Music and Noise: Independent Film and Globalization

Tonglin Lu

Abstract

This article proposes to study as a test case the use of popular music in Xiaowu, a Chinese underground film released in 1997. The three recurrent pieces of music underline the importance of a male bond between two former thieves, one of whom remains a pickpocket, while the other has become a model entrepreneur in the wake of economic reform. This bond is disrupted by the process of globalization, which has provided a different value system. Through the disruption of this bond, the film casts a critical light on the effects of globalization, which has contributed to a growing gap between the rich and the poor. The voices of the localized population can be heard through popular music, which is often submerged by a cacophony of machinery, or, at a different level, by a cacophony produced by state censorship and global capitalism.

Tonglin Lu teaches modern Chinese culture at the University of Iowa. She is the author of Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of Taiwan and Mainland China.