Wong Chia Chi's theme* as part of the soundtrack. It is beautifully set up for the audience to long for the completion of the theme as they will come to know bits and pieces of it better and better as the film goes on, just as Wong Chia Chi herself hopelessly longed for the completion of her mission.



Streets of Shanghai - W.C.C.'s theme I

It is fitting that the first suggestion of *Wong Chia Chi's* theme⁵ in the score is a subtle variation of the incredibly simple minor third motif that is *Wong Chia Chi's theme I*. Here it is used very subtly in the background to give a sense of motion to a cue where Wong Chia Chi is being driven through the war-ridden streets of Shanghai.

⁵ Hereafter named W.C.C.'s theme for short.



Exodus - W.C.C.'s theme III & I

Exodus is the first cue after the film flashes back to 1939. Wong Chia Chi sits on the back of a truck along with thousands of others who are fleeing Shanghai because of the war. The music enters with a fairly mundane, dramatic receding minor chord progression when Wong Chia Chi notices the handsome Kuang Yu Min on the next truck. It then fades into a harp playing over soft strings a version of *W.C.C.'s theme III* as Wong Chia Chi discusses the war with another girl on the truck. As they finish their conversation the strings take over with *W.C.C.'s theme I* – softly at first but more emphatically for the second time to link the film's cut to the next scene in Hong Kong.

A small but significant cue as the audience hears both *W.C.C.'s theme I* and *W.C.C.'s theme III* in their original form for the first time.



Falling Rain - W.C.C.'s theme III & I

Falling Rain is another combination of *W.C.C.'s theme III* and *W.C.C.'s theme I*. The group of students is having fun on a bus in Hong Kong and Wong Chia Chi moves to the front of the bus to escape the rowdiness of the others, which is when this cue starts. It continues as Kuang Yu Min joins her and the two of them share an intimate moment as the rain pours down on the bus. It then fades subtly out shortly after the next scene starts.

This is the first time the piano carries the main melody of any of the *W.C.C.*'s themes, which becomes common throughout the rest of the score. More significantly this cue solidifies the link between the two themes heard in the ears of the audience.



The End of Innocence - W.C.C.'s theme IV & I

The more time Wong Chia Chi spends as Mrs. Mak in Hong Kong, the less is heard of her own theme. It is therefore fitting that the next time it appears is right after Wong Chia Chi receives a phone call from Mrs. Yee who informs her that Mr. Yee has been relocated to Shanghai, marking the end of the group's naïve mission in Hong Kong – and subsequently the end of Wong Chia Chi's role as Mrs. Mak. The music continues as the group is seen packing up their things in dismay. It softly fades out as Wong Chia Chi steps out to the balcony for a cigarette. In the background Mr. Yee's assistant is seen sneaking into the house.

This cue marks the introduction of *W.C.C.'s theme IV*, which to no surprise links perfectly well with the chorus-like *W.C.C.'s theme I*. The piano is again used to play the main melody.



Shanghai 1942 - W.C.C.'s theme II (b)

After the brutal stabbing of Mr. Yee's assistant the horrified Wong Chia Chi runs out of the house and away. She is accompanied by an electronic drone on the tonic and the dominant and soon a solo violin joins in in a small intro. The entrance of *W.C.C.'s*

*theme II (b)*⁶ is impeccably timed with the film's cut to Shanghai, now three years later. The tragic theme, reminiscent of John Williams's score for *Schindler's List*, continues throughout a montage of the war-ridden Shanghai. As the theme suggests, Wong Chia Chi appears amongst a crowd of peasants standing in line for their daily food rations. She then walks past paramedics removing dead bodies of the poor from the streets. The music softly exits as she enters a modest looking building and walks inside.

Shanghai 1942, one of the strongest cues of the soundtrack, introduces the haunting *W.C.C.'s theme II (b)*. It is the first sign of this theme representing Wong Chia Chi's modest background and how far from reality her disguise as Mrs. Mak actually is. That the theme is in this cue used to underscore images of extreme poverty supports that statement.



Remember Everything - W.C.C.'s theme II (b)

After having been approached by Kuang Yu Min on the street, Wong Chia Chi agrees to resume her role as Mrs. Mak in order to get to Mr. Yee once again. The music starts as a Kuomintang officer lists everything she has to remember to successfully complete her disguise, his voice echoing over a short montage of Wong Chia Chi preparing for her role. As we see her leave her house with a packed suitcase, *W.C.C.'s theme II (b)* enters. The music continues while Wong Chia Chi asks the officer to mail

⁶ It could be argued that this theme, here named *W.C.C.'s theme II (b)* should simply be called *W.C.C.'s theme II* since the actual *W.C.C.'s theme II* as heard in the full version is never used until the end credits. The full version is however named "Wong Chia Chi's theme" on the film's official soundtrack and therefore the themes within that version will be looked at as the original themes.

a letter to her father in England. The officer promptly burns the letter and the theme briefly reappears along with the image of the burning letter in a trash can. The music fades out on the tonic minor chord shortly after the film cuts to Mr. Yee entering his house.

Again one can see connections between the use of *W.C.C.'s theme II (b)* and Wong Chia Chi's background. In this cue the theme enters at the precise moment she leaves her home, and with it her real identity. The second time it appears in this cue is when the letter to her father burns, as if her past is burning with it.



Hotel Room - W.C.C.'s theme I

This cue has already been discussed at length in the previous chapter as it is built around the *Lust, caution* theme. However, towards the end of the cue, *W.C.C.'s theme I* can be heard ever so slightly in the background. It can now be safely said that while *W.C.C.'s theme* is obviously a leitmotif for Wong Chia Chi, the *Lust, caution* theme is in fact a leitmotif for Mrs. Mak. The fact that *W.C.C.'s theme* is mixed into a cue dominated by the *Lust, caution* theme is perhaps a sign of things to come – a sign of Wong Chia Chi failing to distance herself from her role as Mrs. Mak as she falls more and more in love with Mr. Yee.



Check Point - W.C.C.'s theme I & III

This cue starts after Wong Chia Chi breaks down in front of Kuang Yu Min and the Kuomintang officer, revealing how the mission is wearing her down mentally, and begging them to end it as soon as possible. It is therefore natural that the cue is made up of *W.C.C.'s theme I* as a constant ostinato in the background, and a slight variation of *W.C.C.'s theme III* as the main melody. The latter theme comes in shortly after the film cuts to the checkpoint into the Japanese district of Shanghai. Mr. Yee's driver is taking Wong Chia Chi to meet Mr. Yee at a high-class Japanese brothel. The music fades into source music as Wong Chia Chi enters the brothel.

The constant ticking of *W.C.C.'s theme I* on harp and marimba gives this cue a sense of unnerving motion as the audience senses how fragile and unstable Wong Chia Chi is becoming, and how hard it is for her to differentiate between her own self and her role as Mrs. Mak.



Streets of Shanghai part II - W.C.C.'s theme I

This is another example of where a cue that is built around another theme is given a sense of motion and anxiety by *W.C.C.'s theme I*.⁷

⁷ This cue will be discussed at length in *The Resistance theme*



Nanjing Road - W.C.C.'s theme II (b)

Wong Chia Chi and Mr. Yee step out of his car on Nanjing Road, in front of the jeweler's store where Mr. Yee's assassination is scheduled to take place. As they walk across the street, a sound of a gunshot is heard in the distance. Wong Chia Chi is startled and as the film moves into slow motion, she anxiously looks around at other members of the resistance who are waiting to ambush Mr. Yee. As Mr. Yee puts his arm around her she looks back at him with a protective smile, as if she had just realized that in his arms is where she wants to be. The film goes back to normal speed and they enter the store together.

A high-pitched tonic string drone is triggered by the distant gunshot. *W.C.C.'s theme II (b)* enters shortly thereafter. It is a slight variation of the theme with added reverb, to match the slow motion effect. The choice of using this theme suggests Wong Chia Chi is reflecting on her entire life, her background and her friends in the resistance, as she tries to make up her mind on whether actually allowing the love of her life to be assassinated.



On the Street - W.C.C.'s theme II (b)

On the Street starts as Wong Chia Chi steps out of the jeweler's store after Mr. Yee barely managed to escape the attempt on his life thanks to Wong Chia Chi's warning. She frantically tries to hail a cycle-rickshaw without succeeding. *W.C.C.'s theme II (b)* enters as she walks towards fancy looking shopping windows on Nanjing road. The theme is yet again used to signify her modest background as she regretfully

examines the expensive clothing in the windows – knowing that her life as the high-class Mrs. Mak is now over. Suddenly, as the harp and celesta join the string section in a mournful outro, Wong Chia Chi snaps out of her daydream when she sees another rickshaw reflecting in the window and this time manages to grab the driver's attention. As she takes a seat in the carriage, the music fades into the next cue – *The Angel*.



The Angel - W.C.C.'s theme III, I & IV

The cycle-rickshaw drives off with Wong Chia Chi through the crowded streets of Shanghai. Her journey comes to a halt when the driver has to stop because of a barricade on the road. As she realizes that there is no way for her to escape she contemplates taking her own life, clutching a cyanide pill that was sown onto her jacket. The film flashes back to the moment the six young students in Hong Kong originally planned the assassination of Mr. Yee, before cutting to Mr. Yee himself standing in his office, which is where the music ends.

Arguably the musical highlight of the film, *The Angel* is the closest the audience gets to hearing a full version of *Wong Chia Chi's* theme during the actual film. Underscoring Wong Chia Chi's reflective journey through the streets of Shanghai, this cue makes it very clear that her life as Mrs. Mak is over. That façade was immediately stripped off her when she revealed herself to Mr. Yee. Even so, there is a very subtle hint that she may never go back to being the Wong Chia Chi of old: When the piano plays *W.C.C.'s theme III* for the second time, one can ever so slightly hear a

cello line of A (5th) – E (9th) – D (8th), which incidentally or not is also the first part of the *Lust, caution* theme.⁸



An Empty Bed - W.C.C.'s theme I

Mr. Yee sits on Wong Chia Chi's empty bed. As a clock rings for 10 o'clock, a high-pitched string drone enters. It is soon accompanied by *W.C.C.'s theme I* on harp, marking how strongly Mr. Yee feels Wong Chia Chi's presence in the room as he slowly walks out of it.⁹

⁸ Which, as has been previously discussed, can also be interpreted as Mrs. Mak's theme.

⁹ This cue will be discussed at length in *The Love theme*

The Resistance theme



Playacting

Playacting marks the introduction of the least prominent of all the major themes – *The resistance* theme. *The resistance* theme is a leitmotif for the group of six young students as well as for the mission to murder Mr. Yee. It is first heard in a playful yet suspenseful way (the melody is mainly carried by piano and flute) during a scene where the group moves into the apartment they acquired to help build the disguise of Mrs. Mak. The cue ends on a dramatic tonic minor 9th chord when the audience sees Wong Chia Chi dressed up as Mrs. Mak for the first time, as she waits to be introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Yee.



Tsim Sha Tsui Stroll

Wong Chia Chi, as Mrs. Mak, is getting acquainted with Mrs. Yee and the two of them are enjoying a leisurely stroll along with Kuang Yu Min, who is posing as Wong Chia Chi's cousin, and Mrs. Yee's bodyguard. The music enters at the end of the previous scene and *The Resistance* theme starts right after the camera focuses on the slightly awkward looking foursome walking down the street. This time the piano

plays the melody along with a solo violin. The music continues throughout their trivial conversation and fades out on a high violin note that stretches slightly into the next scene.

This variation of the theme is different in tempo from *Playacting with Tsim Sha Tsui Stroll* boasting a waltz-like rhythm, but the atmosphere sounds equally playful without having the same colour of mystery. The playfulness of both these cues suggests that the young students do not fully realize the serious nature of their mission.



The End of Innocence

This cue was already discussed in *Wong Chia Chi's theme*. What was purposefully left out in that chapter is the fact that *The Resistance theme* is briefly played by violas on top of *Wong Chia Chi's theme IV*. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the group finds out their mission has come to an end. In this cue, *The Resistance theme* mournfully laments the group's failure as it blends seamlessly with Wong Chia Chi's own sorrow over the course of events.



Familiar Faces

Wong Chia Chi is living her lonely and modest life in the Shanghai of 1942. As she walks out of a movie theater, one of her old friends from Hong Kong is seen watching her. Fittingly, a string section meanwhile plays a slow rendition of *The Resistance*

theme. The music modulates when it reaches the second half of the theme, creating a subtle hit point as Wong Chia Chi notices Kuang Yu Min waiting outside her apartment when she arrives home.

The dark nature of this variation of *The Resistance theme* indicates that the group's naïve mission in Hong Kong three years earlier undoubtedly left its mark on all of them. Even though it did not dampen their will to challenge the Japanese regime, they all have aged beyond their years.



Desire

The first half of this cue was discussed in detail in *The Lust, caution theme*. In this chapter however it is the very end of the cue that is of interest. As Mr. Yee and Wong Chia Chi lie in each other's arms after their extremely passionate lovemaking, Wong Chia Chi asks him to provide her with an apartment. The advantage of her having an apartment for herself is not only to have more privacy with Mr. Yee – that privacy would also give her and the resistance a better chance to get at him unguarded. Shortly after she asks Mr. Yee, a harp plays *The Resistance theme* in octaves. This brief inclusion of the theme reminds the audience, and perhaps Wong Chia Chi herself, that even though she is very much in love with Mr. Yee, her mission of having him assassinated is still ongoing.



Sacrifice

The latter half of *Sacrifice* was discussed in *The Lust, caution theme*. *The Resistance theme* is heard here in the beginning of this long cue. Wong Chia Chi is being carried through a crowded, narrow street in Shanghai. As she passes the entrance to the now confiscated office of the Kuomintang official, the first half of *The Resistance theme* is played by violins.

As may already be gleaned from the above, this score lives and dies by its use of leitmotifs. The use of *The Resistance theme* in this cue is yet another example of an extremely traditional, and obvious, use of a simple leitmotif.



Streets of Shanghai part II

Streets of Shanghai part II is yet another cue that has already been mentioned in previous chapters, which goes to show how often different themes are mixed together in this score.

Wong Chia Chi is about to deliver the mysterious envelope to the man who turns out to be the jeweler. The music starts right on the cut and Wong Chia Chi is seen stepping out of her carriage. This cue is appropriately built around *The Resistance theme* (played on top of an ostinato made up of *W.C.C.'s theme I*). It is heard for the last time in the film as Wong Chia Chi walks towards the front door of the jeweler's store. Before she goes in she looks back to see many of her old friends from Hong Kong stand guard. The music softly fades out as she walks into the store.

The Love theme

"Love theme I"

Two systems of musical notation for "Love theme I". Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The first system shows a melody in the treble staff and a bass line in the bass staff. The second system continues the melody and bass line, ending with a double bar line.

"Love theme II"

Two systems of musical notation for "Love theme II". Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The first system shows a melody in the treble staff and a bass line in the bass staff. The second system continues the melody and bass line, ending with a double bar line.

"Love theme III"

A single system of musical notation for "Love theme III". It consists of a treble clef staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The melody is written in the treble staff, starting with a half note and followed by quarter notes.



Dinner Waltz - Love theme I, III & III

The last of the four major themes is *The Love Theme*. Like the name suggests, it is used during intimate moments between the film's two main characters, Wong Chia Chi and Mr. Yee. Much like *Wong Chia Chi's theme*, *The Love theme* is made up of different themes that can all be linked to each other.¹⁰ The first time it is heard is in fact the only time all three of them are used in the same cue, apart from during the end credits.

Dinner Waltz takes place during the first time Wong Chia Chi and Mr. Yee are alone together, in Hong Kong in 1939. The two of them are enjoying each other's company at a nice restaurant with Wong Chia Chi wearing the dress Mr. Yee previously told her to wear. A piano player is seen playing dinner music, the second movement of Brahms's *Intermezzo In a Opus 118*, which continues during the first part of their meal. The film then cuts to later in the evening where the couple is still engaged in a conversation at the restaurant. At the same time the music is cut rather abruptly as it switches from Brahms's *Intermezzo* to Desplat's *Dinner Waltz*, which is made sound like it is also being played by the same piano player at the restaurant. As their talk continues, all three of the themes that make up *The Love theme* are heard before the film cuts to the next scene (*Moonlight Drive*) in an inexplicably abrupt manner.

¹⁰ The three themes are named in the order of their appearance in this cue, *Dinner Waltz*.

There are several examples of source music in this film.¹¹ This cue is unique in the sense that it is the only time in the film that source music is actually written by the film's composer, Alexandre Desplat. Furthermore, this source music is used later on as non-source music on numerous occasions, albeit in different variations.



Desire - Love theme III & II

One of the factors that make *Desire* an extremely important cue is the fact that it contains themes from three of the four major theme categories.¹² The first half (*Lust, caution theme*) and the very end (*The Resistance theme*) of this cue have already been discussed in previous chapters. In *The Lust, caution theme* the disturbing nature of the cue was discussed in detail. However, their lovemaking reaches a point where the two lovers slow down and look at each other's eyes, during which the music becomes more tonal. Subsequently *Love theme III* enters on harp over a string section. It then leads into a very romantic version of *Love theme II* with its entrance impeccably timed with Mr. Yee's climax. A short outro, which includes the previously discussed *Resistance theme*, follows as the two lovers lie in each other's arms.

It can be argued that the inclusion of *The Love theme* in this cue makes it unnecessarily romantic (especially with the hit point being Mr. Yee's dramatic climax). However, it does help the audience understand that despite how wrong it may seem, Wong Chia Chi's love for Mr. Yee is no façade.

¹¹ Most of which is not mentioned in this paper as it focuses on Alexandre Desplat's score.

¹² For the reader to be able to vision this cue in context with its appearances in previous chapters, this sample plays the whole cue instead of just focusing on the part where *The Love theme* is heard.



The Secret - Love theme I

At the Japanese brothel, the two lovers share an intimate moment when Wong Chia Chi sings a traditional love song for the visibly moved Mr. Yee. The fact that this brute of a man is comfortable enough to cry in front of Wong Chia Chi is yet another sign of the strong bond between the two. It is therefore fitting that a slow string arrangement of *Love theme I* is heard following this emotional scene. It enters right as the film cuts to Mr. Yee's car stopping to let Wong Chia Chi out of the car. The theme continues until Mr. Yee asks her to deliver the mysterious envelope to the jeweler, at which point the music fades into a variation of the *Lust, caution theme* – as was described when this cue was discussed in *The Lust, caution theme*.



"Go, now!" - Love theme III

It is the moment Wong Chia Chi and the resistance have been waiting for. She is sitting beside Mr. Yee inside the jeweler's store with the place surrounded by resistance members waiting to ambush Mr. Yee as he steps outside. The music enters as he lovingly admires the newly made ring on her finger. Wong Chia Chi then succumbs to her emotions and with tears in her eyes she whispers to Mr. Yee: "go, now". The music quickly but subtly fades out as Mr. Yee realizes the danger he is in and runs in panic out of the store, knocking a resistance member over before jumping into his car.

Desplat appropriately uses *Love theme III* to underscore the film's climax in a very delicate fashion. The choice of this theme underlines that Wong Chia Chi's decision

to warn Mr. Yee was made because of her unquestionable love for him. Knowing her actions would most likely condemn herself to death, she still could not bare the thought of leading the love of her life to his grave – and the use of *The Love theme* helps the audience to better understand her reasoning.



An Empty Bed - Love theme II, III & I

This is the final scene of the film, and in *Wong Chia Chi's theme* was described as follows:

Mr. Yee sits on Wong Chia Chi's empty bed. As a clock rings for 10 o'clock, a high-pitched string drone enters. It is soon accompanied by *W.C.C.'s theme I* on harp, marking how strongly Mr. Yee feels Wong Chia Chi's presence in the room as he slowly walks out of it.

As the camera lingers on her bed after Mr. Yee stands up, his shadow stops in the doorway, briefly looking back at the empty bed before he leaves the room. As the screen fades to black, a soft waltz is introduced by the low strings. The rest of the string section join in with *Love theme II* precisely as the first credits pop up on screen. The orchestra skips between the three love themes just as the piano did in *Dinner Waltz*, before quickly fading out, making way for *Wong Chia Chi's theme* as the credits roll down.

The decision of having *The Love theme* take over after this devastatingly sad final scene is perhaps a surprising one, given the importance of both the *Lust, caution theme* and *Wong Chia Chi's theme*. It is however the right choice to make as it makes it possible, and even inevitable, for the audience to genuinely feel sorry for the villain that is Mr. Yee. Perhaps it also suggests that ultimately, *Lust, caution* is a story about love – a love gone horribly, horribly wrong.

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