

Document Citation

Title	'Dust in the wind' is picture perfect
Author(s)	Bret Senft
Source	<i>New York City Tribune</i>
Date	1989 Jan 16
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Lianlian fengchen (Dust in the wind), Hou Hsiao-Hsien,, 1986

FILM

'Dust in the Wind' Is Picture Perfect

BY BRET SENFT

Special to the New York City Tribune

A lyrical, dream-like vision of rural and urban Taiwan is captured by director Hou Hsia-hsien in his 1987 production *Dust in the Wind*, currently at Film Forum I through Jan. 24. The feature is part of *The Cutting Edge II: New Films From International Filmmakers*, distributed by The International Film Circuit.

Similar in tone to *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (which also documented peasant life, albeit in 19th century Italy), *Dust in the Wind* presents a surface tranquility covering a multitude of life's harshest realities.

Set primarily in a small, isolated village in the rural South, the story centers on a pair of teenagers, Wan (Wang Ching-won) and Huen (Hsin Shu-fen). Unable to afford further schooling, they travel to Taipei and take menial jobs (Wan in a print shop; Huen as a seamstress). They live in squalid quarters in the back of a moviehouse with friends from their village.

Wan finally leaves the print shop and finds work as a delivery boy. Huen continues to work in the sweatshop and cries herself to sleep at night.

Eventually, Wan is drafted into the army for a two-year hitch. At first, Huen waits patiently for him; then, mysteriously, Wan's letters to her go unanswered. Finally, his brother sends him the bad news: Huen has married

the local postman (someone with greater status in the community than Wan).

These are the bare bones of a story told with sensitivity by a master craftsman; for as Van Gogh rendered peasants working in the field with brushstrokes of tenderness and compassion for their hard lot in life, so Hou Hsia-hsien frames each shot with the gentleness, confidence and, at the same time, artistic distance of an accomplished director.

The film seems almost a series of still-lives taken from the circumstances of Wan and Huen's lost love: the train tracks cutting through the verdant countryside, carrying them to near slavery in Taipei; the printshop where Wan halfheartedly works; the prison-like iron bars separating Wan and Huen

when he visits her at the sweatshop; Wan observing a Buddhist death ritual by the sea.

Nearly all the shots are stationary, the details of urban or country life filling each frame. Many of the shots last 30, 40, 50 seconds. Entire scenes take place within the frame of one fluid, continuous take. There are virtually no close-ups. It is, ultimately, the very antithesis of this country's MTV/Madison Avenue shooting style of extreme close-ups and machine-gun editing.

Hsia-hsien has documented the impoverished lifestyle of his poorest countrymen, and thus created a world apart: the mind's eye of an artist whose work transcends political and cultural boundaries, whose signature is etched along every finely crafted frame.



'DUST IN THE WIND' is a Taiwanese film about lost love.