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THE WARRIOR WOMEN OF TRANSNATIONAL CINEMA
GENDER AND RACE IN HOLLYWOOD AND HONG KONG ACTION FILMS

By

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Submitted to the Department of English and Film
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Doctor of Philosophy in Literary/Theater Studies in English
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ABSTRACT

In *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema*, I consider the significance of transnational Asian action women in the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema; more specifically, I explore how Pan-Asian (e.g. Michelle Yeoh, Pei Pei Cheng, Ziyi Zhang), Asian American (Lucy Liu, Maggie Q, Marsha Yuen), and Asian Canadian (e.g. Françoise Yip, Charlene Choi, Kristy Yang) warrior women function as a source of transnational female identity for local, Pan-Asian (i.e. East and Southeast Asian), and diasporic Asian audiences. I argue that the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema—and *not* Hollywood—has offered space for the development of Pan-Asian and Asian North American screen identities which challenge the racial stereotypes historically associated with the Asian female body in the West. In the new millennium, Hollywood has redefined its representation of transnational Asian action women by incorporating Hong Kong choreographers, action aesthetics, and/or female stars into its blockbusters. In these films, however, the representation of Pan-Asian and Asian North American action women caters to the tastes of American/Western audiences and relates American/Western ideals of gender, race, and heroism. Furthermore, I argue that Hollywood's recent investment in Hong Kong and/or Mainland Chinese co-productions reflects America's attempt to tap into the burgeoning Asian film market and wield significant political, economic, and social power particularly in Mainland China.

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INTRODUCTION TO WARRIOR WOMEN

The Asian female body has long been a source of fascination in the West. In early cinematic representations, Asian/Asian American women were predominantly envisaged as either the Dragon Lady or Lotus Blossom. Relying on these racial stereotypes, Classical Hollywood (1920s to 1960s) presented the Asian female body as the erotic object of the white male gaze. The past decade has seen the (Western) redefinition of Asian/Asian American women on screen with the influx of Asian cinema in Europe and North America, and the increasing Western interest in the Hong Kong action cinema. In *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema*, I consider the significance of female performance in the Hong Kong action cinema; more specifically, I explore how Pan-Asian (e.g. Michelle Yeoh, Pei Pei Cheng, Ziyi Zhang), Asian American (e.g. Lucy Liu, Maggie Q, Marsha Yuen), and Asian Canadian (e.g. Françoise Yip, Charlene Choi, Kristy Yang) action women working in Hong Kong cinema function as a locus of transnational female identity for local, Pan-Asian (i.e. East and Southeast Asian), and diasporic Asian audiences. In *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema*, I argue that the action cinema of Hong Kong—and *not* Hollywood—has offered space for the development of Pan-Asian and Asian North American¹ screen identities, and produced images which challenge the stereotypes typically associated with the Asian female body in the West.

Hollywood's recent pre-occupation with the Asian female body can be attributed to the unprecedented international success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee 2000). In the new millennium, Hollywood has redefined the representation of Asian/Asian American women in its blockbusters by adopting Hong Kong

filmmakers/choreographers, action aesthetics, and/or female stars into its generic action cinema. Moreover, American producers have invested heavily in co-productions with Hong Kong and/or China in order to gain a foothold in the burgeoning Asian film market. In *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema*, I argue that Hollywood's quest to (re)gain control over the representation of the Asian female body in Pan-Pacific co-productions reflects America's global aspirations to wield significant political, economic, social, and cultural power in Asia and especially in Mainland China.

Critical Discourse

In *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema*, I explore how the Asian female body in action has come to articulate the (social, cultural, political) ideologies of Hong Kong and Hollywood. This study is situated within the vein of Western scholarship, more generally, and film studies and gender studies, more specifically; it has been produced primarily for a Western academic audience. One of the greatest challenges of this study was determining *how* to apply the ideas, approaches, and/or theories of Western scholarly discourse to the discussion of transnational cinema. More specifically, I was faced with the question of *how* to speak about Asian female representations from a Western perspective.

The term "second-wave" refers to a period in Western feminist history which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Second-wave feminists were primarily concerned with social relations relating to what they considered to be the continuing inequality and oppression of women. Their writings were centered on issues that directly affected women including reproduction, mothering, sexual violence, domestic labour, and the

expression of sexuality (Gillis 1). Striving to displace the notion of natural sex difference (i.e. woman is not man) which justified the social subordination of women, second-wave writers defined “women’s nature” in relation to the concept of shared experience. Describing women as a social group, second-wave feminists fell into the trap of *universalizing* their experiences—the experiences of white, Western, northern, middle-class, and well-educated women—as being the experiences of all women. While desiring to speak collectively about the patriarchal power and the oppression of women, second-wave feminists overlooked the voices and experiences of non-white feminists and/or women.

According to Ruth Frankenberg, the 1980s saw the critique of “white feminist racism” by non-white feminists, a sentiment which marks (and mars) the entire second-wave (448). Carole McCann and Seung-Kyang Kim contend that second-wave feminists camouflaged class, race, ethnic, national, and/or sexual differences under the hegemonic umbrella of “gender difference” in order to create a social group of women positioned to fight against patriarchy (148). Mary Childers notes that this exclusive focus on male–female conflict served as a distraction from other forms of social oppression (Childers and hooks 63). bell hooks argues that second-wave feminists were unable to articulate what it meant to be subjugated by gender while privileged through race and class; they lacked both the forethought and language paradigm to be able to express, “this is how I am privileged” and “this is how I am exploited” (ibid. 62-63). What second-wave feminists overlooked was the fact that the lives and experiences of women were shaped by race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and nationality, in addition to gender.

It is important to acknowledge and address the criticism levelled against second-wave feminists especially in light of the fact that I am a white, Western, middle-class, and educated woman interested in exploring the transnational representations of Asian action women. The research presented in *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema* is a descriptive and *not* prescriptive account of the multiple representations of Asian female identity in the action cinemas of Hong Kong and Hollywood. The goal of this study is to explore the transnational and transcultural significance of the production and consumption of said images. Gina Marchetti expresses a similar sentiment in the preface of her notable study, *Romance and the Yellow Peril*. She writes, “[w]hile no one should attempt to speak for or in the place of another, a critic who refuses to engage with radically different cultures can never hope to establish any significant communication across constructed social barriers” (ix).² Thus, a principle concern of this study was determining *how* to appropriately employ Western theoretical discourses in order to discuss the transnational Asian female body in action.

Unlike second-wave feminism, the writings and theoretical approaches of “third-wave” feminists strongly inform this study. Third-wave feminism is a critical movement established in response to the perceived failures of the second-wave. Third-wave criticism is centered on individuality, rejects essentialist notions of womanhood, and welcomes difference and contradictions (Tong, *Feminist* 258). Moreover, third-wave feminists reject the “exclusive tendencies” of dominant feminist theories emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, and especially the essentialist notion that women share common characteristics which unify them as a group; while universal claims of womanhood promote particular feminine experiences as the norm, they also overlook systems of

oppression that should be contested (Stone 85-87). According to Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, third-wave feminism has been “shaped by the racial and ethnic diversity of post-boomer generations” (15) and is characterized by “dispersal and diversity, as opposed to a single-leader and single-issue movement” (20). Fostering women of colour consciousness, third-wave feminism emphasizes racial, ethnic, cultural, and national diversity while promoting the breakdown of ideological barriers including gender binaries (Tong, *Feminist* 288).

A central concept of third-wave feminism is “intersectionality,” the notion that various socially and culturally constructed categories interact or intersect on multiple levels (McCann 149). Third-wave feminists argue that identities are interlocked—for instance, that gender is raced and race is gendered—and that the system of representation, and not simply one category, is responsible for the experience of social inequality. In other words, gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality do not act independently of one another; instead, they interrelate to form a system of oppression that reflects the “intersection” of multiple forms of discrimination (ibid. 149-50). One of the most important theories to emerge from intersectionality is “performativity.” As Judith Butler has famously theorized, gender is not a role but a “performative accomplishment” instituted through the stylized repetition of the body which creates the illusion of an abiding gendered self (415). Butler’s theory of performativity builds upon the work of Michael Foucault and more specifically his discussion of the “docile body” whereby the body is perceived as being a cultural text which is trained and regulated through cultural norms (Shildrick 8).³ Since the aim of this study is to explore the representation of Asian action women in Hong Kong and Hollywood, third-wave ideas such as intersectionality

and performativity will facilitate the examination of how women perform transnational identity in the action genre.

Unlike the “third-wave” which is considered a critical feminist movement, postfeminism is identified as a social popular movement prominent among young women. According to Susan Owen, postfeminism is premised on the notion that feminism has won its battles and women have gained the essential liberties desired by second-wave feminists. With femininity demystified, women can reclaim their sexuality and “sexiness” can be portrayed without moral judgment (10-11). Postfeminists reject the inclusive agenda of the third-wave and dismiss the need for feminist action. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra describe postfeminism as a predominantly white and middle-classed movement which glosses over social differences as it centers on an “affluent elite” (2). Moreover, Jessica Taft argues that the emergence of Girl Power in the 1990s and its postfeminist claim for gender equality distracts young women from the realities of gender oppression and ignores forces like racism, classism, and homophobia informing the current social order (Taft 73). While *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema* acknowledges the popular cultural influence of postfeminism—especially in light of the production of such “action babe” films as *Charlie’s Angels* (McG 2000)—it is not informed by postfeminist sentiments.⁴ I focus almost exclusively on the action genre which remains a male dominated and oriented space. In the action cinemas of Hong Kong and Hollywood, male protagonists are more frequently and prominently featured, earn more per film, and generally attract larger audiences to the theater. As a result, action women are featured less frequently in the genre and expected to match the male performance standard when cast as lead protagonists. Since gender inequality continues

to persist in the action cinemas of Hong Kong and Hollywood, postfeminist discourse cannot be applied to this study in theory or principle.

Critical race theory offers a strong compliment to the concepts put forth by third-wave feminists. According to John Solomos and Les Back, race and ethnicity were sites of women's oppression that had been neglected in early feminist writings. They further contend that gender and sexism have also remained neglected aspects in mainstream studies of racial and ethnic relations. Solomos and Back call for an expansion in scholarship focusing on the intersection of gender, sex, class, race, ethnicity, and nationality (18). King-Kok Cheung echoes these sentiments when describing the conflicting politics of gender between Asian American men and women. She writes,

It is impossible, for example, to tackle gender issues in the Chinese American cultural terrain without delving into the historically enforced "feminization" of Chinese American men, without confronting the dialects of racial stereotypes and nationalist reactions or, above all, without wrestling with diehard notions of masculinity and femininity in both Asian and Western cultures. (Cheung 234)

Through her work, Cheung similarly emphasizes the centrality of internationality to the study of the complex power relations influencing both the perception and (literary) representation of Asian American identity. Since the 1990s, the concept of intersectionality has also become a principle component of contemporary critical race studies.

Similar to third-wave feminists, race studies scholars have employed intersectionality in their discussions of racial subjugation. For instance, Hazel Carby argues against the notion of a single source of oppression (i.e. patriarchy) and binary

comparisons (i.e. male/female), promoting instead a historically and contextually specific discourse theorizing the intersection of class, gender, and race (391). She contends that both race and gender are social constructs which are often construed as being “natural” through the visibility of biological differences (390).⁵ K. Anthony Appiah argues in a similar vein that while gender and race are highly visible constructs delineated through “natural” difference, the body plays a less important role in the ascription of ethnicity (610). In this study, however, I will explore the visibility of ethnicity and nationality, in addition to race and gender, located at the level of the body of Asian action women. More specifically, I will consider the means through which both Hong Kong and Hollywood visually define and differentiate Hong Kong, Mainland Chinese, Asian American, and Asian Canadian action women. Employing ideas of intersectionality, I will expand upon contemporary race studies to explore the corporeal conceptualizations and subsequent representations of ethnicity and nationality in relation to the Asian female body in action.

Solomos and Back contend that the study of “whiteness” (i.e. white racial identity) is a central component of critical race theory as it helps to disrupt the “sociological common sense” which places empirical scrutiny on non-white communities instead of examining the perpetrators of racism (21). While all people live racial lives, only white people, according to Ruth Frankenberg, have historically viewed themselves as being “non-racial” or “racially neutral” (447). Richard Dyer contends that this self-perceived “racelessness” is most evident in the lack of references to whiteness in habitual speech and writing on white people in the West (“Matter” 540). For instance, the term “Asian American” is commonly used to describe an American citizen of East or Southeast Asian descent. Conversely, the term “American” is frequently employed when

describing white American citizens. The presence or lack of a racial descriptor draws attention to the differing role that race plays in the construction of American identities. On the one hand, the use of the racial descriptor in the term “Asian American” suggests that the national identity of an American citizen of East or Southeast Asian descent is inextricably defined in relation to their race. As noted by Peter Feng, the frequent employment of this label “suggests that we cannot understand what it means to be American without understanding what it means to be Asian American” (“Introduction” 1). On the other hand, the absence of a racial descriptor in the term used to reference white citizens highlights the invisibility of whiteness in Western discourse. Dyer suggests that this type of labelling helps to perpetuate the notion that “whites are not of a certain race, they’re the just the human race” (“Matter” 541). Moreover, it draws attention to an implicit racial hierarchy in the United States, institutionalized through Western discourse, which delineates the conceptual racial subject (i.e. non-whites) from the self-perceived non-racial subject (i.e. whites).

Frankenberg contends that scholars need to be more attentive to the “racialness” of white experience and examine the “system[s] of differentiation” which bestow[s] privileges on some and oppresses others (447). As a result, Frankenberg defines “whiteness” as a site of structural advantage and racial privilege; as a “standpoint” or place from which white people view themselves, others, and society; and as a set of cultural practices which typically go unnamed and unmarked (ibid. 447). Dyer similarly argues that scholars should be attentive the white cultural agendas which continue to predominate in the West. He writes,

Against the flowering of a myriad of postmodern voices, we must also see the countervailing tendency towards a homogenization of world culture, in the continued dominance of US news dissemination, popular TV programmes, and Hollywood movies. Postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up space for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the West, but it may also simultaneously function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them. ("Matter" 541)

Recognizing a recent shift in Western critical discourse(s) away from the illusory and unified identities of gender, race, class, sexuality, and class, Dyer argues that the path to *genuine* hybridity, multiplicity, and/or heterogeneity exists outside of white hegemony and requires that the mechanisms of white racial power be examined and exposed ("Matter" 541). Thus, a central aim of this study is to expose the white racial agenda of Hollywood and the ways through which it is expressed through the representation of Asian action women.

This study also acknowledges the persistence and prominence of racial hierarchies especially in the mainstream American film industry. In *Visual Media Racism*, Eugene Franklin Wong draws attention to the institutionalized racism of Hollywood. He argues that through "role segregation" white actors are offered a variety of roles including non-white parts while Asian actors are rarely, if ever, cast in roles defined by the industry as being white: "[W]hites can move horizontally and cross into roles otherwise designed by the industry as *Asian*, while being secure in the knowledge that there is an industry guarantee that white roles will not be violated by Asians" (12).⁶ Wong also argues that Asian actors endure "vertical discrimination" through the process of "role stratification"

(ibid. 13). He notes that white actors typically play larger and more centralized roles while Asian actors are relegated to the narrative periphery. He contends that in Hollywood “Asians have been vertically stratified below whites in terms of role importance” (ibid. 13). Finally, Wong argues that Asian actors are limited by Hollywood’s racial stereotyping: “Asians presented to the American film audience are largely a patchwork of traditionally inaccurate images and clichés, totally the products of white society” (15). In light of the continuing gendered and racial limitations intrinsic to Hollywood film production, *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema* draws attention to the ongoing structural inequalities which delimit Asian/Asian American representation in the action genre.

Racial Stereotyping in Hollywood

According to Darrell Hamamoto, the history of Asian American cinematic representation has been “marked by a pattern of exclusion, relocation, deportation, and containment [and] has been shaped by the group identity imposed and enforced by the ‘racial state’” (10). Employing hegemonic strategies of containment and control, Hollywood has sought to differentiate white from non-white characters/actors. Through racial stereotyping, Hollywood films have historically essentialized racial difference and presented white racial identity as natural, innate, and/or ideal. Describing the “fixity” of racial stereotypes in maintaining racial/cultural/historical differences, Homi Bhabha writes:

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of

representation that, in denying the place of difference [...] constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in signification of psychic and social relations. (107)

In terms of American citizenry, Lisa Lowe draws attention to the important role that cultural images play in shaping (national) subjectivities. She writes that “collectively forged images, histories, and narratives that place, displace, and replace individuals in relation to the national polity – powerfully shapes who the citizenry is, where they dwell, what they remember, and what they forget” (2). By employing racial stereotypes, Hollywood constructs and presents Asian/Asian American women as functions of the (hetero)normative white male standard, and in the process limits, contains, and controls the representation of Asian American female subjectivity in mainstream film.

Classical Hollywood film (1930s to 1960s) presented Asian/Asian American women as either the “Dragon Lady” or the “Lotus Blossom.” According to Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, “[e]ach stereotype comes in two models, the acceptable and the unacceptable [...] The unacceptable model is unacceptable because he [or she] cannot be controlled by whites. The acceptable model is acceptable because he [or she] is tractable” (65). The Dragon Lady can be considered the “unacceptable model” for Asian/Asian American women. As the first female stereotype to emerge, the Dragon Lady was a by-product of (white) American concerns of the threat of “yellow peril:” the fear that Asian populations would overtake the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Jiwani 185). According to Gina Marchetti, yellow peril was a Euro-American expansion of the medieval fears of Genghis Khan and the possibility that Mongolians would invade Europe:

[T]he yellow peril combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the *irresistible*, dark, occult forces of the East. Given that knowledge about Asia and Asians has been limited in Europe and America, much of this formulation necessarily rests on a fantasy that projects Euroamerican desires and dreads onto the alien other.⁷

(Romance 2)

At the height of yellow peril, sexual contact between the races was greatly feared and determined illegal with the establishment of anti-miscegenation laws in the United States which were upheld until the mid-1950s. Considered illegal and taboo, miscegenation was also prohibited as a subject matter in Classical Hollywood films. In 1934, the Motion Picture Association of America instituted the Production Code (a.k.a. the Hays Code), an industry censorship guideline which governed Classical Hollywood film production until the 1960s (Hayward 209). Explicitly prohibited from depicting miscegenation, Classical Hollywood studios produced films which characterized the Asian female as a dangerous sexual threat to the white male hero.

According to Yasim Jiwani, the Dragon Lady (a.k.a. “oriental” dominatrix) is presented as a cunning, aggressive, alluring, and exotic figure of the underworld. Positioned as the erotic object of the white male gaze, the Dragon Lady is most dangerous when she appears alone on screen as she is capable of seducing the white male protagonist away from his “civilizing mission and reducing him to naivety” (184). Jiwani notes that the Dragon Lady is presented in narrative contrast to the virginal and/or sexually repressed white female protagonist of the film. By juxtaposing the innocent white woman with the “excessive and aberrant” Asian/Asian American woman, the film

reinscribes the notion of white racial superiority in order to counter the threat of yellow peril (184-85). In Classical Hollywood, the Dragon Lady is considered a villainous character whose seduction of the white male hero was considered both illegal (via anti-miscegenation laws) and immoral (via the Production Code) at the time. Hollywood's first Asian American female film star, Anna May Wong, was frequently presented a Dragon Lady throughout her career (1919-1949).⁸

The dismantling of anti-miscegenation laws in the United States led to development of an alternative, opposite, and co-existing racial stereotype for the Asian/Asian American woman.⁹ The Lotus Blossom (a.k.a. "China Doll," Madame Butterfly, geisha girl) can be considered the "acceptable model" as she was presented as a submissive, compliant, industrious, and exotic character eager to please the white male hero. The identities of both the Dragon Lady and Lotus Blossom are dependent on their sexual relationship with the (hetero)normative white male hero and these stereotypes, according to Peter Feng, "operate within an economy of exchange in which Western superiority to the 'Orient' is affirmed through the possession of female bodies" ("Introduction" 9). What conceptually defines the Lotus Blossom from the Dragon Lady is the degree to which the white male hero colonizes, owns, and/or controls her sexuality. As noted by Jiwani, these predominant racial stereotypes are constructed in binary terms in order to uphold the obedient and submissive Asian woman over her rebellious counterpart who is looked down upon for undermining the moral order (186). As a result, Classical Hollywood cinema established the Lotus Blossom–Dragon Lady schema through which Asian/Asian American women have been historically and predominantly envisaged.¹⁰

Matters of Terminology / Terminology Matters

In her description of overseas Asian actors working in Hong Kong, Winnie Chung has employed the terms “ABC” (American-born Chinese), “BBC” (British-born Chinese), and “CBC” (Canadian-born Chinese). While emphasizing the Western nationality and Chinese ethnicity of these actors, these terms are too limited in their range and scope. For instance, Maggie Q is one of the best known Asian American actors working in post-1997 Hong Kong. Although born in the United States, Maggie Q is Vietnamese and not Chinese, and thus her ethnicity excludes her from consideration if I employ this restrictive set of terms. On the other hand, Kristy Yang was born in Shanghai but raised in Canada. Although she is Chinese and has Canadian citizenship, she too is excluded from consideration as she is not “Canadian-born.” The subsequent employment of Chung’s terminology would require the systematic exclusion of key female actors from consideration and result in a fragmented impression of Hong Kong’s casting and/or characterization of overseas Asian women. In lieu of this, I will rely on the terms “Asian American” and “Asian Canadian” as they denote the racial and national identities of an actor without delimiting ethnicity or place of birth.

Peter Feng, however, contends that the label “Asian American” is highly problematic. First, the term “Asian” refers to a variety of cultural groups whose makeup is determined by the location of the term’s use. For instance, in the United States, “Asian” refers to East and Southeast Asians (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Vietnamese) while in Britain the term is used in reference to South Asians such as Indians and Pakistanis (“Being” 186). Second, the term “America” is equally problematic in that it is predominantly used in reference to the United States and not other North and

South American countries (ibid. 187). Although heavily contested, “Asian American” can be considered a political label rather than a cultural designation:

The term thus not only replaces the derogatory “oriental” but also calls attention to the provisionality and contradictions that it contains. Thus, while the term lumps Asians together, it does so in service of a racial rather than a racist logic, unlike the term “oriental.” (ibid. 187)

Feng thus considers “Chinese American” as a cultural reference while “Asian American” invokes a political label (ibid. 187).

Mindful of Feng’s arguments, I will employ the terms Asian American and Asian Canadian in a particular way. First, the term “Asian” will be used in reference to East and Southeast Asians (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Vietnamese). By employing the *North* American version of the term, my discussion of Asian American and Asian Canadian screen identities in Hong Kong can be located within a broader field of study exploring the local, regional, and transnational representations of Asian Americans and/or Asian Canadians in mainstream film (including Hollywood). Moreover, Hong Kong filmmakers have long cast East and Southeast Asian actors to star in their action films. My employment of the North American definition of “Asian” will inherently emphasize this fact. Second, the term “American” will refer to persons who were either born in the United States or who migrated to the United States and gained citizenship. Similarly, the term “Canadian” will refer to persons who were either born in Canada or who migrated to Canada and gained citizenship. By employing the terms Asian American and Asian Canadian, my purpose is not to prescribe/describe monolithic identities and/or experiences. As Feng has argued, “given this diversity of cultural

experience, how can there be a voice that is distinctively Asian American” (“Being” 186) or, by extension, Asian Canadian? Instead, my goal is to analyze the individual cinematic performances of American and Canadian actors of East and/or Southeast Asian decent working in the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema. This terminology will allow me the opportunity to discuss the coexisting representations of overseas Asian women in Hong Kong and consider how an actor’s national identity and/or affiliation influence the means through which they are integrated into Hong Kong’s star system.

When presenting personal names in this study, I will employ the Western naming order whereby the given name is presented first followed by the family name. I have adopted this practice for two key reasons. First, many Hong Kong filmmakers and actors are known by their Western (screen) names which differ from their birth/Chinese names. For instance, action superstar Michelle Yeoh was born Zi Chong Yang and was initially billed by her English name, Michelle Khan, before adapting her screen name to Michelle Yeoh (IMDb). In order to minimize confusion, I will use the most widely known Western names when identifying Hong Kong creative film talent. Second, many filmmakers and actors working in Hong Kong cinema have multiple spellings and/or versions of their names. According to *Internet Movie Database*, action director Woo Ping Yuen has also been billed under the alternative names of Yuen Da-an, Yuen Dai-an, Jua Lu-Jiang, Master Yuen Wo Ping, Yuen Woo Ping, Yuen Wo Ping, Yuen Ta-an, Yuen Wo-Ping, Yuen Ta Yen, Wo Ping Yuan, Wo Ping Yuen, Woo-Ping Yuen, Woo Yuen, and Wu Ping Yuen. By presenting the most familiar version of a personal name in the Western order, I hope to promote accessibility to my research.

The term “Hollywood” is often defined in three interrelated ways. First, the term describes a style or aesthetic of filmmaking associated with mainstream American cinema. According to Philip Green, Hollywood style is primarily defined by its representation of “commodities of dominant visual culture” as being “objective evidences of the world, rather than as subjectively authored interpretations of it” (17). Second, the term describes a commercial industry that specializes in the production of generic films for profit. As a corporate enterprise, Hollywood has dominated in the international film market since the 1970s through practices of vertical integration and saturation booking, control of domestic and international film distribution, and the development and monopoly of new visual technologies (Benshoff and Griffin 197-98). Third, the term describes an institutional entity that is also ideological. Philip Green notes that “both the style and the institutional position [of Hollywood] mesh with the intention of ideological discourse generally, which is to present social institutions as natural and normal” (17). Gina Marchetti similarly describes Hollywood films as being discourses produced “both within the film industry and beyond it” (*Romance* 7). In this study, I will predominantly use the term to describe the American industrial filmmaking system. On a few occasions, however, I will also use the term to describe a style of filmmaking—particularly in relation to the “Hollywoodization” of post-1997 Hong Kong film.

While conducting research for *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema*, limited scholarship was available particularly in relation to the history of popular cultural events in Hong Kong such as beauty pageants, albums sales for Cantopop singers, and the biography of local stars working in Hong Kong that have not crossed over into Hollywood. This information was subsequently acquired through various online sources

including actor/star official webpages, actor/star fansites, and the corporate websites for TVB (Television Broadcasts Limited) and EEG (Emperor Entertainment Group). In addition, this study includes various comments posted by bloggers on *Internet Movie Database* which provide insights into the cultural reception of Hong Kong and Hollywood action films. Finally, box-office statistics were acquired from a variety of online sources which are clearly footnoted throughout the study.

The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema

In *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema*, I explore the social, political, economic, and ideological factors influencing the casting and characterization of Pan-Asian and Asian North American performers in the action cinemas of Hong Kong and Hollywood. I am chiefly concerned with *how* the Asian female identity is being represented rather than engaging in the positive-negative debate which has historically impeded the discussion of gender in film, as it has similarly impeded the discussion of Asian and Asian American cinematic representations. According to feminist scholar E. Ann Kaplan, feminist film criticism needs to move beyond the positive-negative debate in order to explore *how* meaning is being produced rather than simply accessing the value of film content (23). Susan Hayward similarly argues that (social, cultural, economic, ideological) power should not be discussed in “positive” and “negative” terms; instead, scholars should consider *how* this power is being exercised (124). This shift away from the positive-negative debate is not limited to feminist discourse but can also be seen in contemporary Asian American film criticism. For instance, Sandra Liu argues that the positive-negative debate is premised on the notion that the primary purpose of film is

to offer a faithful reproduction of the world (26). Feng further contends that “there is no such thing as a positive or negative representation, rather, there are representations that are mobilized positively or negatively depending on discursive context” (“Introduction” 5). He argues that (Asian/Asian American) film scholars should move beyond the positive-negative debate to consider how images are discursively deployed (ibid. 5). Thus, in this study, I explore how the images of Asian action women are being mobilized by Hong Kong and Hollywood. On the one hand, I examine how Hollywood has historically depicted the Asian female body (in action) and consider the politics of representation informing contemporary characterizations. On the other hand, I explore the self-representations depicted in the Hong Kong action cinema which often require the contrasting of local heroes with other Pan-Asian identities (usually Mainland Chinese). Thus, the goal of this study is to explore the place of Asian action women in popular culture and the global film market.

Chapter 2 of *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema* focuses on two generations of action women who have helped to shape the transnational identity of Hong Kong in the global film market. Pei Pei Cheng and Michelle Yeoh are legends of the (pre-1997) Hong Kong action cinema and gained significant international exposure through their performances in the Hong Kong/Chinese-American co-production *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee 2000). Cast in subsequent Hollywood action films, Cheng and Yeoh are characterized as transnational mediators facilitating communication between “the East” and “the West;” they embody the global perception of Hong Kong as the place where “East meets West” as the Special Administrative Region balances traditional Chinese practices (i.e. “the East”) with a more modernized way of life (i.e. “the West”).

In their American roles, Cheng and Yeoh offer an alternative to Hollywood's stereotypical representation of the Asian female body as being a sexual object/love interest for the white male hero. Characterized as maternal action women, their bodies are freed from white male sexual conquest.

Chapter 3 explores the industry crisis in Hong Kong and the increasing domestic interest in Hollywood products. Responding to changing market tastes, director Andrew Lau adopted a more "international" or Hollywood style of action filmmaking—employed CGI, improved production values, included English-language dialogue—and cast male Cantopop (Cantonese pop-music) singers at the center of his action narratives in order to attract young audiences to the theater. While Lau did not integrate female singers into his post-1997 action films, he alternatively cast a popular porn star, Qi Shu, and refashioned her image to work in the mainstream film industry. Through her portrayal of secondary characters, Shu quickly gained star power in East and Southeast Asia, and transitioned into the role of action woman in the early 2000s. She is envisaged through the pre-existing heroic model featured in "girls with guns," the female phase of the gunplay film and stars in a cycle of post-1997 action films which I term "girls with guns revival." The success of these films, however, is strongly dependent on the presence and popular appeal of the male Cantopop singers co-starring in the films.

In Chapter 4, I examine the representation of Mainland Chinese action women who embody a different conceptualization of transnational Chinese female identity than the one popularized by the female stars of Hong Kong. With her performance in Chinese dramas, Li Gong became the first international star of Mainland cinema and was marketed as the face of "New China;" her characters are interpreted as being

personifications of modernized China as it moves towards an era of globalization. Ziyi Zhang is the most notable star of the second generation and quickly gained international superstardom with her performance in *Crouching Tiger*. She is considered the “face of New Asian cinema” since she is featured in a string of blockbuster Mainland-based co-productions with Hong Kong which have dominated the Pan-Asian film market. Upon establishing their star images in Mainland cinema, Gong and Zhang crossed over into Hong Kong and/or Hollywood, and portray characters that are associated with the Mainland; unlike Hong Kong identity which is associated with masculinity and male stars, Mainland identity is associated with female stars who alternatively express their “Chineseness” through femininity.

Chapter 5 explores the casting and characterization of Asian American action women Maggie Q, Eugenia Yuen, and Marsha Yuen in the post-1997 Hong Kong action cinema. I argue that the representation of each action woman reflects a different production strategy targeting distinct audience demographics—the local, Pan-Asian, and/or international films markets—in order to (re)stimulate interest in the domestic film industry. I explore how each actor’s nationality, ethnicity, and familial ties to Hong Kong influence their on-screen representations, the development of their star persona, and the degree to which they are integrated into the (Cantonese-language) star system of Hong Kong.

In Chapter 6, I consider Hong Kong’s increasing interest in Asian Canadian female performers in the years bookending Hong Kong’s handover to China (July 1997). Featured in action films of the mid-1990s, Françoise Yip and Christy Chung were precursors who helped stimulate local interest in Asian Canadian identity prior to the

industry crisis. The post-1997 action cinema has since seen the rise of a number of Asian Canadian action women including Kristy Yang, Monica Lo, Bernice Liu, Charlene Choi, and Karena Lam. Perceived differently than Asian American action women, Asian Canadians have developed star personas which emphasize their embodiment of particular qualities—modern, multilingual, cosmopolitan, urban—typically associated with the global image of Hong Kong. Thus, Asian Canadian performers are considered return migrants (i.e. diasporic Hong Kong Chinese) and offer the post-1997 cinema an ideological connection to the Westernized Chinese roots of Hong Kong’s colonial past. Granted local status, Asian Canadians are seamlessly integrated into Hong Kong’s star system through the music and television industries, develop local and/or Pan-Asian fan bases, and then transition into action filmmaking.

In Chapter 7, I examine the transposition of Hong Kong action aesthetics into a Hollywood/American form. Working in Hollywood, Hong Kong choreographers Woo Ping Yuen and Cheung-Yan Yuen helped transcribe the heroic models of “girls with guns” into two distinct versions of white female heroism in Hollywood which I term the “parodic Angels” featured in *Charlie’s Angels* (McG 2000, 2003) and the “Trinity warrior” introduced in *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers 1999, 2003, 2003). While inspired by the warrior women of “girls with guns,” Hollywood’s white action women are distinctly American and relate American ideals of gender, race, and heroism. This is most notable in the characterization of Lucy Liu, the only Asian American action woman featured in Hollywood blockbusters stylized by Hong Kong action. Envisaged through the racial stereotype of the model minority, Liu portrays characters which appear more white than Asian. Through her representation, Liu is granted temporary access to the

space of physical action which is typically presented as being the domain of white heroes in Hollywood.

The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema offers a comprehensive examination of the Pan-Asian and Asian North American action women featured in Hong Kong and Hollywood. A preliminary aspect of this project was determining *how* to speak about the transnational Asian female body from a Western theoretical perspective. In this study, I explore the social, political, economic, and ideological factors informing the representations of Asian action women in Hong Kong and Hollywood. In *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema*, I explore how filmic identities are highly visible social constructs which are located at the level of the body and are informed by the intersection of gender, race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and nationality. Employing these critical approaches, I explore the many articulations of Asian female identity produced at various levels of production and by various (trans)national cinemas. Overall, the goal of this study is to examine transnational Asian action women performing in an increasingly globalized film economy.

CHAPTER 1

HONG KONG-HOLLYWOOD GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

PART I: INDUSTRIAL COLLABORATIONS AND DIVERGENCES

Hollywood constitutes the only truly global cinema system. According to David Bordwell, a global cinema is “one that claims significant space on theater screens throughout developed and developing countries” (82). For forty years, Hollywood has saturated the international film market with its products, enjoyed some of the largest box-office returns, and maintained consistent (popular) culture influence beyond a single picture or cycle of films.¹ With such a demand for its film products, Hollywood threatens other film industries by dominating their markets with generic English-language films often devoid of local/indigenous content and themes. While Hollywood might not be the most prolific film industry, it is the most moneyed (Denison 105).² In light of Hollywood’s domination of worldwide screens since 1980 and the rise of the Hollywood blockbuster, Hollywood has become *the* global film culture (Desser, “Hong” 214).

In the wake of Hollywood’s increasing global dominance, Hong Kong was one of the few cinemas to thrive, entering its own golden age of filmmaking from the mid-1980s to early 1990s; during this time, Hong Kong came second to Hollywood only in terms of its total overseas exports. These films, however, were almost exclusively screened in East and Southeast Asia³ and brought in only a fraction of Hollywood’s international box-office returns⁴ (Bordwell 82). In light of its production and distribution practices, and the (local, Pan-Asian, international) influence of its action genre,⁵ Hong Kong cinema can be considered a transnational cinema whose interstitial and artisanal production, distribution,

and exhibition are regionally based, and whose film products cater to more localized audiences.

As noted by Leon Hunt and Wing-Fai Leung, the term “transnational” is used more often than it is defined and is frequently employed interchangeably with the term “global” (2-3). Aihwa Ong contends that the global is defined analytically as political economic and positioned in binary opposition to the local/cultural; conversely, the transnational considers the *horizontal* and *relational* nature of social, economic, and cultural processes (4). Ong defines transnationality as a “condition of interconnectedness and mobility across space which has been intensified under late capitalism” (ibid. 4). She writes,

Trans denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something...[and] also alludes to the *transversal*, the *transactional*, the *translational*, and the *transgressive* aspects of contemporary behaviour and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism.⁶ (ibid. 4)

When applied to film, according to Hunt and Leung, this definition of transnationalism can become so broad that it encompasses every film that has ever been exported across a national border, or so narrow in its reference to any non-Hollywood film with significant presence in the West (3). Implicit in discussions regarding the transnational nature of world cinema is the ideological tendency to pit Hollywood against the rest of the film-producing world (ibid. 3). While the Hong Kong-Hollywood connection is important and central to this study, it is important to recognize that the influence runs *both ways*;

filmmaking personnel, cinematic technology and techniques, and narrative content flow back and forth between Hollywood and Hong Kong.

Although initially discussed through the lens of national cinema, Hong Kong filmmaking evades the narrow definition of national cinema due to the complex and paradoxical history of the region. According to Charles Leary, Hong Kong is “a popular subject for transnationalism because of its history existing between two nations, the British Empire and China” (58). Moreover, Hong Kong is still regarded as the access point for “the West” to “the East,” and has earned the reputations as being “one of the world’s most cosmopolitan locales” (ibid. 58). Recently, film critics have employed alternative models in an attempt to understand this complex cultural industry while emphasizing particular aspects of this filmmaking system. Hong Kong cinema has been discussed as a “popular cinema,” “urban cinema,” “ethnic cinema,” “crisis cinema,” “subcultural cinema,” and “postmodern cinema” (Morris 11). Noting the increasing transnational character of Asian film production and the prevalence of multi-ethnic casts, David Desser states that “questions of national origin must take a back seat to what is obviously pan-Asian and even global filmmaking. Film producers and distributors are thus already acknowledging what academics seem reluctant to admit: the transnational character of contemporary filmmaking in Asia” (“Hong” 218). In the wake of increasing globalization, which is typically read as Americanization, film critics appear to be reluctant to speak about the development of Pan-Asian film (ibid. 218).

Hong Kong’s global aspirations began with the “kung fu craze” which was sparked by the international success of *King Boxer* a.k.a. *Five Fingers of Death* (Jeong 1972) in March 1973. By the end of that year, Hong Kong had released 38 films in the

United States including those of Asian American superstar Bruce Lee. The novelty of the genre, however, quickly faded and kung fu became a bad joke due to the low production values and poor voice dubbing of the films (Bordwell 84), and, in the U.S., the derogatory term “chopsocky” was used to describe these low-budget kung fu films (Partridge 408). Since the 1970s, Hong Kong producers like Raymond Chow of the Golden Harvest production company have aspired, with little success, to compete with Hollywood by breaking into its lucrative domestic film market.⁷ In the 1990s, however, independent producer Terence Chang became Hong Kong’s “first significant liaison with the United States” by opening up American doors for his Hong Kong client list which included director John Woo and actor Yun-Fat Chow (Bordwell 86). Their success in Hollywood paved the way for the migration of other Hong Kong filmmakers including directors Hark Tsui, Ringo Lam, Stanley Tong, Kirk Wong, Peter Chan, and Ronnie Yu; actors Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Donnie Yen, and Simon Yam; and choreographers Corey Yuen, Woo Ping Yuen, Cheung-Yan Yuen, Sammo Hung, and Dion Lam. According to Bordwell, Hong Kong cinema only “began to go global by joining the only truly global film industry,” Hollywood (ibid. 86).

In the wake of Hong Kong’s reunification with China in 1997, the local cinema entered into a state of crisis. The industry decline can be attributed, in part, to uncertainties as to how the “one country [China]—two systems [Hong Kong, Mainland]” amalgamation would affect Hong Kong’s domestic film industry. This sparked the migration of the aforementioned creative talent to Hollywood which drained the local industry of some of its most bankable filmmakers. As a result, post-1997 cinema has struggled to compete domestically with more polished Hollywood blockbusters. In the

new millennium, however, Hong Kong has strongly relied on its collaborative relationships with other Pan-Pacific cinemas (i.e. Japan, Mainland China, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand) to keep its domestic cinema afloat. In addition, the remaining marquee film talent was so overexposed that local and regional audiences began to lose interest in their film projects. As the local cinema spiralled into crisis, Hong Kong production companies lacked a uniform response to the industry decline and filmmakers employed a variety of strategies in order to ensure the survival of the local cinema.

In response to the industry crisis, some local filmmakers began tailoring their films to suit the changing tastes of the domestic and Pan-Asian film markets. In light of the increasing popularity of Hollywood blockbusters throughout East and Southeast Asia, Hong Kong filmmakers adjusted their practices to compete with Hollywood in the local, Pan-Asian, and international film markets. Some of these notable changes include a more systematic approach to filmmaking; increased emphasis on scripts and the scriptwriting process; improved production values and increased use of CGI; the inclusion of English-language dialogue as well as the production of English-language action films; and the casting of multiethnic and multilingual actors to star in the local action cinema. Much to the dismay of filmmakers and critics, the implementation of a more formalized system of production post-1997 has resulted in the change or evolution of Hong Kong's film products. According to Michael Curtin, the most distinctive feature of Hong Kong films produced during the golden age (1985-1994) was improvisation. For example, it was common for a crew to shoot a film with little more than a story outline and cast list; advanced planning was not required since the idea was to actually make movies rather

than simply talk about making movies (247). Considered outdated, this ensemble style of filmmaking has been replaced with a more structured mode of production in the hopes of securing more local, as well as international, financing (ibid. 248). Another notable change, according to critics, is that Hong Kong cinema has lost its local identity (see Kraicer). Unable to secure consistent interest in domestic products beyond a single film or series—i.e. the isolated box-office hits such as *Infernal Affairs* (Lau and Mak 2002, Lau and Mak 2003, Lau 2003) and *Kung Fu Hustle* (Chow 2004)—some Hong Kong filmmakers began to focus on the broader international film market. As such, these films have “sacrificed” the local/indigenous qualities predominantly associated with golden age filmmaking—Hong Kong locations, local actors, Cantonese dialect—in order to compete with Hollywood. The decline of the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema can be attributed to the changing commercial tastes of the local audience for Hollywood blockbusters and the inability of Hong Kong filmmakers to produce a slate of comparable products.

Second, Hong Kong’s collaborative relationship with other Pan-Asian cinemas intensified in the wake of the Asian financial crisis of 1997 which weakened East and Southeast Asian economies—Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand—to such a degree that they were (temporarily) unable to purchase Hong Kong films. As a result, countries like Thailand and South Korea began to produce their own films inspired by the Hong Kong action aesthetic in order to fill the market gap (Pang 63). Having temporarily lost a primary source of revenue, Hong Kong filmmakers instigated partnerships with peripheral Asian cinemas in order to gain access to their film markets. In addition, Hong Kong production companies also looked towards the previously ignored Mainland market in order to achieve “the Mainland dream” (Pang 63).

With the international success of the Hong Kong/Chinese-American collaboration *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee 2000), Hong Kong invested in subsequent Mainland-based and Mandarin-language co-productions which strongly relied on the cinematic expertise of Hong Kong filmmakers and the popular appeal of Hong Kong's marquee male stars. In 2003, Hong Kong signed a free trade agreement with China—CEPA (Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement)—which delineates the parameters of film collaborations. While CEPA does not limit Hong Kong “principle creative personnel” (i.e. director, screenwriter, cinematographer, choreographer), the agreement stipulates that one-third of the film's “leading artists” (i.e. lead actor/actress, supportive actor/actress) must originate from the Mainland (“Special” 1). While promoting the participation of Hong Kong filmmaking talent behind the scenes, CEPA insists that the film's casting (i.e. the faces of the film) reflects the transnational nature of the co-production. Hong Kong-Chinese co-productions complying with the regulations outlined by CEPA are treated as Mainland motion pictures, granted access to the Mainland market, and distributed on a quota-free basis.

Third, Hong Kong has also produced films co-funded by Hollywood. In the late 1990s, Hollywood began featuring Hong Kong stars in its blockbuster films in order to capitalize on the Asian action phenomenon. With the international success of *Crouching Tiger*, Hollywood became attentive to the lucrative Asian film market and adjusted its approach to collaborating with Hong Kong. In the early 2000s, Hollywood producers began investing in Chinese film productions starring local talent in order to remain at the forefront of creative innovations. For instance, the American production company Columbia Pictures set up a production center in Hong Kong and has been financing

directors like Ang Lee, Yimou Zhang, and Hark Tsui (Curtin 99). As noted by Tony Wang of BVI,

[I]n the U.S., there are a lot of action directors who can fill the pipeline in Hollywood, but a film like *Crouching Tiger* or *The Wedding Banquet* can only be made in Asia. And if they are done well, these films will bring new audiences to the theater both here and abroad. (Qtd. in Curtin 99)

The general manager of Warner Village, Steve Kappen, contends that there is “nothing wrong” with the Chinese film industry: “The only thing that’s happened is that it has been transferred to Hollywood, and now it’s coming back to Asia with the tools that Hollywood uses to make global films” (Qtd. in Curtin 99-100). The increase in global (i.e. Hollywood) financing offers Asian filmmakers access to creative resources which will improve production values and render their films competitive on the international market. Thus, Hollywood can maintain its market dominance in Hong Kong/China by co-producing high quality Chinese blockbusters alongside its highly popular domestic action films.

The relationship between Hong Kong and Hollywood, however, is not a one-way exchange as may be the popular conception. Hong Kong filmmakers collaborated with Hollywood out of necessity in the late 1990s; unlike the global aspirations of Hong Kong filmmakers during the “kung fu craze,” recent interest in the American film market via Hollywood co-productions appears to be a strategy of survival for a struggling post-1997 Hong Kong film industry. In contrast, Hollywood’s interest in transnational collaborations with Pan-Asian cinemas like Hong Kong is primarily for commercial gain. According to Curtin, Hollywood’s investment in Hong Kong and/or Chinese co-

productions is just another phase in Hollywood's "ongoing exploitation" of international film talent and labour (1). He argues that it is "simply the latest turn in a strategy that has perpetuated American media dominance in global markets for almost a century and contributed to the homogenization of popular culture under the aegis of Western institutions" (ibid. 1). On the one hand, these co-productions point towards a more "elaborate endgame" as Hollywood moguls attempt to gain a stronger foothold in the Mainland Chinese film market. With more than 1 billion television viewers and 200 million moviegoers in the People's Republic of China (PRC), as well as over sixty million "overseas Chinese" living in Taiwan, Malaysia, the United States, and Canada, Chinese audiences around the globe constitute the most attractive film market. On the other hand, Curtin notes that these movies represent the "expanding ambitions" of Hollywood as it refashions Chinese narratives for Western audiences (ibid. 1).

Indicative of transnational exchange, Hollywood's "Asiaphilia"—defined by Darrell Hamamoto as "the fetishization of all things Asian in popular culture"—can be attributed, in part, to the rise of Hong Kong cinema and its action-oriented personalities (11). As a result, the late 1990s and early 2000s has seen the increasing "Asianization" of Hollywood cinema. Through remakes of Asian films, Hollywood repackages and integrates the film fantasies of Hong Kong and other East and Southeast Asian film industries into mainstream Hollywood (Marchetti and Kam 1). Leon Hunt attributes the Asianization of Hollywood film to the transnational "gatekeepers" like Quentin Tarantino and Joel Silver; accordingly, these gatekeepers are "producers attuned to the cults surrounding Japanese and South Korean cinema, auteurs displaying their connoisseurship of Asian cinema or acting as patrons to cult Asian films and directors" ("Asiaphilia"

220). Hunt argues for two types of transnational gatekeepers. First, the “connoisseur” not only incorporates the aesthetics of East Asian cinema but is also explicitly referential towards these sources. Known for his intertextual referencing of East Asian cult classics, Tarantino is the most notable example of this type of gatekeeper and has even earned the reputation as the “patron” of East Asian cinema. The second type of gatekeeper absorbs Asian talent into Hollywood and “*incorporates* East Asian cinema in a non-referential and non-cinephile way” (“Asiaphilia” 220).⁸ One such figure is Joel Silver, producer of *The Matrix* trilogy and the English-language Hollywood films of Jet Li (ibid. 220). Yet, post-*Crouching Tiger*, Hunt argues that it is “decidedly regressive to see a global Martial Arts film return to fantasies of white warriors triumphing over the ‘Orient’” (ibid. 233).

Stephen Teo describes Hollywood’s approach to filmmaking as a form of “globalizing postmodernism” which he defines as a process through which the conventions of (Asian) film genres are reconstructed for the global film economy (“*Wuxia*” 198). The commodification of Pan-Asian cultures does not require foreknowledge of said traditions; instead, Hollywood filmmakers transcribe “what is culturally specific in order to make [their films] more presentable to a worldwide audience” (ibid. 98). Bliss Cua Lim similarly argues that Hollywood deracinates Asian genre cinemas by transforming “a signature (a mark of innovation, of originality, of newness or novelty greeted by vigorous, profitable audience demand)” into “a formula (no longer a marker of local, national, or cultural singularity but a marker of deracinated iterability)” (116). She writes,

[B]y way of homage, by hiring émigré talent, through distributor pick-ups of foreign films and through the funding of transnational productions [...Hollywood]

neutralise[s] national or regional cinemas that have acquired cult US audiences and have proven able box office adversaries abroad [...] All of a sudden, Hollywood action blockbusters look just like Hong Kong martial arts flicks and the distinctions between J-horror and Hollywood horror films become less acute. (Lim 116-17)

Both Teo and Lim draw attention to the centrality of genre—and more specifically the action film—to Hollywood’s deracination of Pan-Asian cinemas like Hong Kong. Thus, scholars should not only consider *what* images are being translated but also *how* these images are being mobilized and transcribed by Hollywood.

Industrial Differences

The economic success of Hollywood has been historically dependent on star culture, and more specifically, on the construction and promotion of (film) star personas. In *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, Richard Dyer argues that the star phenomenon “consists of everything that is publicly available about stars” including their filmic images, studio released promotional materials, (un)intentional publicity, and the circulation of star discourse (*Heavenly* 3). While filmic images are typically afforded a privileged place in the construction of a (film) star’s persona, Dyer contends that “different elements predominate in different star images [and] they do so at different periods in [an individual] star’s career. Star images have histories, and histories outlive the star’s own lifetime” (ibid. 3). Always intertextual and multimedia, star images are complex systems of representations which work to present Hollywood actors as fascinating and intrinsically important individuals to the social and cultural welfare of Hollywood’s loyal

audience (ibid. 3, 17). Since the movie star is made and not born, he/she can be considered a cultural commodity whose star appeal is measured primarily in box-office terms.⁹ Each actor willingly participates, to some degree, in the manufacturing of his/her own star persona (Dyer 5). While serving as the provisional face of Hollywood, the contemporary star possesses limited control over the direction of his/her star image and career due to the lack of capital they personally invest into the budgets of their films (Tashiro 30). Each star faces structural limitations in the forms of role choice, type-casting, and/or (racial, gendered, sexual) stereotyping, and the degree of control a star retains over his/her image varies greatly from star to star, as well as across phases in a star's career (Dyer 5).

In Hollywood, a film star comes second to their film which is considered the primary commercial product and the sole purpose of the star is to promote their vehicles (Bordwell 36). Historically, there has been limited star crossover between American entertainment industries such as film, television, and music. For instance, Kay Dickinson argues that the star system of Hollywood has produced in its audiences "a craving to see the cross-over star fail" (185). Moreover, Charles Tashiro contends that Hollywood promotes an "illusion of individuality" by highlighting or even exaggerating the contributions of filmmakers and actors as artists. The goal, according to Tashiro, is to draw attention away from the hierarchy of corporate command and obscure the structural dynamics informing Hollywood production (32, 34).¹⁰ With the conglomerization of Hollywood in the 1970s, American producers have invested extremely large and concentrated sums of money into a smaller number of film projects.¹¹ As a result, Hollywood has increasingly relied on the box-office appeal of its exclusive roster of

marquee stars to promote its blockbusters and guarantee a profitable return on their investments.

Conversely, Hong Kong cinema is part of a Cantonese-language multimedia entertainment complex known as *ge-ying-shi* (music—film—tv) which is geared towards promoting the star first and their vehicles second. A Hong Kong producer typically builds a film around an intermedial star with a devoted fan base and that star then sells the film, along with his/her other vehicles (i.e. CDS, concerts, albums), through public appearances and interviews with fan-magazines (Bordwell 36). The success of the Hong Kong film industry is contingent on the development and promotion of intermedial stars. For instance, Bey Logan notes that Hong Kong popular culture in the early 1990s was dominated by male Cantopop stars such as “The Four Golden Kings”—Andy Lau, Jackie Cheung, Leon Lai, and Aaron Kwok. These four singers parlayed their Cantopop success into lucrative acting careers and were featured in numerous high octane action movies (179). The late 1990s saw the rise of a new generation of male Cantopop stars—Ekin Cheng, Michael Tse, Jordan Chan, Jason Chu, and Nicholas Tse—introduced through the action films of Andrew Lau, including the *Young and Dangerous* franchise (1996, 1996, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1998, 2000), *Storm Riders* (1998), and *A Man Called Hero* (1999). In Hong Kong, the most successful (Cantonese-language) stars typically enjoy intermedial careers in more than one entertainment industry.

The intermedial star system of Hong Kong presents a different and interconnected relationship between the film star and the auxiliary market; as a result, it is impossible to speak about Hong Kong film stars without considering the rest of their body of work. This requires the use of a transmedial lens in order to take into consideration the

confluence of various (popular) cultural texts through which the local identity of the Hong Kong star is shaped. In order to speak knowledgeably about the female stars of Hong Kong action, one cannot discuss their filmic representations in isolation from their intermedial star personas. In *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema*, I consider the various entertainment industries contributing the star personas of Hong Kong action women including Cantopop (e.g. Charlene Choi), beauty pageants (e.g. Kristy Yang), television (e.g. Bernice Liu), and even pornography (e.g. Qi Shu). Furthermore, I examine how these additional industries have helped to shape a distinctively local star persona for Pan-Asian and Asian North American action women in Hong Kong.

PART II: HEROIC IDENTITIES IN HONG KONG CINEMA

Scholarly interest in Hong Kong cinema was sparked by the signing of the Joint Declaration in 1984 which determined the date of Hong Kong's handover to China. As noted by Kobena Mercer, identity "only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent, and stable is displaced by the appearance of doubt and uncertainty" (503). Mercer's statement draws attention to the fact that preliminary research on Hong Kong cinema primarily discusses the industry in relation to the impending amalgamation. According to Gary Needham, early dossiers in *Film Comment* and *Cahiers du cinéma*, as well as festival reports which appeared in *Screen*, "read Hong Kong films in a highly allegorical way as explicitly or implicitly symptomatic of a culture responding to the negotiations between Britain and China" (64). He notes that films produced from the New Wave (1979-1984) onwards were regarded as formally embodying concerns about the accelerating handover deadline and exhibited

signs of postmodern crisis (ibid. 64). These early writings set the tone for the subsequent film scholars who, consciously or not, also consider Hong Kong cinema in relation to its colonial history (ibid. 65).

The volume of film scholarship produced on Hong Kong cinema greatly increased in the years bookending the amalgamation of Hong Kong and China (1997). As noted by Needham, North American and European scholars became increasingly attentive to the generic, formal, and aesthetic qualities of Hong Kong cinema, and addressed issues regarding the cinema's history and representation of local identity (65). The rich scholarship produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s can be divided into two categories. First, scholars such as Bey Logan (1995), David Bordwell (2000), David Desser (2000), and Leon Hunt (2003) have produced comprehensive studies which focused almost exclusively on the action cinema of Hong Kong. Mapping out the history of Hong Kong cinema via the action genre, these scholars highlighted the contributions of prominent male directors, actors, and action choreographers working in the kung fu (1970s), gunplay (1980s), and kung fu revival (1990s) genres. Since the crossover of Hong Kong stars to Hollywood coincides with the production of these studies, scholars frequently discuss the emigration of creative film talent at the end of their studies without fully considering its potential impact on the domestic cinema. Second, scholars such as Esther Yau (1994), Stephen Teo (1997), Julian Stringer (2000), and Gina Marchetti (2006) frame their discussions of Hong Kong cinema in relation to the (social, political, economic, ideological, cultural) impact of the handover of Hong Kong to China. These scholars are most interested in exploring how, in the years leading up to the handover, Hong Kong cinema began exhibiting symptoms of a "1997 consciousness" (Yau,

“Border” 181) or “China syndrome” (Teo, *Hong* 207). They focus on dramas and art films produced before 1997 which take the experiences of diasporic Chinese as their subject matter. These scholars also stop their examination of Hong Kong cinema in 1997 and provide limited insights into the production of films in the post-1997 industry.

A new phase of scholarship, of which this study is a part, began in the mid-2000s with such notable studies as Needham’s “The Post-Colonial Hong Kong Cinema” (2006) and Michael Curtin’s *Playing to the World’s Biggest Audience* (2007), as well as the edited collections *Hong Kong Connections* (2005), *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood, and New Global Cinema* (2007), and *East Asian Cinemas* (2008). What collectively defines this body of scholarship is the explicit focus that is placed on the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema. While attentive to the industry crisis, this new phase of scholars acknowledge the fact that Hong Kong has continued to produce commercial films for local, Pan-Asian, and international audiences throughout the 2000s. Noting recent trends in Hong Kong filmmaking, this new wave of scholars has also begun to (re)view and (re)visé the history of the action cinema. For instance, Hong Kong’s recent investment in Pan-Asian and Pan-Pacific co-productions has compelled scholars like Kinnia Yau (2005) to explore Hong Kong’s prior transnational connections with other East Asian cinemas such as Japan in the 1960s. Thus, the goal of the new phase of scholarship is not to discount or discredit the work of previous scholars, but rather, to elaborate on and (re)contextualize the previous wave of scholarship to explore films produced in Hong Kong after the 1997 handover.

The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema is part of this new phase of scholarship. This study seeks to (re)envision Hong Kong film history in two key ways.

First, this project predominantly focuses on films produced in the wake of Hong Kong's (re)amalgamation with China (1997). Instead of exploring the "China syndrome," I consider how the handover has impacted the subsequent production of Hong Kong popular culture. Although the Hong Kong film industry entered into a state of crisis in 1997, local filmmakers continued to produce commercially viable action films. This study is primarily concerned with the various production strategies devised to (re)stimulate domestic, Pan-Asian, and international interest in the local film industry. Second, this project focuses on the contributions of Pan-Asian and Asian North American action women performing in the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema—a topic all but ignored in other scholarship on post-1997 Hong Kong cinema. I consider how the Asian female body, through its multiple and co-existing expressions, functions as a locus of local identity for domestic, Pan-Asian, and international audiences. Moreover, I explore the representation and ethnic differentiation of Asian action women that have crossed over into Hollywood films after 1997. I consider the transnational exchange, located at the level of the Asian female body, between Hong Kong and Hollywood in the new millennium.

Post-1997

Discussion of the Hong Kong film industry following the city's handover to China (1 July 1997) requires the use of a clear and appropriate term to describe its cinema. Although the term "post-colonial" might seem, at first, to be a good candidate, Gary Needham argues that the descriptor is a highly problematic label especially when applied to film production in Hong Kong. He explains,

One of the problems with the post-colonial is the relationship between the ‘post’ and the ‘colonial’ through the various uses and meanings of the term. Do we use it with or without the hyphen? Does the term indicate a clear-cut historical shift from colonial governance to decolonization? Is it quite simply after colonialism? (Needham 63)

Needham draws attention to the current political situation in Hong Kong and questions whether the city has entered into a state of post-colonization. The terms of the Hong Kong’s amalgamation with China are outlined by the “one country, two systems” policy which states that for (at least) 50 years following reunification, Hong Kong will be considered a Special Administrative Region of China (SAR). Hong Kong is thus responsible for maintaining its own economy, political system, educational guidelines, and currency. This policy was set in place in order to ensure that Hong Kong continues to grow as an international city post-reunification (“One” ¶3).

Hong Kong, however, is only a semiautonomous region under the “one country, two systems” policy and its citizens remain subject to the laws of China. The continuing social, political, cultural, and ideological influence of the Mainland became such a concern that on 10 December 2008, more than 300 Hong Kong lawyers, writers, scholars, and artists signed “Charter 08,” a document calling for the democratization of Hong Kong and the implementation of a new constitution that would guarantee:

human rights, [the] election of public officials, freedom of religion and expression, and an end to the Communist Party’s hold over the military, courts and government. It also called for the abolition of the criminal code that allows

for people to be imprisoned for ‘incitement to subvert state power.’ (Lee, “HK” ¶5)

The desire for political reform was further fuelled by the arrest of Xiaobo Liu on 23 June 2009; Liu is a prominent Hong Kong intellectual and social activist who signed “Charter 08” and was arrested a day before publishing a new manifesto which called for even greater political reform in Hong Kong (ibid. ¶1, 7). According to Dan Wang, one of the student leaders of the Tiananmen Square protests, Liu’s arrest draws attention to the ideology of China and the ongoing influence of the Mainland government on Hong Kong:

Even though Chinese society is changing, even though the Chinese economy is growing, the fundamental nature of the Chinese Communist Party’s authoritarianism and their use of state violence to maintain their way of governance hasn’t changed. (Qtd. Lee, “HK” ¶11)

These recent examples draw into question whether Hong Kong currently exists in a post-colonial state. One could argue that Hong Kong was not de-colonized in 1997 but rather that control over the region shifted from Britain to China.

Needham also contends that the term post-colonial has been overused and under-defined in film scholarship relating to Hong Kong cinema. He notes that film critics have used the term to reference all of the films produced since the signing of the Joint Declaration (1984) which outlined the date of Hong Kong’s reunification with China (63). For instance, Needham draws explicit attention to the influential text, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), written by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. Needham observes that the authors use the term post-colonial to reference, as Ashcroft suggests, “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of

colonisation to the present day” (Qtd. in Needham 63). Thus, Needham contends that such broad use of the term renders it an essentialist and potentially vacuous category which obscures the important differences between phases and genres of Hong Kong filmmaking (63).

The descriptor post-colonial also evokes a post-modern intellectual discourse. Post-colonialism is comprised of a set of theories from various fields of study including literature, philosophy, political science, and film. Post-colonial theory seeks to destabilize Western modernist thinking to create space for the emergence of alternative discourses (Hayward 295). When applied to film studies, post-colonial theory helps critics read films, produced by post-colonial countries and the diaspora, through a non-Eurocentric eye (ibid. 299). Hayward contends that these films “explore questions of representation, identity and location politics [and] question the center/margin binaries imposed by Western thought” (299). Post-colonial theory can also be used in the analysis of films produced in the West—during the colonial era and the post-colonial moment—that display Eurocentrism (299). While considering the representation of local identity in the films bookending Hong Kong’s handover to China, this project is not primarily concerned with issues of Eurocentrism; instead, this project takes a film studies approach to explore how Hong Kong action women serve as a locus of identity for local, Pan-Asian, and diasporic Asian audiences. Thus, the label “post-colonial” will not be employed in this study since it makes reference to a critical discourse which is not being utilized.

Although post-colonial is too problematic a term for this project, an alternative descriptor must be employed. For the purposes of this study, the term “post-1997” will be

used to designate films produced in Hong Kong following the city's handover to China.¹² This descriptor has been selected for two key reasons. First, it references the date of the amalgamation which, as it will be later argued in this study, has had a strong impact on the filmmaking industry. Second, the term clearly designates the time period being considered: from 1 July 1997 to the present date. The use of the term post-1997 should improve the clarity of my arguments relating to film production in Hong Kong.

Masculinity and Identity in Hong Kong Action

At the heart of the transnational exchange of people, technology, and aesthetics between Hollywood and Hong Kong is the action genre. Similar to Hollywood, Hong Kong cinema is an entertainment industry which specializes in the production of generic films. With the international success of kung fu films in the 1970s, Hong Kong cinema became "known" for its action filmmaking. Moreover, the transnational identity of Hong Kong became firmly associated with the heroic accomplishments of male heroes starring in the action cinema. In order to explore *how* the Asian female body functions as a site of cultural exchange between Hong Kong and Hollywood, I must first explore the history of heroic representation in the action cinema and the (limited) role women have traditionally played in this male dominated space.

Since the 1970s, heroic identity in Hong Kong cinema has been firmly associated with masculinity, male performance, and physical achievement. This perception stems from the transnational popularity of kung fu films with Hong Kong, Pan-Asian, and international audiences. Although *The Chinese Boxer* (Wang 1970) sparked the "kung fu craze" in the West, it was Bruce Lee's performance in *Fist of*

Fury (Lo 1973) which captivated American and European film audiences. According to Hunt, Lee popularized physical authenticity as he “grounded his action in crisp, rapid techniques, multiple kicks, ‘realistic’ exchanges and a fluid grace that the genre had never seen before” (*Kung* 9). Lee performed predominantly martial arts shirtless, and the camera captured his sleek muscular frame in action. Yvonne Tasker contends that the “hardness of Lee’s body and his star image emerges from a history of softness, a history of images in which both Chinese men and women have been represented as passive and compliant” (“Fists” 445). In other words, Lee’s muscular body counters a history of Western representations which has “feminized” Asian men (ibid. 443). While Lee only starred in a handful of projects, his kung fu films are the most widely viewed Hong Kong productions in history and his iconic image helped shape international perceptions of Hong Kong heroic identity.

Although Lee became the face of Hong Kong action in the West, his films were less popular in Hong Kong and, according to Bey Logan, had a “negligible” effect on the local film industry (43). Instead, the most profound effect of the kung fu films produced by director Che Zhang was the centering of male heroes in Hong Kong. In fact, Zhang is credited with the “re-masculinization” of a Chinese cinema that was previously dominated by female stars by “fill[ing] the screen with half-naked male pulchritude” (Hunt, *Kung* 53). The *built* Chinese body was a relatively new phenomenon in Hong Kong. Hunt contends that the foregrounding of muscularity is a product of the “colonial government’s attempt to shift local identification away from China” (ibid. 53-54). Matthew Turner similarly argues that the Hong Kong body was designed to match Western models of masculinity

influenced by the health and fitness movement in the United States (38). Moreover, the emergence of muscular masculinity coincides with the rise of a Chinese middle class in Hong Kong and according to Hunt sparked local interest in “gazing” at healthy bodies (*Kung* 54). The muscular heroes developed by Zhang were heavily promoted by the Shaw Brothers star system which celebrated male heroism while commodifying male beauty (ibid. 55).

By the end of the decade, “pure” kung fu had gone out of fashion and the late 1970s saw the rise of the kung fu comedy which evolved into the modern action comedy of the 1980s (Bordwell 207). What distinguishes these generic hybrids from classical kung fu films is their representation of heroic masculinity. According to Hunt, heroic identity in the kung fu and action-comedy is centered on the principle of “corporeal authenticity” which he defines as the measure “of the stuntwork and physical risk as much as fighting ability” (*Kung* 39). This high impact and high risk aesthetic is notable in the films of Jackie Chan, the most famous comedy dragon to emerge from the genre. The logic of corporeal authenticity is evident in the “Jackie Chan outtake reel” which documents Chan’s failed attempts at performing stunts. Marketing himself as a “real” action star, Chan takes physical authenticity, a concept popularized by classical kung fu films, in a new direction which has since defined his career (ibid. 39).

The mid-1980s saw a shift away from kung fu filmmaking. The rise of the modern gunplay genre (1985-1994) corresponds with the 1984 signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration which established the date of Hong Kong’s reunification with China. One by-product of the Joint Declaration, according to David Bordwell,

was the development of a distinctively local popular culture and the establishment of local (heroic) identities (32). While exchanging martial arts combat for “airily choreographed” gun battles (Bordwell 32), gunplay films remained focused on male heroes and their hyperbolic bodies. Kwai-Cheung Lo contends that the “pumped up” bodies of kung fu heroes reveal the colonial state of Hong Kong and the ideological influence of the West (*Chinese* 82). In comparison, gunplay heroes had slimmer bodies and perform fully clothed in the space of violent action. Lo contends that the male protagonists featured in the gunplay films of John Woo, Hark Tsui, and Kar-Wai Wong possess “virile bodies” which played an important role in the “reinvention” of Hong Kong and the “remasculinization” of the Chinese body on both a local and global scale. Through the gunplay genre, male heroism in Hong Kong was reconnected with a pre-existing Chinese mode of representation; exemplified by the military god Guan Yu, heroes were portrayed as aggressive, militant, and macho tough-guys (ibid. 81). The production of gunplay films in the mid-1980s expanded upon this Chinese heroic tradition and parlayed it into a compelling representation that appealed to trans/national audiences (ibid. 81).

The gunplay genre was defined by its representation of heroic bloodshed and emphasis on the bonds of brotherhood which link male protagonists. While Woo has been credited with popularizing heroic bloodshed in the gunplay genre, actor Yun-Fat Chow has been considered Woo’s “on-screen *alter ego*” who embodied Woo’s vision of a modern chivalric knight in such films as *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), *The Killer* (1989), *Once a Thief* (Woo 1991), and the 1992 hit *Hard Boiled* (Logan 117).¹³ Julian Stringer reads Woo’s gunplay films as masculinist texts which

combined the male “doing” film genres (i.e. action flicks, westerns, war films) with the female “suffering” genres (i.e. melodrama, woman’s film) to create a hero (Chow) who was both active and suffering; it was the hero’s suffering that compelled him to violent action (“Your” 29-30). Philippa Gates contends that gunplay films “are not simply saturated with emotion *and* violence but it is the emotionality of the male hero—his loyalty and devotion to other men—from which the excess of violence erupts” (“Man’s” 63).¹⁴ The emphasis on male interpersonal relationships, rather than heterosexual romantic connection, played a central role in defining the morality of the Chinese hero. As noted by Sun Longji,

In Existentialism, a man [...] ‘exists’ by virtue of retreating from all social roles and searching his own soul. If he fails to go through this process, he cannot become a man in the philosophical sense. By contrast, a Chinese fulfills himself within the network of interpersonal relationships. A Chinese is the totality of his social roles. Strip him of his relationships, and there is nothing left. He is not an independent unit. His existence has to be defined by acquaintance [...] In Chinese, the worlds ‘single’ and ‘alone’ have the connotations of ‘immoral’ and ‘pathetic.’ (Qtd. in Stringer, “Your” 39)

By emphasizing bonds of brotherhood, Woo not only established the ethnic/racial and moral qualities of his hero (Chow), but also arguably foregrounded local uncertainties regarding Hong Kong’s impending handover to China (1 July 1997). According to Hsiung-Ping Chiao, gunplay films often blurred the line between enemy and friend which results in the genre’s emphasis on loyalty and brotherhood in the construction of heroism (162). In gunplay, the hero was defined by his

interpersonal relationships with his “brothers” whom he supports, defends, and/or avenges through his employment of heroic bloodshed.

Action filmmaking in Hong Kong remained a masculine space throughout the 1990s with the emergence of the kung fu revival film and with it, the return of hand-to-hand martial arts combat. Jet Li and Donnie Yen are the biggest stars of the genre; while Li headlined the critically acclaimed *Once Upon a Time in China* series (1991, 1992), Yen starred in Woo Ping Yuen’s action-comedy *Iron Monkey* (1993). Although kung fu films bookend Hong Kong’s golden age in filmmaking—with Bruce Lee at the beginning in the 1970s and Jet Li at the end in the 1990s—there is a notable shift in the representation of male martial arts heroes. Formally trained in martial arts (*wu shu* specifically), Li and Yen differ from their “pumped up” predecessors in that their muscular and toned bodies are never displayed on-screen; Li and Yen are fully clothed while performing in the space of physical action. Rather than foregrounding physical impenetrability, kung fu revival films emphasize the moral impenetrability of its male heroes which was enhanced, reinforced, and/or inspired by their training in martial arts.

This shift in representation reflects broader changes taking place in Hong Kong relating to the city’s impending handover to China. By deviating away from muscular masculinity, the kung fu revival films distance their heroes from Western models of masculinity. While the Chinese body as built shifted local identification away from China in the 1970s, the more modest (but still hard-bodied) male heroes of kung fu revival reflect the mediation of Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese identities in anticipation of the reunification of China in 1997. This is clearly evinced

by the performances of Jet Li, the most popular kung fu revival star. Although Li is a Mainlander, he worked in the Hong Kong action cinema and portrayed local heroes. According to Hunt, Li became an “iconic figure in Hong Kong cinema’s countdown to 1997” (Kung 140). For instance, Li stars in *Once Upon a Time in China*, a film which considers life in Hong Kong following the signing of the Treaty of Nanking (9 August 1842), an agreement which shifted the city from Mainland to colonial rule. The film arguable creates a parallel between the negotiation of Chinese identity amidst early British colonial rule and the city’s impending re-colonization by China (Logan 178). These experiences are embodied by a physically proficient and morally-inclined Chinese hero who negotiates issues of national/ethnic identity in a 1997-context.

Warrior Women in Hong Kong Cinema

Film critics attribute the local and international appeal of Hong Kong cinema to the male-centered action narratives at the heart of the kung fu, action-comedy, gunplay, and kung fu revival genres. The centrality of male performance is most evident in film scholarship which emphasizes the accomplishments of male practitioners while overlooking the contributions of women. For instance, in seminal studies such as Logan’s *Hong Kong Action Cinema* (1995), Bordwell’s *Planet Hong Kong* (2000), and Hunt’s *Kung Fu Cult Masters* (2003) the discussion of female performance is relegated to subsections and/or a separate chapter, and dislocated from the author’s primary discussion of film history and action aesthetics. Those studies that do address action women tend to focus on a handful of “key” texts which are considered representative of female performance. For instance, film scholars interested in exploring female heroic identity seem to gravitate towards *The*

Heroic Trio (To 1993). While the film stars three of Hong Kong's most notable female actors—Michelle Yeoh, Anita Mui, Maggie Cheung—it was a box-office failure in Hong Kong and had limited local impact. Instead, *The Heroic Trio* has been championed by Western film critics interested in exploring the underlying political context of the film as it is set in a post-apocalyptic port city which is considered to be a metaphor for a post-1997 Hong Kong. The film presents action women, and *not* men, as the heroes of the film who safeguard the city from attack. In reality, I argue, the local film industry has relied on the box-office appeal of its action men, rather than women, to ensure the survival of the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema.

The overwhelming impression given by film scholars is that Hong Kong identity is inextricably bound up in discourses of Asian masculinity, male performance, and physical achievement. The male body in action has been considered a locus of identity for local, Pan-Asian, and diasporic Asian audiences. While this may be the case, the history of Hong Kong action remains incomplete and can only be expanded through an in-depth examination of Hong Kong “warrior women,” a term that will be used to describe female protagonists who engage in the space of physical action and perform martial arts choreography. While men have set the heroic precedent in Hong Kong action, women have subsequently matched (if not surpassed) this standard by demonstrating their physical authenticity and being presented with a more masculine image via costuming. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate that the female body can also be considered a locus of transnational identity for local, Pan-Asian, and diasporic Asian audiences. Moreover, I argue that the representation of warrior women in Hong Kong reflects

broad changes in the local cinema as the region moves towards, and past, its 1997 amalgamation with China.

Since the mid-1980s, Hong Kong producers have cast “foreign” (i.e. non-Hong Kong) actresses to star in their action films in order to promote the emerging global image of Hong Kong as a center for international trade (Bordwell 170). While films of the mid-1980s featured East and Southeast Asian action women (i.e. Malaysian, Japanese, Taiwanese), the late 1990s saw the casting of Asian American and Asian Canadian action women. While contributing to the “international” look of the cinema (ibid. 170), actresses such as Michelle Yeoh (Malaysian), Qi Shu (Taiwanese), Marsha Yuen (Asian American), and Charlene Choi (Asian Canadian) are considered distinctly local stars in Hong Kong. I consider the various ways through which local identity is articulated—especially in a post-1997 context—through the representations and performances of Pan-Asian, Asian American, and Asian Canadian action women in Hong Kong cinema. Moreover, I argue that the representation of Hong Kong female identity in the post-1997 action cinema is strongly rooted in the cultural history of colonial Hong Kong.

As previously mentioned, Hong Kong action women are expected to match the male standard of performance in the genre in order to be considered bona fide heroes. Since heroic identity is associated with masculinity, action women are expected to limit and/or repress their femininity in order to emerge from the narrative periphery: typically, this is manifested in the action woman being stripped of her femininity or being presented as gender-neutral. By gender-neutral, I am referring to the fact that action women—through costuming, behaviour, and mannerisms—are not presented with obvious markers

of gender and are thus distanced from femininity which typically renders female characters passive in the action genre. These gender-neutral action women are then granted access to the space of physical action which is predominantly presented as the domain of Asian action men. In addition, post-1997 action women are predominantly envisaged through pre-existing heroic models prominent from the golden age of the cinema (1985-1994) and positioned within the cinematic lineage of Hong Kong's warrior women. Moreover, they embody local identity because they are connected to, and envisaged through, pre-existing heroic models prevalent in the cinema prior to Hong Kong's amalgamation with China.

In this study, I also explore how dialect and language play an increasingly important role in the definition of local identity in post-1997 Hong Kong. Prior to the 1980s, Hong Kong was a dual-dialect cinema and films were produced in both Cantonese and Mandarin. In the golden age, however, Hong Kong films were defined by their use of distinctively local Cantonese slang. Following the handover, the use of Cantonese dialect has become one way through which Hong Kong residents can define themselves in relation to Mainlanders, many of whom speak Mandarin. In addition, Hong Kong-Chinese co-productions are predominantly Mandarin-language films shot in the Mainland. The use of Cantonese dialect in (locally produced) Hong Kong popular culture has become an increasingly important signifier of local identity in a post-1997 context.

During the golden age (1985-1994), Hong Kong films were produced in Cantonese and dubbed in postproduction for regional distribution. In the late 1990s, Hong Kong filmmakers shifted away from dubbing and began to employ the real-life voices of actors accompanied by subtitles. In order to (re)present Hong Kong as the center of

international commerce, filmmakers typically featured actors/characters of different nationalities speaking English in order to communicate with one another. Unlike voice dubbing which obscures linguistic, and thus cultural, differences, the use of English-language dialogue facilitates transnational and transcultural interaction while maintaining the local, national, and/or ethnic identity of individuals. Moreover, proficiency in English has increasingly become an international marker of Hong Kong identity. For instance, the most successful Hong Kong action stars crossing over into Hollywood are proficient in English and speak the language clearly with traces of an American or English accent. According to the logic of Hollywood, Hong Kong identity is inextricably dependent on the Western colonial roots of region and thus verbally expressed through clarity of speech. Through accent, Hong Kong actors can be defined in contrast with Mainlanders who typically have less experience and greater difficulty with speaking English clearly.

Furthermore, I explore how local identity is established through the foregrounding of an actor's familial ties to Hong Kong and/or its cinema via extra-textual promotional materials. This is especially the case with Asian American actors whose star images emphasize their Hong Kong family trees; they are considered return migrants to the Special Administrative Region following the handover. When taken together, the foregrounding of local identity via heroic models, language, and family trees reflects an attempt, on the part of local filmmakers, to (re)establish, (re)present, and/or (re)produce the distinctly local, cosmopolitan, and urban identity associated with (colonial) Hong Kong prior to the handover of the region to China. In effect, these filmmakers are producing a visual and/or cultural equivalent to the "one country-two systems" agreement

overseeing the amalgamation. Thus, this study considers the various ways through which this local identity is represented in the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema.

In *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema*, I explore how the Asian female body has become a site of cultural exchange between Hong Kong and Hollywood. The new millennium has seen the migration of filmmakers/choreographers, action aesthetics, and female stars between Hong Kong and Hollywood. Through their representations, Asian action women have come to embody the social, cultural, political, and economic ideologies of both cinemas. The examination of the Asian female body in action offers insights into the Pan-Pacific perceptions of Hong Kong's handover to China (1997). Moreover, it draws attention to Hollywood's global aspiration to wield significant power in Mainland China and gain a stronger foothold in the burgeoning Asian film market. Similar to the critical examination Asian action men in the 1990s, I explore how the performance of Asian action women in Hong Kong and Hollywood contributes to the transnational identity of Hong Kong in a post-1997 context.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSNATIONAL ASIAN MOTHERS

THE HEROIC IDENTITIES OF MICHELLE YEOH AND PEI PEI CHENG

In this chapter, I will explore the shifting representation of the Hong Kong female body in action with a focus on two generations of action women who have helped to shape the transnational identity of Hong Kong cinema in the global film market. Pei Pei Cheng is the first female star of the post-Pacific War (1937–1945) Hong Kong action cinema and the best known actress from the first generation. While she initially rose to fame in the 1960s with performances in the new-style *wuxia pian* (chivalrous swordplay films), she returned to action filmmaking in the 1990s after a brief retirement, and starred in a number of kung fu revival films. In these films, Cheng was cast as mother-figure and martial mentor to a new generation of Hong Kong action stars of which Michelle Yeoh is a part. Yeoh rose to superstardom in the 1990s with performances in action-comedy and kung fu revival films. Although popular with local and Pan-Asian audiences, Cheng and Yeoh have gained significant international exposure with roles in more recent Hollywood and/or Hong Kong-American co-productions. Together, Cheng and Yeoh have helped to shape an impression of Hong Kong female identity which differs greatly from the one produced by Hong Kong action men working in Hollywood since the 1990s; while Hong Kong action men are presented distinctly as Asian heroes in Hollywood (i.e. they retain their “Asianness” in their American representations), Hong Kong action women are characterized as transnational mediators facilitating connections between “the East” and “the West.” In their American characterizations, Cheng and Yeoh subvert the politics of Western representation in Hollywood film which have historically envisaged the Asian

female body as a sexual object/love interest for the white male hero; instead, they are presented as maternal heroes, a representation which frees their bodies from white male sexual conquest. This chapter will consider how the characterization of Hong Kong action women in Hollywood counters a history of Western representations which has “feminized” and fetishized the Asian female body.

PART I: GENERATION 1 – PEI PEI CHENG

Queen of Swordplay

Through her performances in new-style *wuxia pian* and kung fu revival films, Pei Pei Cheng paved the way for the casting and characterization of subsequent action heroines in the post-1997 action cinema. Commonly referred to as the “Queen of Swordplay” and the “First Lady of Kung Fu,” Cheng is considered the first female action star of post-Pacific War Hong Kong [Figure 1]. She quickly rose to prominence in the mid-1960s with performances in Shaw Brothers new-style *wuxia pian* films including *Come Drink With Me* (Hu 1966), *Princess Iron Fan* (Ho 1966), *Golden Swallow* (Zhang 1968), and *Brothers Five* (Lo 1970). While these roles predate the “masculinization” of Hong Kong action in the 1970s, Cheng’s shifting cinematic representations anticipated broader changes in Hong Kong cinema including the rise of kung fu filmmaking and the relegation of action women to the narrative periphery.

In the mid-1960s, Cheng quickly developed the reputation of proficient swordswoman in the new-style *wuxia pian*. Her star image was strongly shaped by her memorable portrayal of heroine Golden Swallow in King Hu’s *Come Drink With Me*

(1966). According to Kin-Yuen Wong, Hu championed a particular style of fight choreography for this film which included his trademark “confrontational stillness:” during fight sequences, kung fu masters would “remain very still while fighting, making only minimal movements with their arms” (281).¹ In the same vein, I argue that Hu relies on *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, and editing to enhance the dynamism of confrontational stillness. For instance, in one early scene in *Come Drink With Me*, Golden Swallow (Cheng) is encircled by a group of threatening men garnishing weapons at the tavern. Hu accentuates the threat via physical levels and depth of plane by presenting assailants in the background on elevated surfaces (i.e. tables, chairs) maliciously hovering over a solitary Swallow. After extensively mapping out the location of each assailant in relation to Swallow, Hu then cuts to a close-up of Swallow’s two daggers engaged in a fury of swordplay with the swords of her opponents. Hu then cuts to a long shot of the tavern which reveals Swallow’s bloody opponents retreating away from her. Envisaged through confrontational stillness in *Come Drink With Me*, Cheng is presented as a master of swordplay who, even when outnumbered by a group of armed men, remains a skilled, patient, and intuitive fighter; she is presented as a competent fighter who not only matches, but also surpasses, the male performance standard in the genre.

Hu’s use of cinematography also enhances the fluidity and dynamism of Cheng’s movements in the film. As noted by Bey Logan, *Come Drink With Me* was one of the first Hong Kong action films “to combine the beauty of Chinese martial artistry with the elegant camera movements of modern Western cinema” (154). Likening action filmmaking with dancing, Hu cast ballerina Cheng for her ability to accurately *and* eloquently perform his action choreography. Although Cheng was not formally trained in

martial arts, she is prominently featured in long takes which capture her graceful execution of his complex choreography. When she is not presented in long takes, Cheng's performance is captured through tracking shots which enhanced the fluidity of her movements. For instance, midway through the film, Swallow finds herself outnumbered and surrounded by a group of weapon-wielding men at the temple and engages in swordplay with her opponents. As she moves towards the camera, it begins to track backwards in order to maintain a set distance. At the height of the film's violence, Swallow appears to almost glide through her opponents leaving a trail of carnage. Through his stylization of action in *Come Drink With Me*, Hu helped to shape the star image of Cheng which has since been associated with virtuosic swordplay.

While featured as a marquee action star in the late 1960s, Cheng's representation began to change in the early 1970s and her characters were gradually pushed to the periphery of the action narrative. This trend is notable in *Brothers Five* (1970), a film which signals a shift in her star image and anticipates her retirement from action filmmaking. In the film, Cheng plays Hsing-Kung Yen who reunites her five estranged brothers and enlists them to defeat the film's villain. During a fight with said antagonist, Yen studies his movements and later simulates them while sparring with her brothers. Yen shifts from the role of sister to martial arts teacher and devises a special move which pools the strengths of her brothers into a superhuman force; referring to the new style of martial arts as the "peerless five tigers with one heart" tradition, Yen instructs her brothers to conjoin their bodies to form a human structure which is collectively stronger than the villain.² While Yen is presented as the focal point of fight sequences leading up to the film's climax, she does not participate in the final fight; instead, she watches as her

five brothers employ the techniques she taught them in order to defeat the enemy. While the film emphasizes Yen's martial arts superiority over her brothers, she is also removed from the physical action and relegated to the periphery of the narrative. The film appears to reverse the swordplay narrative typically associated with Cheng in which she is featured as a solitary hero pit against a group of armed men; instead, *Brothers Five* features five male heroes who work in tandem to eliminate a single but highly skilled male villain.

The film's shift in focus from female to male martial heroes speaks to a larger generic shift in action filmmaking of the 1970s favouring male-centric kung fu films over the female-focused narratives of the *wuxia pian*. As previously expressed, kung fu is a body-focused genre in which stardom is strongly dependent upon physical authenticity (Hunt, *Kung* 2, 5). Placing emphasis on the accurate performance of regional martial arts traditions, kung fu directors began casting "real" martial artists over local film stars. The underrepresentation of women in the genre—and their removal from the space of physical action—arguably draws attention to the gender inequalities in certain martial arts schools which have refused to train women (ibid. 122). Moreover, in the kung fu film, women are often presented in the role of mother (and often sidekick) to their heroic sons—as evinced by Cheng's maternal role to her brother in this film. Portraying heroic rather than villainous characters, kung fu mothers typically employ violent force in self-defence rather than for aggressive purposes or personal gain (Arons 30-31). Since their characterizations are framed within the family unit, mothers are *always* subject to the rule of patriarchy even if they are the most physically empowered characters in their films (Arons 45). Although Cheng is cast as a sister to, rather than mother of, the five brothers,

her role in *Brothers Five* anticipates broader shifts in the characterization of women in the kung fu genre as they cast in secondary/supportive roles and relegated to periphery of the film's physical action.

Throughout the 1960s, Cheng was a popular and bankable star of the Hong Kong action cinema. Although born in Shanghai, Cheng was considered a local celebrity and her star persona was firmly associated with Hong Kong. During the kung fu craze of the 1970s, Cheng even enjoyed success in the UK with the Wide Rank video release *Kung Fu Girl* (Lo 1973). Although a popular and appealing star, she too was subject to the generic and gendered shifts in Hong Kong filmmaking. Dissatisfied with her role choices in Hong Kong, Cheng retired from the action filmmaking and moved to LA to work as a ballet teacher and start a family (Logan 154).

Maternal Master

After raising her children in the United States, Cheng returned to Hong Kong and action filmmaking in the 1990s co-starring in kung fu revival films. According to Hunt, kung fu revival can be differentiated from 1970s kung fu films in two key ways. First, a new star system became the focal point of kung fu revival films, centered on Cantopop (i.e. Cantonese pop-music) stars rather than kung fu practitioners: for instance Andy Lau, Leslie Cheung, and Anita Mui enjoyed dual singing and acting careers (*Kung* 24). Second, there was a shift in focus away from “cinematic authenticity” in kung fu revival films. Technological advances in Hong Kong filmmaking—such as the ubiquitous employment of special effects, wire work (i.e. “wire fu”),³ and stunt doubles—allowed for stuntmen and/or “real” martial artists to recede/return to the background (ibid. 24).

Thus, the 1990s saw the rise of a new generation of action stars in Hong Kong introduced through the kung fu revival film.

Cheng's star image, following her temporary retirement, is exemplified by her casting and characterization in *A Man Called Hero* (Lau 1999). The film is a "migration melodrama" which depicts the struggles and ultimate triumph of diasporic Chinese working in the United States in the early 1900s.⁴ As noted by Staci Ford, migration melodramas chronicle the "urban underside of the quest to fulfill the American dream" (52). Typically set in New York City, these films present parallels between the port city of Hong Kong and the port city of New York in order to telescope issues facing diasporic Chinese as they negotiate their new identities in the United States. According to Ford, these films do cultural work by appropriating American spaces, mythologies, and histories, and reconfiguring them to demonstrate the interconnectedness between Hong Kong and the United States (52). Some notable migration melodramas include *An Autumn's Tale* (Cheung 1987), *Farewell China* (Law 1990), *Full Moon Over New York* (Kwan 1990), *Crossings* (Chan 1994), and *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* (Chan 1996).

In *A Man Called Hero* (Lau 1999), Pei Pei Cheng is cast as the mother and martial arts master of Hero Hua portrayed by Cantopop star Ekin Cheng. Portraying a "maternal master" as I have termed it, she plays a brief but important role in preparing her son to engage in heroic exploits overseas. In the opening scenes of the film, her character passes down to him *her* family's heirloom—the coveted Blood Sword—believing that Hero has progressed enough in martial arts to wield it. She sends him to meet with Master Pride (Anthony Wong), who deems Hero worthy of learning The China Secret, a highly coveted martial arts manual. Hero returns home to discover that his mother has been

murdered while attempting to defend her household. Hero avenges his mother's death by killing the perpetrators and subsequently flees to the United States to start a new life.

Although brief, Pei Pei Cheng's role in the film is critical on two key levels. First, her appearance as a maternal master helps to position Cantopop star Ekin Cheng, who lacks formal training in martial arts, within the lineage of Hong Kong's action heroes. The film capitalizes on her reputation as the "First Lady of Kung Fu" and foregrounds the biological connection between her character and Hero Hua in order to emphasize the heroic pedigree of actor Ekin Cheng and his character (Hua). Second, the Blood Sword she passes down to her son functions as an important cultural, racial, and generational connection between Hero Hua, who takes the sword with him as he migrates to the United States, and his Hong Kong motherland (personified by Pei Pei Cheng). At the end of the film, Hero finally uses the Blood Sword to restore honour to the diasporic Chinese living in the United States. In the final fight sequence of the film, Hua battles against his Japanese adversary on top of the Statue of Liberty, an icon of the United States as the land of freedom and opportunity. Hua not only defeats his opponent with the Blood Sword, but through his victory he literally transforms the Statue of Liberty into an icon of Chinese identity; with a broken tablet and missing torch, the statue transforms from being Lady Liberty to the Goddess of Mercy, the Chinese interpretation of this landmark. With Hua standing on top of her crown holding his mother's sword, he provides an image of diasporic Chinese heroism rooted in the United States. As a maternal master, Cheng's character facilitates the heroic exploits of her son who fights in her honour and subsequently re-visions Lady Liberty into a maternal figure that safeguards and empowers the diasporic Chinese living in the United States.

In Hong Kong action films of the 1990s and early 2000s, Cheng has been cast consistently in the role of maternal master. In addition to being cast as a mentor to local stars, Cheng also serves as a transnational mediator who introduces, trains, and subsequently localizes non-Hong Kong actors in the Hong Kong action cinema. For instance, in *The Spirit of the Dragon* (Tam 1997) Cheng plays Yen Gee, a kung fu master obsessed with action star Bruce Lee. She accepts Rat Face—played by Asian Canadian Michael Chow—as her pupil and trains him in Lee’s trademark fighting style—“the art of fighting without fighting.” The film also exploits Cheng’s reputation as the “First Lady of Kung Fu” as well as her well-publicized friendship with Bruce Lee by positioning her character as the bridge connecting Rat Face with the legend of Bruce Lee.⁵ In addition to Chow, Cheng has served as a maternal master to subsequent generations of post-war Hong Kong action stars which include Mainland Chinese actors Man Cheuk Chiu in *Fist Power* (Chang 2000) and Ziyi Zhang in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee 2000), Asian American Maggie Q in *Naked Weapon* (Ching 2002), and—most importantly—Malaysian actor Michelle Yeoh in *Wing Chun* (Yuen 1994), helping to establish the next generation of female action stars in Hong Kong.

PART II: GENERATION 2 – MICHELLE YEOH

Yeoh’s Rising Star

According to Ackbar Abbas, prior to Hong Kong’s “New Wave” in filmmaking (1979–1984), films about Hong Kong “were somehow always turned into stories about somewhere else, as if Hong Kong culture were somehow not a subject” (25). Typically, before the 1980s, Hong Kong action films were typically set in the pre-colonial past and

featured notions of a unified and/or mythic China. The emergence of the gunplay genre (1985–1994) marked a shift towards the construction of local Hong Kong/Chinese identities and corresponded with the 1984 signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration determining the date of Hong Kong’s reunification with China. The announcement of the amalgamation deadline (1 July 1997) came as a shock to Hong Kong residents as the negotiations took place behind closed doors: many were outraged and made plans to move overseas. Although some anticipated (political, economic, social, cultural) opportunities for Hong Kong, their guarded enthusiasm “gave way to grim tension after the massacre of demonstrators at Tiananmen Square in 1989” (Curtin 70).

One by-product of the Joint Declaration was the development of a distinctively local popular culture in Hong Kong and the fervent establishment of local identity. According to David Bordwell, “the closer 1997 came, the more aggressively distinctive Hong Kong’s lifestyle seemed to become, as if to assert cultural liberation from the Mainland even as economic and political ties were tightening” (32). The mid-1980s saw the emergence of the new *gang-chan-pian* (Hong Kong made films) which catered to local audiences with their fast pace, inclusion of Cantonese slang, and the absence of Confucian moralizing (ibid. 32). At the heart of the *gang-chan-pian* was the “gunplay genre,” a popular of cycle of action films set in modern-day Hong Kong exploring the bonds of brotherhood (*yi*) and featuring “airily choreographed” gun battles enacted on modern urban settings between/with groups of cops and/or triad gang members (ibid. 99). John Woo directed some of the most notable gunplay films including *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), *The Killer* (1989), *Bullet in the Head* (1990), and *Hard Boiled* (1992).

Although gunplay was established as a masculine genre comprised of male-focused narratives, a female cycle emerged soon after. Termed “girls with guns,” this subgenre of films was produced by independent D&B Films on small budgets, featured low production values and unknown female stars, and earned less revenue at the box-office than male-driven gunplay films. For instance, the first “girls with guns” film, *Yes Madam!* (Yuen 1985), starred newcomers Michelle Yeoh, a Malaysian beauty queen, and Cynthia Rothrock, an American martial arts champion [Figure 2]. The casting and characterization for the film draws attention to another characteristic defining the female cycle of genre. Playing off of Hong Kong’s emerging global image as a center of economic trade, producers attempted to create a more “international” look to their films by casting “foreign” (i.e. non Hong Kong) actresses like Yeoh and Rothrock (170). On the one hand, producers cast Pan-Asian female actors who lacked formal martial arts training to star in their action films: originally models, beauty queens, or (Canto)pop singers, these women transitioned from being minor/local celebrities to transnational stars of Hong Kong cinema—including Malaysian Michelle Yeoh, Taiwan-born Cynthia Khan⁶ (*In the Line of Duty 3* [Wong and Yuen 1988], *In the Line of Duty 4* [Yuen 1989]), and Japanese action stars Yukari Ôshima⁷ (*Angel* [Leung and Woo 1987], *Angel Force* [Hua and Ching 1991], *Kickboxer’s Tears* [Shen 1992]), and Michiko Nishiwaki (*My Lucky Stars* [Hung 1985], *City Cops* [Liu 1989]).

On the other hand, producers also began casting non-Asian/white actresses to star in their action films; trained in martial arts, many of these women were former martial arts champions and even competed against one another on the martial arts circuit. This included Americans Cynthia Rothrock⁸ (*Yes Madam!* [Yuen 1985], *The Inspector Wears*

Skirts [Chin 1988]) and Karen Shepherd⁹ (*Mission of Justice* [Wong 1992]), Australian Kim Maree Penn (*Fun and Fury* [Chan 1992], *Police Story 3* [Tong 1992]), and Dutch-born Saskia Von Risjk (*White China* [Yu 1989], *Final Run* [Ko 1989]). The differing prerequisites for Pan-Asian and non-Asian/white actors were centered on the racial assumption that martial arts is a Chinese/Asian-based form of combat. Historically, Hong Kong filmmakers have played upon the popular trope in which even the most harmless-looking (and often elderly) citizen inherently knows kung fu (Bordwell 12). Thus, in order for non-Asian/white actors to be considered credible action stars in Hong Kong, they were expected to be formally trained in martial arts.

Critics and fans still find it hard to believe that Yeoh was never formally trained in martial arts (Hunt, *Kung* 122). Like Pei Pei Cheng, Yeoh used her background as a trained dancer to pick up martial arts choreography and perform it gracefully, quickly mastering an impressive array of skills and demonstrating her proficiency with traditional Chinese weapons like the staff, rope dart, and sword. From the outset of her career, Yeoh's physical abilities were an important dimension of her star identity and prominently showcased in her first action roles in *Yes Madam!*, *Royal Warriors* (Chung 1986), and *Magnificent Warriors* (Chung 1987). Upon her return to action filmmaking following her temporary retirement (1989-1992),¹⁰ Yeoh further demonstrated her proficiency in martial arts while working with Woo Ping Yuen (a.k.a. Uncle Eight), a legendary action filmmaker in Hong Kong who directed and choreographed the action sequences in her films *Tai Chi Master* (1993) and *Wing Chun* (1994). Yuen is known for his action aesthetics and, more specifically, for the realism of the complex and physically demanding body-focused choreography he devises for his action stars. In order to convey

the dynamism and authenticity of physical performance, Yuen shoots action sequences from the best angle, rather than editing together shots from multiple angles, in order to present the combat in its entirety (Cheung 70). Yeoh not only mastered his action choreography, but her dynamic performance rivalled that her male action co-stars, Jet Li (*Tai Chi Master*) and Donnie Yen (*Wing Chun*). Yeoh's exemplary performative abilities only appeared extraordinary when she fought in tandem with, and subsequently outshined, her male co-stars. Since Hong Kong action is a male-dominated space, in order to appeal to audiences Yeoh had to prove herself as a skilled fighter of a comparable quality to Hong Kong's action men.

It was in the action-comedy *Police Story 3* (Tong 1992) that Yeoh presented herself as a bona fide action star comparable to Jackie Chan and her performance in this film launched her into Pan-Asian superstardom. In the role, Yeoh's star image was shaped by what Leon Hunt refers to as the "high impact / high risk aesthetic" of *corporeal authenticity* which measures martial arts performance in relation to "stuntwork and physical risk as much as fighting ability" (Kung 39). The logic of "corporeal authenticity" is best embodied by Jackie Chan whose star image is centered on his performance of filmic stunts and the showcasing of his injuries during the end-credit montages of his films (ibid. 41). In *Police Story 3*, Yeoh also performed her own stunts which included her landing a motorcycle on a moving train, jumping from a moving van onto the hood of a car, and hanging from a speeding vehicle while avoiding traffic [Figure 3]. Moreover, Yeoh was prominently featured in the film's outtake credit reel which emphasized her corporal authenticity by showcasing *her* multiple attempts at these stunts and the serious injuries *she* incurs as a result. Through her performance in the film,

Yeoh quickly gained the title of bona fide action star and her star image in Hong Kong was derived from the authenticity of her physical performances.

By the mid-1990s, Yeoh established herself as the quintessential martial art partner of the Hong Kong action cinema, fighting alongside some of its most popular action men. In these films, Yeoh typically portrays single and romantically unattached characters, a status that offers the opportunity to fully support male martial partners. Reflective of their lack of interest in romantic attachment, Yeoh's characters maintain a more masculine image which, as Lenuta Guikin argues, taps into the cultural heritage of the Chinese theatrical arts. According to Guikin, the Cantonese opera has a long tradition of female performers portraying male and masculinized roles. As a result, costuming has historically played an important role in signifying the gender identity of the character, and these visual codes have been subsequently integrated into the Hong Kong action cinema (55-56). Guikin contends that in Hong Kong, the action film was, and arguably still is, conceived for a predominantly male audience and centered on male protagonists who became the principle heroic models for the genre (*ibid.* 59). While women were being (re)integrated into the masculinized realm of physical action in the mid-1980s, they also lacked a contemporaneous female model of heroic identity. Thus, Guikin argues that these action women "followed the only available model, the male hero, developing into a diverse array of more or less mirror-like versions of this masculine protagonist" (*ibid.* 57). Through costuming, female stars are aligned with masculinity and more closely associated with the performances of male action heroes defining and dominating the genre.

Not only do Yeoh's physical performances in films of the mid-1990s rival those of her male martial partners, her costuming also aligns her with the male heroic models predominating in the action film. She typically wears gender-neutral costumes—clothing that could be associated with either gender (i.e. there are no obvious markers of gender via colours or cuts of clothing). She is frequently clothed in floor length robes of a neutral colour palette (brown, beige, ivory, gray, black, white) which do not define or highlight the female body. Moreover, Yeoh is presented without make-up and her hair is typically tied back in either a pony tail or wrapped with a bandana. On the one hand, her costuming serves a practical function; they are what Kinsley Amis refers to as “clothes of action” as they are not primarily decorative or inactively feminine. Instead, her clothing provides her with a range of physical motion so that she can run, jump, punch, kick, twist, fall, and so forth (56). Her costuming reflects her role in the film; she is an active member of the narrative rather than a secondary/supportive character relegated to the periphery of the film's physical action (ibid. 57).

On the other hand, Yeoh's gender-neutral image serves another function in that it allows her characters access to the space of physical action which is considered male dominated and oriented. For instance, in *Wing Chun* Yeoh's character Wing Chun rejects her submissive position as a housewife. Wing Chun defies her husband by learning martial arts which (physically, emotionally, mentally) empowers her through her training. Guikin contends that after Chun divorces her husband, she renounces the display of her femininity and wears “colourless male clothes [which] render her invisible as a woman to the point that her fiancé mistakes her for a man” (59). The film presents Wing Chun in distinct contrast with Charmy (Catherine Hun Yan), the “Tofu Beauty,” who attracts

customers to Wing Chun's family restaurant. While Wing Chun is defined by a lack of femininity, Charmy is presented as being traditionally feminine through her form-fitting costumes which display her body (ibid. 60). Moreover, this masculine/feminine female character contrast is extended into the narrative of the film. Wing Chun is positioned as a knight-errant who rescues a kidnapped Charmy from the chief male bandit. As noted by Guikin, "the traditional fairy tale of a hero saving a princess becomes the story of a woman saving another woman in trouble" (59). Thus, the film presents the notion that Hong Kong action women are expected to engage in masculine performance, and match the physical and visual standards set by their male counterparts in the genre. If they remain visibly feminine, however, they run the risk of remaining on the periphery of the film's physical action which is regarded as being a male dominated and orientated space.

Late into the film, Wing Chun seeks guidance from her kung fu master who is portrayed by Pei Pei Cheng [Figure 4]. The film relies on Cheng's reputation as the "First Lady of Kung Fu" to create a generational connection between a martial arts legend of the past and a Hong Kong star with a bright future. Yet, Cheng's image in the film is notably different from her representation in the new-style *wuxia pian*. Throughout the 1960s, Cheng portrayed overtly feminine martial warriors; she was costumed in colourful robes, wore make-up, and was often presented with her long hair hanging down and framing her face. Cheng was also presented as the love interest of at least one suitor per film, and her image supported this aspect of her characterization. Conversely, in *Wing Chun*, Cheng's appearance is overtly masculine. In her scene with Yeoh, Cheng is seated cross-legged on the ground and costumed in a loose-fitting blue, green and grey robe which obscures the shape of her body. Not only does Cheng appear without make-up, but

she also has her hair shaved off and is wearing a Chinese hat. If not for the familiarity of her face, Cheng's character could pass as a man. In fact, her identity is initially withheld in the scene as she is shot from the back and side. The film then transitions from a close-up of Yeoh's face as she says the word "master" before cutting to a close-up of Cheng smiling at the camera. The film, thus, not only provides a generational link between Cheng and Yeoh but also revisions two generations of female heroism to meet the masculine standard defining the Hong Kong action cinema.

In the 1990s, Yeoh quickly gained power as a Pan-Asian star and became the female face of the Hong Kong action cinema. Although born in Malaysia, Yeoh is considered a definitively local star of the *gang-chan-pian* and her action performances are regarded as being emblematic of transnational Hong Kong identity because she matched (if not surpassed) the male standard in the genre. Uncertain as to how Hong Kong's impending amalgamation with China would affect the local film industry, Yeoh began looking for American-funded film projects that would facilitate her cross-over into Hollywood.

Yeoh's Transnational Appeal

In 1997, Michelle Yeoh was cast in her first English-language role portraying "Bond Girl" Wai Lin in *Tomorrow Never Dies* (Spottiswoode 1997). The character of the Bond Girl, as established in the first Bond film *Dr. No* (Young 1962), has historically been presented as erotic object of the white male gaze (i.e. James Bond).¹¹ Although entering Hollywood through the predetermined sexualized role of the Bond Girl, Yeoh maintains her masculinized image. In fact, Yeoh received critical praise for her unwillingness to be

portrayed as a sex symbol—specifically an Asian sex symbol (Lu, *China* 133). While the Bond Girl is typically presented as the erotic object of the gaze, Yeoh is never sexualized or fetishized in the film, and her body is never placed on display; instead she is costumed in loose fitting clothes which offer her practical mobility and provide her with a more gender-neutral image. Rejecting the advances of Bond, her character remains romantically unattached; Lin dedicates herself fully to her partnership with Bond and their collective mission. Perhaps more importantly, Yeoh is the first Bond Girl to be featured in a solo action sequence. According to Sheldon Lu, *Tomorrow Never Dies* deviates from the expected ratio of action/violence vs. sex/romance and in the process reaffirms Yeoh's status "as an *action* heroine above all, not as a sex symbol, in a traditionally rather heterosexual, male-centered, romantic, promiscuous genre of spy stories, namely the Bond genre" (*China* 134).¹² Lin is valued for her heroic performance and her characterization in the film offers a new image of Asian femininity which is based on physical abilities and achievements rather than (oriental) sexuality.

José Arroyo notes that "action/spectacle" filmmaking is the most popular (and critically derided) mode of filmmaking in Hollywood (1). According to Steve Neale, the male body cannot be placed on erotic display in the Hollywood action cinema. He writes,

We are offered the spectacle of male bodies, but bodies unmarked as objects of erotic display. There is no trace of an acknowledgement or recognition of those bodies as displayed solely for the gaze of the spectator [...] We see male bodies stylized and fragmented by close-ups but our look is not direct, it is heavily mediated by the looks of the characters involved. And those looks are marked not by desire, but rather by fear, or hatred, or aggression. (18)

Action is used to justify the display and subsequent gazing of the semi-nude male body in action without the question of eroticization arising. Richard Dyer notes that male (action) stars do not appear passive when they are presented (semi-)naked in photographs or on-screen; instead, they are shown performing actions or are associated, through images, with activity (*Only* 128-29). In a similar sense, for the action woman to be considered a competent hero in Hollywood, her body also cannot be placed on erotic display. This provision is of greater consequence to the envisaging of the Hong Kong action woman since Hollywood has a long history of eroticizing and fetishizing the Asian female body, presenting it as a sexual object for the white male hero. In order to produce the spectacle of the Asian female body unmarked as an object of erotic display, this requires that the Hong Kong action woman remain fully clothed in loose-fitting costumes which do not reveal her body. This results in a gender-neutral image for the Hong Kong action woman in Hollywood which does not attract attention away from her physical accomplishments in the film.

When a Hong Kong action woman appears in a Hollywood film, her characterization emphasizes her credibility as an action hero; the global appeal of her star image is dependent on her dynamic physical performance which validates her heroic status (Lu, *China* 124). Yeoh is the first Hong Kong action woman to break into Hollywood and her characterization in *Tomorrow Never Dies* set the performance standard for subsequent Hong Kong action women attempting to crossover. Her performance in the film appears so extraordinary because she outshines and outfights Bond in every scene they share. For instance, in one of the most memorable action sequences where Bond and Lin ride a motorcycle while handcuffed together, it is Lin

who performs the most dangerous stunts as she shifts her positioning on the bike while Bond remains stationary. On the whole, Lin is presented as a more competent and effective agent than title character James Bond. The character of Lin is arguably an extension of the star image Yeoh cultivated for herself in Hong Kong, as she is presented as the quintessential martial arts partner to James Bond.

According to Sheldon Lu, *Tomorrow Never Dies* reconfigures, for Western audiences, the traditionally libidinous relationship between British masculinity and Chinese femininity by presenting a cooperative, rather than parasitic, relationship between “the West” and “the East.” Released only months following Hong Kong’s handover to China (1 July 1997), the film attempts to “remap the place of Britain and China in the geopolitical imaginary” by presenting the imaginary and cooperative resolution to a mutual threat through the pairing of a male British agent and a female Chinese agent (Lu, *China* 134-36). While Lu stresses the Chinese identity of Lin and even refers to her as being “China personified” (ibid. 137), I would argue that Yeoh’s characterization in the film is firmly grounded in her identity as a *Hong Kong action woman* and is supported by the Western conceptualization of Hong Kong as a bridge, mediation, or intersection of “the East” and “the West.” As noted by Gary McDonogh and Cindy Wong, the global impression is that Hong Kong is

closer than other cities of China or the region to what the West has recognized as legitimate, scientific, and functional. Because of its colonial history and its capitalistic success story, Western (and other) governments have construed Hong Kong to be more enlightened and more honest than other Third World cities. (5-6)

Under British colonial rule, Hong Kong citizens were required to learn the English language as part of their grade school curriculum; the fact that most Hong Kong citizens (and especially the business class) are proficient in English strongly influences the global impression of the city. Yeoh is highly proficient in English and her language abilities played a role in facilitating her casting over a Mainland Chinese actor for the part in the film; this resulted in the positioning of a Hong Kong action woman to facilitate the bridging of “the East” and “the West” in a post-1997 context.

With her performance in *Tomorrow Never Dies*, Yeoh quickly gained star power in the West, a feat virtually unheard of for Pan-Asian female actors. While offering Western audiences a glimpse of the dynamic capabilities of Hong Kong action women, she offered a less sexualized or arguably desexualized image of the Asian female body in Hollywood. Her star persona in the West was shaped by her dynamic physical abilities and her embodiment of characteristics associated with Hong Kong identity. Furthermore, Yeoh is not presented as the Eastern/Asian contrast to the Western/white hero, James Bond; instead, Yeoh is positioned as a translator who facilitates communication between “the East” and “the West” in a post-1997 context. She is similarly characterized as a transnational mediator in her subsequent American action roles.

The Global Face of Hong Kong

In 2000, Michelle Yeoh starred in the Hong Kong/Chinese-American coproduction *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee 2000). According to Stephen Teo, the film is an example of “globalizing postmodernism” which he defines as “the process where narrative conventions of genre films are reconstructed to take account of a new global

entertainment economy” (“*Wuxia*” 199); this process is centered on the transcription of “what is culturally specific in order to diminish certain indigenous qualities (while highlighting others) to make them more presentable to a world-wide audience” (199). *Crouching Tiger*’s globalizing postmodernist paradigm is evinced by Lee’s translation of the new-style *wuxia pian* film for the global film market: Lee reconstructs culturally specific conventions of the marital swordplay film in order to improve the rhythm, clarity, and accessibility of the film for global audiences (ibid. 202).¹³ As a “cross-over” film, the commercial appeal of *Crouching Tiger* arguably resides in its alternative representation of Asian female identity. Hollywood has typically cast Asian actresses in superficial roles with their cinematic identities exclusively dependent on their sexual relationships with white male protagonists (i.e. as the “Dragon Lady” and “Lotus Blossom” stereotypes). Instead of focusing on “oriental sexuality,” *Crouching Tiger* presents three generations of skilled female fighters who literally fight to pursue what they desire. In terms of race, these images of Asian female identity are not subject to the colonizing gaze of white male patriarchy.

According to Huaiting Wu and Joseph Chan, director Ang Lee wanted to move away from the “macho” images of the Hong Kong action cinema and create “a story-driven action fantasy led by women” (209). Wu and Chan attribute the popularity of the film to Lee’s infusion of Western postfeminist sentiments into the characterization of his action women; the notion that women can appear traditionally feminine while still exerting physical power (209). While Yeoh shares the screen with established female action star Pei Pei Cheng and newcomer Ziyi Zhang, her physical performance in the film appears extraordinary as she is able to stand out from her action co-stars [Figure 5].

While Yeoh's performance rivals that of her co-stars, her physical abilities in the film are enhanced by the emotional depth of her character and the dramatic demands of the role. Yeoh portrays Shu Lien Yu, a security expert who is dedicated to upholding the legal and ethics codes of China. Yu is positioned as the moral center of the film and her characterization is strengthened through her mentoring of Jen (Ziyi Zhang), the teenage daughter of a wealthy aristocrat who is being forced to marry a man she does not love; Jen desires, instead, to be a martial warrior and looks up to Yu who has lived the life of a "free" and "single" swordswoman. After Jen steals the Green Destiny sword and flees the city, Yu locates Jen and tries to convince her to return the weapon. When Jen refuses, Yu and Jen engage in combat in a warehouse facility. During this sequence, Yu demonstrates her proficiency with a variety of traditional Chinese weapons and eventually defeats Jen but spares her life; showing mercy and patience, Yu asks Jen to return the sword she stole. Unwilling to accept defeat, the undisciplined Jen strikes Yu and her action reveals the depth of her immaturity and selfishness. Eventually, Jen's brashness results in the death of Yu's lover. Although grieving, Yu resists the temptation to avenge his death and, instead, offers the young Jen guidance. While *Crouching Tiger* explores female relationships enacted through martial arts, Yeoh's dramatic (vs. action) performance helps to elevate and celebrate her character as being the more mature and honourable woman.¹⁴

Of the three Asian action women starring *Crouching Tiger*, Yeoh has been consistently marketed at the face of the film and thus Hong Kong. Her star persona in Hollywood is presented as the intersection, mediation, or bridge linking "the East" with "the West." This is evident in the Region 1 DVD release of the film.¹⁵ According to Brian

Ruh, regional DVD releases encourage particular readings of the filmic text; he contends that the regional inclusion and/or exclusion of (actor, director, cinematographer) commentaries contributes to a particular regional understanding of the film (140). The Region 1 release of *Crouching Tiger* contains an exclusive interview with Michelle Yeoh but does not offer commentaries from actors Yun-Fat Chow, Pei Pei Cheng, and Ziyi Zhang. Yeoh is positioned as the sole translator of the film who discusses, explains, and interprets various topics in order to promote a better Western understanding of *Crouching Tiger*. While influencing the reading of the film, her interview also contributes to the reading of character and, by extension, star image. In addition to providing insightful comments regarding the production and storyline of the Chinese-language film, Yeoh clearly articulates her comments in English. Her proficiency in, and clear pronunciation of, English increases her popular appeal and further promotes her star image as a translator of Eastern culture for Western audiences.

Through her extensive promotion of *Crouching Tiger* via Western media outlets and the DVD extra-primary text, Yeoh began to develop a super-filmic presence and greatly increased her star currency in the West. She was actively sought out by Hollywood producers to star in their big-budget action films. Unsatisfied with her role choices, Yeoh returned to Hong Kong, started her own production company, Mythical Films, and produced two English-language action films in which she starred: *The Touch* (Pau 2002) and *Silver Hawk* (Ma 2005). Although Yeoh wanted to control her filmic image and compete with Hollywood domestically, her films were box-office failures and her production company folded shortly thereafter.

The lack of commercial success for these films can be attributed to three main factors. First, Yeoh's performance departs too much from her expected star image. For instance, in *Silver Hawk*, she plays a more glamorous and overtly feminine hero, Lulu Wong. While proficient in martial arts, Wong is featured on screen with a romantic interest rather than a male martial partner; although she participates in some spectacular action sequences, Yeoh's performance falls flat because it is not presented in tandem with a notable male action co-star. The film also suffers from a weak supporting cast which can be attributed, at least in part, to the migration of marquee film talent out of Hong Kong in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Second, Yeoh's physical performances are heavily mediated by CGI and wire-fu. For instance, *The Touch* contains an excessive amount of CGI which detracts attention away from the realism of her performance. In fact, the final fight sequence is shot in front of a "green screen" and the poor quality of the graphics results in an almost cartoon-like background against which Yeoh performs wire-fu choreography; this renders the sequence fantastic and wholly unrealistic. Since the 1990s, Yeoh's star image has been defined by the high impact and high risk aesthetic of corporeal authenticity; like Jackie Chan, she performed her own stunt work and earned the reputation as being a "real" action star.¹⁶ Thus, Yeoh's depiction in the film, which is heavily mediated by CGI and wirework, offers too much of a departure from her star image which is centered on the authenticity and realism of physical performance. Finally, both films lack the high production values and extensive promotion to domestically compete with Hollywood.

PART III: TRANSNATIONAL MOTHERS

Yeoh as Self-Sacrificing Asian Mother

Finding little success with her English-language Hong Kong action films, Yeoh returned to Hollywood. Since 2007, she has been prominently featured in three large-budgeted action films: *Sunshine* (Boyle 2007), *Babylon A.D.* (Kassovitz 2008), and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (Cohen 2008). In his discussion of Hollywood's globalized postmodernist action filmmaking, Teo notes that major kung fu personalities of the Hong Kong action cinema tend to "change their personalities, if not their action styles, to suit the global audience" ("Wuxia" 196)—notably Jackie Chan. Teo contends that Chan has shifted from being an "indigenous Chinese buffoon" in such kung fu comedies as *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (Yuen 1978) and *Drunken Master* (Yuen 1978) to a more "amorphous man-about-the-globe persona" in his later action-comedies *Mr. Nice Guy* (Hung 1997), *Rumble in the Bronx* (Tong 1995), and Bret Ratner's 1998 hit *Rush Hour* (ibid. 196-97). Chan's shift away from "his 'Chineseness' is in a concession to the forces of late transnationalism" (Teo, "Wuxia" 197).

Similarly, a shift is also notable in the transnational star image of Yeoh. In the late 2000s, she has starred in three films which are markedly different in terms of storyline, tone, and even action content. In *Sunshine*, Yeoh portrays Corazon, a biologist who participates in a mission to reignite the dying sun; she is in charge of a nursery which produces oxygen for the ship. Constantly referring to the plants as her "babies," Yeoh collapses into the fetal position while holding her womb when she discovers that her garden is on fire. Yeoh is similarly associated with nature and maternal femininity in *Babylon A.D.* She plays a nun, Sister Rebeka, who adopts and raises an orphan child as

her own. When her virgin daughter becomes pregnant, Rebeka must protect her from scientists and religious fanatics hoping to claim the child for their organization. Finally, in *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*, Yeoh is cast as Juan Zi, a pregnant witch who curses Emperor Han (Jet Li) in order to stop his destructive reign in China. Zi must protect her daughter while safeguarding the healing waters of Shangri-la which would bestow eternal life upon the Emperor. Yeoh's characters are associated with maternal femininity and function as the gatekeepers of the natural world working to preserve female biological systems. In addition to being associated with maternal femininity, Yeoh's character, in each film, sacrifices her life for her children and is killed from a wound to her stomach/womb; she is impaled by a scalpel in *Sunshine*, stabbed with a sword in *The Mummy*, and shot in *Babylon A.D.* Her death works to symbolize as well as solidify her characterization as a protective and self-sacrificing Asian mother. In her American films of the late 2000s, Yeoh is associated with maternal femininity rather than "oriental sexuality," and her image offers an alternative to the historical representation of Asian femininity in Hollywood as being a sexual object/romantic love interest for the white male hero.

With her performances in the blockbusters *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *Crouching Tiger*, Yeoh proved to be an extremely popular and bankable action star for a global film economy. In order to tap into her international fan base, Hollywood producers have been careful not to deviate too far from the transnational star persona which Yeoh established through her portrayal of gender-neutral and physically competent *Hong Kong* heroes. Yeoh has been distanced from the hypersexual imaging conventions typically associated with the Asian femininity in Hollywood which would render her body an erotic object,

undermine her heroic proficiency in the film, and potentially alienate her fan base. Through the trope of motherhood, each film justifies Yeoh's positioning within the action narrative and removes her body, which is marked by maternal identity, from the (white) erotic gaze typically associated with Asian femininity. While presented as a maternal hero, Yeoh does not exude the same muscular masculinity Tasker refers to in her discussion of white action women of the early 1990s (*Working* 69-70).¹⁷ Instead, Yeoh's characterization is a modification of the star persona she developed in Hong Kong during the 1990s and popularized in the early 2000s with her roles in Hollywood action films. She continues to portray gender-neutral heroes who fight to safeguard their children rather than martial arts partners.

Although each of these Hollywood films focus on the heroic exploits of white protagonists, Yeoh is characterized as a bridge, mediator, and/or translator in support of a peaceful coalition between China and the United States in a post-1997 context. Hollywood has historically positioned white action heroes as the central narrative focus and relegated non-white characters to the periphery. Manthia Diawara considers the racial hierarchy of Hollywood in relation to the relegation of black characters to the narrative periphery of mainstream American films. Diawara contends that,

spatial narration in classical cinema makes sense through a hierarchal disposition of objects on the screen. Thus space is related to power and powerlessness, in so far as those who occupy the center of the screen are usually more powerful than those situated in the background or completely absent from the screen. (11)

Diawara's arguments regarding black and white power relations can also be applied to the discussion of Asian/Asian American representation in Hollywood. Similar to black

characters, Asians also predominantly come second to white characters that occupy the center of the narrative. Yeoh's characterization in *Sunshine*, however, appears to circumvent this racial hierarchy. This argument is supported through a consideration of the casting and script-writing process for the film. Yeoh was the first actor approached by director Danny Boyle to star in the film. In an interview with *Movies Online*, Boyle recalls that he handed over the script to Yeoh and offered her the opportunity to play any of the eight parts in the film. After Yeoh selected the character Corazon, Boyle had the script rewritten in order to showcase her more prominently; the character Corazon was not initially intended for an Asian actor and the role was quite minor in the film (Roberts ¶31). Boyle also admits that he did not intend to have such a strong Asian presence in the film. Initially the script only included two Asian characters—Kaneda (Hiroyuki Sanada), and Trey (Benedict Wong)—both of which die early in the film. When Yeoh signed on to the project, Boyle reconceptualised the mission to be an “American-Asian” endeavour (ibid. ¶31-32) and characterized Corazon as a bridge or mediator facilitating communication between the Asian and (white) American crew members. Thus, Yeoh's representation in *Sunshine* builds upon her star persona and reflects the degree of her transnational star power in Hollywood.

Babylon A.D. also presents a racial hierarchy situated within a family unit [Figure 6]. Although the film depicts the transnational migration of a transracial family (Asian mother, white daughter), a familial relationship rarely depicted in mainstream American film, it uses Christian imagery to reinforce the notion of white centrism. Characterized as a Virgin Mary, Rebeka's (Yeoh's) white adoptive daughter (Mélanie Thierry) is given religious, moral, and narrative significance in the film. *Babylon A.D.* emphasizes

Rebeka's status as a nun and servant of the church, and takes this servant status one step further by presenting Rebeka, at times, as more of a nursemaid rather than mother to her adoptive child from a different station of life. The film not only presents an alternative image of Asian femininity but through the film's logic, *Babylon A.D.* maintains the typical hierarchy of power and space in Hollywood; Rebeka appears to be racially subordinated to her white daughter, and this power relation is naturalized through the film's employment of highly recognizable Christian imagery. Moreover, Rebeka sacrifices her life to ensure her daughter a safe passage to the United States and the film extends the concept of the American Dream to non-Americans.

In her notable study *Fear of the Dark* (1996), Lola Young argues that Hollywood consciously uses race to create a dichotomy between white and non-white characters; while white characters are depicted as good and normal, non-white characters are often presented as evil and alien "others" (39). However, Hollywood also appears to favour non-white characters that have assimilated into white mainstream society while vilifying non-white characters who threaten the status quo. Gina Marchetti contends that Hollywood has historically used costuming, in addition to make-up, lighting, gestures, and framing, to aid in their portrayal of evil and shadowy characters (*Romance* 62-63). In *The Mummy*, racial identity is linked to costuming and language. For instance, Emperor Han (Jet Li) is a villainous ruler who aspires to return China to its previous glory. Han's characterization is enhanced by costuming and language which reflect the Emperor's dark and single-minded intent: Han wears rigid body armour and only understands one Chinese dialect which he uses to command his army. Conversely, Yeoh is costumed in flowing colourful gowns and speaks multiple languages throughout the film. She speaks

Sanskrit in order to unlock the ancient secrets of China (i.e. China's past), Chinese when interacting with Emperor Han (i.e. China's present), and English when working in concert with the white heroes of the film (i.e. China's Americanized future, according to the logic of the film). Of great significance is the fact that Yeoh speaks English as she sacrifices her immortality to raise the army of the dead; speaking directly to Western (and English-speaking) audiences, she reveals her moral intent and is positioned as the glue holding together the coalition of the Chinese army and American heroes.

In all three films, Yeoh portrays characters that make the political choice to side with the American forces in order to guarantee a Western-inspired future for her children. As noted by Gina Marchetti, "Hollywood films are discourses [...and] their meaning springs from the institutions (both within the film industry and beyond it) and the historical, cultural, and social circumstances surrounding their production" (*Romance* 7). By characterizing Yeoh as a mother responding to the impulse to safeguard her children, these films offer a subtle Hollywood/American commentary as to how post-1997 Hong Kong could/should respond to China's threat of assimilation; like Yeoh's characters, Hong Kong citizens should maintain their local identity while embracing Western/American ideology. Additionally, these films also serve a commercial purpose and draw attention to Hollywood's globalizing postmodernist mandate. Hollywood is primarily interested in exploiting the Hong Kong action phenomenon by importing and exploiting its stars in order to generate international box-office revenue.

Cheng as Transnational Maternal Master

Cheng and Yeoh represent two generations of Hong Kong action stars who have developed Pan-Pacific film careers in the 2000s. Interest in the Hong Kong action woman was initially sparked by Yeoh and her dynamic performance in *Tomorrow Never Dies*. In light of the film's success, Hollywood producers hoped to capitalize on Yeoh's popular appeal and cast her in subsequent action films. While her star persona was initially centered on physical authenticity, Yeoh began to portray more dramatic roles in Hollywood blockbusters of the late 2000s which emphasize maternal identity and language proficiency over martial arts performance. While Yeoh established a new model for Hong Kong female identity in Hollywood—the self-sacrificing Asian mother—Cheng appears to be following suit and is characterized in much the same way in *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun Li* (Bartkowiak 2009).¹⁸ Collectively the representations of Cheng and Yeoh highlight Hollywood/American conceptualizations of Hong Kong female identity as being a bridge between “the East” and “the West.” Moreover, by casting these female stars in their blockbusters, Hollywood producers hope that the popular appeal of the Hong Kong action woman will help promote greater box-office for their films in the Pan-Asian film market.

Like Yeoh, Cheng has enjoyed significant international exposure with her starring role in *Crouching Tiger*. In the film, Cheng portrays Jade Fox, who is the governess and secret martial arts master (i.e. maternal master) of Jen (Ziyi Zhang).¹⁹ Although Fox is typically read as the film's villain, I would argue that Fox is a sympathetic character whose tragic nature is the result of her limited social agency. First, Fox is marginalized by the misogyny of *wu dang* martial arts school; the master of the school refused to train

women and instead employed them as servants and/or concubines. During her confrontation with Li Mu Bai (Yun-Fat Chow), the prized pupil of the sexist *wu dang* master, Fox states, “Your master underestimated women! I was good enough to sleep with, but not to teach. What better punishment than to die by a woman’s hand!” (Lee 2000). Fox’s marginalization is further enhanced by the casting of Cheng for the role, an action star that similarly experienced gender discrimination in Hong Kong when the industry shifted from *wuxia* to kung fu filmmaking in the 1970s. Second, Fox’s opportunities for empowerment are further reduced by her social class. Uneducated and illiterate, Fox cannot unlock the secrets of the *wu dang* manual and her understanding is limited to the knowledge she can ascertain from the manual’s illustrations. She is also betrayed by her aristocratic pupil Jen who can not only read the manual but purposely hides its secrets from her.²⁰ In the *wuxia* tradition, the Chinese hero is governed by loyalty to his/her family; it is expected that the martial hero will remain loyal to his/her master who is often functions as a surrogate parent (Bordwell 42). Moreover, martial arts training is centered on the Confucian concept of fidelity; the master is the father/mother while the pupil is the obedient child (ibid. 52). Characterized as both mother *and* master, Fox is doubly betrayed by Jen and this ultimately results in her death in the film.

Lee’s casting of Cheng in *Crouching Tiger* helps to create a generic connection between new-style *wuxia pian* and his adaption²¹ of the genre in 2000. Cheng’s iconic screen identity and memorable martial heroines from the 1960s are a primary source of inspiration for Lee’s female-focused narrative. For instance, Hunt notes that *Crouching Tiger* is similar to the film *Dragon Swamp* (Lo 1969) which features Cheng as a young martial heroine who is deadly with her sword. While Hunt contends that Cheng’s

youthful heroines like Golden Swallow anticipate the figure of Jen in *Crouching Tiger* (Kung 81),²² I believe that Cheng's appearance in the film and mentoring of Jen creates a transtextual and transgenerational connection between the "Queen of Swordplay" and her cinematic protégé. This results in the creation of transnational star images for Cheng and Zhang which emphasize age and transgenerational connection/conflict while foregrounding physical performance. Thus, by casting Cheng as Fox, Lee self-consciously roots his film in new-style *wuxia pian* and creates a diegetic connection between his martial heroines Cheng and Zhang.

In 2009, Cheng was featured in the Hollywood action film *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun Li*. Like Yeoh, Cheng's star image has been adjusted in her American characterization in the late 2000s. *Street Fighter* chronicles the training of Chun Li (Kristin Kreuk) and her adventures as a noble street fighter. In the film, Cheng is cast in a dramatic role and is excluded from the space of physical action; she portrays Zhilan, a merchant, who offers Li guidance early in the film. The film's action director, Dion Lam, had previously worked with Cheng on *A Man Called Hero* (2000) and even composed for her a dynamic action sequence which showcased her abilities and aided in her characterization as a maternal master.²³ While aware of Cheng's star persona and fighting abilities, Lam was required to stick to the script which foregrounds paternal rather than maternal identification. As Tasker has argued, paternal identification is a central aspect of the characterization of white action women in Hollywood: since mother figures are frequently absent, the white female hero over-identifies with her father and, most often, elects to follow her father's line of work (*Working* 81). *Street Fighter* explores Li's relationship with her father Xiang (Edmund Chen) and martial arts master Gen (Robin

Shou), and focuses on paternal rather than maternal mentorship for the female action hero.

As a result, Cheng does not take up her trademark role as maternal master in the film and is instead cast as a Hong Kong merchant who translates Li's mysterious scroll. Written in Ancient Chinese, the parchment can only be translated and interpreted by Zhilan who sets Li off on her mission. Similar to Yeoh's characterization in *The Mummy* film, Cheng's representation in *Street Fighter* is strongly dependent on the Hollywood/American conceptualization of Hong Kong identity as being a bridge, mediator, and/or translator between "the East" and "the West." With an emphasis on her proficiency with language (rather than martial arts), Cheng decodes a scroll from China's past (ancient Chinese) and mediates the message to the present (Cantonese) for its use in the future by Chun Li (English). Moreover, Cheng's presence in the film arguably creates a symbolic and transnational link between the performance of Asian Canadian actor Kristin Kreuk and the heroic exploits of Hong Kong's martial women. Although her role in the film is minor, Cheng provides a transnational and transgenerational connection between Hollywood and Hong Kong action women, and subsequently naturalizes the Pan-Asian adventures and heroic exploits of an Asian Canadian actor.

CHAPTER 3

INTERMEDIAL STARS

HONG KONG ACTION WOMEN IN POST-1997 CINEMA

In the wake of Hong Kong's amalgamation with China (1 July 1997), the Hong Kong film industry entered into a rapid state of decline. Hong Kong filmmakers lacked a uniform response to the industry crisis and struggled to produce commercially viable action films appealing to the domestic and international film markets. Some Hong Kong filmmakers looked to other cinema systems and/or cultural industries for inspiration. For instance, director Andrew Lau adopted a more "international" or Hollywood aesthetic of action filmmaking by employing CGI, improving produce values, and even including English-language dialogue in his films. Lau was also attentive to the rising popularity of male "Cantopop stars" (i.e. Cantonese pop singers) in Hong Kong who were establishing large local fan bases throughout the 1990s. Lau cast male singers at the center of his action narratives and relied on their star power to attract domestic audiences to the theater. Through his action films, Lau highlights the importance of intermedial stars to the success of the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema.

While Lau did not incorporate female singers to the same degree into his post-1997 action films, he did integrate a female star from another cultural industry of Hong Kong who had immense cross-over appeal; Lau cast popular porn star, Qi Shu, in his action films of the late 1990s, and effectively refashioned her star persona to work in the mainstream film industry. Although Shu initially portrayed supportive roles in Lau's films, her local star power quickly increased, and by 2000, she was actively sought out by other directors to star in their action films. In the new millennium, Shu is characterized as

a Hong Kong action woman and is presented through a pre-existing female heroic model prominent during the golden age of Hong Kong cinema (1985-1994); featured in a string of films which I term “girls with guns revival,” Shu is presented as a gunplay star of the new millennium and her revamped star image draws attention to the importance of reproducing, in a post-1997 context, the local identity associated with the cinema’s colonial past. Although Shu is not as well known as Michelle Yeoh in the West, she is a popular star of the post-1997 cinema and represents a new generation of action women in Hong Kong.

PART I: HONG KONG INDUSTRY CRISIS

From Decline to Crisis

In the late 1990s, Hong Kong cinema entered into a state of crisis. The decline of the film industry can be attributed to the convergence of four factors. First, Hong Kong filmmakers were plagued by uncertainties as to how the “one country, two systems” amalgamation with China would affect Hong Kong’s cinema. Fearing the demise of the industry, producers and creative talent accelerated their output of films, often working on multiple and concurrent projects that resulted in the early 1990s being an era of hyperproduction. This “gold rush mentality” took its toll on the industry and resulted in the production of a poorer quality of films (Curtin 70-71). As the amalgamation deadline drew closer, prominent filmmakers left Hong Kong to work in Hollywood. The mid-1990s saw a rapid reduction in film production and even the liquidation of film companies (Pang 63).

A second factor contributing to the decline of Hong Kong cinema was the restructuring of the Pan-Asian film market in the late 1990s and the rise of “peripheral” cinemas offering market competition. Because the Hong Kong film industry is disproportionately large for its domestic market and cannot be supported by local audiences, Hong Kong has historically relied on Pan-Asian box-office revenue (Pang 62).¹ In the early 1980s, Hong Kong filmmakers benefited from Taiwan’s strict import laws which limited the screening of foreign films; during Hong Kong’s golden age, the Hong Kong industry generated up to 30% of their film revenue in Taiwan. The relaxation of import laws in 1986 coupled with the growing popularity of Hollywood blockbusters² resulted in Taiwan’s gradual abandonment of Hong Kong products for Hollywood films³ (Leung 71-75). By the late 1990s, Hollywood films captured approximately 95% of Taiwan’s box-office revenues while Chinese-language films earned only 2.5 % (Curtin 86). Moreover, the Asian financial crisis of 1997 weakened other East and Southeast Asian economies—especially Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand—to such a degree that they were (temporarily) unable to purchase Hong Kong films. While the Hong Kong industry waned, countries like Thailand and South Korea⁴ began to produce their own domestic films inspired by the Hong Kong action aesthetic in order to satisfy the tastes of their own domestic audiences (Pang 63); by the early 2000s, these “peripheral” cinemas achieved “unprecedented visibility, circulated through mainstream distribution, the festival/art-house circuit, as well as cultification on DVD, often championed by cinephiles like Quentin Tarantino” (Hunt, “Introduction” 2). Thus, as the East and Southeast Asian film markets recovered, Hong Kong filmmakers faced regional competition for box-office revenue.

Third, the rise of film piracy in Hong Kong in the 1990s burdened the local industry as it minimized box-office profits and eroded much of the creative climate in Hong Kong. According to Michael Curtin, blockbusters and smaller independent films were less affected than the B-grade movies Hong Kong typically produces. Through strategic distribution, blockbusters (i.e. Hollywood) subverted the system by beating pirates at their own game; by simultaneously releasing a film in theaters while stocking video shelves with superior quality copies at a competitive price, blockbusters made a reasonable return or even turned a healthy profit (265). Video pirates also paid less attention to smaller independent films because they targeted a small/limited/niche market and sold slowly on the black market. Thus, B-grade movies were the primary target of pirates as audiences were (and still are) more willing to purchase a cheaper version of the film rather than pay full price at the theater or for an authorized copy (ibid. 265). Curtin contends that the piracy of B-movies stole away much needed film revenue and undermined the creative climate in Hong Kong; piracy helped to shape the perception that Hong Kong films are somehow less worthy of legal screening or purchase (than Hollywood), contributed to the stagnation of the film industry's labour force, and deterred creative talent from migrating to Hong Kong cinema for work. Curtin argues that Hong Kong films in the current system will continue to suffer until regulations are changed (ibid. 265).

Finally, the Hong Kong film industry was strongly impacted by a shift in local film tastes in the 1990s. During the industry's golden age of filmmaking (1985-1994), domestic audiences preferred Hong Kong cinema over Hollywood's generic products.⁵ Unlike European bureaucrats who regulated the number of Hollywood films that could be

imported into European countries, the government of Hong Kong did not ban or limit the screening of Hollywood productions; instead, Hollywood films were limited only via screen quotas in Hong Kong. While a Hong Kong film would be released to twenty or thirty houses, a foreign film was screened in fewer than ten “mini-theaters.” In the early 1990s, the number of venues screening foreign films increased and as a result, domestic audiences began to see more Hollywood films. By the mid-1990s, films like *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg 1993), *Speed* (de Bont 1994), and *Titanic* (Cameron 1997) were the top-grossing films in Hong Kong and outperformed local cinema products at the box-office (Bordwell 34-35).

As David Bordwell has noted, the success of the screen quota system was dependent on Hong Kong’s production of a competitive product. During its golden age, Hong Kong rivalled Hollywood in terms of the quantity of films produced but more importantly maintained a competitive degree of quality in light of the fact that Hong Kong films were always cheaply made and quickly produced (Bordwell 35). In the 1990s, changes in local film consumption reflected not only a greater interest in Hollywood blockbusters, but also an increasing gap between the quality of films in Hong Kong and Hollywood. This line of argument is supported by the research conducted in 2001 by TELA (Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority) which explored preferences of filmgoers in Hong Kong. According to the study, 55.3% of Hong Kong filmgoers preferred imported films while only 17.5% favoured local films and 19.1% enjoyed both (13). What respondents appreciated most about the local cinema was its use of Cantonese dialect (73.2%), local storylines (58.6%), and well-known local actors (52.6%). On the other hand, few respondents felt that the local cinema produced films with meaningful

storylines (10.5%) and diversified themes (18.8%), or had high enough production values (16.1%). In fact, TELA reported that the major concern of Hong Kong filmgoers relates to the *quality* of local film products (45). Respondents felt that local filmmakers, and the cinematic techniques they have employed, were not up to par with imports.⁶ More importantly, respondents believed that foreign directors had better facilities and greater access to updated technology (ibid. 34). They seem to overwhelmingly prefer imported films that feature more rigorous production values (73.9%), diversified themes (59.9%), and more meaningful stories (56.1%; ibid. 34). Responding to the shifting taste of filmgoers, Hong Kong filmmakers began to adjust the stylization of their action films in order to appeal to the local film market.⁷

Internationalization of the Industry

Responding to the changing film tastes of domestic and Pan-Asian audiences, Hong Kong filmmakers like Lau adopted a more Hollywood or “international” style of filmmaking in the late 1990s. While his post-1997 action films were designed to attract local audiences back to the theater, Lau has been heavily criticized for relying too strongly on CGI, which is considered at odds with the lower-budgeted films of the *gang-chan-pian*—films produced during Hong Kong’s golden age of filmmaking (1985–1994) and characterized by their fast paced editing, use of Cantonese slang, and lack of Confucian moralizing (Bordwell 32). In his review of *Storm Riders*, Shelly Kraicer considers the film as a prelude to the imminent collapse of Hong Kong’s filmmaking industry. He argues that the film is devoid of “traditional” *gang-chan-pian* characteristics such as “acrobatics arts,” “proactive roles for actresses,” and a “dizzying sense of playful

velocity” (¶5). He considers *Storm Riders* a throwback to the colonial era with a male-centered world obsessed with virility and paternity. This obsession, he contends, reflects the anxieties of a post-1997 cinema searching for its own paternal identity (ibid. ¶7). Moreover, Kraicer fears that Hong Kong cinema is “Hollywoodizing” its values in order to adapt to a “relentlessly globalizing international area without collapsing” (ibid. ¶6). Although *Storm Riders* earned record-breaking box-office receipts which helped to keep the post-1997 cinema afloat, Lau is considered by some to be a director who is willing to exchange the local identity of Hong Kong filmmaking for monetary success.

I would argue, however, that the predominance of male-centered narratives, as well as the relegation of female characters to the periphery of action narratives, is not actually related to the post-1997 shift. For instance, as Jinhua Dai has noted, women were often relegated to the periphery of *gang-chan-pian* action narratives. Dai contends that narrative emphasis was placed predominantly on male action heroes who were “of the only gender” that resolved issues of “social identity and individual crises” related to Hong Kong’s reunification with China (Dai 88). While gunplay films of the 1980s focused on the bonds of brotherhood (*yi*) between triad members (Bordwell 99; Teo, *Hong* 105), kung fu revival films of the 1990s explored the development of Hong Kong masculinity through the performance martial arts (ibid. 88). Although this golden age featured female stars like Michelle Yeoh and Pei Pei Cheng, they often performed alongside male action stars. Female-centered narratives appeared in lower-budget action films and earned smaller box-office returns. Thus the foregrounding of male action stars is not the result of the post-1997 shift but rather is the product of the “(re-

)masculinisation” of Hong Kong action filmmaking which began in the 1970s with the rise of the male dominated and oriented kung fu genre.

Kraicer argues that the result of Hong Kong cinema’s global aspiration is the loss of its local identity; in order to attract local audiences, Hong Kong filmmakers have exchanged the trademark aesthetic of the *gang-chan-pian* for a more ‘international’ or Hollywood style of filmmaking (¶14). What seems to be missing from this discussion, which I mentioned earlier, is that the shift in local filmmaking is in service to a shift in local film taste. Respondents to the TELA survey, for instance, reflect this change in domestic film taste through their preference of higher quality imported (e.g. Hollywood) films (45). In order to compete against Hollywood in the domestic market, Lau extensively employed high-quality CGI throughout *Storm Riders* and even foregrounds its use in the end-credit reel of the film. The montage contains the unmediated images of actors performing in front of a green screen and then cuts to the same shot with the CGI included. This results in a remarkable before-and-after comparison of images which highlights the technical mastery behind the film. Similar to the Jackie Chan credit reel which helped establish the actor’s corporeal authenticity by featuring his failed attempts at stunts, the end credit reel of *Storm Riders* highlights the ingenuity and technical advancements in local CGI production of a quality comparable to Hollywood. The resulting record-breaking box-office receipts for the film reflect the importance of production values to Hong Kong filmgoers.

Rise of Male Cantopop Stars

In addition to incorporating Hollywood action aesthetics into his post-1997 films, Lau also featured male Cantopop stars in his action narratives. According to David Bordwell, a Hong Kong producer typically builds his/her film around a star with a pre-established fan base. Hong Kong cinema is part of a multimedia entertainment complex known as the *ge-ying-shi* (music—film—tv), an intermedial and Cantonese-language star system which promotes multi-faceted stars (36). Bordwell notes that in Hollywood, the star comes second to his/her film which is considered the primary commercial product; the sole purpose of the Hollywood star is to promote the consumption of his/her vehicles rather than marketing his/her own image as a commercial brand (ibid. 36).⁸ In contrast, the star in Hong Kong is the principle commercial product and uses his/her celebrity to sell his/her vehicles such as movies, CDs, and concerts through public appearances and stories in fan magazines (ibid. 36). By shaping their action films around popular Cantopop stars in the late 1990s, Hong Kong filmmakers attempted to rejuvenate the declining local cinema.

In order to maximize profits during the industry crisis, directors began tailoring their film products to appeal to the most avid local filmgoers who were, according to TELA, 12-29 years old (TELA 11).⁹ According to TELA, these included filmgoers between the ages of 20 and 29 (averaging 10.4 visits per year) followed by those aged 12 to 19 years (averaging 7.5 visits); Hong Kong residents over the age of 30 were infrequent filmgoers and only attended the cinema 3.9 times or less (ibid. 11). While TELA's study took place in 2001, Hong Kong filmmakers were already attentive to the development of youth culture in Hong Kong and the increasing popularity of Cantopop.

As previously mentioned, Hong Kong popular culture in the early 1990s was dominated by four male singing stars—Andy Lau, Jackie Cheung, Leon Lai, and Aaron Kwok—whom Logan collectively refers to as “The Golden Four Kings” (179). Logan writes,

The influence of this quartet is far more pervasive than that of Jackie Chan, Jet Li, or Donnie Yen. [The Golden Four Kings] are visible every day, everywhere, on billboards, on TV, all over CD stores and on a vast range of memorabilia. [...] Perhaps, surprisingly, each of these singing superstars has forged a parallel acting career and made his fair share of high octane action movies. (179)

In the late 1990s, the popular cultural influence of Cantopop was further intensified by programming changes at MTV Asia. Originally, the station predominantly featured international (i.e. Western) artists but struggled to attract regional audiences. In 1997, the station adjusted its programming quota to feature 75% local content. Promoting local/regional artists over international singers, MTV Asia experienced a 400% increase in viewership in just one year (Curtin 217). Aspiring to duplicate the box-office performance of “The Golden Four Kings” in the post-1997 cinema, Hong Kong filmmakers began to feature a new generation of male Cantopop stars with pre-existing fan bases.

Male Cantopop stars have played a central role in sustaining the local industry in the years that bookend Hong Kong’s reunification with China. This is most evident in the films of Andrew Lau which include the *Young and Dangerous* franchise (1996–2000) and his comic-book inspired action films, *Storm Riders* (Lau 1998) and *A Man Called Hero* (Lau 1999). These films all feature a male-centered action narrative and star at least two of the following Cantopop singers: Ekin Cheng, Aaron Kwok, Michael Tse,¹⁰ Jordan

Chan, Jason Chu, and Nicholas Tse. In doing so, these films explore the development of local masculinity in the wake of Hong Kong's reunification with China. For instance, *Young and Dangerous: Prequel* (1998) is set in 1989 and chronicles the admission of protagonist Ho Nam Chan (Nicholas Tse) and his friends into their local triad branch.¹¹ Andrew Lau emphasizes the importance of developing and maintaining the local identity of Hong Kong as dictated by the "one country-two systems" policy structuring the re-amalgamation of Hong Kong and China. This sentiment is most pronounced in the film's climax which features a machete fight between rival triad branches intercut with stock footage from the massacre at Tiananmen Square. Initially, the adolescent battle for territory appears to be minimized by the events simultaneously unfolding at Tiananmen. Presented as a microcosm for Hong Kong society, hospital workers in the next scene are depicted in a state of shock as they watch the events unfold on their television screen; the machete fight appears to be a relatively unimportant event when depicted alongside images of China's oppressiveness. However, the battle becomes a pivotal moment in the life of Chan and the development of his local identity as the scene in the hospital develops. Upon entering the hospital, Chan is informed that his mother died while he was engaged in the machete fight. When Chan's step-father scolds him about his selfish lifestyle in the midst of such trying times, Chan screams out that he does not care about the event taking place at Tiananmen. Following in the footsteps of his biological father who was also in a triad, Chan leaves the hospital to rejoin his gang in order to fight for his territory and create his own destiny. Chan's choice can be read as a metaphor for Hong Kong's potential to maintain its local sense of identity even in the midst of the city's reunification with China. The film positions its young male Cantopop star as the

locus of identity and presents his embracing of his paternal lineage as a central component of his transition from adolescence to manhood.¹² Moreover, the film draws attention to the centrality and importance of intermedial stars to the post-1997 Hong Kong action cinema.

PART II: CASE STUDY – QI SHU

Rising Star of Post-1997

In addition to Cantopop stars, Lau also cast a popular female star from another entertainment industry in Hong Kong. Taiwanese actress Qi Shu was originally a porn star who was known for her nude photographs in such adult magazines as *Penthouse Hong Kong* and erotic performances in softcore films like Man-Kei Chin's 1996 erotic classic *Sex & Zen II* [Figure 7]. The first Chinese porn star to transition into mainstream cinema, Shu won critical recognition at the 1997 *Hong Kong Film Awards* ("Best New Performer" and "Best Supporting Actress") for her portrayal of a porn star in the drama *Viva Erotica* (Yee 1996). Recognizing her star quality, Lau cast Shu in *Young and Dangerous 5*, *Young and Dangerous Prequel*, *Storm Riders*, *A Man Called Hero*, and *Young and Dangerous 6*. In the late 1990s, Shu also procured roles in the action films *Another Melt Down* (Lam 1998) and *Extreme Crisis* (Luo 1998). Taken together, these films reflect a significant change in her star image; during the first phase of her mainstream career, Shu is distanced from her past as a porn star through her consistent characterization as a Chinese victim in need of rescue.

Cast in secondary/supportive roles, Shu frequently portrayed young and naïve characters that were abused by the male antagonists in her films; relegated to the

periphery of the action narrative, Shu's characters lacked the physical agency, as well as abilities, to defend themselves from ill-treatment.¹³ Featured in dramatic and *not* action-oriented roles, Shu was frequently presented as the object of struggle between rival bosses (*Young and Dangerous 5*) or friends (*Young and Dangerous Prequel*).¹⁴ Shu also plays the love interest of a male Cantopop star in all of her action films of the 1990s. Presented as arm candy, Shu's character is romantically linked to the Cantopop star and this renders him the envy of both his friends and enemies. Her role is to support her lover from the periphery of the film's physical action which is presented as the domain of men. She plays a damsel in distress that inspires the hero to save her. A telling example occurs in *Another Meltdown* (Lam 1998), a film set in the fictional Eastern European country of Lavernia in the early 1990s. Shu play Pun Chan, a Mainlander who relocates to Lavernia to build a new life following the massacre at Tiananmen. Her death in the film compels her boyfriend (Vincent Zhao) to action—he shoots down a helicopter with a hand gun and engages in a spectacular fight sequence with his Japanese rival. Thus, Shu's function in each film is to highlight the male protagonist through her ill-treatment and inspire him to perform action.

In *Another Meltdown*, however, the victimization of Chan is not entirely in service to the character development of her boyfriend; instead, she is presented as a Chinese victim who is marginalized by the politics of China and the racism of (Eastern) Europe. Chan is featured in an additional scene which does not advance the action narrative but instead foregrounds her characterization as a victim in the film. After Japanese terrorists bomb a small town, Chan is targeted by an angry Soviet mob; she is pulled from her car and beaten. Although she repeatedly exclaims that she is Chinese and

not Japanese, the beating continues. Upon escaping the clutch of the angry mob, she hides in a small room and her beaten face can be seen from a crack in the door. As a sidebar to the film's primary action narrative, this sequence does not involve the Hong Kong action hero nor does it impact his actions in the film as Chan does not relay her traumatic experience to her boyfriend. Through the victimization of Chan, the sequence offers an emotional and parallel connection between the experiences of the Chinese diaspora following the Chinese Revolution and the Hong Kong diaspora in a post-1997 context. While Shu's character draws attention to the profound shift in her star persona which at one point was linked with the porn industry, it also offers a powerful representation of Hong Kong identity in a post-1997 context.

Although Shu did not portray primary or action-oriented characters in the late 1990s, she was privileged in promotional materials and marketed as a Hong Kong action woman [Figure 8]. For instance, *Another Meltdown* is centered on the partnership between action stars Andrew Lin and Ken Wong. In the film, Shu plays a supportive role and does not participate in the film's physical action. And yet, she is prominently featured alongside Lin in the cover art for the TriStar Home Entertainment DVD release of the film. Shouldering a gun strap with attached grenades, Shu is (mis)presented as being an action woman in the film. She is similarly marketed as an action woman in the cover art for her other action films of the late 1990s. While these promotional materials do not reflect the nature of Shu's performances in the films, they draw attention to the popularity of Shu in the late 1990s (i.e. she is a box-office draw) and anticipate a further shift in her star image.

The Threat to Cantonese Language Cinema

In Hong Kong, films were originally produced in Cantonese (or Mandarin) dialect and subsequently dubbed into other dialects in post-production in order to make them easily exportable to the Pan-Asian film market. While action films of the *gang-chan-pian* often starred 'foreigners' and/or featured international relationships between characters from different countries, actors were not required to learn or even speak Cantonese since their voices were dubbed in post-production; emphasis, instead, was placed on the action aesthetics of the film. However, in the post-1997 cinema, there has been a shift away from dubbing and action films are more frequently employing the real-life voices of actors. Communication between Hong Kong characters and their non-Cantonese speaking counterparts is now facilitated through the use of English-dialogue rather than dubbing. For instance, *Extreme Crisis* features the partnership between Hong Kong cop Ken Cheung (Julian Cheung) and Japanese Detective Takami (Sawanda Kenya) but the pair communicate with one another in different languages: while Cheung speaks Cantonese (but understands English), Takami responds to him in English (but understands Cantonese). While their conversations help to present Hong Kong as a hub of Pan-Asian and/or global exchange, it might also reflect the language limitations of the film's stars. The film features other instances in which English, Cantonese, and Japanese dialogue are used interchangeably to facilitate transnational communication. During a board meeting between the Hong Kong police force and Japanese embassy officials, individuals speak Cantonese or Japanese to communicate with members from their own organization. English, however, is used to facilitate communication between the groups.¹⁵ In *Extreme*

Crisis, the representation of transnational communication reflects a broader shift in the cultural relations in Hong Kong

The increasing use of English-language dialogue in the post-1997 cinema is arguably a by-product of Hong Kong's reunification with China. While Hong Kong Chinese speak Cantonese, the majority of Mainlanders speak Mandarin. However, regions of China employ different dialects including Wu, Min, Xiang, Hakka, and Gan. Although grouped within the same Chinese-language family and based on the same written characters, each dialect with its respective pronunciation is rendered virtually unintelligible to non-native speakers. In the wake of Hong Kong's reunification with China, language has become a way in which individuals can retain their national/local identities. Instead of relying on voice dubbing which obscures linguistic and thus local and cultural differences, Hong Kong filmmakers in the post-1997 industry rely on English dialogue to facilitate verbal communication across different groups of Chinese-speaking people.

Moreover, the inclusion of English-language dialogue in Hong Kong action films of the 1990s anticipates the region's production of English-language action films of the 2000s. Films like *The Touch* (2002), *So Close* (Yuen 2002), *Naked Weapon* (2002), *The Medallion* (Chan 2003), and *Silver Hawk* (2004) further contribute to the internationalization of Hong Kong cinema by employing the primary language of globalized (i.e. Hollywood) cinema, English. In the process, however, these films rely too much on the English language and eliminate the Cantonese-slang which helped to define the local character of the *gang-chan-pian*. According to Wing-Fai Leung, these films have "little local flavour" and this contributed to their poor performance at the box-office

(80). While attempting to adopt a more international style of action filmmaking, some Hong Kong filmmakers have eliminated the cultural identity of their protagonists which is partially expressed through language. In Hong Kong, the retention of local identity remains a primary concern of domestic filmgoers in a post-1997 context.

The Jackie Chan action-comedy *Gorgeous* (Kwok 1999) presents two distinct articulations of local identity. Although the film features marquee stars Chan and Tony Leung, Shu is cast as the lead protagonist and the narrative is told through her point-of-view. She plays Bu, a Taiwanese village girl who travels to Hong Kong in search of love [Figure 9]. At the beginning of the film, it is revealed that Bu's mother is Hong Kong Chinese. Embodying the region's global image as a center for international commerce, a place where "the East" meets "the West," Bu's mother speaks Cantonese, Taiwanese, and English interchangeably. While Bu is able to understand her mother, she is not presented in the film as a master of languages;¹⁶ instead, she is characterized as being a Pan-Asian chameleon who can convincingly take on various national and ethnic Asian identities. For instance, upon first meeting Chan, Bu convinces him that she is a Vietnamese refugee and later contends that she is the girlfriend of a Taiwanese gangster. Bu's diegetic exchange of identities draws attention to the chameleon-like nature of actor Shu who has been similarly cast in a variety of Pan-Asian roles. Although Taiwanese, she has portrayed characters of various national and ethnic identities including Malaysian (*Young and Dangerous* films), Mainland Chinese (*Another Meltdown*), Hong Kong Chinese (*Extreme Crisis*), and Japanese (*A Man Called Hero*). Moreover, in *Skyline Cruisers* (Yip 2000), Shu portrays a spy who can blend into any Asian society and she works undercover in North Korea, Japan, and Malaysia.

The chameleon-like aspect of Shu's persona and characters is exemplary of what Aihwa Ong refers to as the "flexible subject" (1). In the wake of Hong Kong's reunification with China, many Hong Kong citizens, and especially government officials, acquired foreign passports as insurance against Mainland Chinese rule; it has been estimated that over 600,000 Hong Kong citizens or 10% of the population held foreign passports in 1997 (ibid. 1). Ong regards the "multiple-passport holder" as an "apt contemporary figure" which "embodies the split between state-imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets" (2). Moreover, she contends that since the amalgamation, it has become increasingly important to differentiate Chinese national and ethnic identities in Hong Kong (ibid. 2). Thus, the chameleon-like nature of Shu's persona reflects the emergence of the "flexible subject" in Hong Kong following the amalgamation. Moreover, her characterization as a Pan-Asian chameleon reflects an important shift in the establishment of local/national identity in the cultural products of Hong Kong.

Dragon Hidden

With her starring role in *Gorgeous*, Shu became one of the most popular stars in Hong Kong and was actively sought out by Hong Kong and Pan-Asian filmmakers to star in their action films. One such filmmaker was Ang Lee who initially cast Shu in her first action-oriented role portraying the young martial warrior, Jen, in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). Early into the film's production, however, Shu's manager, Manfred Wong, did not believe that the film would be an international success and pulled her from the project in order to star in a Japanese soft drink commercial. The part was

subsequently given to a little known Mainland actor, Ziyi Zhang, and the role catapulted her to superstardom in the global film economy (“About” ¶3). In the wake of *Crouching Tiger’s* unprecedented international success, Shu fired her manager but her decision to leave the film has strongly impacted the trajectory of her career (ibid. ¶3). For instance, Shu’s performance in the film likely would have resulted in international notoriety and facilitated her transition into Hollywood film. Furthermore, her participation in the project could have changed her star image. The role of Jen required extensive martial arts training in order to perform Woo Ping Yuen’s complex body-focused choreography. Lacking formal training in martial arts, Shu would have greatly benefited from the experience which could have helped her in procuring more action-oriented roles in Hong Kong cinema. By performing alongside such action warrior women as Michelle Yeoh and Pei Pei Cheng, Shu, who has previously been excluded from the space of physical action, could have increased her credibility as an action woman and become one of Hong Kong’s most notable international stars.

In films produced during the late 1990s, Shu predominantly portrayed dramatic roles in the Hong Kong action cinema. Her performance in *For Bad Boys Only* (Yip 2001), however, helped to modify her persona. In the first half of the film, Shu plays three versions of her star image: Kwan Chin is Mainland Chinese, Shadow is from Macau, and Eleven is a human clone of Chinese and Japanese origin.¹⁷ In addition to being presented as a Pan-Asian chameleon, Shu is cast as the love interest to three different male stars: Oh Yat-Jing, Vincent Kok, and Ekin Cheng, respectively. Mid-way through the film, narrative focus is placed on her character Eleven who is presented as a childlike human clone; Eleven constantly makes faces, speaks with funny voices, and

becomes easily mesmerized by children's toys and random household objects. Shu's characterization of Eleven shares much in common with her portrayal of the childlike Bu in *Gorgeous*.

For Bad Boys Only offers Shu the opportunity to transition into a new phase of action-focused representation. The film alludes to the Hollywood blockbuster, *The Matrix* (1999), in the final action sequence of the film. Eleven's creator implants a "violent chip" into her system so that his clone can protect herself from being destroyed. With the press of a button, Eleven transforms from a childlike love-interest into a violent warrior through the trope of downloading martial arts.¹⁸ On the one hand, Shu appears as a *wuxia* warrior; costumed in a flowing white gown, she gracefully performs wirework and martial arts choreography in slow motion. Like *wuxia* warriors, the dynamism of her physical performance can be attributed to the use of body doubles, camera angles, and editing. On the other hand, her image as a *wuxia* warrior is updated through the film's intertextual referencing of *The Matrix* (1999); *For Bad Boys Only* uses "bullet-time" to depict Eleven avoiding the bullets fired at her.¹⁹ Although presented as a perfect killing machine that can repel bullets, Eleven is electrocuted and the shock results in a merger of her personalities. For a brief moment, before sacrificing her life to save her lover (Ekin Cheng), she is at once love interest and action hero. Her characterization in this film anticipates the next shift in Shu's star image as she transitions from Pan-Asian chameleon to action woman.

Girls with Guns Revival

In the early 2000s, Shu transitions into the role of action woman and is presented through a pre-existing model of heroic female identity already established in Hong Kong cinema. Shu stars in a cycle of action films of which I term the “girls with guns revival.” Films such as *Marital Angels* (Fok 2001), *Wesley’s Mysterious File* (Lau 2002), and *So Close* (Yuen 2002) update the generic conventions of girls with guns (1985-1993)—the heroine cycle of the gunplay film featuring sexy but tough action women proficient with weaponry and martial arts—in a post-1997 context.²⁰ These films are also inspired by *The Matrix* (1999), *Charlie’s Angels* (2000), and *Mission Impossible II* (Woo 2000), three Hollywood blockbusters which feature action aesthetics and character templates originating in the Hong Kong gunplay genre (which will be discussed in a later chapter). Although it might be tempting to read Hong Kong’s revival of gunplay as the cinematic return and/or reclamation of the genre from Hollywood, I would argue that this shift in action filmmaking is in service to broader changes taking place in Hong Kong cinema in the new millennium.

The revival of girls with guns reflects a shift in Hong Kong filmmaking towards “safe” genres. Leung contends that in response to the industry crisis, film investors in Hong Kong wanted to be part of safe projects which would guarantee returns (76). These safe films are characterized by the following: an all-star cast which includes box-office guarantees Tony Leung and/or Andy Lau;²¹ bankable genres such as action and comedy rather than dramas; a notable director with a strong box-office track record (such as Lau); and export potential at least to the Pan-Asian film market (ibid. 76). According to Leung, the investment in safe projects has resulted in limited diversity and the polarization of the

Hong Kong film market: films are either big-budgeted blockbusters targeting the local and Pan-Asian theaters, or extremely low budget productions aimed at the local VCD market. Moreover, big-budgeted films with all-stars casts typically have international appeal and will not be affected by the weak local market (Leung 76).

The revival of the girls with guns genre is an attempt, on the part of Hong Kong filmmakers, to produce safe action films which reflect local tastes but also appeal to the international film market. The genre adapts the two types of female heroism featured in the original girls with guns films; the first stars at least three action women who are members of an elite crime fighting organization (e.g. *The Heroic Trio* [To 1993]) and the second features the partnering of two female cops (e.g. *Yes Madam!* [Yuen 1985]).²² Shu's characterization *Martial Angels* and *So Close* can be considered a modification of the first type of female heroism (i.e. *The Heroic Trio* model). In these films, Shu stars alongside at least two other action women and they are presented as members of a conglomerate of thieves/spies. For instance, *Martial Angels* features a group of seven female jewellery thieves who were raised as sisters in an orphanage.²³ In *So Close*, Shu and her sister (Vicky Zhao) are for-hire assassins who eventually team up with a local policewoman (Karen Mok). While each film explores the literal bonds of sisterhood Shu shares with other action women, she is still presented as a romantic interest in the film. No longer characterized as an object of struggle between two men, Shu's character competes with other woman for the affections of her lover; although placed within a love triangle, she is pushed to the center of the narrative because she is the most famous female star in the film.²⁴ Shu is also featured as the most physically capable female protagonist whose performance in the space of physical action is heavily mediated by

wirework, cinematography, and CGI.²⁵ Although featured in combat sequences, Shu appears most dynamic when she participates in gunplay battles with her opponents [Figure 10]. Both films feature Shu in the same close-up shot as she prepares to shoot a sniper rifle; these images simultaneously emphasize the beauty of her face and her physical abilities. Presented as a gunplay hero, Shu's star image has been channelled through a pre-existing model.

Martial Angels and *So Close* were produced for different audiences: on the one hand, *Martial Angels* was lower-budget film which targeted the local theater and VCD markets; on the other, *So Close* was an English-language film aimed at international audiences. *So Close* boasts high production values, excellent CGI, a notable director with a box-office track record (Corey Yuen), and a popular transnational star (Shu). The film, however, failed at the box-office and brought in less revenue than *Martial Angels*; while *Martial Angels* grossed \$5 million at the box-office, *So Close* earned less than \$1 million.²⁶ Despite the fact that Shu is a popular star in Hong Kong, the film still bombed at the box-office. The dismal performance of *So Close* can be attributed to a number of factors. First, female-focused gunplay narratives have historically earned less at the box-office than male-centered films. Second, the early 2000s saw the box-office failure of other female-focused English-language action narratives including *The Touch* and *Silver Hawk*. Even bona fide action star Michelle Yeoh struggled in the local and regional film markets. Third, as female-focused narratives, what *So Close*, *The Touch*, and *Silver Hawk* each lack is the presence, performance, and box-office draw of a high-profile action man. While the commercial appeal of *Martial Angels* can be attributed to the casting of seven (attractive) action women, the film also stars Cantopop singer Julian Cheung who has a

large fan following. As previously discussed, male Cantopop stars are a box-office draw and Cheung's casting in the film arguably serves as a tipping point which resulted in the film's unexpected commercial success.

In the second type of girls with guns revival film, Shu plays a government agent who is partnered with a fellow law enforcer (i.e. the *Yes, Madam!* model). In *Wesley's Mysterious File*, Shu is cast as the partner and love interest of Andy Lau. As a safe production, the film features a high-profile male lead (Andy Lau), a notable action director (Andrew Lau), high production values, and CGI. The film targeted the international film market and earned \$10 million at the box office.²⁷ The "international" look to the film can be attributed to the multiple filming locations including San Francisco, Japan, and Hong Kong, and the use of Cantonese and English-language dialogue. Situated in the center of the narrative, Shu and Lau speak English when communicating with non-Chinese characters in the film.

Unlike Lau who is proficient in English and speaks with a slight accent, Shu's English is so heavily accented that it renders her dialogue almost intelligible. While her lack of proficiency in English has not hindered her ability to secure roles in Hong Kong, it has affected her attempt to cross over into Hollywood. After working with Corey Yuen on *So Close*, the director facilitated her casting in his 2002 Hollywood blockbuster *The Transporter*. Her performance in the film, however, was heavily criticized in the West—especially in internet chat spaces (i.e. amongst genre fans). The primary concern of bloggers relates to the unintelligibility of Shu's articulation of English-language dialogue. In his/her review of the film on the Internet Movie Database, blogger "Flagrant-Baronessa" writes, "Qi Shu's performance keeps us guessing, mostly about what the hell

she is saying” (ImDb). This biting criticism reflects the assumption of Western audiences that all Hong Kong actors are proficient in English; crossover stars like Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Yun-Fat Chow, and Michelle Yeoh set this precedent. Second, audiences unfamiliar with Asian acting tropes might find Shu’s acting style, and especially the childlike qualities of her characterization, disconcerting. According to Bordwell, when compared with Japanese popular culture, Hong Kong films (and acting styles) are not as startling in their oscillation between “scalding violence and cloying cuteness;” what both traditions present, however, is the notion that “to be grown up is to be aggressive, and the only way to be gentle is to regress into childhood” (12). In the West, the perception of Shu’s childlike performance in *The Transporter* was only exacerbated by the fact that she was cast in a dramatic rather than action-oriented role and her character lacks physical/heroic agency. Shu does not meet the Western precedent set by Yeoh in the late 1990s and early 2000s who outfights and outshines her white action co-star (Pierce Brosnan) in *Tomorrow Never Dies*; instead, Shu is shown on the periphery of the film’s physical action screaming like a stereotypical damsel in distress. This renders *The Transporter* a male-focused action film.

Continuing Importance of Male Cantopop

In 2006, Shu was featured as the primary action protagonist, Aryong, in the Mainland-South Korean action comedy, *My Wife is a Gangster 3* (Cho 2006). Inspired by Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* (2003, 2004), *My Wife is a Gangster 3* characterizes Aryong as a capable swordswoman and daughter of a triad branch leader. Although the role was originally designed for Ziyi Zhang who made a cameo appearance in *My Wife is a*

Gangster 2 (Jeong 2003), Zhang turned down the role and the part was awarded to Shu. Ironically, the film generates humour by playing off of Aryong's inability to clearly communicate with the Korean gang tasked to protect her; Shu's characterization in the film arguably plays upon her previous struggles to communicate through non-Chinese dialogue. As the third instalment of the popular South Korean franchise *My Wife is a Gangster* (Cho [1999], Jeong [2003], Cho [2006]), the film had a ready-made audience for the sequel. In addition, the film is a Mainland co-production and was thus marketed and screened in China. Nonetheless, this female-focused film earned \$9 million at the box-office without the casting of a male Cantopop star.²⁸

Shu is a good example of how popular female stars in post-1997 Hong Kong cinema have struggled to generate box-office revenue while headlining action films. Audiences seem to prefer films in which Shu is cast as a love interest and/or action partner to a prominent male Cantopop star. This is notable in Shu's most recent starring role as a gunplay hero in the Hong Kong-South Korean action film *Seoul Riders* (Ma 2005). The film features Tony Leung—who has enjoyed dual singing and acting careers—as Lam, the head of the Interpol Asia Division; he is the leader of a fleet of young and attractive Korean “angel” agents. Shu is cast as Leung's partner, J.J., and she competes with the angel fleet for his romantic affections. *Seoul Riders* earned \$7.5 million at the box-office, and the success of the film can be attributed more to the romantic/heroic pairing of Leung and Shu, and less to the commercial appeal of Shu alone.²⁹

CHAPTER 4

CHINESE WOMEN AND THE TROPES OF MODERN CHINA

THE TRANSNATIONAL APPEAL OF LI GONG AND ZIYI ZHANG

In the previous chapters, I have argued that local identity in the Hong Kong action cinema is associated with masculinity and males stars. In this chapter, I explore how female stars in Mainland Chinese cinema express their “Chineseness” through femininity. These representations differentiate Hong Kong from Mainland cinema, and the oppositional relationship is encoded through gender: namely, Hong Kong = masculine and Mainland China = feminine. These binary associations appear to mirror Western philosophical traditions which, according to Mari Yoshihara, have associated “the West” with men and masculinity while “the East” is linked with women and femininity (6). Jacques Derrida contends that a binary set of terms is organized in hierarchy in which the first term is awarded primacy over the second term which is considered weaker or derivative (Qtd. in Scott 137). According to this logic, “the West,” which is conceptualized as being dominant and masculine, is favoured over “the East,” which has been rendered passive through its feminization and eroticization. In both sets of binaries, Chinese cinema and Mainland identity are associated with femininity. These correlations have influenced the representation of Mainland action women in Hong Kong and Hollywood, and Mainland action women are presented differently than those from Hong Kong.

Mainland action women—notably, Li Gong and Ziyi Zhang who represent two generations of Mainland action stars—embody a conceptualization of Chinese identity that is different from the one popularized by the female stars of Hong Kong. With her

performance in such Chinese dramas as *Ju Dou* (Zhang 1989), Gong became the first international star of Mainland cinema and was marketed as the face of “New China;” her characters offer personifications of modernized China as it moves towards an era of globalization. Zhang rose to international superstardom with her performance in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee 2000) and has become the “face of New Asian cinema;” in the early 2000s she was featured in a number of large-budgeted Mainland-based co-productions with Hong Kong which dominated the Pan-Asian film market. Having established their star images in Mainland cinema, each actress has crossed over into the action cinema of Hong Kong and/or Hollywood, and through her characterizations has been ethnically differentiated from the Hong Kong action woman.

PART I: LI GONG AND MAINLAND CHINESE CINEMA

Propaganda vs. Profit

While Mainland filmmaking dates back to the early 1900s, the cinema’s policies, according to Yingchi Chu, were shaped most strongly during the Maoist period (1948-1976) wherein the film industry was regulated by the government and used for propagandistic purposes (Chu 45).¹ This era is named after political revolutionary and theorist Zedong Mao who led the Communist Party of China (CPC) to establish the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Mao was instrumental in the development of film policy in China, beginning with his *Talks at the Yan’an Forum* (1942)—a speech he presented before Chinese intellectuals in the city of Yan’an in order to promote the development of a Chinese culture that was both populist and nationalist (Kraus 61).² During this event, Mao described the role of art and literature in Chinese society; he

conceived of film as a tool of mass education (i.e. propaganda) and advocated the development of *gong-nong-bing* (worker—peasant—soldier) images which were targeted towards the masses (ibid. 45). Under the direction of Mao, Mainland film was reorganized and placed under the direct control of the government which funded all aspects of film production, including scriptwriting, shooting, distribution, and exhibition. The government set laws in place which prohibited foreign films from being imported into the country; domestic films lacked market competition from external cinema systems (Chu 48). In addition to subsidizing the Mainland cinema, the government also maintained ideological control over the content of films. Each year, the Film Bureau of China developed a plan which would outline narrative topics, production costs, distribution and screening zones, and production quotas for each studio (Chu 45); the Film Bureau's annual production plan was always in service to the government's socio-political agenda for that year (ibid. 51). Moreover, each studio was assigned a Party Secretary who "exercised ideological control, ranging from the implementation of policy to the proper distribution of a film in the market" (45). During the Maoist period, Mainland cinema was highly regulated and domestic films were employed as tools of government propaganda.

Following the death of Mao, the change in government leadership led to a shift in film policy and production. In 1978, Xiaoping Deng became the leader of the PRC (where he remained until 1992).³ In 1984, under his direction, the government withdrew its financial backing of Mainland cinema but maintained policy control over industrial production; the government continued to oversee script development, production quotas, and film censorship (Chu 45). Film studios were expected to comply with government

regulations while balancing their budgets, procuring investors/investments, maintaining and updating equipment, and distributing salaries to employees (ibid. 48). The institution of the “self-responsibility” system, as Chu refers to it (ibid. 46), placed the onus on studios to secure financing from non-government sources. By the late 1980s, one third of total investments came from foreign (i.e. Pan-Asian) sources; however, in order to procure screening in China, these co-productions had to comply with government policies of script development, censorship, and quotas. Foreign investments also opened up an alternative market for the screening of Mainland films and offered domestic filmmakers the opportunity to explore topics that were considered unacceptable by the Film Bureau’s standards. While these films might be banned in China or poorly distributed domestically, they could be screened internationally and thus provided alternative representations of China outside official mandates (Chu 49). In 1994, the government implemented tougher regulations for the production of co-funded films. The action was a response to the screening in Japan of the controversial film, *The Blue Kite* (Tian 1993), without government clearance. The new regulations implemented included the provisions that post-production had to take place in China and that 50% of principle actors must be residents of the Mainland. These strict regulations resulted in the sharp decrease of co-produced films in China (Chu 49).

At the same time, the “self-responsibility” system sparked an increase in the domestic production of genre films such as martial arts movies and thrillers which proved popular with audiences and thus offered investors a guaranteed return on their investment (Chu 46). In the late 1980s, more than 40% of films produced in China were martial arts thrillers (ibid. 51) and according to Chu, this trend in filmmaking became a concern for

state officials who felt that there existed an “‘imbalance’ between state promotions and commercial entertainment” (46). Demanding more pedagogic content in Mainland films, the government in 1987 instituted the principle of *hongyang zhuxuan lü, tichang duoyang hua* (“development of mainstream melody, promoting diversity”) which became an official mandate in 1989 following the student demonstrations at Tiananmen (ibid. 46, 51). As noted by Chu, this principle “refers to a dialectic relationship being established between [...] the works that reflect an approved version of events, and the CPC’s promise of a more open cultural space” (46). From its inception, the “mainstream melody” film, as Chu terms it, was conceptualized as a tool of re-education that would remind citizens of China’s socialist past.

According to Chu, “mainstream melody” refers to a group of films—typically revolutionary history and war films—which were aimed at reinforcing the “social memory” of the government’s founding of the PRC (51). In the late 1980s, the country was undergoing an economic transition as it shifted from being a socialist state to a “socialist state with capitalistic characteristics” (Pang 58). Thus, the government felt it necessary to “boost society’s confidence” in party leaders during this time of change (Chu 51). At the heart of mainstream melody films were high-profile Communist leaders such as Zedong Mao, De Zhu, Enlai Zhou, Shaoqi Liu, Dehuai Peng, Biao Lin, and Xiaoping Deng. Mainstream melody films frequently integrate stock footage of these leaders in order to create the impression of an “objective” perspective. Moreover, these films tend to emphasize the human characteristics of the leaders rather than their revolution spirits (Chu 51). For instance, the film, *Long March* (1995), is most notable for including an image of Zedong Mao kissing his wife (ibid. 52), and this moment helps

to humanize the infamous leader and renders his Communist plight more appealing. Mainstream melody films also highlighted notable individuals within the community who embodied the spirit of the CPC. For instance, the revolutionary melodrama, *Red Cherry* (Ye 1995), celebrates Communist characters who sacrifice love and their families to pursue their political ideals (ibid. 53). The production of these films usually coincided with celebrations such as the anniversary of the founding of the CPC, the Liberation Army, and the PRC (ibid. 51). Mainstream melody films were notable for their promotion of policy and/or political agency of the CPC.

While Mainland cinema still produced a variety of generic films in the 1990s including dramas, thrillers, and martial arts films, these products were not promoted nor funded in the same way as mainstream melody films. The early 1990s saw an increase in the number of mainstream melody films produced. This increase corresponds with the establishment of the *wei shehui zhuyi fuwu, wei renmin fuwu* (“political orientation: art for socialism and for the people”) policy (Chu 47). In 1993, the government required that at least 30 mainstream melody films were produced per year (ibid. 47). Yet, the early 1990s also saw a decrease in theater attendance and the Mainland industry began to spiral into financial crisis. For instance, Chu notes that attendance decreased from 34 billion spectators in 1980 to 4.5 billion in 1999 (43). In addition, six of the sixteen film studios in China went bankrupt in 1992 (ibid. 46). Responding to the industry crisis, the government began funding *certain* domestic film projects. In 1994, the committee of the National Film Development Special Funds introduced three ways in which studios could acquire funding: they could request loans, receive awards, or apply for financial assistance (ibid. 47). Preference was given to mainstream melody films or projects which

promoted the ideology of the CPC. In 1996, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) proposed the “9950 project” which was centered on the production of 10 high quality mainstream melody films between 1996 and 2000. They also required that three percent of all revenue acquired from the film and television industries be reinvested into mainstream melody film production (ibid. 47). Chu notes that by the year 2000, the government was investing more than \$100 million Chinese Yuan or approximately \$15 million USD into mainstream melody production (ibid. 47). Moreover, publicly funded films were privileged in publicity, distribution and exhibition in order to guarantee a return on the government’s investment (ibid. 49). Thus, by prioritizing CPC propaganda over the commercial tastes of audiences, the government laid the groundwork for the imminent collapse of the local industry.

The Face of New China

The implementation of the self-responsibility system had an impact on the representation of Chinese identity in Mainland film. In the late 1980s, Li Gong quickly gained domestic star power with principle roles in Yimou Zhang’s female-focused historical dramas *Red Sorghum* (1987), *Ju Dou* (1989), *Raise the Red Lantern* (1992), and *The Story of Qiu Ju* (1992). At the time, Zhang was considered a controversial filmmaker who frequently featured female characters that challenged the status quo;⁴ throughout China, Gong became known for her compelling portrayal of subjugated women and has remained tied to this association for the rest of her career. Beyond its merits as a film, *Ju Dou* generated international attention for the controversy it sparked within China. Believing that *Ju Dou* was damaging to the country’s image, the Film Bureau of China banned the film from

domestic exhibition and attempted to withdraw it from an Academy Award nomination (Lau 154).⁵ *Ju Dou*, however, was a Japanese-Chinese transnational co-production⁶ and was able to by-pass Mainland censors. Marchetti notes that “with perfect timing, Yimou Zhang shifted from domestic funding to transnational financing, from a subject of power of the Chinese government to a winner in the global economy” (*From* 3). With her high-profile performance in the critically acclaimed *Ju Dou*, Gong also became a highly recognizable face throughout East and Southeast Asia, as well as North America and Europe.

Gong’s star image was shaped by her dramatic performance of downtrodden Chinese women struggling against patriarchal oppression. Portraying frustrated and/or tortured young wives, widows, mothers, adulteresses, and concubines (Chow 44), Gong emerged in the 1990s as the face of New China—although her characters are beaten down, they remain stubborn and “pregnant” with possibilities (Marchetti, *From* 18).⁷ In *Ju Dou*, for instance, Ju Dou (Gong) is physically and sexually assaulted by her domineering husband. In Mainland film, “woman” is often used as a trope for modern China (Lu, “Historical” 23); by exploring shifting gender roles and the resulting sexual crises, Chinese filmmakers often present the female body as a personification of the modern Chinese nation at the crossroads with an increasingly global culture (Marchetti, *From* 18). The body of Dou, according to Gina Marchetti, can be understood as the representation of a bloody but defiant China and is similar to the image of the lone man confronting a line of tanks in Tiananmen Square (*From* 2-3).⁸ Jenny Lau contends that Dou stands alone to confront the gerontocratic and patriarchal structures oppressing her [Figure 11].⁹ Bathing her bruised and defiled body, Dou turns to face the camera but her

image offers no “visual pleasure” to her secret admirer Tianqing or the filmic audience (“*Ju*”155). Instead, Dou has transitioned from an object of desire to a “wounded being” that silently confronts Tianqing and the audience, asking for, if not demanding, justice (Marchetti, *From* 3). Rey Chow writes that the “wish to ‘liberate’ Chinese women, which seems to be the ‘content’ [of Zhang’s films,] shifts into the liberation of ‘China,’ which shifts into the liberation of the ‘image’ of China on film, which shifts into the liberation of ‘China’ on film in the international culture market” (149). Just as Michelle Yeoh, Pei Pei Cheng, and Qi Shu represented the concerns of Hong Kong in the previous chapters, so, too, does Gong, whose representations are tied to themes of Mainland Chinese national identity.

In constructing his heroines, Zhang emphasizes their femininity but refuses to idealize it as an “original” or essential sexual nature; instead, he employs “dirty” representations which “redirect ‘sexuality’ and ‘nature’ into the materiality of his filmmaking” (47-48). Zhang reveals the “sexual energy” of his cinematic “women” which renders them visible by drawing attention to their spectacular and dramatic bodies (ibid. 48). This is most evident in *Ju Dou*, wherein Dou’s sexual torture at the hands of her husband is contrasted initially with her first pleasurable sexual experience in the film. Bound and gagged by a red cloth, Dou is pinned down by her sadistic husband who blames her for his sexual inadequacies; covered in blood, sweat, and tears, her semi-nude body is rendered defenceless against her oppressor. In contrast, Dou willingly engages in sexual relations with Tianqing, and the scene of their lovemaking celebrates Dou’s ecstasy. According to Lau, in the Confucian tradition, *Yin* is the original word for lovemaking, and the Chinese written character for *Yin* also has the meaning of “an

uncontrollable/excessive (flow of) [a] torrent of water” (Lau, “*Ju*” 159). She argues that Zhang references both definitions of the term in this scene by bookending a shot of Dou reclining back while receiving sexual stimulation with shots of an unending piece of red cloth flowing down like water into a dyeing vat (ibid. 159). (Re)discovering her sexuality, Dou’s ecstasy is enhanced by the flowing red textile which has been invested with new meaning and results in the reading of her femininity as the merging of “nature” and “culture.” Despite the fact that she is experiencing liberation through the rediscovery of her sexuality, Dou remains dominated by men in her life—her husband, lover, and, eventually, her son. Throughout her career, Gong has consistently portrayed characters like Dou that are defined simultaneously by their expression of femininity and experience of oppression via gender inequality.

Participating in Hong Kong Action

While Gong is known for her performances in Chinese dramas, she crossed over into the Hong Kong action cinema in the early 1990s. Her relocation to another film industry and performance in a different film genre did not bring about a change in her representation. Despite her transition into Hong Kong film, which maintains its own set of generic expectations for female characters, Gong retained the associations she had established in Mainland film—namely, a more feminized characterization centered on her victimization. The consistency of her representation in Chinese dramas and Hong Kong action films can be attributed, in part, to the continuing influence of Yimou Zhang, who directed Gong in the Mainland thriller, *Operation Cougar* (1989), co-starred with Gong in her first Hong

Kong action film, *A Terra-Cotta Warrior* (Ching 1990), and directed Gong in the Hong Kong-Chinese co-production, *The Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006).¹⁰

Gong's representation in Hong Kong action was established through her performance in *Operation Cougar*, for which she won "Best Supporting Actress" at *China's Hundred Flowers Awards*. In the film, Gong plays Ah Li, a nurse who is held hostage on a hijacked plane and works with the terrorists in order to secure the release of her lover. Li is trapped in a hopeless situation in which she can only save one person, either herself or her boyfriend—and she chooses to forfeit her life in order to safeguard that of her lover. In her subsequent action films, Gong was continually re-cast in this role—a beautiful but oppressed lover who willingly sacrifices her life to save that of her boyfriend. For instance, in the action-fantasy film *Terra-Cotta Warrior*, Gong portrays three incarnations of the same character, Winter, who is presented as the soul mate of Tian Fong (Yimou Zhang). Fong has been gifted an unnaturally long life; although he is old, he is not immortal. In the film, Winter is only temporarily (re)united with her lover for a brief moment in time. She willingly sacrifices life in each of her reincarnations to safeguard Fong who is facing mortal danger; before giving her life, she expresses the hope of reuniting with Fong in her next lifetime.

In the early 1990s, Gong's characters came to be strongly aligned with the depiction of "faux" action women in Hong Kong cinema. As previously discussed, Hong Kong's mastery of cinematic technology in the 1990s resulted in the casting of non-martial artists to star in the action cinema and improved a director's ability to present these actors in convincing fight sequences (Hunt, *Kung* 24). During this time, there was a distinct difference in the representation of "real" versus "faux" Hong Kong action

women. The “real” action woman was masculinized and defined by the authenticity of her physical performance which matched the male standard defining the genre (e.g. Michelle Yeoh). Conversely, the physical performances of “faux” action women were heavily mediated by wirework and editing. According to Logan, the 1990s saw a number of established actresses try their hand at Hong Kong action in order to prove that they too “could fight with the best of them” (164), including Hong Kong actresses Brigitte Lin¹¹ (*Swordsman 2* [Ching and Tong 1992], *The East is Red* [Ching and Lee 1993]) and Maggie Cheung¹² (*Dragon Inn* [Lee 1992], *The Heroic Trio* [To 1993], *Moon Warriors* [Hung 1993]). These women lacked formal training in martial arts and their performances in action sequences were heavily constructed via the creative use of camera angles, editing, and stunt doubles (Logan 167-68).

In the action-fantasy *Dragon Chronicles: The Maidens of Heavenly Mountain* (Chin 1994), Gong’s performance as a martial heroine reflects that of Lin and Cheung. The film’s fight sequences heavily rely on wirework, rapid editing, body doubles, and the surreal stylization of action in order to emphasize the magical/supernatural powers, rather than fighting abilities (i.e. physical authenticity), of its heroines [Figure 12]. In the film, Gong performs simple fight choreography, consisting of her gracefully waving her arms around while staring intensely into the camera. Although the film was “overblown” with special effects, *Dragon Chronicles* earned more at the Hong Kong box-office than Zhang’s *Story of Qui Ju* (1993) which also stars Gong (Logan 167). According to Logan, the incorporation of dramatic actors into Hong Kong’s action cinema provides “an indication of the curious balance between art and commerce in the Chinese film industry” (167). Moreover, Steve Fore contends that Hong Kong films are “unabashedly

commercial in nature” and that “alternative” or “art” films have a difficult time locating a niche market (41). Hoping to remain viable and relevant in the Pan-Asian film market,¹³ dramatic actors, like Gong, felt compelled to perform in mainstream Hong Kong films in order to maintain, if not increase, their transnational star power. And yet, she was characterized differently than “real” Hong Kong action women like Michelle Yeoh.

As previously mentioned, Hong Kong action films are produced rapidly and only have a brief shelf life in the theater. In light of the quick turnover rate of films, Hong Kong filmmakers are always searching for the next fresh female face to star in their action films (Lallane 52); this perhaps explains the initial casting of Gong in the Hong Kong action cinema. In the late 1980s, Gong’s star was on the rise with her dramatic performances in Mainland dramas; as such, Gong offered Hong Kong filmmakers a new face to exploit. Hong Kong cinema’s obsession with youth, however, does not offer an explanation for Gong’s longevity in the action cinema. At the age of 41, Gong starred in the Hong Kong-Chinese co-production *The Curse of the Golden Flower*. In this female-focused narrative, she plays Express Phoenix who is trapped in a loveless marriage with the Emperor (Yun-Fat Chow) and determined to bring about the political downfall of her husband and have her eldest son ascend to the throne. Gong’s ability to secure such a substantial role late in her career offers can be attributed, in part, to Zhang’s direction of the film; however, it is Gong’s compelling performance which helped the film earn over \$72 million at the box-office.¹⁴ Like Yeoh and Cheng, Gong is a female star who has enjoyed long-term success in the action cinema of Hong Kong and who is similarly not from Hong Kong.

Although *Curse of the Golden Flower* is an action film, Gong plays a dramatic rather than action-oriented role and the identity of her character is centered on her emotional life rather than physical performance. Zhang emphasizes the dramatic aspect of Gong's performance by featuring her frequently through close-up shots.¹⁵ When she is physically abused, for instance, violence is enacted upon the locus of her cinematic identity, her face.¹⁶ In the opening scene of the film, Zhang employs long shots in order to situate Phoenix within the palace; costumed in decorative gowns and golden hair pins, Phoenix blends in with her opulent and ornamental surroundings. Zhang then switches to close-up and extreme close-up shots to reveal the emotions of Phoenix who is trapped within the patriarchal structure of her household and limited by the expectations of the royal family. Through these close-up shots of her face, Zhang reveals the fact that she is being slowly poisoned; with sweat streaming from her brow, Phoenix's face expresses a range of emotions, including fear, pain, betrayal, and embarrassment. With her face indicative of the trauma she endures, Gong's characterization in *Curse of the Golden Flower* is consistent with her representation in Mainland dramas. When working in the Hong Kong action cinema, Gong remains aligned with Chinese national identity and she is not re-cast as a "real" Hong Kong action woman.

American Image

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Hollywood producers were selective when casting Asian actors to star in their action films. For instance, Hollywood producers cast "hard body" Hong Kong action stars (Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and Yun-Fat Chow) over dramatic actors (Tony Leung, Andy Lau, and Takeshi Kaneshiro). In addition, following the

precedent set by Michelle Yeoh with her spectacular performance in *Tomorrow Never Dies*, Hollywood producers preferred Hong Kong action heroines with more “authentic” performative abilities over dramatic actors like Maggie Cheung.¹⁷ Gong was not part of the migration of Hong Kong action women to Hollywood in the early 2000s; known for her performances in Mainland dramas, Gong was cast in Wayne Wang’s 1997 drama, *Chinese Box*, and was later featured in a dramatic role in the Hollywood blockbuster, *Miami Vice* (Mann 2006). Although her Hollywood films are separated by almost a decade, her characters remain consistent. Unlike Yeoh, whose transnational star image is rooted in “authentic” physical performance, Gong was already known in the West for her award-winning performances in Chinese dramas. Thus, when appearing in American cinema, she continues to portray Chinese characters that are defined by their femininity and sexual subjugation.

Chinese Box is an Asian American independent film which explores life in Hong Kong in the months leading up to the Chinese amalgamation (1 July 1997). Director Wayne Wang, who was born and raised in Hong Kong but moved to the United States at the age of 17 to become a filmmaker, had already directed notable films such as *Chan Is Missing* (1982), *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1989), and *The Joy Luck Club* (1993); through these films, Wang highlighted the Asian American subject and challenged Hollywood’s racial stereotyping of Asian/Asian American characters. Similarly, *Chinese Box* is a non-Hollywood self-determined film produced by a filmmaker interested in exploring Asian female identity within the context of the Hong Kong handover. And yet, Wang’s characterization of Gong in the film seems to parallel Hollywood’s stereotypical rendering of the Asian female body as being a sexual object for the white male hero.

In the film, Gong plays Vivian, a “Northerner” (i.e. Mainland Chinese) who migrates to Hong Kong to start a new life. While Vivian has enjoyed financial success in Hong Kong and even owns her own bar, she is considered “unacceptable” for marriage since she was once a prostitute. She is limited by a social system which separates prostitution from respectable public society. The film’s white protagonist John (Jeremy Irons), however, is sympathetic to Vivian’s past and offers her a future free from the social ideology that is restraining her.¹⁸ *Chinese Box* reframes the relationship between the white (British) man and Chinese woman which has historically centered on the white male’s sexual conquest of the Asian female; instead, the white hero is positioned as the liberator of the Chinese woman who, in a post-1997 context, has become oppressed by Chinese men. If Gong’s characterization is emblematic of modern China, then the liberation of her character by the white man can be read as a metaphor for the liberation of China by Anglo-America through its embracing of liberal Western ideology.

Wang also presents two distinct *national* expressions of Chinese identity: Jean (Maggie Cheung) who is Hong Kong Chinese and Vivian (Gong) who is Mainland Chinese. Actor Maggie Cheung is considered one of the most beautiful women of Hong Kong; initially a beauty queen, Cheung transitioned into the mainstream film industry and has since developed an award-winning acting career.¹⁹ In *Chinese Box*, she is played against type and is presented as a gender-neutral protagonist, a characterization which has become associated with Hong Kong female identity. Jean’s ‘interesting’ personality is emphasized more than her beauty: she has short hair, is dressed in loose-fitting clothing, wears no make-up, and has a large scar on the side of her face. Working as a street merchant, Jean not only speaks Cantonese and English to her clients, but more

importantly, she does so with a British accent which reflects her Anglo-Chinese identity. Conversely, Gong's character remains consistent with Gong's previous roles in both Mainland and Hong Kong cinema. *Chinese Box* emphasizes Vivian's beauty and essentializes her Chinese femininity: she has long flowing black hair, she wears more traditionally feminine clothing, and she has a flawless pale complexion which is only enhanced by make-up. Moreover, Vivian speaks English with a heavy Chinese accent and at times is difficult to understand. By contrasting the characters of Jean and Vivian, *Chinese Box* highlights the differing Western perceptions of Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese female identities; while the Hong Kong woman is presented as a translator or mediator between "the East" and "the West," the sexually oppressed Mainland woman is considered an allegory for a modern China in need of liberation.

Produced a decade later, *Miami Vice* is a Hollywood blockbuster chronicling the partnership between American cops Sonny Crockett (Collin Farrell) and Ricardo Tubbs (Jamie Foxx) as they infiltrate an international drug trafficking ring. Although *Miami Vice* is vastly different from *Chinese Box* in terms of genre and budget, Gong is cast in the same type of role in both films; she plays Isabella, a Chinese diasporic woman who is sexually oppressed by the non-white men in her life and is subsequently rescued by her boyfriend, Crockett [Figure 13]. Isabella is an international drug smuggler and the only female member of the South American drug cartel. Although she is initially presented as a strong, independent, and well-respected businesswoman, it is revealed that Isabella has used her sexuality to further her career: she sleeps with her boss, Montoya (Luis Tosar), flirts with members of the South American cartel including Jose Yero (John Ortiz), and begins dating Crockett who is working undercover as a drug distributor. As the film

progresses, Isabella is defined less in terms of her work in the drug trade and more in terms of her sexuality, and this is reflected by a change in her costuming from business suits to more form-fitting feminine clothes which emphasize her figure.²⁰ Isabella's feminization is inversely proportional to her independence and agency in the film. While her feminization heightens male competition for her affections and results in a bloody gunfight at the end of the film between the South American cartel (led by her suitor Yero) and the Miami police (led by her boyfriend Crockett), Isabella does not participate in the gunfight or in any other action sequences in the film. Instead, she is presented as a damsel in distress who requires saving from the white male hero who is positioned in the narrative as the saviour of the oppressed Chinese woman. In *Miami Vice*, Gong reflects a distinctly Hollywood/American idea of Chinese female identity: while Gong still portrays a downtrodden woman in need of liberation, her femininity is defined in relation to a white male hero.

PART II: COMMERCIALIZATION OF MAINLAND CINEMA IN THE 2000S AND ZIYI ZHANG

Leading up to the 1990s, Mainland Chinese cinema was a closed system heavily regulated by the government. The distribution agency, China Film Corporation, was selected for the task of surveying and censoring all filmic materials screened in China. In 1993, the government introduced market principles into its film industry and China Film Corporation was allowed to import 10 revenue-sharing foreign films per year.²¹ Throughout the 1980s, foreign films could be screened in the Mainland but, without a revenue-sharing option in place, production companies lacked financial incentive to

distribute and screen their films in China. With the introduction of revenue-sharing, Hollywood blockbusters not only filled the quota but also created a stir in the Chinese film market by dominating box-office receipts and shaping the tastes of Chinese filmgoers (Pang 58). Since 1996, ten imported Hollywood films have earned 60% of China's annual box-office revenues despite regulations requiring Mainland cinemas to screen domestic films for at least 75% of the time (Chu 43, 51). Hollywood blockbusters have also raised audience expectations for higher production values (ibid. 52). In the late 1990s, China announced that upon its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, it would double its quota of revenue-sharing foreign films. Mainland filmmakers were fearful that Hollywood blockbusters would fill the new quota and double their box-office earnings. Moreover, critics predicted that low consumption of the domestic cinema would result in the demise of the Mainland film industry within two decades (Chu 43). Thus, Chinese filmmakers and critics began devising production strategies to stimulate local interest in domestic film products.²²

While the domestic industry was threatened by the prospect of increasing foreign imports, Mainland cinema has been most strongly crippled by its production ideology. According to Laikwan Pang, the government *still* remains resistant to the notion that Chinese cinema should be a commodity free from its ideological control. This has resulted in structural problems which threaten the longevity of the domestic film industry (59). For instance, the conservatism of China's tight censorship has led to black market piracy of films in two parallel exhibition flows. While the official cinema outlets screen 'clean' movies, the black market circulates the prohibited (and more entertaining) films; the black market and *not* the official cinema reflects the popular taste of Chinese

moviegoers. Moreover, a pirated VCD²³ is cheaper than a theater ticket and is often available for purchase on the street directly outside the cinema. Thus, in order to survive, Mainland cinema needs to develop a healthy market which cannot happen until censorship is relaxed (ibid. 59).

Historically, the Mainland Chinese market was ignored by Hong Kong filmmakers who relied on the East and Southeast Asian film markets to generate revenue. In 1997, the Asian financial crisis weakened the East and Southeast Asian film markets to such a degree that Hong Kong filmmakers could no longer secure distribution. Desperate for film revenue, Hong Kong looked towards the Mainland market in order to achieve “the Mainland dream” (Pang 63). Although recently reunified with China, Hong Kong did not receive any preferential treatment from the Mainland; China was unwilling to grant Hong Kong films the status of national product or allow these films unrestricted access to its lucrative market.²⁴ In 2000, China clearly stipulated that their newly expanded WTO quota of 20 imported revenue-sharing films included Hong Kong productions; Hong Kong would have to compete with Hollywood for distribution in the Mainland market (Pang 63). In 2001, Donald Tsang, the Financial Secretary of Hong Kong commented:

We must remember that although Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of China, we do not receive any preferential trade treatment from the Mainland. Our role as an intermediary will be challenged with competition coming not only from overseas markets, but also within the Mainland itself [...] We cannot sit back and wait for the opportunities to fall on to our lap. That’s why we have been working with the Mainland. (Qtd. in Pang 55)

Since the release of Tsang's statement, China has adapted its national film importation policy to include a separate quota for films co-produced with Hong Kong and/or Taiwan. This new regulation was set in place to increase Pan-Chinese cinema collaborations.

Since 2000, Hong Kong has played a critical role in securing a future for Mainland cinema. Pang contends that the "global structure" of the Hong Kong film industry is its greatest merit. With access to the Pan-Asian market, Hong Kong "serve[s] as a gateway to introduce capital and marketing concepts to China's film market, while Chinese film companies can rely on Hong Kong's finance, techniques, and experiences to enter the new global economy without being engulfed by it" (60). Through co-productions, Mainland cinema has been strengthened by Hong Kong's "production know-how and business experience" (ibid. 61). For instance, Mainland distributors were taught about consumption patterns and more specifically, the marketing concept *dangqi*²⁵ or cinema seasons (Pang 61). Acknowledging the strength of its domestic market and potential for box-office success, Chinese officials developed strict laws which not only governed co-productions but also favoured Mainland Chinese ideology. For example, a co-production script is submitted to the scrutiny of government officials to ensure that no morally or politically corrupt messages are espoused by the film, a charge the Mainland has historically levelled at the Hong Kong cinema. These regulations guarantee the Mainland's control over Hong Kong's contributions to co-productions (61).

Crouching Tiger

As one of the highest-grossing foreign-language films in history, *Crouching Tiger* is arguably the most important Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese co-production of the new

millennium. Possessing qualities which render it attractive to the global film economy, *Crouching Tiger* has served as a prototype for future Hong Kong-Chinese co-productions (Teo, “*Wuxia*” 191). In the film, director Ang Lee “translated” new-style *wuxia pian* (chivalrous swordplay films) for the global film economy. Lee, however, was heavily criticized for his refusal to dub the film in postproduction; he, instead, employed the real-life voices of his actors (Michelle Yeoh, Yun-Fat Chow, and Pei Pei Cheng) who learned Mandarin phonetically on set. This resulted in accented Mandarin dialogue which, according to Teo, had a jarring effect on Mainland audiences and contributed to the film’s generally poor reception in China (“*Wuxia*” 203). Yingchi Chu, however, attributes the film’s lukewarm reception to “bureaucratic manoeuvring.” In China, *Crouching Tiger*’s release rights were shared by a private production firm, Asian Union Film & Entertainment, which invested 80% of the \$1 million cost, and their government partner, China Film Co-Production Company, which only put up 20% (54). During the film’s production, according to Chu, it became increasingly clear that the film would be an international success. In response to this sentiment, China Film’s state officials distanced themselves from Asian Union and attempted to buy out the private company’s share. Unsuccessful in their buyout, Chinese officials quickly withdrew the film from theaters immediately after its Beijing premiere in July 2000. The film was also made readily available on pirated DVDs, thus killing the profits of the film and by extension, Asian Union (ibid. 54). Thus, the lukewarm critical reception of *Crouching Tiger* in China appears to be the product of bureaucracy rather than a matter of clarity of speech.

Yet, the shift in the language (from Cantonese to Mandarin) of *wuxia* culture anticipates broader shifts in the genre’s development. As a “cross-over” translation of

new-style *wuxia pian*, *Crouching Tiger* was not only designed to reach Western audiences but also aided in expanding the genre from a product of the Hong Kong action cinema²⁶ to a Pan-Chinese and/or Pan-Asian co-production targeting Pan-Asian and diasporic Asian audiences. If the generic reconstructions represent an evolution in the *wuxia* paradigm as the genre enters the new millennium, as Stephen Teo suggests (“*Wuxia*” 203), then the casting of Mainland actress Ziyi Zhang in a predominantly Hong Kong cast reflects a new phase of *wuxia* production in Mainland China and inaugurates a Mainland Chinese tradition of warrior women in the genre.

Western Reception and Zhang’s Hollywood Phase

Zhang became an international star with her role in *Crouching Tiger* [Figure 14]. Her portrayal of the martial warrior Jen, however, has been read differently by Western and Eastern audiences; this has resulted in the simultaneous development of a Western and Eastern star persona for Zhang. The different readings of Zhang’s persona can be attributed to the fact that *Crouching Tiger* is a revisionist film. According to Teo, generic revisionism requires that audiences have foreknowledge of the archetypes and conventions prominent in the genre. Directors then employ ambiguity to subvert the stereotypes or clichés of that genre (“*Wuxia*” 201). For Eastern audiences familiar with the conventions of the new-style *wuxia pian*, *Crouching Tiger* is a revisionist film of the genre. Lee uses ambivalence, especially in the characterization of Jen, in an attempt to derail the *wuxia* heroic tradition and revise the genre for Pan-Asian audiences. Teo notes that *wuxia* films are typically centered on the quest for *xiayi* (the principle of chivalric righteousness) and feature a knight-errant who has achieved the pinnacle of martial arts

(ibid. 201). In *Crouching Tiger*, Jen believes herself worthy of possessing the Green Destiny sword; although she has mastered the technical skills of *wu dang*, she does not embody the moral standards required to properly and righteously employ the sword (ibid. 201). Jen's complete disregard for the martial moral code draws attention to the generic and gendered limitations of the heroic tradition, and Pan-Asian audiences familiar with the genre would read her characterization, as well as the film, through the lens of revisionism.

In the West, however, none of this foreknowledge exists and thus the film is read a different way. While Jen might be considered a revisionist marital heroine in the East, her reception by Western audiences is solely based on Zhang's portrayal of the character. Although Jen is beautiful and talented, she also lacks discipline and heroic virtue which renders her unworthy of possessing the Green Destiny sword she stole. In *Crouching Tiger*, Jen is also named the mortal enemy of the tragic Jade Fox (Cheng) and is positioned as the principle adversary of the film's protagonists portrayed by popular "cross-over" stars Yeoh and Chow. Diegetically contrasted with the film's more virtuous heroes, Jen is presented as a hero turned villain (see Park ¶8, 9).²⁷ Despite her casting alongside Hong Kong action stars, Zhang is positioned as their enemy in the film and this creates a dichotomy based on nationality and ethnicity which has since defined her career in the Hollywood action genre.

Due to the associations established in *Crouching Tiger*, Zhang was subsequently cast as a villain in her next Hollywood action film, *Rush Hour 2* (Ratner 2001), and pitted against the film's hero played by Hong Kong action star Jackie Chan.²⁸ In the film, Zhang is portrayed through a prominent Hollywood/American stereotype of Asian female

identity, the Dragon Lady. Hollywood employs the Dragon Lady stereotype when characterizing Asian women as cunning, aggressive, alluring, exotic, and threatening figures of the underworld (Jiwani 184). Zhang's character is exclusively costumed in formfitting black pant suits which evoke a sense power that is backed up by her proficiency in martial arts [Figure 15]. Her long black hair frames her face and emphasizes the porcelain quality of her skin. Moreover, her lips are accented with cherry red lipstick and work to emphasize the alluring nature of her character. Limited by her inability to speak English, Zhang relies exclusively on her facial expressions and physical performance to convey meaning in the film. Presented on screen as a cold, silent, and deadly assassin, Zhang projects the image of an exotic but threatening "other" whose motivations are rendered inaccessible by her lack of proficiency in English. Moreover, Zhang embodies a distinctly Hollywood/American conceptualization of Chinese identity which presents Zhang's femininity, the locus of her identity, as a threat to the Hong Kong action hero. Zhang's characterization is arguably the product of Western perceptions of China's (social, cultural, political, and especially ideological) threat to Hong Kong identity following the amalgamation in 1997.

The Mainland Tradition of Warrior Women

Following her high-profile performance in *Rush Hour 2*, Zhang returned to China an international star. She was subsequently re-cast as a hero in a string of *wuxia* films in the early 2000s which helped to popularize Mainland-based blockbuster co-productions, including the Hong Kong-Mainland films *Hero* (Zhang 2002), *The Legend of Zu* (Hark 2002), and *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang 2004), as well as the South Korean-

Mainland *Musa the Warrior* (Kim 2001). According to Tong Gang, the director of the SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film and Television) Film Bureau, transnational co-productions have been the key to the Mainland cinema's success (Tong ¶ 13). While China maintains its import quotient for foreign films, Mainland producers aspire to overtake Hollywood and dominate the domestic market. Moreover, China Film Group Corporation chairman Han Sanping claims that box-office returns for American imports have declined since 2000, while Chinese films, the majority of which are Mainland-based co-productions with Hong Kong, have enjoyed increasing box-office revenues (Tong ¶ 9-10). A central figure in the popularization of Mainland-based co-productions, Zhang can be considered the face of New Asian Cinema.

Using *Crouching Tiger* as a model for Mainland-based co-productions, Yimou Zhang directed the Hong Kong-Chinese blockbusters *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004). These films have helped in establishing a "commercialized" Mainland (i.e. Mandarin) cinema which strongly relies on China's cultural connection with Hong Kong.²⁹ According to Kwai-Cheung Lo, *Hero* and *Flying Daggers* are "major paving stones towards extensive commercialization, competition with the domestic market, and the possible globalization of China's film industry in the new century" ("Copies" 131). Moreover, Yimou Zhang has revised his representation of the Chinese female subject; in action, the Chinese female body is presented as a personification of a globalizing China seeking national unification and transnational connectivity in the new millennium. Having cast Ziyi Zhang in her first film, the Mainland drama *The Road Home* (1999), Yimou Zhang chose her to play the lead Chinese protagonist in both of his films. Yimou

Zhang expands upon the transnational star image Ziyi Zhang developed in *Crouching Tiger* in order to situate her as the face of New Asian cinema.

The casting in these two films helped establish the prevailing characteristics of Mainland-based co-productions with Hong Kong. First, these films strongly rely on the star power of Hong Kong actors, and more specifically, its action men with *Hero* starring Jet Li, Donnie Yen, and Tony Leung, and *Flying Daggers* featuring Andy Lau and Takeshi Kaneshiro. Second, these films feature a Mainland action woman whose casting arguably reflects the transnational nature of the co-productions.³⁰ In Mainland cinema, the female body is often considered a trope for modern China while in Hong Kong cinema, heroic identity is associated with male heroes and masculinity: thus, it only seems fitting that Hong Kong action men are paired with young Mainland women in these co-productions. Although set in the past, *Hero* and *Flying Daggers* emphasize the importance of unifying China and eliminating dissidents of this movement thus offering an allegory for the reunification of the Mainland and Hong Kong. The heroes of the past—Hong Kong action men—must work with the heroes of the present—young Chinese women—to create a cinema of the future—Mainland/Mandarin-language action cinema.

Yimou Zhang presents two relationships between Hong Kong action men and his Mainland action woman. In *Hero* this connection is presented through a master-student relationship. Through subjective narration, he re-imagines Ziyi Zhang's characterization as a young warrior woman.³¹ In the Nameless Hero's (Jet Li) first story (i.e. the red story), Moon (Ziyi Zhang) is presented as the talented but morally undisciplined student of Broken Sword (Tony Leung); however, in both the King of Qin's (Daoming Chen's)

response narrative (i.e. the blue story) and the Nameless Hero's second or truth story (i.e. the white story), Moon is presented in a more positive light. Although she is still characterized as young and naïve, Moon is presented as the loyal and prized pupil of Broken Sword. Following the death of her master, Moon is considered the future of his martial arts school and a strong warrior of the newly unified China.³²

In *House of Flying Daggers*, Ziyi Zhang is not presented as the pupil of a Hong Kong action hero; instead, she is cast as May, a fellow martial warrior or an equal. She is caught in a love triangle between her long-term boyfriend Leo (Andy Lau) and her new romantic interest Jin (Takeshi Kaneshiro), and the film explores how love/lust can destroy the bonds of brotherhood (*yi*) between martial warriors and how individual desires offer distractions from the greater common good [Figure 16]. All three characters are focused on attaining *Yin* (excessive sexual feeling or action) rather than striving for *Xiao* (filial piety). Their impulses go against the Confucian code which structures their martial world and ascribes what it means to be a good person: "The biggest Sin of all sins is Yin and the greatest Virtue of all virtues is Xiao" (Lau, "*Ju*" 157). This transgression threatens the very structure of the martial arts tradition by pitting brother against brother, and results in the physical and emotional destruction of each member of the love triangle. In his examination of the final scenes of the film, Lo contends that the anticipated showdown between government forces and the House of Flying Daggers is not depicted in the film; instead, the final confrontation takes place between the three members of the love triangle ("Copies" 133). This shift in focus can be attributed, in part, to Yimou Zhang's heeding of the criticism levelled against his use of *wuxia* culture to promote the idea of Chinese (re)unification in *Hero*; in the film, the Nameless Hero and Broken

Sword both sacrifice their lives for the unification of China, and in the process become heroes of the new Chinese empire (ibid. 133). In *Flying Daggers*, May's self-sacrifice facilitates the reconnection of the male heroes. While the film overlooks the encounter between government officials and the House of Flying Daggers, it emphasizes the importance of (female) self-sacrifice to the process of (re)unification.

Ziyi Zhang's rapid rise to transnational stardom in the early 2000s has opened the door for the casting of other Chinese action women in Mainland-based co-productions with Hong Kong.³³ These include actresses Vicky Zhao (*Shaolin Soccer* [Chow 2001], *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* [He 2003], *Painted Skin* [Chan 2008]), Bingbing Li (*A World Without Thieves* [Feng 2004], *D-Project* [Tsui 2010]), Betty Sun (*Fearless* [Yu 2006], *Painted Skin* [Chan 2008], *Chen Zhen the Nocturnal Hero* [Lau 2010]), Isabella Leong (*A Chinese Tall Story* [Lau 2005]), Jingchu Zhang (*Seven Swords* [Tsui 2005]), Jinglei Xu (*The Warlords* [Chan and Yip 2008]), and Bingbing Fan (*A Chinese Tall Story* [Lau 2005], *Sweet Revenge* [Ho 2007], *Bodyguards and Assassins* [Chan 2009]). The rise of co-productions thus corresponds with the establishment of a Mainland tradition of warrior women whose performances represent China in the Pan-Asian and international film markets.

Under a Media Microscope

In their cinematic depictions, stars such as Li Gong and Ziyi Zhang have come to represent China; however, the image or impression of the Mainland has changed with the proliferation of co-productions in the 2000s and accounts for the difference in characterization between the two actors.³⁴ Since the 1990s, Gong has maintained a fairly consistent transnational star image as the face of New China. This can be attributed to her

multiple collaborations with Yimou Zhang and the high-profile nature of her award winning dramatic performances which have facilitated her casting in similar roles in the United States. On the other hand, Ziyi Zhang's career has been marked by a disjuncture in her star image resulting from the differing Western and Eastern readings of her breakthrough role in *Crouching Tiger*. In subsequent Hollywood films, Zhang has embodied the American conceptualization of Chinese femininity and her roles emphasize her Asian sexuality whereas, in Mainland-based co-productions with Hong Kong, Zhang has been marketed as the face of New Asian Cinema in the new era of commercialization and collaboration in Mandarin-language film. However, in 2005, Zhang's performance in the American drama *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Marshall 2005) resulted in the curtailing of her Mainland film career. The film was banned in the Mainland as Chinese censors felt that the film was insensitive to the atrocities inflicted on the Chinese during Japan's occupation of the Mainland in the 1930s ("China" ¶3). Reflective of the disjuncture in her star image, Zhang's performance was critically praised in the West but resulted in her being labelled a "traitor" in the East by the Chinese media ("Zhang" ¶6). Since the release of *Memoirs*, Zhang has lived under a media microscope and her personal life has been heavily scrutinized; the Chinese media seems determined to curtail Zhang's career and document her "fall from grace." This serves as good example as to how industrial shifts or issues of national identity can end a career, at least temporarily.

CHAPTER 5

PAN-PACIFIC CONNECTIONS

ASIAN AMERICAN ACTION WOMEN IN POST-1997 HONG KONG

As the industry spiralled into crisis following the handover, Hong Kong production companies lacked a uniform response. Media Asia implemented a new strategy centered on improving production values and developing a new generation of stars in Hong Kong. In the late 1990s, Media Asia began casting overseas Chinese—and especially Asian American actors—to star in its action films. While film critics such as Michael Curtin and Winnie Chung have examined the rise of male stars in the post-1997 action cinema, the significant contributions of Asian American action women in Hong Kong have been overlooked. In this chapter, I will consider the contributions of Asian American women to the development of the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema. I will explore the casting of Asian American actors and the identities they present in the Hong Kong action cinema: Maggie Q, Eugenia Yuen, and Marsha Yuen. Each of these action women reflects a different production strategy targeting different audience demographics—the local, Pan-Asian, and/or international film markets—and a different embodiment of nationality and/or ethnicity.

PART I: “WHICH WAY IS GLOBAL?”

As previously noted, the industry crisis in Hong Kong can be attributed to a confluence of factors which include the decline in production values due to hyperproduction in the 1990s (Curtin 71); the Asian financial crisis and changes to the Asian film market (Pang 63); the development of “peripheral” East Asian cinemas like South Korea and Thailand

(Hunt and Leung 2); the increasing East and Southeast Asian interest in Hollywood blockbusters (Leung 74); and the impact of piracy on the box-office performance of domestic films in Hong Kong (Desser, "Hong" 211). However, the Hong Kong industry was most severely crippled by the constant and continuing migration of creative film talent out of Hong Kong. Drained of some of its most exhilarating and bankable directors, actors, and choreographers, the Hong Kong action cinema has struggled to compete with more polished Hollywood blockbusters within its domestic market. In addition, the remaining marquee talent have been overexposed to such a degree that local and regional audiences have been losing interest in their film projects.

The draining of Hong Kong's talent pool has occurred in four phases. The mid-1990s saw the first concentrated migration of male filmmakers to the United States, including directors John Woo, Tsui Hark, Ringo Lam, Stanley Tong, Kirk Wong, Peter Chan, and Ronnie Yu. The late 1990s saw the second wave of male talent leaving Hong Kong, including actors Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Yun-Fat Chow, Donnie Yen, and Simon Yam, and action choreographers Corey Yuen, Woo Ping Yuen, Cheung-Yan Yuen, Sammo Hung, and Dion Lam. This was followed by a third wave of migration to Hollywood in the early 2000s involving female action stars such as Michelle Yeoh, Pei Pei Cheng, and Qi Shu. Since 2000, Hong Kong has been experiencing a fourth wave of migration of marquee film talent leaving Hong Kong to work on Mainland-based blockbuster co-productions, notably, Yimou Zhang's trilogy—*Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006)—which alone features Maggie Cheung, Tony Leung, Jet Li, Donnie Yen, Andy Lau, Takeshi Kaneshiro, and Yun-Fat Chow.¹

By the mid-2000s, Hong Kong-Chinese co-productions became commonplace and were directed by some of Hong Kong's most notable filmmakers like Johnnie To (*Big Man* [2003], *Breaking News* [2004], *Throw Down* [2004], *Triangle* [2007]), Andrew Lau (*Infernal Affairs III* [2003], *Initial D* [2007], *Chen Zhen the Nocturnal Hero* [2009]), and Gordon Chan (*Painted Skin* [2008]). The Mainland also attracted Hong Kong filmmakers returning from Hollywood to work on Hong Kong-China and/or Mainland blockbusters, including "émigré directors" such as John Woo (*Red Cliff* [2008], *Red Cliff II* [2009], *The Swordswoman's World* [2010]), Hark Tsui (*Zu Warriors* [2001], *Seven Swords* [2005], *Missing* [2008], *All About Women* [2008], *D-Project* [2010]), Ringo Lam (*Triangle* [2007]), Stanley Tong (*The Myth* [2005]), and Peter Chan (*Perhaps Love* [2005], *The Warlords* [2007]); actors including Jackie Chan (*New Police Story* [Chan 1994], *The Myth*, *The Founding of a Republic* [Han and Huang 2009], *Big Solider* [Ding 2009]), Jet Li (*Hero*, *The Warlords*, *The Founding of a Republic*), Yun-Fat Chow (*The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* [Hui 2006], *The Curse of the Golden Flower*, *Confucius* [Hu 2009]), Donnie Yen (*Hero*, *Seven Swords*, *An Empress and the Warriors*, *Painted Skin*, *The Founding of a Republic*, *Bodyguards and Assassins* [Chan 2009], *Chen Zhen the Nocturnal Hero*), Simon Yam (*Breaking News*, *Triangle*, *Bodyguards and Assassins*), and Michelle Yeoh (*True Legend* [Yuen 2009], *The Swordswoman's World*); and such choreographers as Corey Yuen (*A Chinese Tall Story* [Lau 2005]), Woo Ping Yuen (*The Legend of the Black Scorpion* [Feng 2006]; *True Legend*), Cheung-Yan Yuen (*Kung Fu Chefs* [Yip 2009]), and Sammo Hung (*Kung Fu Hustle* [Chow 2004], *Three Kingdoms: Resurrection of the Dragon* [Lee 2008]).²

Since the 1990s, Hong Kong cinema has experienced a consistent depletion of film talent enticed to work on larger-budget Hollywood *and* Mainland Chinese action films. Offering better working conditions, high production values, and access to large film markets, American and Mainland blockbusters have become increasingly appealing to Hong Kong filmmakers. In order to remain commercially viable, Hong Kong producers began adopting a variety of strategies in order to stimulate local, Pan-Asian, and international interest in Hong Kong films. However, as noted by film critic Kar Law at the 2000 Hong Kong-Asian Film Financing Forum (HAF),³ the local cinema lacks a clear direction as it enters the new millennium:

To go global, are we going to the West or going north to China? Do we go more international style or more Chinese? Some companies are focusing on mainland China. Others are building alliances among Asian filmmakers. And others are working with the U.S. and Japanese film industries. We are at a crossroads: Which way is global? (Qtd. in Curtin 248)

According to Curtin, two of Hong Kong's most important film studios employed different strategies in the wake of the industry crisis. On the one hand, China Star Entertainment shifted their focus from the theatrical to the VCD market. In light of widespread piracy, China Star began adopting strategies to compete with pirates in the black market with the goal being to reclaim legal shares while establishing a brand identity that could pave the way for future theatrical investments (ibid. 250). On the other hand, Golden Harvest moved away from film production altogether in order to secure the exhibition and distribution of Hong Kong films in Mainland China; while still investing in a small number of local films, Golden Harvest limited their in-house production until

they had established a distribution pipeline to, and through, the Mainland. Golden Harvest executives believed that “secure distribution and exhibition [were] the keys to a full-fledged studio production program” in Hong Kong (ibid. 248, 252-53).⁴

Hong Kong film companies still interested in producing domestic films were faced with one of three options. First, they could collaborate with China and/or the United States, and lose creative control over their film projects. As noted by Fruit Chan, investors were no longer interested in films that would only be screened for a niche audience in Hong Kong (“Hong” ¶24). Second, Hong Kong producers could continue to make lower budget Cantonese films for local and diasporic Asian audiences featuring lesser known and relatively inexperienced actors. For example, the Ann Hui film, *The Way We Are* (2008), which won four awards including “Best Director” and “Best Actress” (Hee Ching Paw) at the *Hong Kong Film Awards* (2009), was critically praised but earned little at the local box-office and had limited popular appeal (“Hong” ¶18). Third, Hong Kong filmmakers could produce more Hollywood-styled action films, once again with lesser known actors, aimed at both the local and international film markets which seem to prefer Hollywood’s blockbuster fare. This third strategy was employed by Media Asia, the most successful Hong Kong-based production company of the new millennium (Curtin 27).

Media Asia’s Shifting Production Ideology

Media Asia’s approach to post-1997 filmmaking was centered on the local production of films for the international market.⁵ In 1997, Thomas Chung became the CEO of Media Asia and was determined to change the direction of the company. Lacking confidence in

the Pan-Asian film market and uncertain about Mainland prospects, Chung insisted on producing “event films” for the local and international market which would attract audiences regardless of language or ethnicity (Curtin 261).⁶ Describing Media Asia’s production ideology in early 2000s, Wellington Fung, the deputy managing director of the company, states,

We deliver all the ingredients you expect from a Hollywood film and we do it less expensively, which is what gives us a chance to compete with Hollywood. Before, Hong Kong films played to a niche market, and that’s why you could see the local flavour, because it was purely for domestic viewers. But once it comes to the point that you need bigger revenue to compensate for bigger production values, then you need a bigger audience, and then it becomes less specific, less like a traditional Hong Kong movie. (Qtd. in Curtin 261)

As noted by Curtin, the *gang-chan-pian* was “premised on a distinctive cultural moment in a particular locale” and that moment has since passed (261-62). In the wake of the cinema’s decline, Media Asia began developing a new production model for transnational success.

Media Asia established its brand identity with the breakout hit *Gen-Y Cops* (Chan 2000). Opting to spend the film’s budget on special effects rather than marquee actors, Chung outsourced the work to a special effects house in the United States in order to match the production values offered by Hollywood. Chung’s decision to invest in special effects over actors was in direct response to the migration of Hong Kong action stars to Hollywood and the rising cost of signing the remaining marquee talent notably Tony Leung, Andy Lau, Takeshi Kaneshiro, and Maggie Chung. In the place of these

headliners, Media Asia began to develop a new slate of young, multilingual, and cosmopolitan stars, including Edison Chen, Sam Lee, Stephen Fung, and Daniel Wu. According to Winnie Chung, the early 2000s saw Media Asia's signing of numerous "ABCs" (American-born Chinese), "BBCs" (British-born Chinese) and "CBCs" (Canadian-born Chinese) to star in its action films with stories and topics that travel (Qtd. in Curtin 261). These films featured narratives that were not necessarily local or Chinese and a more international/Hollywood style of filmmaking. Under the helm of Thomas Chung, Media Asia films of the new millennium were designed to transverse national boundaries (i.e. simultaneously appeal to the local and international film market) and media formats from theater to video in order to capitalize on the box-office and home video markets (Curtin 261).

In 2003, Media Asia was purchased by Peter Lam who (re)adjusted the production ideology of the company. Aspiring to build a multimedia enterprise, Lam abandoned the company's previous emphasis on special effects and low-budget talent; instead, he produced films that were primed for the local and regional film markets, and centered on star promotion. This is evidenced by Media Asia's first release with Lam at the helm, *Infernal Affairs* (Lau and Mak 2003), featuring stars Tony Leung and Andy Lau. The film also features newcomers Edison Chen and Shawn Yue, striking a balance between the established and new generations of Hong Kong stars (Curtin 262).

While *Infernal Affairs* (2003) was not screened in the Mainland, *Infernal Affairs 3* (Lau 2004) was a Hong Kong-Chinese co-production and complied with the terms outlined by CEPA (Closer Economic Partnership Agreement) in order to secure

distribution in China.⁷ Director Andrew Lau alludes to the increasing pressure to comply with Mainland regulations in order to access the lucrative Chinese film market.

If you are brave, you can leave the Mainland market. Without the Mainland market, it'd still be okay. The first one [*Infernal Affairs*] didn't make the cinemas in China. The ending did not consider Mainland. They had already said no. Lots of countries have these rules, [so] you have to go along with them [and] change these things. In terms of commercial consideration, I feel there's no problem. Of course, there are people who are insistent, then you have to make other calculations. Making commercial products, you have to consider your markets. (Qtd. in Leung 79)

Hong Kong director Fruit Chan has also expressed concerns about the compromises local filmmakers have to make when participating in co-productions with the Mainland. He states that local filmmakers "are not making the kind of films that Hong Kong was famous for [...]. It would be fatal for Hong Kong directors who are watering-down their topic to fall into line with SARFT's tight grip on themes and topics" (Qtd. in Hong ¶ 10-11). With the success of *Infernal Affairs 3*, Media Asia has continued to co-produce blockbusters with the China, investing in films which strengthen the Mainland's cinema system often at the expense of the Hong Kong film industry.

In his discussion of Media Asia's production ideology and casting of overseas Chinese actors, Curtin focuses almost exclusively on the development of male stars in the post-1997 cinema. He briefly mentions female performers in a passing reference to *Naked Weapon* (Ching 2002) and the VCD market (264). Media Asia's casting of a new generation of overseas female action stars since 1997 as a key strategy to internationalize

the look of the cinema has generally been overlooked by scholars. While the 1980s saw the inclusion of foreign action women whose performances were dubbed in postproduction, the 1990s saw the increased inclusion of English-language dialogue. The casting of multilingual and multicultural Asian American and Asian Canadian actors in the 2000s represents an attempt, on the part of Hong Kong filmmakers, to foreground the cosmopolitan nature of a city that, in the wake of recolonization, has maintained its transnational connections with the West. Moreover, the representations of Asian American action women in Hong Kong films offer important insights into the construction of Hong Kong identity in the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema.⁸

PART II: PAN-PACIFIC CONNECTIONS

The First Wave: Asian American Women, 1930s-50s

The contributions of Asian American women working in Hong Kong cinema pre-date 1997. In his discussion of the interflow of people and resources between Hong Kong and the United States in the early 20th century, Kar Law emphasizes the importance of Pan-Pacific connections to the development of Hong Kong's film industry. In 1933, Moon Kwan and Joe Chiu established Grandview Production Company, one of Hong Kong's "big four" prewar producers.⁹ Although born in the Guangdong province,¹⁰ Kwan and Chiu were raised and educated in the United States, and relied exclusively on the monetary investment from eleven Chinese-American businessmen to set up their company. Moreover, Kwan and Chiu were trained in American filmmaking, modelled their studio after the Hollywood system, imported the best American filmmaking technology into Hong Kong, and employed the latest techniques in sound and colour (51-

54). Benefiting from Pan-Pacific connections, Hong Kong cinema entered into its first golden age of filmmaking (1936-1941).

With the outbreak of the Pacific War (1937-1945),¹¹ Hong Kong cinema went into exile. Grandview continued its operations in California and Grandview (US) produced more than 20 Cantonese-language films which were screened in Chinatowns throughout the United States (Law 54). According to Law, Grandview produced “the first films made by Chinese filmmakers to depict the lives of Chinese in America [...] none use costumes, nor are they fantastical or historical. They simply represent the lives of overseas Chinese, using a realistic approach” (54). Grandview films featured the performances of Chinese-American actors, the majority of which relocated to Hong Kong after the war to work in its Cantonese-language cinema. These included male actors Hok-Sing Wong, Chiu-Mo Wong, Fut-Yeuk Yip, King-Wan Chiu, Kei-Wai Liu, and Pui Tang; and female actors Yee Lai, Kwun-Ling Chow, Bik-Yuk Leung, and Siu-Sin Luk (55).

Asian American women, in particular, played a crucial role in (re)shaping the character of post-war Hong Kong cinema. For instance, Yee Lai aided in the reestablishment of Grandview in Hong Kong. An Asian American child star, Lai appeared in a number of Hollywood films and played a brief role in Paramount’s *China* (Farrow 1943) before appearing in several Grandview productions. After marrying Joe Chiu, the co-founder of Grandview, Lai relocated to Hong Kong—starring in *Infancy* (Chun 1951) which features a young Bruce Lee, and *A Woman’s Revenge* (Cheng and Chiu 1955), Hong Kong’s first 3-D film—and managed the dubbing department of the company until Grandview faded from the filmmaking scene in 1958 (Law 56).

Another influential figure of the postwar Hong Kong cinema was Asian American Ester Eng. Educated in the United States and briefly trained in Hollywood, Eng became Hong Kong's first female director and is affectionately referred to as the "First Lady of Chinese Cinema" (Law 67). Independently produced in the United States, her first film *Heartache* (1935) chronicles the life of a female pilot who joins the Air Corps to serve her country. Released in Hong Kong under the title *Iron Blood, Beautiful Soul*, the film attracted the attention of Grandview producers and Eng was signed to direct films for the company. A feminist filmmaker, Eng's films in Hong Kong included *The World of Women* (1938) featuring Hong Kong's first all-female cast. At the height of World War II, Eng returned to the United States and directed a number of Grandview films including *Golden Gate Girl* (1941).¹² In 1946, she returned to Hong Kong with her Grandview projects which were released in theaters and generated revenue which helped to revive the film industry (ibid. 67-68). By 1950, Eng had become "the most prolific woman filmmaker in the history of Chinese cinema" who desired to see "Chinese-American films soar beyond their 'Chinatown' base and into mainstream American theaters without sacrificing their cultural roots" (Bren and Law ¶2-3).¹³ Although unable to subvert the racial politics of the American filmmaking system, Eng is considered one of the most important early figures of Hong Kong *and* American "ethnic" cinema (Bren and Law ¶3); Eng highlights the importance of Asian Americans to the development and sustaining of the Hong Kong film industry.

The Second Wave: The Bruce Lee Model, the 1970s

Asian American women of the post-1997 cinema were not the first wave of Asian American action stars to work in Hong Kong. Asian American Bruce Lee is arguably the best known martial artist of the twentieth century.¹⁴ His career trajectory has served as a prototype or “ideal” model of transnational success for Asian American action women to emulate: an actor marginalized by his/her local cinema moves to Hong Kong, is cast in top-billed roles, establishes his/her star image, becomes proficient in stunt work and competent in martial arts choreography, enjoys Pan-Asian and diasporic Asian success, and then breaks into Hollywood film.¹⁵ Troubled by the racial politics governing American mainstream media and the limited roles (both in terms of quantity and quality) for Asian American actors in Hollywood, Lee left for Hong Kong in 1970s with the goal of becoming a star. Although he self-identified as an Asian American, Lee quickly realized that Hong Kong “audiences saw him as a distinctly *Chinese* hero who was willing to defend his nation’s honour” (Logan 32) and Lee played up the image desired by the Hong Kong public. Starring in only four kung fu films before his untimely death in 1973, Lee is considered a legend of the Hong Kong cinema: his films remain the most viewed Hong Kong productions worldwide and he is the action star to which all other cinematic martial arts have been subsequently compared (ibid. 23).

The death of Lee was considered a tragedy for kung fu fans around the world hungry for the type of performance only Lee could bring.¹⁶ His death, however, also sent Hong Kong producers and distributors into a tailspin; having penetrated the American market with the kung fu craze, they had their international success come to an abrupt halt with the death of Lee. Hong Kong filmmakers attempted to fill the market gap with kung

fu films starring various imitators (i.e. Bruce Lee clones)—martial artists who looked like Bruce Lee, who emulated his fighting style, and who often used similar stage names such as Bruce Chen, Bruce Lai, Bruce Lau, Bruce Le, Bruce Lei, Bruce Li, Bruce Liang, and Bruce Lo.¹⁷ These films had limited success in Hong Kong and abroad, and producers quickly abandoned the Bruce Lee clone approach; instead, they began to develop a new generation of kung fu stars who rose to prominence in the action-comedies of the late 1970s and early 1980s. These include such action-comedy dragons as Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, and Yuen Biao.

In the 1980s, Lee's legend and transnational success opened the door for the inclusion of subsequent Asian Americans in the action cinema—including his own American son. Trained in martial arts by his father, Brandon Lee starred in one Hong Kong action film, *Legacy of Rage* (Yu 1986), before transitioning into Hollywood (Desser, "Martial" 93). Lee starred in a string of low-budget action films—*Laser Mission* (Davis 1989), *Showdown in Little Tokyo* (Lester 1991), *Rapid Fire* (Little 1992)—before landing his breakthrough role in the comic book inspired *The Crow* (Proyas 1994). In the film, Lee portrays Eric Draven, a musician who arrives home and discovers that his fiancé is being gang-raped by a group of assailants. Although Draven and his fiancé are killed that night, he returns from the dead to avenge their murders by eliminating all the men associated with the crime. Tragically, Lee was shot and killed while filming *The Crow*: a live round of ammunition was accidentally loaded into a gun that was supposed to be shooting blanks. Upon its release in 1994, the film became an immediate cult-classic and Lee's star image became inextricably connected to the legend of his father (ibid. 93).

Aside from Brandon Lee, there were only a small number of Asian American actors working in Hong Kong cinema prior to 1997, most notably brothers Michael and Russell Wong. Michael Wong has enjoyed a long film career in Hong Kong. Considered a viable star of the *ge-ying-shi*, he has starred in over 70 films and portrayed a variety of Pan-Asian characters in Cantonese-language roles. Moreover, he has worked with some of Hong Kong's most venerable action directors including Woo Ping Yuen (*In the Line of Duty 4* [1989]), Gordon Chan (*The Final Option* [1994]), Andrew Lau (*Modern Romance* [1994]), John Woo (*Once a Thief* [1996]), Corey Yuen (*And Now You're Dead* [1998]), and Tsui Hark (*The Seven Swords* [2005]); and performed alongside such marquee talent as Michelle Yeoh (*Royal Warriors* [Chung 1986]), Donnie Yen (*In the Line of Duty 4*), Maggie Cheung (*Will of Iron* [Chiang 1991]), Jackie Chan (*City Hunter* [Wong 1993], *Thunderbolt* [Chan 1995]), Simon Yam (*Don't Stop My Crazy Love for You* [Hon 1993], *Partners* [Chan 2002]), Ekin Cheng (*Return to a Better Tomorrow* [Wong 1994]), Leslie Cheung (*The Long and Winding Road* [Chan 1994]), Chow Yun-Fat (*American Shaolin* [Lau 1994]), and Anthony Wong (*Option Zero* [Lam 1997], *Beast Cops* [Lam and Chan 1998], *Violent Cop* [Cheng 2000]). Conversely, the career trajectory of Russell Wong mirrors that of Bruce Lee in the sense that the Hong Kong action cinema functioned as a stepping stone propelling him towards a career in American film. Wong starred in only a handful of Hong Kong films before being cast in Asian American films (*Eat a Bowl of Tea* [Wang 1989], *The Joy Luck Club* [Wang 1993], *Dim Sum Funeral* [Chi 2008]) and Hollywood action films (*Romeo Must Die* [Bartkowiak 2000], *Undoing* [Lee 2006], *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* [Cohen 2008]).

In the late 2000s, Wong returned to East Asia to star in the Hong Kong action flick *Unshakable* (Orzel 2009) and the Thai action film *The Sanctuary* (Maliwan 2009). On the one hand, his recent casting can be attributed to the Pan-Asian exposure he enjoyed from working on the American blockbuster *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (2008) which also featured major stars Jet Li and Michelle Yeoh. The film not only grossed \$389 million worldwide¹⁸ but is also ranked the first top grossing in film in Thailand in 2008 and third in Hong Kong.¹⁹ On the other hand, his casting coincides with the exodus of Hong Kong stars from Hollywood and their return to East Asia. This return migration might be a product of Hollywood's ongoing racial politics which have limited the role opportunities for Asian/Asian American actors.

Following the signing of the Joint Declaration (1984) and exacerbated by the events at Tiananmen (1989), Hong Kong cinema began exhibiting symptoms of what Esther Yau refers to as, a "1997 consciousness" (181).²⁰ The *gang-chan-pian* started to reflect local anxieties related to the impending change in sovereignty, and its potential impact on Hong Kong, its economy (including the film industry), and its people (Marchetti, *From* 6). One by-product of the 1997 deadline was the relocation of Hong Kong residents to the West. As a result, films like *A Better Tomorrow II* (Woo 1987), *Eight Tales of Gold* (Cheung 1989), *Twin Dragons* (Lam and Tsui 1992), and *Once Upon a Time in China and America* (Hung 1997) consider the experiences of Asian Americans as their subject matter. Moreover, Asian American and/or diasporic Asian characters in the United States were portrayed by familiar local Chinese rather than incumbent Asian American actors. According to Julian Stringer, these films explore how mass migration and displacement will affect Hong Kong's post-1997 sense of identity. He states that

“each of these titles can be read as a map, a guidebook offering advice to prospective overseas Chinese about the skills they need to possess in order to get on in the world” (“Cultural” 299). Stringer further contends that these films “anticipate what a future cinema may look like” when Mainland China/Mandarin filmmaking changes the face of the post-1997 Hong Kong/Cantonese cinema (ibid. 299). Thus, Asian American identity was considered a means through which Hong Kong filmmakers could articulate local anxieties regarding Hong Kong’s impending handover to China and quell fears of potential emigrants by presenting the possibilities of life in the United States. Lucy

Liu is one of the few Asian American women who transitioned in and out of Hong Kong cinema, not unlike Bruce Lee. In the early 1990s, Liu attempted to break into Hong Kong but only starred in one Cantonese-language film, *Rhythm of Destiny* (Lau 1992). In the film, Liu plays an aspiring dancer who chooses to leave Hong Kong (and her Cantopop star boyfriend) behind to start a new life in the United States. Liu’s characterization in the film draws attention to the increasing importance of Asian American screen identities, rather than Asian American actors, to Hong Kong cinema of the late 1980s and 1990s.

PART III: THE THIRD WAVE – MAGGIE Q

Maggie Q is part of a new generation of Asian American female actors cast by Media Asia to star in their action films targeting both the local and international film markets. In light of her quick rise to transnational superstardom, Maggie Q stands out from lesser known Asian American action women like Eugenia Yuen (*Flying Dragon Leaping Tiger* [Lan 2002], *The Eye 2* [Chun and Pang 2004], *The Drummer* [Bi 2007]), Marsha Yuen (*Undiscovered Tomb* [Kung 2002], *Hero Youngster* [Law 2004], *Shaolin vs. Evil Dead 2*:

Ultimate Power [Kung 2006]), and Anya (*For Bad Boys Only* [Yip 2000], *Cop on a Mission* [Mak 2001], *Runaway* [Lam 2001], *Era of Vampires* [Chin 2002], *Naked Weapon* [Ching 2002]). Maggie Q's commercial appeal can be attributed, at least in part, to her being multiracial—her father is white and her mother is Asian. According to Sheridan Prasso, “a more western aesthetic of beauty has taken hold of Asia” and privileges big wide eyes, high cheekbones, pointy noses, light skin, and large breasts, causing thousands of Chinese women undergo cosmetic surgery every year and even use skin whitening cream to achieve this look (114). In his article “White Skin, Large Breasts,” Perry Johansson explores the cultural significance of the emerging female beauty ideal in East Asia which appears to be based on Caucasian features (59). He notes that the idealization of fair complexions is not necessarily new. Since antiquity skin colour has been associated with class and social identity in Mainland China; fair skin was historically considered a symbol of refinement which indicated that a person did not belong to the peasant classes that laboured in the sun (*ibid.* 60). Criticizing cosmetic ads and beauty editorials featured in women's magazines in Mainland China during the 1990s, Johansson argues for a change in the perception and marketing of fair/white skin in East Asia. He writes,

White skin no longer signifies class and wealth in a domestic context but is now also used to construct identity in a globalized culture. Instead of signifying identity in relation to an internal other, it now constructs difference with an external other, namely the West. The quest for beauty is made into an international beauty contest where Western women, whose pale skins are

supposedly admired by Chinese, in turn are said to admire the tenderness and smoothness of the skin of the 'Oriental' woman. (Johansson 64)

As a multiracial actor and model, Maggie Q embodies China's beauty standard in the global era and is appreciated for her pale complexion. She has been featured in advertisements for a variety of skin-related products including Nivea, Oil of Olay, and Max Factor, and has served as a spokeswoman for Shiseido, a Japanese cosmetics company which specializes in producing skin whitening creams [Figure 17].²¹

Conversely, Johansson contends that the "adoration of large breasts" in Mainland China is a relatively new phenomenon. The sexual development of the female body is now considered a metaphor for the growth and maturation of China in the global economy; large breasts are associated with "the West," civilization, and modernity (ibid. 71, 74). He writes,

[Breast size] is said to reflect the social and technological level of development. The popularity and prevalence of large breasts in the West is explained in terms of the advance of modern medicine, science and a high level of civilization [...] breast size is turned into a marker of universal modernity. In this way, bust enhancer ads participate in Chinese discourses on modernization, the West, and national identity. (75-76)

Thus, the popular appeal of Maggie Q can be attributed to the fact that she is a pale-skinned and voluptuous American actor whose image (as well as nationality and race) exemplifies the qualities associated with the Western aesthetic of beauty which has taken hold of East Asia and especially China. As such, Maggie Q represents a hybridation of East and West in an era of globalization, modernization, and change in China.

***Naked Weapon* and the Subversion of Stereotypes**

Maggie Q's performances in the Hong Kong action cinema reveal notable shifts in the representation of Asian American actors *and* characters onscreen. First, Q is cast in English-speaking roles as her films are primed for the broader international film market and she typically portrays Asian American characters that travel to Hong Kong for business. Unlike the action films of the 1990s which feature Chinese actors leaving for the United States, Q's films present Asian American characters entering, and working in, post-1997 Hong Kong. Second, her films feature at least one other Asian North American actor, for instance Asian Canadian Edison Chen in *Gen Y Cops*, Asian American Michael Wong in *Manhattan Midnight* (Cheung 2001), and Asian American Daniel Wu in *Naked Weapon*. Third, these films also feature white American actors who are presented as figures of American authority, for example Michael Biehn in *Dragon Heat* (Lee 2005). Fourth, Q is typically cast in the role of law enforcement agent or hired assassin. The films in which she stars focus on the conflict between the Hong Kong Police and American law enforcement agencies, like the FBI and CIA, or American mercenaries, in post-1997 Hong Kong. Portraying Asian American characters, Q is positioned as a bridge or mediator between Hong Kong and the United States, pushing for communication and/or collaboration between the two. Similar to Hollywood's representation of the Hong Kong woman as a translator of "the East" to "the West" (e.g. Michelle Yeoh), the Hong Kong action cinema envisages the Asian American woman as a bridge or mediator of "the West" working in "the East" for the post-1997 era.

Naked Weapon is arguably her most important Hong Kong film. The film was a star vehicle designed for Q and strongly defines her image as a competent action woman.

As suggested by the film's title, *Naked Weapon* explores the dangerous power of the female body to seduce men and render them vulnerable for attack.²² Although the film had the potential to hypersexualize Q and present her through the stereotype of the deadly "China Doll," *Naked Weapon* appears to have subverted this notion. Hollywood has historically relied on racial stereotypes to represent the Asian woman as an object of desire for the white male hero. The term China Doll (a.k.a. Lotus Blossom) refers to a prominent stereotype in the West which characterizes an Asian woman as being sexually attractive, exotic, overly feminine, and eager to please. The China Doll becomes "deadly" (or transforms into a Dragon Lady) when she uses her Asian femininity to threaten, endanger, and possibly kill (white) men for personal gain. *Naked Weapon* explicitly subverts these stereotypes by presenting the violent reality of Charlene's (Q's) training. The first third of the film chronicles the kidnapping of Charlene at the age of 12, her six-year imprisonment and extensive training, and the psychological effects of being forced to kill. This culminates in a violent gang-rape scene in which Charlene is drugged and violated. Charlene's oppression and victimization complicate the reading of her character as a deadly China Doll due to the lack of free will she possesses. Moreover, *Naked Weapon* overtly addresses the China Doll stereotype through the character of Katherine portrayed by Asian American actor Anya. At the end of the film, Katherine is placed in a glass box and her limbs are penetrated by thick pieces of knotted rope. Forced to become a literal "Chinese" doll (like a marionette), Katherine withstands excruciating pain before begging for death [Figure 18]. Charlene watches in horror as her best friend is beheaded by one of the film's villains. Thus, *Naked Weapon* undermines the deadly China Doll stereotype by foregrounding the victimization and traumatization of Charlene and

Katherine which results in their lacking free will. By foregrounding the relationship between the two women over romantic and/or sexual relationships with men, the film privileges sisterhood over images of excessive Asian sexuality.

In *Naked Weapon*, Q embodies an image of multiracial Asian American female identity that strongly departs from mainstream American representations. According to Gina Marchetti, multiracial characters in Hollywood are typically presented as the offspring of a white father and Asian mother, and placed within a narrative that highlights their identification with one parent, and thus racial identity, over another. By choosing their Asian heritage (i.e. the maternal over the paternal), multiracial characters are often linked to “a sinister involvement with the occult dangers of Asia” and this identification is presented as undesirable (*Romance* 67-68).²³ Marchetti argues that Hollywood typically prefers and positively portrays multiracial characters that “blot out taint of their Asian heritage through a forced acceptance by white society” (ibid. 68-69). Moreover, paternal identification is a staple element featured in the characterization of white action women in Hollywood. As noted by Yvonne Tasker, mother figures are frequently absent from the white female hero’s life and this lack of maternal guidance results in the female hero’s over-identification with her father and most often, her mission to complete and/or defend her father’s life’s work (*Working* 81). For instance, Tasker notes that the Hollywood disaster film *Twister* opens with a scene in which a young Jo Harding watches on as her father is swept away and killed by a F5 level tornado. Twenty years later, Harding (Helen Hunt) is (re)introduced into the film as the head researcher of a storm-chasing team. Harding has become a storm researcher like her father and risks her life to analyze a F5 tornado with a new technological device her team has created (ibid.

81). *Twister* offers a clear-cut example of paternal identification which explains the imperative of the action woman to step into the space of physical action.

In contrast, *Naked Weapon* does not emphasize white paternal identification and Charlene's American father does not appear in the film. Instead, the film emphasizes the importance of maternal identification and chronicles the reunification of Charlene with her estranged Asian mother portrayed by Pei Pei Cheng. On the one hand, Charlene embraces her Asian heritage and (re)discovers her cultural roots through her identification with her biological mother. On the other hand, Cheng functions as a transnational mediator who simultaneously locates and localizes Asian American actor Q within the tradition of Hong Kong warrior women. As I have previously discussed, Cheng's presence in the film helps to facilitate a generational and cinematic link between the Hong Kong and Asian American action woman.

Transnational Success at a Cost

Like other stars of Hong Kong cinema, Q was also enticed by high profile roles in Hollywood²⁴ and Mainland Chinese blockbusters. In the mid-2000s, she was cast in the Hollywood action films *Mission Impossible III* (Abrams 2006) and *Live Free or Die Hard* (Wisemen 2007), and the action-comedy *Balls of Fury* (Garant 2007). Q's Hollywood roles represent a progression from being identified with her action abilities from her Hong Kong roles to being increasingly defined in relation to Western stereotypes of Asian femininity. Her performance is limited by the racial politics prominent in mainstream American filmmaking. For example, Q's role in *Mission Impossible III* bears the closest resemblance to her work in Hong Kong. In the film, she

portrays Zhen Lai, an American military operative who is assigned to a small tactical unit led by Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise). For a majority of the film, Lai is defined by her proficiency with weaponry, martial arts, and computer technology rather than her Asian American identity. During an undercover mission at the Vatican, however, Lai is presented through the China Doll (i.e. Lotus Blossom) stereotype—she is presented as sexually attractive, exotic, overtly feminine, and eager to please. Costumed in a slinky red dress with her hair tied back with hair sticks, Lai speaks Chinese²⁵ while pretending not to understand English.²⁶ *Mission Impossible III* subsequently justifies the orientalization of Q's character by situating the scene within a narrative which emphasizes the *need* for a convincing distraction (i.e. the *need* for the racial stereotyping of the Asian American action woman).

Of her three Hollywood films, *Live Free or Die Hard* presents the most explicit marginalization of the Asian American action woman. Although Q's character, Mai, demonstrates her competency in computer programming and martial arts, she is defined in terms of her alluring Asian femininity. In the opening scenes of the film, Mai communicates with various male characters via telephone and radio; despite the lack of face-to-face interaction, several men comment on her attractive voice and express sexual attraction to her character. Midway through the film, John McClane (Bruce Willis) engages in a violent confrontation with Mai. During their encounter, and shortly after, McClane unleashes a tirade of racial insults aimed at demeaning Q's character. For instance, he refers to her as “a little Asian chick [who] likes to kick people,” as the biggest “bitch” he has ever met, as a “dead Asian hooker bitch,” and as a “smokin’ hot [...] skinny little ninja chick.” In the eyes of the white American hero McClane, Mai

epitomizes the dangers of Asian femininity (i.e. the Dragon Lady). While McClane is presented as an old-school action hero with old-school ideas—a relic from the 1980s of white masculinity—his comments still frame audience perception of her character and work to shape future expectations regarding the characterization of Asian American women in action.

The action-comedy, *Balls of Fury*, invokes racial stereotypes in order to play them up for comic affect. At the beginning of the film, Maggie (Q) is presented as a competent ping pong player and martial arts expert; however, once she becomes romantically involved with the white hero of the film, she transitions into the role of a passive China Doll. Near the end of the film, Maggie is captured by the film's villain, Feng (Christopher Walken), and emerges dressed in a short red kimono with her hair tied back with hair sticks. Her filmic image strongly resembles that of Asian American actor Ming Na in *Street Fighter* (de Souza 1994) who is similarly captured by her film's villain, General M. Bison (Raul Julia), and dressed in a short red kimono by her oppressor [Figure 19]. Not only are both women sexualized and fetishized through their imagining as geisha girls, but their heroic proficiency is consequently undermined by the passive images they project. In her America roles, Q is reduced to Western stereotypes whereas in Asia she represents a more meaningful idea of the connection or hybridization of Eastern and Western cultures in an era of globalization.

Return to the Chinese Cinema

Disillusioned by Hollywood's racial politics, Q returned to China to star in the Hong Kong-Chinese blockbusters *Three Kingdoms: Resurrection of the Dragon* (Lee 2008) and

The Warrior and the Wolf (Tian 2010). Just as other Hong Kong stars returned from Hollywood, Q has been enticed to work on Mainland-based blockbuster co-productions. The degree of Q's transnational star power is evidenced by her casting as a main character in both films and opposite other big stars such as Sammo Hung and Andy Lau in *Three Kingdoms* and Japanese heartthrob Joe Odagiri in *The Warrior and the Wolf*. Unlike her previous roles in Hong Kong action, Q was required to speak Chinese in these Mandarin-language films and learned the language phonetically while on set. The relationship between language and national/ethnic identity is central to Q's characterizations; she plays forward-thinking and highly influential women in the male-dominated space of war and, as such, embodies Chinese progress as the nation shifts from its nomadic, and at times even barbaric, traditions towards a more organized, unified, and peaceful society. Although each of her characters can be considered a personification of the modern Chinese nation, Q is presented as a distinctly Hong Kong action woman. She is presented with a more gender-neutral image and predominantly wears loose-fitting and neutral-coloured costumes which do not define or highlight the female body. Moreover, she is defined in the film through her physical abilities in the space of physical action. In Mainland-based co-productions, Q appears to be aligned with Hong Kong's lineage of warrior women.

In *Three Kingdoms*, for instance, Q portrays Cao Ying, the granddaughter of the warlord Cao Cao of the Wei Kingdom. Educated from youth in the art of war, Ying takes control of her grandfather's army following his death. As the only female warrior on the battlefield, Ying demonstrates her fighting abilities when engaged in hand-to-hand combat with her primary opponent Zhao Zilong (Andy Lau) whom she mortally wounds.

Her intellect, acumen, and patience are most evident in her strategic deployment of troops whom she commands with authority. Positioned as a figure of progress, Ying's victory over the Kingdom of Shu can be attributed her acquisition of gunpowder which tips the scales in her army's favour. While presented as a competent fighter and forward-thinking leader, Ying is also positioned as the locus of cultural identity for the Wei army as she plucks soulful melodies on the pipa (a popular Chinese string instrument of the Qin, Han and Tang Dynasties).

Rather than casting a Mainland actor for the role of Cao Ying, *Three Kingdoms* features a multiracial Asian American actor of Vietnamese descent to portray the figurehead of the Wei Kingdom. The reasoning behind her (mis)casting in the film is best articulated by blogger "Garion67" on the Internet Movie Database:

Not only is she non-Chinese, she's not fully Asian and clearly looks Eurasian. Seeing her in ancient Chinese gear looks a bit hilarious [and unrealistic]. She can't speak Mandarin although she will speak it in the movie phonetically [...] But there's one advantage. She's now a Hollywood actress and that in itself can help promote this movie more in the West. (IMDb)

Q's casting can be attributed to her transnational star power and popular appeal in both "the East" and "the West;" as a multiracial action star who has been featured in high-profile Hollywood action films, Q alone is capable of attracting Pan-Pacific interest in the project. Moreover, her (mis)casting in the film counters the expected formula for Mainland-based co-productions with Hong Kong. As expressed elsewhere in this study, the transnational nature of Chinese collaborations is reflected through the film's casting of Hong Kong action men paired with a Mainland actress. Based on the formula, Cao

Ying is expected to be portrayed by a Mainland actor so that her character can function as the personification of modern China. Instead, the role was awarded to an actor who was not ethnic Chinese and is not from the Mainland. What critics and fans are responding to then, is the fact that *Three Kingdoms* does not meet the casting expectations for Chinese collaborations.

In light of her struggle to circumvent the racial politics in Hollywood (and Mainland cinema), Q draws into question the notion of (Pan-Pacific) transnational success initially embodied by Bruce Lee. Similar to Lee, Q is an Asian American actor who began her career in Hong Kong before being cast in mainstream American action films. While Lee died before transitioning into Hollywood, Q worked in the mainstream American system. Disillusioned by the limited roles and representations available for Asian/Asian Americans, Q (like Russell Wong) left Hollywood in mid-2000s for better opportunities in East Asian Cinema. Through an examination of Q's transnational career, it becomes evident that Hong Kong/China—and *not* Hollywood—offers space for more progressive Asian American identities which challenge the stereotypes typically associated with the Asian female body in the West.

PART IV: THE YUEN SISTERS AND CINEMATIC DESTINY

Although Q is the best known Asian American female star in East and Southeast Asia, she is not the only Asian American actress working in the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema. In the early 2000s, daughters of the legendary swordswoman Pei Pei Cheng, Eugenia and Marsha Yuen, were inspired by the longevity of their mother's career and the diversity of roles she has portrayed to pursue work in Hong Kong. In contrast to Q, the screen

identities of Eugenia and Marsha Yuen are more the product of ancestry than nationality, and draw attention to the ongoing importance of family trees in the Hong Kong.

Hong Kong Family Trees

In order to understand how the Yuen sisters were marketed as distinctively local stars, it is helpful to consider the historical significance of family trees in Hong Kong cinema. According to Curtin, the Hong Kong film industry is a product of the social history of China. He contends that with the rise of the merchant/business class in China over two thousand years ago, government officials became enviously and increasingly resentful of their accumulating wealth. In one moment the ruling elite would embrace the merchants and in the next try to purge them of assets. In light of their fluctuating social position, the business class began to conceal their wealth and exercised discretion in social settings (34). Curtin argues that secrecy “became an ingrained feature in many commercial enterprises, and family or clan members were often the only ones trusted with managerial power or with the secrets of the company books” (34). As a commercial enterprise, the Hong Kong cinema has been run in much the same way. The history of the cinema is replete with tales of hardworking individuals who have been excluded from the innermost circles of authority because they are not blood-relatives of the families owning the businesses (ibid. 34). Curtin notes that patriarchs of Chinese production companies have historically been concerned that non-family staff members will one day depart with both expertise and company secrets, and become their competition within the industry. The best known example of such a betrayal was the departure of Raymond Chow and Leonard Ho from Shaw Brothers: Chow and Ho left and created their own company, Golden

Harvest, which became the most profitable production house in Hong Kong and dominated the film market to such a degree that it resulted in the decline and ultimate demise of Shaw Brothers (ibid. 47). The events surrounding the rise of Golden Harvest illustrate (if not reinforce) the significance and centrality of clan-mentality in the Hong Kong film industry.

In *Hong Action Cinema*, Bey Logan emphasizes the importance of Hong Kong family trees to the local cinema. For instance, Siu Tien Yuen is the patriarch of one of Hong Kong's most important filmic families. While all of his sons have worked in the local film industry (Cheung-Yan Yuen, Hsin Yee Yuen, Chun Wei Yuen, Yat Chock Yuen), his most famous offspring is Woo Ping Yuen. Considered one of Hong Kong's greatest action directors, Woo Ping Yuen has shaped the film careers and star images of such marquee performers as Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Michelle Yeoh, and Donnie Yen with his body-focused action choreography (14). In the wake of the cinema's decline and the continuing depletion of Hong Kong's talent pool, family ties and blood lines have become increasingly important to ensuring the survival of the local industry. This has resulted in the (over-)emphasis of familial connections as seen in the screen identities and star images of Eugenia and Marsha Yuen.

In 2002, Eugenia Yuen was cast in her first Hong Kong action film, *Flying Dragon, Leaping Tiger* (Lan 2002). As the executive producer of the project, Pei Pei Cheng facilitated the casting of her daughter in the Cantonese-language film [Figure 20]. Although the movie was made for television, *Flying Dragon* garnered press while still in its pre-production phase. The title alone caused many to speculate that the film would be a parody of the internationally acclaimed *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee 2000) in

which Cheng starred in the role of Jade Fox. Media interest in *Flying Dragon* led to the discovery that Cheng's American daughter had been cast in the film and this revelation became a major promotional feature of the film (*Flying* ¶2-3). While Yuen does not share the screen with her mother—who was cast as maternal master to the film's male protagonist—Yuen's star image, from its inception, was defined in terms of her familial relation to the “Queen of Swordplay.”

Yuen's background as a rhythmic gymnast aided her in ability to quickly learn and competently perform fight choreography. Her graceful execution of martial arts in *Flying Dragon* is reminiscent of her mother's performance style. While the film showcases her prowess in martial arts, it also demonstrates the range of Yuen's acting abilities. In the dramatic apex of the film, Yuen witnesses the murder of her best friend (Jade Leung) and tearfully mourns before avenging her friend's death. Impressed by Yuen's performance in the film, movie executives in Hong Kong scrambled to sign the young actress and groom her to inherit her mother's kung fu crown (ImDb). While set up to be an action star in Hong Kong, Yuen wanted to establish a career outside of her mother's shadow and moved away from action filmmaking. She has since taken on purely dramatic roles and taken her star image into an unexpected direction.

Rejecting the offers of Hong Kong movie executives, Yuen returned to the United States to star in the independent film *Charlotte Sometimes* (Byler 2002) and her performance in the film earned her an honourable mention at the *Independent Spirit Awards* (ImDb). Yuen proceeded to develop a Pan-Pacific acting career and travelled between East Asia and the United States to perform dramatic roles in both Cantonese- and English-language films. Her resume includes principle dramatic roles the American

independent films *Mail Order Wife* (Botko and Gurland 2004), *Locked* (Lasselle 2006), and *Choking Man* (Barron 2006); supportive dramatic roles in the American mainstream films *My Name is Modesty: A Modesty Blaise Adventure* (Spiegel 2004), *The Great Raid* (Dahl 2005), and *Memoirs of Geisha* (Marshall 2005); and starring dramatic roles in the Pan-Asian co-productions *Three Extremes II* (Chan, Kim and Nimibutr 2002),²⁷ *The Eye 2* (Chung and Pang 2004),²⁸ and *The Drummer* (Bi 2007). Yuen was named “Best New Performer” at the 2003 *Hong Kong Film Awards*; this honour increased her visibility in the local industry and promoted the impression that Yuen was to be taken as a serious actor rather than action star.

Yuen represents a new type of star that emerged in the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema: what Aihwa Ong called “the flexible citizen.” In her first (and only) action film *Flying Dragon*, Yuen was set up to be an action star in Hong Kong cinema and inherit her mother’s kung fu crown. In an attempt to avoid her cinematic “destiny” and develop an individual star persona apart from her mother,²⁹ Yuen carved out an award-winning acting career and garnered critical acclaim for her dramatic performances in American and East Asian cinema. According to Ong, the development of new Chinese subjectivities is a product of transnational capitalism: “Among transnational Chinese subjects, those most able to benefit from their participation in global capitalism create flexibility and mobility, which give rise to such figures as the multiple-passport holder” (19).³⁰ One prominent form of flexible citizenship is the “astronaut,” the Chinese business traveller who engages in the Pacific “shuttle” and crosses borders to conduct business (ibid. 19). In the late 1990s, Hong Kong papers named him an “astronaut” because he continually flies between locations to do business while his wife and children are located in Australia,

Canada, or the United States earning their rights of residence (127). Yuen can also be understood as a flexible citizen: although American (and female), Yuen maintains strong cultural, ethnic, and national ties to Hong Kong through her mother. She is a multiple-passport holder who has been able to move between the cinemas of East Asia and the United States, and develop a Pan-Pacific acting career. While she does not necessarily fit the criteria of an “astronaut”—i.e. she is female, unmarried, and does not have children living in the West—she offers an adapted version of the figure; through her physical mobility, Yuen can be understood as a figure of Chinese transnationalism who maintains national, geographic, and cinematic hybrid identities.

In 1999, Eugenia’s sister, Marsha Yuen, relocated to Hong Kong to pursue a film career. Upon the insistence of her mother, she entered the *Miss Hong Kong Pageant* (1999) with hopes of attracting the attention of a movie executive and/or film director (Lanuque 1). Indeed, some of Hong Kong’s most bankable female stars have been discovered in beauty pageants and subsequently offered principle film roles by movie executives, including such stars as Michelle Yeoh, Maggie Cheung, Anita Yuen, and Valerie Chow. Even before the pageant began, Yuen’s application, which clearly outlined her familial relation to Pei Pei Cheng, became the subject of much media attention (ibid. 1).³¹ After winning the title of “Second Runner Up,” Yuen was approached by a TVB³² executive who offered her a role in a Cantonese-language sitcom (ibid. 1). Following the *Miss Hong Kong Pageant*, Yuen was widely known as the daughter of Cheng and actively sought out Cantonese-language roles in the post-1997 Hong Kong action cinema to follow in her mother’s footsteps [Figure 21].

In 2002, Yuen was cast in the low-budget action flick *Snake Charmer* (Kung 2002) and her performance caught the attention of film producer Sharon Yeung who aspired to make Yuen into an action star. Yeung mentored the young actress and even developed a star vehicle to showcase her martial arts potential (Lanuque 4). Yuen starred as an Asian Lara Croft in the action flick *Undiscovered Tomb* (Kung 2003) and her dynamic martial arts performance in the film can be attributed to her background in dance and rhythmic gymnastics [Figure 22].³³ Prior to filming, Yeung requested that Yuen receive training in the Beijing Opera since the film required the performance of more modern-day martial arts rather than traditional Chinese kung fu (ibid. 3). As a result, Yuen's graceful performance of action choreography and wirework is the highlight of this lower-budget film.

Although *Naked Weapon* (2002) and *Undiscovered Tomb* (2002) were star vehicles for Asian American actors Q and Marsha Yuen respectively, they featured different, yet co-existing, representations of Asian American female screen identities and target different audiences. As a high budget English-language film, *Naked Weapon* was marketed to the broader international market; on the other hand, *Undiscovered Tomb* is a lower-budget Cantonese-language film targeting the domestic market. Differences in cinematic dialogue draw attention to the dissimilarity of on-screen identities. In *Naked Weapon*, Q is positioned as a multiracial Asian American character and the film maintains its strong Asian American focus by casting Daniel Wu as her love interest. Conversely, Marsha Yuen is positioned in *Undiscovered Tomb* (and unlike her initial TVB role as an overseas Chinese) as a Hong Kong hero—i.e. an indigenous or local hero.

Both roles, however, are connected to Pei Pei Cheng and positioned within the lineage of Hong Kong's warrior women. In *Naked Weapon*, Cheng plays the estranged mother of Charlene (Q). The importance of their biological connection emphasized through the demonization of Charlene's adoptive mother Madam M (Almen Wong) who is presented as a Dragon Lady in the film; by focusing on the torture, trauma, and training Madam M forces upon Charlene, *Naked Weapon* stresses the importance of biological (re)connection and by extension, familial lineage. Yuen not only bears a close physical resemblance to her mother, but in *Undiscovered Tomb* she is also positioned as the progeny and heir to Cheng's martial arts throne. This is accomplished by foregrounding a strong maternal connection between Georgia (Yuen) and her adoptive mother Professor Ivy (Yôko Shimada), whose characterization as a maternal master alludes to Cheng. In the film, Georgia is not forced to train; upon hearing about her mother's exciting adventures, Georgia chooses to follow in her footsteps and become an archaeological explorer. Issues of free will, adoption, and familial (re)connection function differently in each film, and present different impressions of the characters portrayed by Q and Yuen. *Naked Weapon* emphasizes Q's bond with Cheng and is symbolically aligned with Hong Kong's warrior women. Conversely, *Undiscovered Tomb* reiterates Yuen's biological connection to Cheng through use of a surrogate maternal master. Yuen is part of a family tree rooted in Hong Kong cinema and her filial connection to Cheng grants her a level of local identity not afforded to Q.

Following her performance in *Undiscovered Tomb*, Yuen is no longer presented as the progeny of Cheng in the action cinema, but instead is featured as the cinematic reincarnation of Cheng herself. This is most notable in her next action role in which she

portrays a competent swordswoman in *Hero Youngster* (Kei and Kong 2004). In light of the film's grainy image quality, stylization of action, and female-focussed narrative, *Hero Youngster* is reminiscent of a 1960s new-style *wuxia pian* film. Yuen's image bears such a strong resemblance to her mother that her performance in the film could easily pass for that of Cheng. Moreover, it was Cheng who originally read the script and urged her daughter to sign on to the project. As Cheng recalls, "When I read the story for her, I thought it was more like my kind. Actually, the character looks like me" (ibid.5). Cheng's comments highlight the fact that Yuen's star image has been consciously adjusted to mirror that of her mother.

Like Cheng, Yuen's star image appears to be defined by roles in martial arts swordplay. Their cinematic and filial connection is even more pronounced through Yuen's characterization as a maternal hero in the martial arts horror flick *Shaolin vs. Evil Dead: Ultimate Power* (Kung and Yip). Yuen portrays a pregnant martial artist that is poisoned during battle; refusing to abort her child, she sacrifices her life to give birth to the next great martial hero, Mu Che (Siu-Wong Fan). Yuen is not only presented in a maternal role which mirrors that of her mother, but her career has the potential to bear an even stronger resemblance to that of Cheng. There are rumours of a possible remake of the *wuxia* classic *Come Drink With Me*, a film which established the legendary image of Cheng. Having expressed interest in the project, Yuen has been put on a short list of actors being considered for the part (Lanuque 6). The consideration of Yuen for the principle role in such a staple Hong Kong film further highlights the fact that she is considered a Hong Kong rather than Asian American action star. Her local identity was initially established through the foregrounding of her biological connection to Cheng in

low-budget Cantonese-language action films. Considered Cheng's kung fu heir, Yuen has since been "groomed" to inherit her mother's crown and this appears to entail the transposition of Cheng's legendary image onto Yuen. Similar to Michelle Yeoh and Qi Shu, Yuen's transition into the role of action woman in Hong Kong requires her to be envisaged through a pre-existing female heroic model, that of her mother Cheng. This renders Yuen vastly different from other Asian American action women like Q.

Transnational Asian American Action Women

Although Hong Kong cinema has historically benefited from the contributions of Asian Americans, the post-1997 cinema has offered extensive space for the development of multiple and co-existing representations of Asian American action women. Cast in English-language roles, Q was initially marketed to international audiences as an Asian American action hero. Transitioning into mainstream American film, she initially appears to achieve transnational success as defined by the (limited) career of Bruce Lee. Disillusion by Hollywood's racial politics and enticed by the production values of Mainland co-productions, Q returned to East Asian cinema to continue her filmmaking career in action. Conversely, Eugenia Yuen attracted considerable attention with her first, and only, role in the Hong Kong action cinema. Distancing herself from the expectations of her mother, Pei Pei Cheng, Yuen has enjoyed an award-winning Pan-Pacific film career, portraying Asian American and Pan-Asian roles in both Cantonese- and English-language films. Unlike her sister, Marsha Yuen has actively sought out a career in Hong Kong action and her star image mirrors that of her mother. Although Asian American, Yuen has been cast as a local Hong Kong swordplay hero in low-budget Cantonese-

language films aimed at the domestic film market. As the daughter of Cheng, Yuen has been granted a certain degree of “Asianness” and/or local identity that is not afforded to Q. This underscores the ongoing importance of family trees to the post-1997 Hong Kong action cinema.

CHAPTER 6

TRANSNATIONAL INTEGRATION

ASIAN CANADIAN ACTION WOMEN IN POST-1997 HONG KONG

The contribution of Asian Canadians to post-1997 Hong Kong cinema is a topic overlooked by film scholars. This critical oversight can be attributed to a number of interrelated factors. First, the 2000s has seen the rise in prominence of Asian American literary and film criticism as an academic field of study. Asian Canadian studies remain, for the most part, the focus of Canadian scholars, and Asian Canadian film criticism typically works in conversation with prominent theories put forth by Asian American film critics. Second, as an industry, Asian Canadian filmmaking is not as established as Asian American independent cinema and has received far less critical attention. Asian Canadian directors and actors frequently migrate to the United States to work on Asian American and/or mainstream American film projects. As a result, there are few Asian Canadians working in Canadian film. Third, in light of the “1997 consciousness” and the migration of Hong Kong marquee film talent to and from the United States, film critics tend to focus, almost exclusively, on the dialogic relationship between Hong Kong and Hollywood action cinemas. In the process, the transnational relationship between Hong Kong and Canada becomes obscured and the contributions of Asian Canadians working within the Hong Kong film industry overlooked.

This chapter will consider the various ways in which Asian Canadian women are integrated into the star system of post-1997 Hong Kong, their varying levels of success in the action cinema, and the Asian identities they embody through their performances. I will first explore the casting of actors Françoise Yip and Christy Chung in Hong Kong

action films of the mid-1990s as precursors who helped to stimulate local interest in Asian Canadian female identity prior to the film industry crisis. I will then explore the subsequent casting of Charlene Choi, Karen Lam, Bernice Liu, Monica Lo, and Kristy Yang in the post-1997 action cinema. These Asian Canadian women together form a new pool of Pan-Asian talent from which the post-1997 Hong Kong film industry draws upon. They are seamlessly integrated into the local star system through the music and television industries, develop local and/or Pan-Asian fan bases, and then transition into action filmmaking. I will also explore how Asian Canadians are perceived differently than Asian American action women in post-1997 Hong Kong. While the star personas of Asian American female actors emphasize their national roots (i.e. American identity), the star personas of Asian Canadians foreground the connection between overseas (i.e. diasporic Canadian) and Hong Kong Chinese. In other words, Asian Canadian women are considered to be modern, multilingual, and cosmopolitan—qualities typically associated with the global image of Hong Kong. I will argue that Asian Canadian performers are considered return migrants (i.e. diasporic Hong Kong Chinese) and offer an ideological connection to the Westernized Chinese roots of Hong Kong's colonial past.

PART I: HONG KONG–CANADA CONNECTIONS

As previously argued, Hong Kong (and Hollywood) filmmakers relied on gender binaries to ethnically differentiate Hong Kong from Mainland Chinese action women. In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which Asian Canadian women working in post-1997 Hong Kong cinema are differentiated nationally from Asian Americans. Pierre Trudeau famously described Canada's relationship with America as being one of a mouse lying

beside a sleeping elephant: “the mouse had to be very attentive to the elephant’s movements lest it turn over in the night” (Wilson 173). While Canada’s long history of social, political, and economic interactions with the United States goes beyond the scope of this study, it is important to explore the nature of the cultural exchange taking place between the United States and Canada, and consider how this contributes to the (self-)perception/portrayal of Canadian identity.

According to Frank Manning, American popular culture has maintained a “pervasive presence” in Canada (4). American media (film, television, music) is widely, if not predominantly, preferred and consumed over domestic products in Canada. The Canadian film industry has historically struggled to compete in its own domestic market with Hollywood films which dominate the theater screens and generate a large majority of film revenue. Although Canadians widely consume Hollywood products, they do not subscribe to the American ideology prevalent in these films. Manning notes that Canadians continue to define themselves in opposition to American identity as a means of “resisting the cultural encroachment of the southern neighbour and responding to it as uncertain adversaries” (4). He contends that Canadians “need to define themselves with reference to an absolute, forceful, and mystified ‘Other’” (19). Although Canadians see themselves as being inherently different from Americans—an image promoted through Canadian popular culture—it is important to explore how “Canadianness,” as a national and cultural identity, is perceived and presented outside of North America. More specifically, I am interested in exploring how national identity impacts the portrayal of Asian Canadians working in post-1997 Hong Kong cinema. Do Hong Kong filmmakers

differentiate Asian Canadians from Asian Americans in the same way that they differentiate Hong Kong from Mainland Chinese?

Hong Kong and Canada share a number of common characteristics. First, they are former British colonies which maintain amicable relationships with the United Kingdom. Second, each is geographically located beside a major world power (China and USA) and maintains close social, political, and economic ties with this country; in essence, Hong Kong and Canada are the proverbial “mice” to their respective “elephants.” Third, both of their cultural industries have been strongly affected by the widespread popularity of Hollywood films. Similar to Hong Kong, Canadian cinema has struggled to compete domestically with Hollywood films and has been drained of creative film talent seeking opportunities in American film.¹ While these elements highlight perceptual (and possibly tangential) connections, they do not account for Hong Kong’s interest in Asian Canadian women in the years bookending the handover. It is my belief that this interest can be attributed, at least in part, to favourable immigration laws which promoted the migration of wealthy Hong Kong investors (and their families) to Canada in the 1980s and 1990s.

In the years leading up to the Chinese amalgamation (1997), many Hong Kong residents migrated to Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Aihwa Ong estimates that over one thousand migrants left Hong Kong each week beginning in 1990; this outflow is often referred to as the “China tide” (96). The decision to migrate to Canada appears to be influenced, at least in part, by Canada’s immigration laws. In the 1970s, the Government of Canada established the Business Immigration Program with the hope of attracting wealthy immigrants (and their capital) to Canada (Waters 223). Two additional components have since been added to the Business

Immigration Program in order to further specify the preferred type of applicant. According to Johanna Waters, the Immigrant Entrepreneur Program (1978) was designed to attract qualified immigrants interested in creating and managing a business in Canada. The goal of this program was to attract applicants who would create jobs in Canada and contribute the local economy. In order to qualify for residency, the applicant would have to demonstrate his/her business experience, have a net worth of \$300,000 CAD, and remain subject to additional conditions upon their arrival (223). Implemented in 1986, the Immigrant Investor Program was designed to attract wealthy immigrants and their capital to Canada. To qualify, applicants would have to demonstrate their business experience, have a net worth of at least \$800,000 CAD, and make an investment in Canada of \$400,000 CAD. Applicants who met these requirements would be granted permanent residency in Canada and citizenship three years later (223). Of great importance is the fact that the Business Immigration Program does not require applicants to sever ties with their “old” country. In fact, permanent residents are only required to reside in Canada for half of their three year tenure. As a result, “economic” immigrants, as Waters has termed them, can retain social, cultural, and especially economic connections with their “old” country (Waters 220, 223).

Due to its immigration policies, Canada appealed to wealthy Hong Kong residents interested in leaving Hong Kong and/or acquiring a foreign passport prior to the handover. According to Waters, the 1990s saw the arrival of many Hong Kong “economic” immigrants especially to Vancouver. She notes that in 1995, 30% of immigrants to Vancouver were from Hong Kong (and an additional 14% were from Taiwan). Moreover, 61% of all applications were classified as “economic” and thus

candidacy for Canadian residency in Vancouver was strongly dependent on an immigrant's demonstration of personal wealth (224). Waters also notes that Canadian immigration policies led to the development of "astronaut families" in Vancouver whereby the patriarch (i.e. the "astronaut") travels to East Asia for work while his wife and children (i.e. "satellite kids") earn their residency in Canada (ibid. 224). Ong suggests that this system tends to "valorise mobile masculinity and [fosters] localized femininity" (20). Within the Hong Kong–Canadian transnational (and flexible) family unit, a new generation of overseas Chinese (i.e. "satellite kids") were born, raised, and/or educated in Canada, but still retain social and cultural connections with Hong Kong specifically through their mobile fathers. It is not my intention to argue that all Hong Kong residents who moved to Canada in the 1980s and 1990s were "economic" immigrants and/or established "astronaut families;" instead, my goal is to highlight the development of transnational connections between Hong Kong and Canada in the years leading up to the handover (1997). Moreover, since the term "astronaut" was both coined and widely used in Hong Kong newspapers around the time of the handover (Ong 127), there was likely a general knowledge of the establishment of transnational connections between Hong Kong and Canada.

PART II: ASIAN CANADIAN PRECURSORS

Françoise Yip

Since this chapter is focused on the connections between Hong Kong and Canada in the years leading up to the handover, I will explore the casting and characterization of Asian Canadian actresses in Hong Kong action films of the 1990s. The collaborative

relationship between Hong Kong and Canada was sparked by the 1995 co-production of the Jackie Chan action comedy *Rumble in the Bronx* (Tong 1995). Shot in Canada, *Rumble* features Asian Canadian model Françoise Yip in her first starring role [Figure 23]. She is cast as Nancy, a member of a local bike gang terrorizing the neighbourhood. Nancy participates in illegal activities in order to raise funds to support her brother who is confined to a wheelchair. Keung (Chan) urges Nancy to break ties with the gang and helps her earn money legally. Although *Rumble* features a number of spectacular action sequences, Yip remains on the periphery of the film's physical action as a damsel in distress who inspires Chan's character to save her. At the time of the film's release, *Rumble* was the top grossing Jackie Chan film in Hong Kong and earned over \$32 million at the domestic box-office.² Due to the high-profile nature of the film, Yip's characterization in *Rumble* helped to establish her star persona in Hong Kong cinema; her performance earned her two nominations at the 1995 *Hong Kong Film Awards*—"Best New Performer" and "Best Supporting Actress"—and was instantly catapulted into transnational stardom in East Asia.

Similarly, Yip was cast as a love interest in her next three action films *Wild* (Tang 1996), *Mr. Mumble*³ (Yuen 1996), and *Web of Deception* (Tang and Yuang 1996). While she played principle characters, her role in each film is to support the male Chinese hero romantically rather than to perform martial arts. Her representation, however, is adapted in her final Hong Kong action film *Black Mask* (Lee 1996) wherein she plays love interest *and* martial arts partner to the male Chinese hero portrayed by Jet Li. As previously discussed, in the 1990s, the Hong Kong action film was dominated by male heroes and action women were expected to match the performance standard of Hong

Kong men in order to be considered bona fide action stars. For instance, Michelle Yeoh performed the body-focused fight choreography of Woo Ping Yuen in tandem with male action stars Li and Donnie Yen in *Tai Chi Master* and *Wing Chun* respectively. In *Black Mask*, Yip similarly executes Yuen's complex action choreography; her performance, however, does not match the physical dynamism of Li who outfights and outshines her in the film. Unable to meet the male standard of the genre (as set by Li), Yip was not recognized as a bona fide action star in Hong Kong; instead, she became known for her dramatic performances in character-driven roles.

With the exception of the English-language and Western marketed *Rumble in the Bronx*, Yip was cast in Cantonese-language roles in Hong Kong. She typically portrayed Asian characters from a variety of nationalities including an Asian American in *Rumble in the Bronx* and a Hong Kong Chinese in *Black Mask*. Her roles aligned her with other Pan-Asian actresses working in Hong Kong at the time. As previously mentioned, in the mid-1980s, models, beauty queens, and singers with little-to-no formal training in martial arts were taught fight choreography on set and transitioned from being minor/local celebrities to transnational stars of the Hong Kong action cinema (Bordwell 170). They were presented with fluid Pan-Asian on-screen identities (Lu, *China* 126) and contributed to the more international look to the cinema which matched Hong Kong's emerging global identity as a center for international trade (Bordwell 170). Michelle Yeoh is the most notable example of a minor celebrity (i.e. beauty queen) becoming a mainstream action film star. Despite the fact that Yip is a multiracial Asian Canadian, she was considered, by the Hong Kong industry, a distinctly Asian and/or Chinese actor. Just as

her Pan-Asian counterparts, Yip was integrated into the star system of Hong Kong and gained Pan-Asian star power with her roles in the action cinema.

Prior to China's resumption of sovereign control over Hong Kong, Yip migrated to the United States to find work in Hollywood. Although she enjoyed popularity in East Asia and had the advantage of starring in *Rumble in the Bronx* which was released in the United States, Yip has struggled to make a name for herself in Hollywood.⁴ She has since played minor roles in Hollywood, Asian American,⁵ and Canadian, films.⁶ Although Bruce Lee has been upheld as a model of transnational success, very few overseas actors have successfully transitioned from mainstream Hong Kong to mainstream Hollywood—including Yip. Yip's legacy, however, resides in the fact that she simulated Hong Kong interest in Asian Canadian women and created a market demand for a successor.

Christy Chung

In the mid-1990s, Asian Canadian Christy Chung also became a popular star in the Hong Kong action cinema [Figure 24]. After winning the 1993 *Miss Chinese International* competition in Hong Kong, she was approached by movie directors interested in casting her in their action films ("Christy" ¶1). She made her film debut in the Cantonese-language *wuxia pian* film *The Bride with White Hair 2* (Wu 1993). Starring alongside such marquee actors as Leslie Cheung and Brigitte Lin, Chung received a great deal of exposure from her first film role. In *The Bride*, Chung portrays Moon, a self-described tomboy who dresses in men's clothes and lives the life of a male martial warrior. Midway through the film, she joins a collective of fighters in order to destroy Ni-Chang Lien, a witch who kills abusive husbands and brings their wives into her harem where they are

transformed into demons. In the final scene of the film, Moon is outnumbered and killed by the harem while attempting to safeguard the members of the heroic collective. As previously mentioned, in the early 1990s, “real” action women (e.g. Yeoh) who performed their own stunts were contrasted with those women whose physical performances were heavily mediated through a combination of wirework, camera angles, editing, and the use of stunt doubles (Logan 167-68). Although Chung is featured as a protagonist, her portrayal in the film aligns her with the other “fake” action women emerging in the cinema at the time.

Since *The Bride*, Chung starred in a string of Cantonese-language action films which feature some of Hong Kong’s most notable action men, including Jet Li (*The Bodyguard from Beijing* [Konaka and Yuen 1994]), Kenny Ho (*The Red Wolf* [Yuen 1995]), Simon Yam (*Man Wanted* [Chan 1995]), Jacky Wu (*Tai Chi Boxer* [Yuen and Zhang 1995]), and Tony Leung (*'97 Aces Go Places* [Chin 1997]). Although these films are directed by some of Hong Kong’s most notable action filmmakers—Corey Yuen (*Bodyguard from Beijing*), Woo Ping Yuen (*The Red Wolf*, *Tai Chi Boxer*), Benny Chan (*Man Wanted*)—Chung is presented in more dramatic rather than action-oriented roles. She portrays local Hong Kong characters and her star image plays on her beauty queen status by emphasizing her attractiveness over physical abilities. She is typically featured as arm candy and her role in each film is twofold. On the one hand, her romantic attachment to the film’s male hero renders him the envy of his friends and enemies. On the other hand, she serves as a visual distraction to the film’s villain(s) and offers her boyfriend a window of opportunity to attack his unsuspecting opponents. This is most evident in Chung’s role in the 1995 action film *The Red Wolf*. Chung portrays Christy, a

waitress who works on a cruise ship in order to pick the pockets of the wealthy passengers. When the vessel is hijacked, she teams up with the ship's security officer Dragon (Kenny Ho) and helps him to regain control of the vessel. Although the film features the martial arts choreography of Woo Ping Yuen, Cheung-Yan Yuen, and Wing Cho, Chung is not presented as an action woman and does not participate in the action sequences. Instead, she is featured on numerous occasions running through the corridors of the ship in order to attract gunfire away from Dragon so that he can subdue the hijackers. Chung is also presented in contrast with Hong Kong actress Elaine Liu who portrays an action-oriented character in the film and performs in multiple fight sequences. This distinction further emphasizes the fact that Chung's star image is centered on her beauty rather than physical abilities in the action cinema.

Just as Asian Canadian Françoise Yip left Hong Kong prior to the 1997 handover, so too did Chung. She retired from action filmmaking after marrying British businessman Glen Ross and started a family (HKMDB). In the 2000s, Chung returned to Hong Kong divorced and seeking work in the post-1997 cinema. She was cast in a secondary and supporting role in Benny Chan's *Gen Y Cops* (2000). As I argued earlier, *Gen Y Cops* helped to establish the brand identity of the Hong Kong production company Media Asia. Notably, the film featured high production values and a new generation of overseas action stars including fellow Asian Canadian Edison Chen and Asian Americans Stephen Fung and Maggie Q. While Chung's character is a member of the Hong Kong police force, she remains on the periphery of the film's physical action which is presented as the domain of this new generation of (overseas) action stars. Although Asian Canadian,

Chung was not part of the new wave of Asian American and Asian Canadian actors working in the post-1997 Hong Kong action cinema.

As previously noted, Michelle Yeoh returned from her temporary retirement (i.e. post-divorce) and quickly rose to Pan-Asian superstardom with her dynamic performance in such action films as *Supercop* (1993) and *Wing Chun* (1994). Conversely, Chung emerged from her temporary retirement to become a Pan-Asian sex symbol: in 2000, she was named “the sexiest woman in Asia” by FHM (“Christy” ¶1). Unlike Yeoh who is known for her physical performances in action, Chung has become known for her body which has been placed on display (often semi-nude) in films such as the Thai erotic drama *Jan Dara* (Nimibutr 2000). In the film, Chung portrays Boonlueang Khun, the third wife of Luang Khun (Santisuk Promsiri) who has an affair with her teenage stepson Dara Jan (Suwinit Panjamawat) and later also with Jan’s wife Kaew (Patharawarin Timkul). Characterized as a bisexual nymphomaniac, Khun experiments with positions from the karma sutra and educates her young lovers in the art of seduction; positioned as the erotic object of the gaze, Khun is featured topless in many of the film’s graphic sex scenes [Figure 25]. In light of the film’s critical *and* commercial success in Hong Kong (ibid. ¶3), Chung has solidified her status as a pin-up rather than action star in post-1997 Hong Kong.

In light of her increasing international profile, Chung was cast in the Hong Kong-American co-production *The Medallion* (Chan 2003). In this Jackie Chan action film, she plays a secondary and supportive role portraying Charlotte Watson, the demure housewife of Eddie Yang’s (Chan) comedic sidekick. Midway through the film, the Watson home is attacked by bandits. Charlotte reveals a weapons arsenal she has hidden

in a broom closet and fights alongside her husband (Lee Evans); she briefly steps into the space of physical action to rightfully defend her household and child before returning to the periphery of the film's physical action. Although momentarily presented as an action woman, Chung's role in the film is brief and her association is mainly with the domestic sphere. In 2003, Chung retired once again to marry. Although Chung increased her star profile in the 2000s, she is not firmly associated with Hong Kong cinema or the action genre in the second phase of her career. As a result, I would not place Chung as part of the new wave of Asian American and Asian Canadian action stars emerging in the post-1997 action cinema. Instead, she functions as a precursor who helped to spark local interest in Asian Canadian women through her increasing visibility and popular appeal in Hong Kong.

PART III: *GE-YING-SHI* (MUSIC—FILM—TV)

As previously discussed, Hong Kong cinema is part of a multimedia entertainment complex known as the *ge-ying-shi* (music—film—tv) which is centered on promoting multifaceted stars who use their celebrity status to sell their vehicles (i.e. CDs, concerts, films, etc). Scholars frequently emphasize the intermedial connection between the music and film industries and the ease at which stars can transition between the two. Often overlooked, however, are the connections between television and film which have facilitated the crossing over of Asian Canadian women between these industries.

Eric Kit-Wai Ma argues for a symbiotic relationship between Hong Kong television and film as “both media show strong institutional ties with each other and articulate dominant identity representations in much the same way” (3). Exploring the

television industry of the 1970s, Ma suggests that Hong Kong identity was constructed by foregrounding the differences between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese. In television serials, Mainlanders were “stigmatized as ‘uncivilized’ outsiders against which modern, cosmopolitan Hongkongers would define themselves” (1). Although scholars typically trace the development of local identity in Hong Kong through the kung fu and gunplay genres, Ma’s study draws attention to the fact that the local television industry also played a role in the development of that distinctively local Hong Kong identity. Since the 1970s, Hong Kong television products have reflected the cultural concerns and shaped the popular tastes of local audiences.

Television and the New Wave (1979-1984)

The Hong Kong television industry is comprised of two competing local networks. In the late 1960s, Shaw Brothers established the first commercial television station in Hong Kong, TVB (Television Broadcasting Limited). TVB initially imported foreign language television series but in the 1970s began to produce their own Chinese dramas (Curtain 110). This change in programming, according to Curtin, was sparked by the establishment of a local competitor, ATV (Asian Television), in the mid-1970s. The rise of ATV sparked a heated ratings competition between the two networks which has continued ever since. Faced with local competition, TVB expanded their programming from variety and talk shows to the production of more expensive dramas. In order to provide a higher quality product, TVB directors were encouraged to tap into the resources of the Shaw Brothers film studio and the dramas they produced helped TVB triumph over ATV in the ratings race (110). Since the 1970s, both TVB and ATV have undergone

significant structural and programming changes in order to globalize each network.⁷ While this discussion goes beyond the scope of this study, I want to emphasize the connections established in the 1970s between the filmmaking and television industries—namely, a sharing of resources including studio space, creative talent, and at times even actors—and that this cooperative relationship has continued throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

The early 1980s saw the first significant shift of creative talent from the television to filmmaking industries which resulted in the establishment of the Hong Kong “New Wave” (1979-1984). According to Jenny Lau, the term “New Wave” refers to a group of groundbreaking filmmakers who emerged in Hong Kong cinema in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These directors include Ann Hui, Hark Tsui, Yim Ho, Allen Fong, and Stanley Kwan. Almost all New Wave directors were trained in filmmaking in the West (North America, Britain) and returned to Hong Kong with significant production experience. This is reflected in their films which reveal a more sophisticated use of *mise-en-scène* and visual effects, and draw attention to the increasing importance of art direction in Hong Kong cinema (“Besides” 159). Lau notes that New Wave filmmakers helped (re)align Hong Kong cinema with social realism; instead of focusing on “glamorized fictions made up of stereotypical characters,” New Wave filmmakers placed narrative emphasis on the retelling and/or interpretation of real-life experiences (159). For instance, Ann Hui’s *The Secret* (1979) explores the topic of premarital pregnancy and how social scrutiny drove the expectant mother to kill her child’s father. Lau contends that prior to the 1980s, this candid nature of social realism was rare in Hong Kong cinema (159).

After completing their training in the West, New Wave filmmakers returned to Hong Kong and began directing dramas in the television rather than filmmaking industry. In the late 1970s, Hong Kong studios required filmmakers to undertake a lengthy apprenticeship before moving into the directorial role. New Wave filmmakers opted to work in television drama since they could begin directing projects immediately (Bordwell 69). For instance, Ann Hui was trained at the London Film School and began working for TVB in 1975. According to Patricia Erens, the late 1970s was the “heyday of independent television production in Hong Kong” and Hui directed 26 television documentaries during this time (176). Like Hui, New Wave directors learned how to shoot films on location and quickly edit together their projects. Many of these filmmakers sought out independent funding for their first commercial films which were produced outside the studio set-up (Bordwell 69). Moreover, these New Wave films took Hong Kong, rather than China, as their subject matter and explored contemporary social problems. Although New Wave films did moderately well at the box-office (Bordwell 69), they anticipate the development of the *gang-chan-pian* (i.e. Hong Kong made films of mid-1980s) and are a precursor to the golden age of Hong Kong filmmaking.

Miss Hong Kong Pageant

While New Wave filmmakers are most notable for their intermedial shift, the television industry also appears to be a means through which Asian Canadian female actors have established their star personas and subsequently transitioned into the action cinema. According to Aihwa Ong, overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) are perceived as offering an intermediary or “contrast category” of Chinese modernity; they reside in a “structural

position between the mainland Chinese and the non-Chinese foreigners who embody Western modernity” (43). It is my contention that Asian Canadian women in Hong Kong are perceived as embodying particular Western characteristics which had previously defined Hong Kong in its colonial state: modern, urban, cosmopolitan, and multilingual. The integration of Asian Canadian women into the *ge-ying-shi* has helped to (re)establish Hong Kong’s local identity in a post-1997 context.

The annual *Miss Hong Kong Pageant* is sponsored by TVB. Although Hong Kong hosts a number of beauty competitions yearly, *Miss Hong Kong* is considered the most important because the winner represents the region at the *Miss Universe Pageant* and the TVB sponsored *Miss Chinese International* competition (Leung 341). The “Miss Hong Kong” titleholder is also awarded a one-year contract with TVB and the network has the option of offering other pageant contestants contracts and/or auditions (Chan ¶3). In the early 1990s, TVB introduced three significant changes to the Miss Hong Kong pageant. First, Hong Kong residents were able to vote for the winner of the pageant. According to Freedom Leung, Sharon Lam, and Sherrien Sze, the pageant results “directly reflect the standards that the general public uses to judge feminine beauty” (341). Second, TVB also introduced the “Miss Photogenic” title which is voted upon by various editors and photographers of popular magazines in Hong Kong. The title is awarded to the delegate who best reflects what local beauty insiders consider to be the new fresh face of Hong Kong and the epitome of commercial beauty at the time (Leung 341). Third, and perhaps most important, in 1991 TVB began to accept nominations for overseas delegates whom, if selected, would fly to Hong Kong to compete (Chan ¶4). According to Yuan-Kwan Chan, TVB realized that many locals were leaving the region

in light of the impending handover to China in 1997 (Chan ¶4). Although Chan does not fully articulate the reasoning behind TVB's inclusion of overseas delegates, it is likely a strategy aimed at highlighting the return migration of overseas and Westernized Chinese into Hong Kong in order to counter the reality of mass migration out of the region.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, films of the *gang-chan-pian* reflected local anxieties as Hong Kong's handover to China drew near: various films explored the experiences of Asian Americans and/or diasporic Asians living in the United States in order to articulate and subsequently quell the fears of potential emigrants leaving Hong Kong (Stringer, "Cultural" 299). Hong Kong's interest in Asian American identity and/or experiences went beyond the cinema. In the early 1990s, Asian American contestants fared well in the *Miss Hong Kong Pageant*. For instance, Amy Kwok won the pageant in 1991 while Winnie Yeung earned the title in 1995. With the publicity generated from the pageant, TVB drew attention to the fact that young Asian American women were interested in travelling to the region in order to compete for the coveted title of Miss Hong Kong.

The late 1990s saw a notable shift in the nationality of overseas winners to Asian Canadians. Between 1997 and 2000, all of the winners originated from Vancouver—Virginia Yung (1997), Anne Heung (1998), Sonija Kwok (1999), and Vivian Lau (2000)—a fact which can be attributed, in least in part, to the large number of Hong Kong residents who migrated to Vancouver in the years leading up to the handover; regardless of whether or not these winners were actually Hong Kong Chinese, what is most important is the fact that these beauty queens represented Vancouver and were arguably perceived as being return migrants of the Chinese diaspora to Hong Kong.⁸ Each of these

winners was voted for by the Hong Kong public, was signed to a one-year contract with TVB, and became a highly visible celebrity in the post-1997 television industry.

These Asian Canadian contestants were also awarded additional titles which draw attention to the perception and/or popular appeal of “Asian Canadianness” in post-1997 Hong Kong. Prior to 1997, a small number of contestants each year would be given additional awards; these titles were part of a recurring slate of awards traditionally associated with the pageant (e.g. “Miss International Goodwill” and “Miss Congeniality”). In 1997, however, Vivian Yung was the first contestant to be awarded the titles “Miss Cosmopolitan” and “Miss Oriental Charm.” The next three beauty queens were also awarded new additional titles: Annie Yung was named “Universal Beauty,” Sonja Kwok was awarded “Miss Intelligence 2000,” and Vivian Lau was the first to win “Miss Millennial Charm.” These additional (and arguably customized) titles emphasize the modern, urban, and cosmopolitan nature of Canadian contestants—characteristics frequently associated with the global image of Hong Kong. In addition, all of the Canadian pageant winners were named “Miss Photogenic,” an award voted upon by local beauty insiders who considered Asian Canadians as the fresh new faces of post-1997 Hong Kong.

The local perception of Asian Canadian beauty queens as being modern, multilingual, and cosmopolitan women is simultaneously reflected in, and reinforced by, the *Miss Hong Kong Pageant*; unlike the differentiation of Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese in television programs of the 1970s, the TVB sponsored *Miss Hong Kong Pageant* foregrounds the similarities between Canadian and Hong Kong Chinese in an attempt to remain connected with the Western roots of Hong Kong identity. This

commonality is based on Chinese ethnicity, Western (social, cultural, ideological, colonial) influences, and a shared experience of Hollywood/American cultural dominance. This connection also requires the return migration of these overseas Chinese back to Hong Kong with a Canadian passport in hand. Asian Canadianness is linked to broader global conceptualizations of Canada which is often defined in opposition with the national mythology of the United States; while the United States is considered a “melting pot” in which ethnic and cultural differences are relinquished in order to assimilate into the general (white) mainstream American society, Canada has maintained a global image centered on multiculturalism. As noted by Elaine Chang, “Canada is fairly unique among multi-ethnic, post-industrial societies for its official understanding of difference in terms of ‘visible minorities’” (19). As a nation, Canada is not associated with the social, political, economical, and cultural ideologies of the United States, many of which are popularized and/or embodied through Hollywood cinema. As a result, Asian Canadians, and especially beauty queens in post-1997 Hong Kong, offer an alternative (and non-American) expression of Westernized overseas Chinese identity. Regarded as some of the most appealing women in post-1997 Hong Kong, Asian Canadian beauty queens made a strong impression on the local public and were quickly integrated into the *ge-ying-shi* through the TVB network.

Since 1997, Hong Kong film producers have offered film contracts to Asian Canadian beauty queens working for TVB and ATV in the television industry. In particular, Kristy Yang, Monica Lo, and Bernice Liu quickly rose to fame in Hong Kong after winning titles in their respective Hong Kong-based beauty pageants. Their star personas, however, differ greatly from that of Maggie Q who has been marketed as a

distinctly Asian American star and featured in English-language action films aimed at the international film market. These Asian Canadian beauty queens were not simply cast in Hong Kong action films, but rather were integrated into the local star system of Hong Kong. Each actor began her career in Cantonese-language television and developed a large local fan base. She was subsequently cast in Cantonese-language—and not English-speaking—roles in Hong Kong action films aimed at attracting domestic audiences to the local theatres. The integration of these performers into the *ge-ying-shi* draws attention to the local perception of Asian Canadianness as being more locally Chinese than Asian Americanness and this association exists outside of pre-existing familial connections which work to localize Asian Americans in Hong Kong and its post-1997 cinema (i.e. Eugenia and Marsha Yuen). Moreover, this perception highlights the increasing importance of Cantonese-language (and Cantonese-language popular culture) to the development of local identity in Hong Kong and the seamless integration of Asian Canadians into the *ge-ying-shi*.

Kristy Yang

Kristy Yang is one of the best known Asian Canadian actors working in Hong Kong cinema [Figure 26]. Born in Shanghai, Yang migrated to Canada as a young child and was raised in Toronto. After graduating high school, she travelled to Hong Kong with her parents and, on the insistence of her mother, participated in an ATV sponsored beauty contest which was taking place. First organized in 1985, the *Miss Asia Pageant* was ATV's response to the success of the TVB sponsored *Miss Hong Kong Pageant*.⁹ In 1995, Yang was named "Miss Asia" and "Miss Photogenic," and became the first (and

only) Western Chinese delegate to win the competition as pageant title is almost exclusively awarded to Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese competitors (“Miss Asia”); Yang exuded the superlative qualities typically celebrated in Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese delegates. Following the pageant, Yang was immediately signed by ATV to work on a number of Cantonese-language television programs (HKMDB). With her local popularity on the rise, Yang transitioned into film and began carving out a career as a dramatic actor. Her first role was the drama *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* (Chan 1996) for which she was nominated “Best New Performer” at the *Hong Kong Film Awards* (1997). In addition, she was also nominated as “Best Supporting Actress” for her role in Wai Man Yip’s 1998 drama, *Portland Street Blues* (HKMDB). With her star on the rise in Hong Kong, Yang was one of the first Asian Canadians to be cast in the post-1997 Hong Kong action cinema and her representation offers key insights into Hong Kong’s interest in, and representation of, Asian Canadian actors.

Yang’s star image was shaped by her performance in a string of male-centered action films directed by Andrew Lau including *Young and Dangerous: Prequel* (1998), *Storm Riders* (1998), *A Man Called Hero* (1999), *The Duel* (Lau 2000), and *The Avenging Fist* (Lau and Yuen 2001). As discussed in Chapter 3, these films starred male Cantopop singers and explored the development of local masculinity in a post-1997 context. Taiwanese actress Qi Shu typically played secondary/supportive roles in these films and portrayed characters that remained on the periphery of the space of physical action; she was presented as a damsel in distress and required the film’s Cantopop star hero to save her. Her characters were often presented as young, naïve, and at times even childlike. In distinct contrast, Yang plays primary characters in Lau’s films. Cast in male-

centered action narratives, she remains disengaged from the space of physical action; instead her characters are associated with the domestic sphere and she is presented in a maternal role in each film. Although she plays the love interest to a male Cantopop star, her role in each film is to support, nurture, and safeguard the hero, and at times his offspring. Frequently, this requires Yang's characters to sacrifice their lives in order to ensure the survival of a new generation of male stars who will save the Chinese world (and arguably the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema) from imminent destruction. Yang's Canadianness or Western roots appear to be erased through her performance of Hong Kong Chinese characters in Cantonese-language roles.

The familiarity of Yang's star image stems from the consistency of her representation in *Storm Riders*, *A Man Called Hero*, and *The Duel*, three of the most popular and profitable films of the late 1990s which earned more than \$20 million apiece at the box-office.¹⁰ Yang is frequently cast in maternal roles. For instance, in *A Man Called Hero*, she portrays Jade, the childhood sweetheart and dutiful wife of Hero Hua (Ekin Cheng). Pregnant, Jade travels from Hong Kong to the United States in search of her husband but dies while giving birth to Sword (Nicholas Tse¹¹), the first generation of American-born Chinese in her family. Yang's role in the film mirrors that of legendary actor Pei Pei Cheng who also stars in the film; as previously mentioned, Cheng is featured as a maternal master in *A Man Called Hero* who sacrifices her life to safeguard her family. The film emphasizes the important role that mothers play in these action narratives; their function is to produce and protect the next generation of heroes who are considered the hope of Hong Kong (and its cinema). While *A Man Called Hero* explores life in the United States and presents the country as a temporary homeland for diasporic

Hong Kong Chinese, the film does not feature Asian American actors. Similar to the *gang-chan-pian* (i.e. Hong Kong films from the late 1980s and early 1990s), *A Man Called Hero* treats Asian American identity as a narrative trope and casts Pan-Asian Hong Kong actors to portray the roles of diasporic Chinese in the United States. This casting choice, then, highlights the strong Asian Canadian presence in the film (i.e. Yang and Tse) and demonstrates the importance of Asian Canadian actors to the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema, their differentiation from Asian Americans, and their integration into the *ge-ying-shi*.

Yang's characterization in *The Duel* offers a minor adjustment the associations which her star image carries. She portrays Ziqing Ye, a swordswoman of the Tianshan fighting clan. Ye and her three sisters are linked through costuming: they wear loose-fitting beige robes and have their hair tied in pigtails, emphasizing their youth and naiveté. Indeed, they remain unaware of the duplicitous intensions of their master. The quartet is enlisted to fight against Dragon 9 (Nick Cheung) whom they are told is the villainous Ghost King. They engage in a brief combat sequence with basic action choreography; Yang's representation shares much in common with the "faux" action women of Hong Kong since her performance is heavily mediated by body doubles, wirework, and editing. When Simon (Ekin Cheng) appears in the scene, it is revealed that master of the Tianshan clan, and not Dragon 9, is the Ghost King. The master then kills Ye's three sisters and attempts to use Ye as a shield to protect himself from the attack of Simon; Simon stops himself from killing Ye and nurses her back to health. For the remainder of the film, Ye is disengaged from the space of physical action and instead, is positioned as the love interest of Simon. She is situated within the domestic sphere and

takes over his family's bakery (which ironically specializes in producing "wife cakes"). Upon finding love, Ye forfeits her physical agency and transitions from the martial to the domestic sphere; the film presents the notion that once married, warrior women are expected to take on a maternal role and only use physical force in the defence of their family. While Ye's role in the film appears to be superfluous to the main action narrative, it might serve an alternative purpose. In both *Storm Riders* and *A Man Called Hero*, the romance between Yang and Cheng ends on a tragic note with Yang's characters sacrificing their lives for their families. *The Duel* offers a happy and romantic ending for the couple, and marks the end of their on-screen romance.

In 2001, Yang was featured in the futuristic action film *The Avenging Fist*. The film explores the untapped potential of the "forbidden zone" of the brain which can enhances martial arts performance. The film introduces three siblings—Nova (Lee-Hom Wang), Belle (Yang), and Jazz (Kar-Lok Chin)—with extraordinary abilities who have been trained in the Avenging Fist fighting style pioneered by their father (Biao Yuen). In the film, however, emphasis is placed on the film's Asian American pop stars—Lee-Hom Wang¹² and Stephen Fung¹³—who have developed lucrative singing and acting careers in China. Although Belle is identified as a skilled fighter, she never engages in martial arts combat. Similar to her characterization in *A Man Called Hero*, Yang is presented in a dramatic role as a self-sacrificing maternal figure to Fung's character Surfer. Belle's maternal identity is centered on her extraordinary ability to warm objects with her hands and her character is presented as a mirror image of Surfer's mother. Midway through the film, Surfer reveals that as a child, he and his mother were homeless. They slept on the street and his mother would hold him close each night to keep him warm. One morning,

he awoke to find that his mother had frozen to death while trying to protect him from the cold. Belle mirrors his mother's sacrifice near the end of the film. When Surfer is caught by the film's villain, he is placed in a cryogenic state. Belle uses up all of her power and sacrifices her life to warm him. Surfer is then compelled to join forces with her brother Nova (Wang) to avenge her death. Through her maternal sacrifice, Belle is presented as the glue which holds the heroic partnership of Nova and Surfer together.

Although Yang portrayed lead characters in Lau's action films, she was not envisaged as an action protagonist. As previously mentioned, Qi Shu transitioned into the role of action woman in the early 2000s and was envisaged through a pre-existing female heroic model featured in "girls with guns," a subgenre of the gunplay film (1985-1994). Conversely, Yang did not transform into an action woman and her star image has remained fairly consistent in the post-1997 action cinema. Yang developed a career playing dramatic and maternal characters which strengthen and safeguard Hong Kong's male heroic lineage. It is important that a well-known Asian Canadian beauty queen is cast as the mother of Hong Kong's future heroes: she represents a perceived connectedness between Asian Canadians and Hong Kong Chinese, and the impression that Asian Canadianness is a more Westernized version of Hong Kong Chinese identity. Yang's casting reflects a local desire for the return migration of these diasporic Hong Kong Chinese and/or transnational citizens (i.e. multiple passport holders) in order to (re)shape and/or (re)direct the future of post-1997 Hong Kong.

Monica Lo

Monica Lo has struggled to achieve the same degree of success and notoriety as Yang [Figure 27]. Born and raised in Toronto, Monica Lo won the *Miss Chinese Toronto Pageant* in 1996 and then the *Miss Chinese International Pageant* (sponsored by TVB) a year later (HKMDB).¹⁴ Lo was subsequently cast in a string of minor Cantonese-language roles in the Hong Kong action cinema beginning with the Cantonese-language film *Hit Team* (Lam 2001)—a Daniel Wu star vehicle.¹⁵ Cast as girlfriend to Wu's male protagonist, Lo's sole function is to encourage Wu's character to discuss his back story. She is similarly cast in a minor role in the Maggie Q star vehicle *Naked Weapon*. Like Charlene (Maggie Q), Lo's heroine was kidnapped from her family and trained as an assassin. Forced to participate in a battle-to-the-death cage match with the other detainees, she prepares to fight in the ring but is killed before the battle begins; while in the holding cell, she is murdered by a fellow detainee. Once again, Lo's role sees her excluded from the space of physical action and this appears more pronounced in *Naked Weapon* as the film is a female-focused action narrative.

Lo's only principle role was in the Category III film *To Seduce an Enemy* (2003).¹⁶ According to Howard Lake, Category III films were developed in the late 1980s in response to the wildly successful Hollywood erotic thrillers *Fatal Attraction* (Lyne 1987) and *Basic Instinct* (Verhoeven 1992). *The Black Wall* (Lau 1989) was the first Category III film and subsequent productions offered more than just "grit and guts"—i.e. action (205). Lake contends that Hong Kong producers saw little value in gaining a Category III certification based solely on graphic violence; they rationalized that if "their film was to be awarded restricted status anyway, why not go the whole hog and get really

down'n'dirty?"—i.e. add sex (206). This mentality spawned a new generation of sex films in the Hong Kong film industry and a string of female porn stars—most notably, Qi Shu—who transitioned into Hong Kong mainstream film in the late 1990s.

In *To Seduce an Enemy*, Lo plays Daisy Chong who has helped her American husband, Siu Chong (Benny Lai) transition from being a psychologist to a billionaire business tycoon. While she tolerates his one-night stands with various women, Daisy confronts him about a long-term affair she discovers and threatens to divorce him. Hoping to avoid a high-profile divorce, Siu hypnotizes his wife and forces her to kill the private investigator she has hired; Chong seduces the man and then stabs him to death while they are having sex. She then turns the knife on herself on the command of her husband. Although the investigation of the murder-suicide structures the narrative of *To Seduce an Enemy*, Lo's role in the film is limited. Unlike the other principle female actors in the film—Teresa Mak, Carmen Yeung, Gobby Wong—Lo remains fully clothed during her scenes and has limited sexual interaction on screen. While Lo plays a primary role in this Category III film, she does not move beyond her beauty queen status to reach the level of erotic actress; unlike Category III porn stars, demure beauty queens and gender-neutral action women offer mainstream articulations of Chinese female identity in Hong Kong cinema that are not exclusively dependent on hypersexuality.

In the early 2000s, Lo struggled to parlay her title of "Miss Chinese International" into a successful film career in Hong Kong action. Unable to make a name in the *ge-ying-shi*, Lo left Hong Kong to find work in Hollywood. In 2008, she starred in the straight-to-video sorority flick *Legacy* (Rothberg 2008) starring Haylie Duff. With no future projects listed (on ImDB), Lo is exemplary of the fact that a beauty queen title in Hong Kong does

not necessarily translate into success in the *ge-ying-shi* and that overseas Chinese actors are not necessarily guaranteed lucrative careers in the post-1997 Hong Kong film industry.

Bernice Liu

Compared to other Asian Canadian actresses working in post-1997 Hong Kong, Bernice Liu has the most promising film career [Figure 28]. In 2000, she won the title of “Miss Chinese Vancouver” and went on to represent the city in the 2001 *Miss Chinese International Pageant* (ImDb). Upon winning the competition, Liu was offered a contract with TVB. Although she spoke limited Cantonese at the time, Liu began learning Chinese phonetically and this helped her to land a starring role on the sitcom *Virtues of Harmony*. Playing a runaway princess on the show, Liu quickly became a fan favourite and even earned the title of “Princess” in the media (“TVB Princess” ¶1-2). Starring in various television series throughout the 2000s, Liu has become one of TVBs most popular stars.¹⁷ At the end of each year, TVB releases a list of its top-earning artists and, in 2006, Liu ranked second, having earned \$5.6 million (HKD) through her TVB contract, appearance fees, and product endorsements with Lipton Tea, Boots Beauty Products, Dr. White, and TenseSlim (“TVB Top”). That year, Liu also won an endorsement deal with Nike and became the first Asian spokesperson for the company (Lam ¶1); with her lucrative endorsement deals, Liu topped the TVB earnings list in 2007 and 2008 (“TVB Top”).

In light of her rising local popularity, Liu was cast in a number of films in the early 2000s, including a supportive role in the comedy *My Wife is 18* (Yuen 2002) and a lead in the romantic comedy *My Dream Girl* (Yip 2003). In 2004, she was featured in her

first action flick, *Hit Team 2* (Lam 2004), a sequel to the film that introduced her fellow Asian Canadian (and “Miss Chinese International” title winner) Monica Lo into Hong Kong action film. In the sequel, Liu is cast as Macy, the love interest and ex-girlfriend of the film’s male star, Lee Ting (Aaron Kwok). Placed in awkward social situations, Macy and Ting create humour through their playful banter; Liu, however, plays a secondary rather than title character in the film and does not participate in the film’s action sequences. Her role, instead, is to highlight the character of Ting.

Although Liu has spent the majority of the 2000s focusing on her television career and advertising campaigns, she is set to return to action filmmaking in the late 2000s with principle roles in *Bad Blood* (Law 2010) and *The King of Fighters* (Chan 2010). Her work is extremely important specifically on the Hong Kong-Japanese-Australian co-production *The King of Fighters*—an adaptation of a popular series of fighting videogames. Liu portrays Vice, an action oriented character.¹⁸ *The King of Fighters* was filmed in Vancouver Canada, contains a strong Asian Canadian presence as it stars Françoise Yip, Bernice Liu, and Hiro Kanagawa,¹⁹ and offers a space for the transnational development of Asian Canadian screen identities. Due to the popularity of the original videogame series, *King of Fighters* has the potential to attract Pan-Asian, if not international, audiences and expose them to the talent, and popular appeal, of Asian Canadian actors. Transitioning into the role of action woman, Liu’s performance will be determined by the videogame version of her character [Figure 29]. It will be interesting to see if Liu’s roles in the future offer an alternative expression of Asian Canadian female heroic identity in Hong Kong film.

PART IV: ASIAN CANADIAN CANTOPOP STARS

Charlene Choi and the Twins Films

Television is one way through which Asian Canadian actors have entered into the *ge-ying-shi* and transitioned into action filmmaking. The Cantopop music industry is the other avenue and has produced the most successful Asian Canadian female star in Hong Kong, Charlene Choi. As a child, Vancouver-born Choi was relocated to Hong Kong and educated at the well-known Rosaryhill School, the alumni of which include Cantopop stars Leslie Cheung and Kelly Chen, and actor Tony Leung Ka Fai (“Two” ¶1). It was there that Choi was discovered by Emperor Entertainment Group (EEG)—a company that specializes in music production, concert organization, artist management, and movie and television production (“Emperor” ¶1). Since 2000, Emperor Entertainment Group has had a number of Asian North American Cantopop stars under contract including Asian Canadian Nicholas Tse and Asian American Jaycee Chan.²⁰ After signing with EEG, Choi was paired with Hong Kong model Gillian Chung and, together, they formed the Cantopop girl-group Twins (“Two” ¶1). Choi and Chung are considered by many to be the most successful pop music duo in China’s history (HKMDB) and Twins have enjoyed transnational success in Hong Kong, China, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Canada [Figure 30]. They have released 23 albums which have dominated the Pan-Asian music market including three EPs,²¹ ten Cantonese-language albums,²² two Mandarin-language albums,²³ five compilation albums,²⁴ a concert album,²⁵ a karaoke album,²⁶ and a series of children’s albums.²⁷

Choi’s ability to speak fluid Cantonese (as well as Mandarin), along with her pairing with the Hong Kong-born Gillian Chung, facilitated her integration into the *ge-*

ying-shi. Attentive to the rapid rise of Twins to transnational superstardom, Hong Kong film producers began to develop film projects showcasing the Cantopop-duo in order to expand their brand image and profit on their widespread popularity. According to Gina Marchetti, Hong Kong's entertainment industry is driven by brands and the cult of the star personality for "unlike logos, stars have the advantage of possessing human(-like) attributes that lend to more congenial and personalized promotional strategies" ("Introduction" 3). In order to capitalize on the transnational stardom of Twins and further promote their brand, the Cantopop duo was featured in a string of action films which I will subsequently refer to as the "Twins films:" *The Twins Effect* (Lam and Yen 2003), *The Death Curse* (Cheang 2003), *The Twins Effect 2* (Leung and Yuen 2004), *House of Fury* (Fung 2005), and *Twins Mission* (Kong 2007). The evolution of the Twins films over the course of the 2000s draws explicit attention to the changing star image of Choi and the increasing importance of Asian Canadians in the *ge-ying-shi*.

The Twins films share a number of common characteristics. First, they are Cantonese-language films produced by Hong Kong and directed by some of Hong Kong's most notable filmmakers; for instance, Dante Lam and Donnie Yen directed *Twins Effect*, while Patrick Leung and Corey Yuen directed the sequel, *Twins Effect 2*. Moreover, the Twins films showcase action choreography from some of Hong Kong's most notable action directors; Donnie Yen was the action director for *Twins Effect*, Corey Yuen produced the choreography for the sequel, and Woo Ping Yuen worked as the action director on *House of Fury*. As the top billed stars of the Twins films, Choi and Chung are positioned as heroes (rather than simply love interests) and perform martial arts choreography. Second, although rooted in action, the Twins films are also firmly

grounded in the horror genre and deal with a variety of topics including vampires (*Twins Effect 1*), haunting (*The Death Curse*), and the supernatural (*Twins Effect 2*). Third, Choi and Chung share the screen with some of Hong Kong's most bankable stars such as Jackie Chan (*Twins Effect 1* and *2*), Sammo Hung (*Twins Mission*), Anthony Wong (*Twins Effect*, *House of Fury*), Donnie Yen (*Twins Effect 2*), Michael Wong (*House of Fury*), Tony Leung Ka Fai (*Twins Effect 2*), and Ekin Cheng (*Twins Effect*). This casting not only reflects degree of the Twins superstardom, but also strengthens the box-office appeal of their films beyond the Twins fan base. Fourth, these films prominently feature at least one additional Asian North American actor; for instance, Asian Canadian Edison Chen co-stars in *The Twins Effect 1* and *2*, and the sequel additionally features Asian Americans Daniel Wu and Jaycee Chan. While *House of Fury* co-stars Asian Americans Michael Wong, Daniel Wu, and Philip Ng, it also features prominently Asian-British actors Jason Tobin and John Foo. The Twins films showcase two generations of Hong Kong action stars and firmly root overseas Chinese within the cinematic lineage of Hong Kong action. Finally, in addition to promoting Cantopop stars Choi and Chung, the Twins films also showcase other local pop singers. *The Death Curse*, for instance, co-stars Kenny Kwan and Steven Cheung from the EEG boy-band Sun Boyz.

As star vehicles for Choi and Chung, the Twins films emphasize the “squeaky-clean” images of the Cantopop duo. The first Twins action film, *The Twins Effect*, set the precedent for future representations by pitting the heroic duo against demonic villainy. Although the film is about vampire hunters, it does not divide heroic and villainous characters along bloodlines (i.e. vampires vs non-vampires); instead, the film chronicles the battle between the evil European Vampires and the Hong Kong heroes who subvert

their quest to take over the world. Both male and female, the evil white characters are presented as power-hungry animals whose thirst for blood is presented through sexual imagery. In contrast, the youth, virtue, and innocence of Hong Kong hero Helen (Choi) is emphasized through her alignment with childhood. For instance, throughout the film Helen can be seen hugging teddy bears, cuddling her dog, baking muffins, crashing a wedding, and, at times, literally jumping up and down for joy. Moreover, she wears colourful clothing which positions her in stark contrast with the dark and gothic images of the European vampires. In addition, the combination of facial expressions, gestures, and playful music results in the impression of Helen as a sweet and upbeat character whose clean-cut image is mirrored by that of Gypsy, portrayed by Chung. In both her singing and acting careers, Choi is presented as a Cantonese-language star and her persona is locally rooted through her “sisterly” connection to her “Twin” Chung.

The Twins films cannot be analyzed in isolation from the pop-star personas Choi and Chung have cultivated through their work with Twins. The sisterly connection of the pop-duo, as promoted through their group name Twins, has an interesting effect on their films; their friendship supersedes any attempts at other relationships especially with on-screen love interests. Maintaining the playful and youthful tone of the films, these romances are presented as puppy love and do not physically progress beyond a caress of the face, holding hands, and/or a light kissing. In *The Twins Effect*, Choi’s character Helen is romantically linked to Kazaf portrayed by fellow Asian Canadian Edison Chen. While they both admit to loving one another on screen, they rarely display physical affection and aside from a brief kiss on the cheek, and there is no other kissing in the film. Choi’s characters often appear youthful to the point of sexual immaturity and this

emphasized through her costuming. In each film, she is dressed in gender-neutral and loose-fitting garments which obscure her feminine frame. For instance, in *The Death Curse*, Choi is exclusively costumed in oversized tank tops, loose khaki pants, and work boots. Moreover, her short hair is tied back into a bandana. While her costuming renders her characters young and youthful, it also grants them access to the space of physical action. As heroic identity in the Hong Kong action cinema is associated with male stars and/or masculine (female) performance, this means that action women must match the male performance standard in the genre. Lacking sexual maturity, Choi's characters are not explicitly feminized which would render them passive in the action narrative; presented as tomboys, Choi's characters are granted heroic agency and allowed access to the space of physical action.

As the *Twins* films have progressed, Choi has taken on wittier roles which showcase her comedic timing and on-screen charisma while Chung's characters have become increasingly serious. For instance, in *The Twins Effect*, Choi and Chung portray mirror characters and they are both presented as witty, youthful, and physically competent heroes. The film's sequel, however, is very different: *Twins Effect 2* is a period piece which exchanges a vampire-integrated society with a supernatural and female-focused one dominated by women who trade male slaves for money. In the sequel, Choi portrays 13th Master, a witty trader whose extroverted nature is reflected in her colourful costumes. Her image, reflective of her character, is in stark contrast to that of Chung who wears black and blue costumes which reflect the quiet, serious and introverted nature of her character Blue Bird. While Choi and Chung portray different character types in *Twins Effect 2*, they are positioned differently in the narrative of their next film, *House of Fury*.

While Choi is cast in a comedic role, her character is supportive rather than central to the action narrative and she does not participate in the film's physical action. Conversely, Chung is positioned as one of the primary heroes of the film. *House of Fury* chronicles the heroic exploits of a father (Anthony Wong) and his two children (Stephen Fung and Gillian Chung) who attempt to thwart the plans of the film's villain. Emphasizing the narrative importance of the family as a heroic unit, all three stars (Wong, Fung, Chung) are top-billed in the film's credit reel. Choi appears in the next set of credits and her name is mentioned alongside that of Asian American Daniel Wu who also plays a supportive role in the film. By no longer presenting the Twins as top-billed stars, the film displays the evolution of the Twins films and the decision on the part of the film's producers to market one of the pop-stars (Chung) over the other (Choi). Following the release of *Twins Effect 2* and *House of Fury*, fans anticipated the demise of the pop-group Twins.

Stepping Out Alone

While Choi achieved Pan-Asian notoriety through her work with Twins, she began taking on solo film roles in the mid-2000s in order to establish a stand-alone star identity. Choi expanded on the associations with her star persona by taking on more challenging and diverse roles in the action genre: for example, the Hong Kong/Jackie Chan *New Police Story* (Chan 2004) and the Hong Kong-Chinese action-fantasy *A Chinese Tall Story* (Lau 2005). The casting of the main roles of each film demonstrates Hong Kong's continuing interest in overseas Chinese actors as the industry moved into the mid-2000s. The sequel to the infamous *Police Story* series (Chan 1985; Chan 1988; Tong 1992), *New Police Story* appeared over a decade later, chronicling the struggles of a now much aged

Inspector Chan (Jackie Chan) as he attempts to engage with a new generation of criminals and crime fighters portrayed by Asian American Daniel Wu, and Asian Canadians Charlene Choi and Nicholas Tse, respectively. One of the most appealing aspects of *New Police Story* is the on-screen chemistry produced between EEG pop-stars Choi and Tse who play love interests in the film. It was no doubt due to their performances in the film the Canadian duo was cast together again in the Hong Kong-Chinese action-fantasy *A Chinese Tall Story* (Lau 2005), a film which focuses on the romance between the leads played by Choi and Tse.

In *New Police Story*, Choi plays Sasa, a technical support analyst for the Hong Kong police. While she plays an important role in locating the film's villain and defies her superiors by helping a suspended Inspector Chan, Sasa does not participate in the film's physical action and her role is more supportive than leading; bringing humour to all of her scenes, Choi aids in the character development of Chan and Tse. Conversely, Choi arguably carries the film *A Chinese Tall Story* through the centrality of her character and the quality of her acting. In the film, she plays the unattractive Meiyen who lives in a cave because she is considered physically repulsive by the local villagers who pick on her [Figure 31]. Meiyen's face, for instance, is covered in warts, she has a large nose, and her oversized teeth protrude from her mouth and are yellow in colour. In order to achieve this unappealing look for the film, Choi wore heavy make-up, a prosthetic nose, and false teeth, in addition to a body suit and wig. Although physically unrecognizable for the majority of *A Chinese Tall Story*, Choi demonstrates her range of acting abilities while still delivering an endearing character with a revolting exterior.

The development of Choi's star image is most notable in her next action role. Cast in another Jackie Chan action-comedy in less than two years, Choi's representation in *Robin B Hood* (Chan 2006) is notably different from her depiction in *New Police Story*. She plays a tragic rather than humorous character in the narrative. Pak Yin (Choi) is the pregnant wife who is belittled by her sexist and cheating husband (Louis Koo). Although pressured by her husband to get an abortion, Yin decides to have her baby and takes on low-paying advertising jobs to support her child; hired to dress up in costumes (e.g. bar maid, chicken, sushi roll) in order to attract customers to different local restaurants, Yin is humiliated as she struggles to save money for her new family. Yin is excluded from the space of physical action; instead, she serves an emotional purpose in the film—as a barometer for the change to her husband's moral compass. As the film progresses, Yin's husband begins to mature and thus, treats her (and by extension, his unborn child) with greater respect. Through her performance in the film, Choi graduates from a young comedic pop-star to an adult actor in a high-profile action film. While transitioning into a new phase of her star image, Choi still exudes the core qualities of her Cantonese pop-star roots; her local popularity is dependent on her maintaining a demure image and ties with her Twins counterpart Chung who was equally popular at the time.

In 2007, Choi and Chung reunited for the final Twins film, *Twins Mission* [Figure 32]. While the title denotes the stars of movie (i.e. the Cantopop group Twins), it is also a reference to narrative and thematic elements structuring the film; virtually every character in the film is presented with a twin. At the heart of *Twins Mission* is a criminal organization, aptly named “The Twins,” which recruits and trains identical twins to be effective thieves. Led by Uncle Luck (Sammo Hung), a group of rogue twins has formed

a counter-organization to destroy “The Twins” and retrieve an artefact that they stole. The film presents three different twin relationships: good twins working together in the rogue unit, bad twins pooling their talents while working for “The Twins,” or a good twin is pit against their doppelganger and only one of them will survive the film. The characters of Choi (Jade) and Chung (Pearl) fall into the first category. Reflective of their pop-group name, they play (un)identical twins whose characters and characterizations mirror one another. Unlike *House of Fury* which foregrounds Chung over Choi, *Twins Mission* places both characters at the center of the narrative and even requires them to perform mirrored choreography at times; they are (re)presented as equally important stars in the film. Although the film is an action comedy, *Twins Mission* displays the progression of Choi’s star image by casting her in a comedic role which does not require her to play an extremely young or goofy character; Choi is able to elicit humour by playing an endearing character rather than an excessive caricature. As the final Twins film, *Twins Mission* presents the maturation of Choi and the ongoing interest in the Cantopop duo. Moreover, it highlights the importance of Choi’s Cantopop image and more specifically its influence on the roles she is offered.

Edison Chen Photo Scandal

The career trajectory of Choi was strongly impacted by the Edison Chen photo scandal which involved her Twins co-star Chung. As a star system, the *ge-ying-shi* is innately conservative and Hong Kong audiences typically hold their Cantopop stars to a high moral standard. Unlike Hollywood where sex sells and celebrity scandals help ignite careers, Hong Kong is less tolerant of these Hollywood-styled antics (Mager 1-2).

Hong Kong is not necessarily prudish, but its public maintains high moral expectations for its Cantopop stars and especially those singers who are marketed as ingénues (Maginer 2).²⁸ In January 2008, Hong Kong's entertainment system was rocked by a celebrity scandal which has had strong repercussions on both the lives and careers of Hong Kong and Asian Canadian stars. Explicit personal photographs were copied from the hard-drive of Asian Canadian Edison Chen's personal computer when he sent the machine in for servicing and leaked on the internet. In these photos, Chen is shown engaged in sexually explicit acts with over a dozen Hong Kong celebrities including Twins starlet Gillian Chung, as well as Cecilia Cheung,²⁹ Rachael Ngan,³⁰ Bobo Chan, Mandy Chen, Candice Chan, and Vincy Yuen. The release of these pictures caused a scandal which was captured by international news agencies including CNN.³¹ The police undertook a comprehensive investigation of the case and charged the culprits, but not before millions of people worldwide viewed the scandalous pictures.

Chen received the greatest public scrutiny for his role in the scandal. In addition to public backlash, Chen received death threats from various triad organizations that allegedly offered a \$500,000 HKD (approximately \$91,000 USD) reward for the person who chopped off one of Chen's hands ("Reward" ¶1-2). Chen immediately held a press conference³² where he apologized to the women he had photographed and to the Hong Kong public. This was followed by his indefinite resignation from the Hong Kong entertainment industry (Lau, "Edison" ¶1) and Chen left for North America in a form of self-imposed exile until the situation blew over. In the meantime, his scenes in the Stephen Fung film *Jump* (2009) were removed; his advertisements for the credit card company Manhattan Titanium were pulled (Au ¶1-2); and his sponsors—Pepsi China,

Standard Chartered Bank, Samsung, Levi's, Hong Kong Metro—either dropped their campaigns with Chen or declined to renew their contracts with him (Maginer 2). In March 2009, Chen returned to Hong Kong and appeared at a number of events. His return was met by a string of death threats including a bullet enclosed with a letter warning Chen to stop making public appearances (Lau, “Bullet” ¶1-2). Struggling to find work in Hong Kong, Chen returned to the United States and is set to star in *Almost Perfect* (Pan 2010) with Asian American Kelly Hu.³³

The female star who suffered the most from the scandal was Gillian Chung since her nude photos were the first to surface (Maginer 3). These sexually explicit pictures quickly tarnished the squeaky clean pop-star image she had spent years cultivating with Twins. In her first public appearance only weeks after the photos were released, she apologized to her fans for being “naïve and silly” and for the “impact the incident has caused to society and the public” (Qtd. in Pang ¶1 and ¶4). Like Chen, she had various endorsement deals rescinded and her appearance during a television charity event resulted in over 2000 complaints to the network; moreover, she was pulled from her scheduled performance during the opening ceremony of the 2008 Summer Olympics (DPA ¶7 and ¶1). Withdrawing from the public for over a year, Chung found herself the subject of rumours circulated by the media that she was contemplating suicide. In March 2009, she emerged from seclusion to discuss her troubles in a TVB interview; however, TELA received 215 phone complaints and 60 emails citing Chung as a bad influence on Hong Kong's youth following the appearance (“Hong” ¶1). Facing a lot of public scrutiny, Chung has attempted to rebuild her career, and has secured numerous commercial endorsements and a role in a stage play (“Gillian” ¶1). Chung's struggle with the media

highlights the centrality of a Cantopop star's intermedial identity in the *ge-ying-shi*, and the dangers of deviating from type.

In light of the public humiliation of her Twins co-star, Choi has received an immense amount of fan support. At the height of the scandal, Twins released their third Mandarin album, *Gillian's Speech, Charlene's Words*: one side of the disc features four solo performances by Choi and the other side contains four solos by Chung. In 2008, Choi's solo recordings of "Little Sister" and "Make a Wish" topped Hong Kong music charts. Moreover, in April 2009 Choi released her debut solo album entitled *Two Without One*. Certified platinum, the album was in such high demand that a limited edition version was released in May 2009 ("Charlene" ¶1). The overwhelming public support of Choi's solo music career highlights the importance of a Cantopop star's (morally acceptable) image to their long-term success in the *ge-ying-shi*.

Released at the height of scandal, *Kung Fu Dunk* (Chu 2008) is Choi's first solo film project since *Twins Mission*. The Hong Kong/Taiwanese/Chinese blockbuster was one of China's top ten grossing films of 2008 earning \$16 million in box-office sales.³⁴ The film chronicles the life of martial artist Fang Shijie (Jay Chou), beginning with him joining a university basketball team. Choi is cast as the team's manager and Shijie's love interest in the film. Being showcased in such a high-profile film, Choi attracted positive publicity during a turbulent time in her career including the demise of the pop-group Twins. In October 2008, Choi starred alongside pop-idol Chun Wu³⁵ in the action-romance *Butterfly Lovers* (Ma 2008). The film offers a modern interpretation of the classic love story of Shan-Pak Leung and Ying-Toi Cheuk.³⁶ Choi and Wu have great on-screen chemistry which helps to enhance their already strong performances as tragic

lovers in the film. In this role, Choi demonstrated her abilities as a dramatic actress, playing a tragic but endearing character; and, it was with this performance that Choi helped to stabilize her star power in the months following the Edison Chen scandal.

Choi is set to star in *Storm Riders II* (Chun and Pang 2010) with fellow Cantopop stars Ekin Cheng, Aaron Kwok, and Nicholas Tse. With a solo music career as well as one in the film industry, Choi has demonstrated her resilience as a multi-media star of the *ge-ying-shi*. Parlaying her Cantopop star image with Twins into an individual identity, Choi has remained one of Canada's most successful stars in Hong Kong—surviving a scandal that destroyed the career of her “twin” Chung. Portraying endearing and emotionally accessible characters, Choi has maintained a loyal fan base attracted to her squeaky-clean pop-star image and has become the most popular Asian Canadian female star in Hong Kong.

Breaking the Trend

Asian Canadian Karena Lam is an award-winning actor of Hong Kong cinema. While on vacation in Taiwan in 1993, she was discovered during a screen audition and returned in 1994 to pursue a music career. She released two studio albums—*Thinking About It* (1995) and *One-Aided Love* (1999)—which had limited success and also appeared in the television series *White Love* (“Karena” ¶1). Hoping to revive her flailing career, in 2001, Lam relocated to Hong Kong in order to break into the film industry. She found immediate success and won critical acclaim for her performance in Ann Hui's 2002 drama *July Rhapsody*. For her performance, Lam was awarded the honours of “Best Newcomer” and “Best Supporting Actress” at the 2002 *Hong Kong Film Awards*.

Quickly gaining recognition in Hong Kong, Lam was cast in a string of Cantonese-language horror thrillers and action films and emerged in the 2000s as one of Hong Kong's most respected leading ladies.

Lam is best known for her work on the horror-thrillers *Inner Senses* (Law 2002) and *Koma* (Law 2004) which reveal the range of her acting abilities and the popular appeal of her star persona with Pan-Asian audiences. Her first starring role was opposite Leslie Cheung in *Inner Senses* (Law 2002), playing Yan Cheung, an emotionally disturbed woman who believes that she sees ghosts and has attempted suicide [Figure 33]. Her case is referred to Jim Law (Cheung), an overworked psychiatrist who discovers that Yan's problems stem from the divorce of her parents when she 12 years old; since neither parent wanted to care her after their marriage ended, Yan experienced an emotional breakdown which made her more suggestive to the experience of paranormal activity. Midway through the film, however, Yan and Jim switch roles as their romance develops. It is revealed that Jim is also being haunted by his teenage girlfriend who committed suicide years ago. Yan helps Jim face his problems and confront the ghost of his ex-girlfriend.³⁷

While Lam shifted roles in *Inner Senses*, she plays a more complicated character in *Koma* (Law 2004). As Suen Ling, Lam plays a medical student who is forced to quit school in order to care for her dying mother. In order to pay for the medical bills, Ling drugs local women and steals their kidneys to sell on the black market and also takes money for sex with Raymond Wai (Andy Hui). Ling falls in love with Wai and befriends his girlfriend Chi Ching (Angelica Lee) in order to remain close to him. As the film progresses, Ling becomes an increasingly sympathetic character who is marginalized by

her station in life and by Wai who preys on her. In the final scenes of the film, Ling kills Wai and then removes her own kidney which she donates to Ching who is sick and in need of a transplant. This act reveals Ling is as at once selfless and selfish: while Ling sacrifices her life to save her friend/rival, she also ensures that Ching will be indebted to her for the rest of her life. *Koma* generates suspense by shifting between the dual natures of Ling and the effectiveness of the characterization is solely dependent on the acting abilities of Lam. Starring in the horror-thrillers *Inner Senses* and *Koma*, Lam became known for her dramatic portrayal of complex and morally ambiguous characters.³⁸

Benny Chan cast Lam in her first action-oriented role in *Heroic Duo* (Chan 2003). The film stars Ekin Cheng as Inspector Ken Li, a tough-as-nails cop who is hypnotized by Professor Jack Lau (Leon Lai) to commit a crime; his family has been kidnapped by Au Yueng Hoi (Francis Ng) and Lau is forced to comply with Hoi's demands. On the one hand, the title of the film references the unlikely partnership between Li and Lau who work in concert to take down the film's villain. On the other hand, the title also refers to the professional and romantic partnership between Li and his girlfriend Brenda played by Lam. When Li is on the run, he relies on Brenda to work the case from the inside the police station and their romance serves as a base for their professional connection in the film. Brenda is also an action-oriented character and her gender-neutral costuming, which mirrors her male counterparts on the police force, reflects her status as a "real" action woman in the film: she wears black pant suits, a black trench coat, and had her hair tied back in pony tail.³⁹ She participates in numerous gunfights and is presented a master markswoman. She is even shot in the final action sequence but survives the film. Lam's

action oriented performance in *Heroic Duo* highlights the evolution of her star persona from dramatic actress to a “real” action woman.

Known for playing complex and morally challenged characters, Lam’s portrayal of Yeung Lam in the cop-action thriller *Kidnap* (Law 2007) meets this expectation. In the opening scenes of the film, Lam is presented as a victim who trusts in the police to negotiate the release of her kidnapped brother; the police, however, mishandle the ransom which results in the death of her brother. Lam’s lack of agency in the situation is reflected through her costuming: although her brown hair is boy-cut short, she wears overtly feminine clothes (which emphasize her figure) and is thus denied access to the space of physical action. Three years later, Lam is presented as the primary caregiver of her chronically ill husband. He requires an expensive operation and Lam devises a plan to procure the necessary funds; she has a local businessman’s son kidnapped and demands a ransom. Before the money is delivered, however, Lam discovers that she has kidnapped the wrong child and is holding the son of a local policewoman (Rene Liu) hostage. This results in a game of cat-and-mouse between Lam and the policewoman. Lam’s decision to step into the space of physical action is complimented by a modification of her image; her short hair has been bleached blonde and she wears jeans, a t-shirt, and a jean jacket [Figure 34]. Lam’s takes on a more gender-neutral image and is subject to the imaging conventions associated with active women in Hong Kong cinema.

While her attempt at a music career failed in Taiwan, Lam is considered a local star in Hong Kong and the box-office success of her films have helped to rejuvenate the floundering Hong Kong film industry. Starring in horror-thrillers and cop-action films, Lam has become a popular star of Hong Kong cinema. She is considered a talented and

versatile actor who portrays complex, morally conflicted, and endearing characters which have appealed to the local and Pan-Asian film markets. When cast in the action genre, Lam is presented through the conventions associated with action women in Hong Kong cinema; she takes on a more masculine role and this is reflected through her costuming.

Western Expressions of Hong Kong Identity

Asian Canadian action women represent a return migration of diasporic and/or overseas Chinese to a post-1997 Hong Kong; they offer a counter to the mass exodus of residents and creative film talent leaving the Special Administrative Region in the years bookending the 1997 handover. These actors have helped to strengthen the commercial appeal of a cinema in crisis and in the process have become some of the most visible Asian Canadians in the world. In Hong Kong, Asian Canadianness is perceived as being a more Westernized expression of Hong Kong identity and the integration of Asian Canadians into the local star system serves to reinforce the characteristics frequently associated with Hong Kong while still in its colonial state: modern, urban, cosmopolitan, and multilingual. This association is most pronounced in the years immediately following the 1997 which saw the rise in prominence of Asian Canadian beauty queens as major stars. Although many of these pageant winners did not speak Cantonese before earning their titles, they quickly learned the language phonetically in order to fulfill their television contracts with TVB and ATV. These Asian Canadian beauty queens draw attention to the increasing importance of Cantonese language to the expression and subsequent representation of Hong Kong Chinese identity in a post-1997 context. Moreover, they highlight another way in which multilingual Asian Canadian female

performers are differentiated from Asian American films stars like Maggie Q: Asian Canadians are integrated into the *ge-ying-shi* and develop intermedial careers in Hong Kong. Like Hong Kong stars, the success of Asian Canadians in Hong Kong is dependent on their ability to develop and maintain large fan bases that will support their various projects. While Asian Canadians are able to capitalize on career opportunities in Hong Kong, they are also subject to the same conservative expectations of the domestic market as evidenced by the Edison Chen photo scandal.

CHAPTER 7

THE HONG KONGIFICATION OF HOLLYWOOD

ASSIMILATING HONG KONG STYLE FOR THE HOLLYWOOD ACTION WOMAN

The Hollywood action film has historically preferred white male heroic performance, presenting non-white and non-male characters in supportive and often racially stereotyped roles. Over the past three decades, the models of heroic identity in Hollywood have “evolved” to accommodate the rise of the white action woman. It is my contention that Hollywood action films continue to perpetuate the notion that the white hero is reflective of the human condition—or as Richard Dyer suggests, that he/she is not “raced but “human-raced” (“Matter” 541). Race plays a critical role in the heroic identity of Hollywood action women even if it is only to ignore race through the idealization or naturalization of whiteness. Female whiteness in the United States, as Ruth Frankenberg suggests, can be considered a site of “structural advantage” and “racial privilege,” a position from which “white people perceived themselves, others and society,” and finally a “set of cultural practices that usually go unmarked and unnamed” reflecting their dominant position in American society (447). The study of action women in Hollywood is ultimately the study of white hegemonic power relations governing, dominating, and being reproduced within, the action genre.

While the popular conception may be that Hong Kong/Hollywood effects are a one-way flow, this chapter explores Hollywood’s appropriation and transformation of the Hong Kong action aesthetic. While Hollywood action women of the 1980s and early 1990s were understood purely in relation to white male heroic models governing the genre, I argue that female heroes appearing by the 2000s were stylistically modelled after

the warrior women of “girls with guns,” the popular cycle of the Hong Kong gunplay film (1985-1994). Working in Hollywood, Hong Kong choreographers Woo Ping Yuen and Cheung-Yan Yuen helped transcribe and assimilate the performances of Hong Kong warrior women into two distinct generic versions suited to Hollywood models: what I term the “parodic Angels” featured *Charlie’s Angels* (McG 2000, 2003) and the “Trinity warrior” introduced in *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers 1999, 2003, 2003). Leon Hunt characterizes Hollywood’s transnational appropriation of Hong Kong action as a form of “Asiaphilia” (“Hong” 270), a term defined by Darrell Hamamoto as “a deceptively benign ideological construct that naturalizes and justifies the systematic appropriation of cultural property and expressive forms created by Yellow people” (12). This appropriation of Hong Kong style takes place on the surface level through the “deterritorialization” of images, a term defined by Rowe and Schelling as the “release of cultural signs from fixed locations in space and time” (231). Although inspired by “girls with guns,” Hollywood action women are distinctly American and relate American/Western ideals of gender, race, and heroism.

I will also explore the correlation between the cross-over of Hong Kong warrior women into Hollywood and the rise in prominence of Asian American female stars. A key example of this phenomenon is Lucy Liu who began her career in the Hong Kong action cinema before transitioning into Hollywood with her breakthrough role in the Hong Kong-American co-production *Shanghai Noon* (Dey 2000). I will examine Liu’s subsequent casting and characterization in two Hollywood blockbusters which have been stylized and/or inspired by the Hong Kong action film aesthetic—*Charlie’s Angels* (2000, 2003) and *Kill Bill* (Tarantino 2003). I will argue that Liu is presented through the racial

stereotype of the model minority and depicted as a distinctly white American character. Through her representation, Liu is granted temporary access to the space of physical action which is traditionally presented as the domain of white heroes in Hollywood. And, notably, she is the only Asian American to achieve this status with no imitators or successors.

PART I: WHITE FEMALE HEROISM IN HOLLYWOOD

Phase 1: Masculine/Muscular in the 1980s

According to Yvonne Tasker, Hollywood is “barely concerned with the narrative dimension” of its action cinema, which is “all but subsumed within the spectacular staging of action sequences employing star bodies, special effects, artful editing, and persuasive music” (“Introduction” 6-7). She argues that the primary site of meaning in Hollywood action is the body which is ascribed heroic identity through the performance of gender, race, sexuality, and class (ibid. 8-9). Richard Dyer describes Hollywood action as a male dominated and oriented genre (*Only* 66); similar to Hong Kong, Hollywood also associates heroic identity with male heroes and masculine performance. Dyer notes that action films of the 1980s employed a specific body-centered model of heroic masculinity which presented the bodies of white, heterosexual, and middle class men as heroic ideal (*White* 160) as well as the site through which masculine crisis was performed and resolved (Jeffords 26-27). The most iconic performances of the decade were by “hard body” heroes Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone who effectively shaped Hollywood action into a body-focused genre. Susan Jeffords notes that the exposed muscular torso of the protagonist is metonymic of the male body in action and can be

understood as a canvas upon which narrative, moral, and political dimensions of the film are performed (24). Jeffords notes that in the early 1990s, the action film shifted away from violent body-centered spectacle with the softening of the hard body to a more family-oriented male action hero (13). The late 1990s saw another shift in heroic male performance: Philippa Gates argues that the arrival of slimmer and more uncertain youth like Leonardo DiCaprio in *Titanic* (Cameron 1997), Keanu Reeves in *The Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers 1999), and Ben Affleck in *Pearl Harbour* (Bay 2001), replaces the older man as action hero. Gates argues that the ideal of masculinity in the late 1990s and early 2000s was redefined to include passivity, boyishness, intelligence, and a spectacular gazed-at body—a position traditionally associated women in film (*Detecting* 41). She also argues that this “youth movement” to a more feminized male action hero is reflective of the same impulse that opened up heroic space for the proliferation of lead action women (225).

Tasker (1998) and Jeffrey A. Brown (2004) identify the white masculine/muscular performances of Sigourney Weaver in *Aliens* (Cameron 1986) through to Demi Moore’s portrayal of Lt. Jordan O’Neil in *G.I. Jane* (Scott 1997) as the first phase of female action heroism. Subject to the criteria of heroic masculinity governing the genre, action women of the 1980s and 1990s downplayed their femininity, and adapted their star images with bodybuilding and costuming in order to emphasize perceivably stronger masculine characteristics (Brown 48). Tasker identifies three main images of muscular action women, each contained within a narrative which works to both define and justify her performance as exceptional to the male standard. First, as a tomboy (e.g. Jodie Foster in *Silence of the Lambs* [Demme 1991]) the masculinized action woman lacks maternal

guidance and over-identifies with her father, resulting in her inability to perform her socially prescribed feminine role (*Working* 81). Second, as a lesbian the action woman is depicted similarly to the tomboy but furthers the characterization by taking the sexual position of the traditional male hero in the film; Tasker notes that the performance of Geena Davis in *Cutthroat Island* (1995) contains distinct and noticeable undertones of lesbianism (ibid. 72). Finally, as a protective mother, the muscular action woman performs “maternal masculinity” and temporarily employs physical force to protect her children. Exemplified in Linda Hamilton’s portrayal of Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2* (Cameron 1991), the protective mother is expected to shed the physical markers of heroic action once her children are safe and return to her socially prescribed role as mother (ibid. 70). Performing the traditionally male heroic role and exuding qualities socially accepted as masculine, these action women, according to Brown, are frequently (mis)interpreted by audiences and critics as *enacting* masculinity rather than providing expressions of female heroism. Described as “figuratively male,” female performance in the action genre has been understood as a function of white masculinity (Brown 48).

Through their negotiation of space in the male-oriented action genre, the first phase of white action women has helped destabilize conceptual gender binaries governing the genre by presenting the female body as built and/or manufactured, and thus subverting “traditional” gendered body aesthetics. According to Dyer, the male body is perceived to be an active accomplishment achieved through a strict physical regiment of training and diet; on the other hand, the process of aesthetic feminine construction for a woman is not visible in her appearance, and is “generally construed as something that has been done to the woman” prior to her emerging in the public eye (*White* 132). Linda Ruth

Williams argues that the built and/or manufactured female body in action increasingly became a “site of confusion” for male and female audiences during the 1990s, presenting as spectacle rather than natural, the bending of gender and the scrambling of “butch” and “femme” iconography (178). In light of this “confusion,” the first wave of white heroic women failed to inspire the same box-office returns as their white male counterparts in the genre. The *Alien* franchise is the most successful female-driven action series of the 1980s and 1990s, grossing in worldwide box-office sales \$184.9 million for *Alien* (1979), \$180.0 million for *Aliens* (1986), \$159.8 million for *Alien*³ (Fincher 1992), and \$161.3 million for *Alien Resurrection* (1997). In comparison, *Terminator 2* (1991) grossed over \$515 million in worldwide box-office sales.¹ While the film features Linda Hamilton in the role of “protective mother,” it also stars male action icon Arnold Schwarzenegger, and the blockbuster success of this film can be attributed to *his* popular appeal and star persona.

Interim Phase: Masculine/Muscular and Hyperfeminine

The mid-1990s saw the emergence of an interim phase of white action women. While Hollywood continued to release films which presented action women as visually, symbolically, and/or temporarily masculine (e.g. *G.I. Jane* [Scott 1997]), Hollywood also began producing a small number of action films featuring what I refer to as “hyperfeminine” heroes who were conversely envisaged as excessively feminine and with dangerous female sexualities ascribed to their performances. In *Barb Wire* (Hogan 1996), the comic-book inspired Pamela Anderson (and her impossible/artificial body) functions within the symbolic realm of the dominatrix and gains power over exclusively

male adversaries through the fetishistic nature of her toughness (Brown 51). In the *Species* films (Donaldson 1995, Medak 1998) and *Alien Resurrection* (Jeunet 1997), Natasha Henstridge and Sigourney Weaver respectively play half-human/half-alien characters, genetic experiments funded by male-run institutions for the sole purpose of harvesting biological weapons; the source of their exceptional power resides in the maternal and/or procreative instincts of their alien side. Presented as “perfect” feminine products of patriarchy, the heroines’ bodies are initially imprisoned, controlled, and erotically placed on display by their male captors. Once freed from prison, their bodies are presented as simultaneously heroic and threatening, with their heroic potential contingent on personal control and constructive employment of their “dangerous” sexualities.

The difference between masculine/muscular and hyperfeminine action women, according to Brown, is a matter of degree and not kind. While the tomboy, lesbian, and protective mother deviate toward the overtly masculine extreme of the spectrum, the hyperfeminine hero indulges in feminine excess; her power is derived from her extreme and excessive sexuality and not her denial or dismissal of it (50). According to Judith Butler, gender is not a role but a “performative accomplishment” instituted through the stylized repetition of the body which presents the illusion of an abiding gendered self (415). Masculine/muscular *and* hyperfeminine heroes both engage in excessive gendered performativity which works to visually isolate them as “others” within their respective film texts. Relying on traditional patriarchal ideas pertaining to the difference and the domination of gendered characteristics, action films of the 1980s and 1990s do not

present female heroism within the realm of women, but rather as a function and privilege of white male power.

Phase 2: O'Day's Action Babe Cinema

In the mid-to-late 1990s, American network television began featuring a string of sexualized but tough “television warriors” who achieved consistently high ratings and enjoyed cult-like followings. Action women like Renée O'Connor (Gabrielle) in *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), Sarah Michelle Gellar in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), Pamela Anderson in *VIP* (1998-2002), Jessica Alba in *Dark Angel* (2000-2002), and Jennifer Garner in *Alias* (2001-2006) are depicted as the all-American “girl next door;” they appear traditionally feminine, almost to the point of “girlie,” and yet are tough enough to “kick butt.” Brown argues that the popular success of these “television warriors” is strongly dependent on the serial format of network television which allows for the development of characters over the course of one or multiple seasons, and facilitates increased audience investment in these action women beyond their surface image. He notes, however, that “the content restrictions of prime time television necessitate a certain degree of campiness, which softens the sexism and often gives the narrative a tongue-in-cheek quality, signalling that audiences should have fun with the fantasy” (71). Despite the differences in format, Hollywood took notice of the dedicated fandom these “television warriors” inspired and began looking for alternative cinematic sources to invigorate its white action women and replicate, in box office terms, the success of sexy and tough “television warriors.”

As previously mentioned, the late 1990s saw the redefinition of the model of heroism in Hollywood which opened up space for a second wave of white female heroes. Marc O'Day examines the emergence of what he has termed the "action babe:" strong, visibly feminine, and sexually desirable action women featured in such films as *The Matrix* (1999), *Charlie's Angels* (McG 2000), *X-Men* (Singer 2000), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee 2000), and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (West 2001; 201). He explores a number of critical factors contributing to the development of the "action babe" including: i) the adaptation of popular videogame avatars Lara Croft and Alice into Hollywood action women portrayed by Angelina Jolie in *Tomb Raider* (2001) and Milla Jovovich in *Resident Evil* (Anderson 2002) respectively;² and ii) the influence of Hong Kong new-style *wuxia pian*, a genre of chivalrous sword fighting films, and more specifically the warrior women featured in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (ibid. 211-12). O'Day's work becomes problematic, however, when he tries to group very different action women within the same universal category: his template does not address the coexistence of multiple female heroic identities informed by the intersection of gender, race, nationality, sexuality, and class. While I do agree that the stylization of videogame/avatar heroes contributes to the representation of white action women later in the decade, I argue that the millennial white female heroism was inspired by an alternative Asian source.

PART II: HOLLYWOOD'S "ASSIMILATION" OF HONG KONG STYLE

During the 1980s, famed Hong Kong filmmakers Tsui Hark (producer) and John Woo (director) collaborated on a number of projects including *A Better Tomorrow* (Woo

1986), the preeminent Hong Kong gunplay film. According to David Bordwell, the “colossal” success of this film with Pan-Asian audiences and critics helped establish, as commercially viable, the gunplay genre (1985-1994), a cycle of films featuring “airily choreographed” gun battles enacted on a modern urban setting between/within groups of cops and/or triad gang members.³ In the early 1990s, Hollywood decision makers became attentive to the Hong Kong action cinema and the increasing significance of the Asian market through another Hark-Woo collaboration, *The Killer* (Woo 1989), a film “idolized” by fans in the West (85, 92). Major Hollywood studios including Universal, Twentieth Century-Fox, Columbia, and Paramount hired Hark and Woo to direct big-budget American pictures, and invigorate white male performance in the action film. Hark and Woo worked within the strict guidelines afforded by their Hollywood employers, producing American films featuring white male heroes stylized in Hong Kong action (ibid. 85). For instance, the Hollywood cycle of Woo features big-name Hollywood stars including John Travolta (*Broken Arrow*, 1996; *Face/Off*, 1997), Nicholas Cage (*Face/Off*, 1997; *Windtalkers*, 2000), and Tom Cruise (*Mission Impossible II*, 2000). When Woo first arrived in Hollywood, he struggled to reconcile his trademark filmmaking style—and his themes of Asian brotherhood—with the Hollywood mode of production.⁴ This is notable in the poor(er) quality and lacklustre performance of his early Hollywood pictures in the United States. As noted by Gates, “Woo’s style has not been translated directly nor effortlessly into American films [...] The problem lies in the fact that Woo’s style is in many way at odds with Hollywood realism and conventions” (“Man’s” 73). Once Woo proved himself to be a bankable director in Hollywood, he

gained more creative freedom to employ this trademark film style which helped invigorate the performance of white male heroism in Hollywood.

In the late 1990s, Hollywood began showcasing the martial arts talents of Jackie Chan, Yun-Fat Chow, and Jet Li cast in the lead action roles.⁵ The rise of Hong Kong heroes in Hollywood coincides with the expansion of positive masculinity within the action genre during the 1990s. The Asian body is considered a *feminized* body by Hollywood/American/Western standards. As Gates suggests, the body of the non-white and non-American hero is doubly ascribed with “otherness” and placed on display as he engages in ballet-like scenes of choreographed action (*Detecting* 296). The Hong Kong hero, however, is supported in the narrative by a black male or black/white female partner who educates him in American social discourse and helps integrate him into Hollywood action.⁶ Similar to the concern regarding the black body in 1980s action, Hollywood was worried that the Hong Kong male might be too much of an “other” to star in big-budget pictures.⁷ Thus, having buddies at the center of the film has a twofold purpose: the “other” buddy attracts broader ethnic audiences while the white buddy functions as a point of identification for the anticipated mainstream (read: white) audience (*ibid.* 297). Although the Hong Kong male works with a partner, he does not replace the white male hero in the buddy film, a subgenre of Hollywood action. Gina Marchetti contends that the Hong Kong male is still presented as an “other” within Hollywood action, a “multicultural spectacle” to the white male American prototype expected of the genre (“Jackie” 157).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Hollywood producers hired Hong Kong action choreographers, including brothers Woo Ping Yuen and Cheung-Yan Yuen, to stylize the

action sequences of their blockbuster films.⁸ Since the 1970s, the *Longhu*⁹ (“Dragon-Tiger Master”) or martial arts choreographer has played a significant role in the visual composition of Hong Kong action films. According to Kei Sek, the action choreographer does “not only arrange fight sequences but also plans the shots; they virtually take over the role of director and in some instances become considerably more important than the director himself” (34). In the same vein, Bordwell describes the contemporary action choreographer as a “resourceful craftsman” and “one of the most important members of the [filmmaking] team [who] may well display more cinematic creativity than the official director;” oftentimes the director supervises the dialogue scenes and relies on his choreographer, who doubles as a “second unit” director, to stage and film the fight sequences (125). One by-product of the incorporation of Hong Kong action choreographers into Hollywood was the invigoration of white female performance in the genre. I argue that the Yuen Brothers transcribed and subsequently assimilated conventions from “girls with guns” into a Hollywood generic form. The result was a new kind of white action woman who was sexy but tough, and proficient with weaponry and martial arts.¹⁰

The Yuen Brothers have worked on two of the most profitable Hollywood film projects of the early 2000s¹¹ and assisted in the creation and definition of two distinct models of female heroism transcribed from “girls with guns:” i) what I term as the “parodic Angel” template established by the *Charlie’s Angels* series (2000, 2003), and ii) the “Trinity warrior” featured in *The Matrix* films (1999, 2003, 2003). This incorporation of Hong Kong style, however, takes place on the surface level, detached from the socio-cultural origins and culturally specific implications embodied in the images. Hollywood

has co-opted the Hong Kong action film aesthetic and produced distinctly American action women whose representations cater to the tastes of American/Western audiences, and relate American/Western ideals of gender, race, and heroism.

The Parodic Angels

“Girls with guns” (1985-1994) films featured groups of tough, intelligent, and notably *feminine* heroes. The films were originally inspired by the American television series *Charlie’s Angels* (1976-1981), and especially the concept of collective female heroism enacted on a modern cosmopolitan milieu. According to Bordwell, Hong Kong cinema has historically borrowed filmmaking techniques, plotlines, and visual elements from various foreign sources including American television and films, parlaying them into “dynamic generic tradition(s)” (210). Hong Kong’s stylistic approach to filmmaking can be understood as a form of regional postmodernism (Teo, “*Wuxia*” 198), a visual strategy which adapts said references into a local product for domestic and/or regional consumption. While inspired conceptually by *Charlie’s Angels*, “girls with guns” develops two interrelated versions of female heroism: i) the partnership of two female cops as exemplified in the first “girls with guns” film *Yes Madam!* (Corey Yuen 1985), and ii) the participation of at least three women employed as members of an elite crime fighting organization, and epitomized in *The Heroic Trio: Executioners* (Ching and To 1993), the final film of the cycle.

Hong Kong gunplay films use the family as their model for social (and thus heroic) organization. Similar to the *yi*, the code of brotherhood governing male heroes in the genre (Bordwell 31), “girls with guns” emphasizes the bonds of sisterhood between

female partners or groups of women. Importantly, these warrior women are most effective while working in conjunction with one another. This collective of heroic women constitutes the last line of defence against the arch-villain who is characterized, in opposition to these warrior women, as a maniacal egocentric tyrant and is reflective of brash individualism. Competent with weaponry and trained in martial arts, the warrior women of “girls with guns” engage in physical combat with, and defeat, large groups of predominantly male opponents.

Working as the choreographer and martial arts expert on *Charlie's Angels* (2000) and its sequel *Full Throttle* (McG 2003), Cheung-Yan Yuen played a key role in transcribing the “girls with guns” heroic model into Hollywood. American actors Drew Barrymore, Cameron Diaz, and Lucy Liu are cast as a trio of Angel agents strongly bonded in sisterhood. Unlike the American “television warriors”—e.g. Sarah Michelle Gellar in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Jennifer Garner in *Alias*—emerging in the late 1990s and early 2000s, *Charlie's Angels* does not designate an individual leader (or lead star); instead, the series exaggerates the bonds of sisterhood between the Angels, presenting them as inextricably dependent on one another to such a degree that physical separation during action sequences results in decreased heroic efficiency. In *Full Throttle*, the primary objective of villain Madisson Lee (Demi Moore) is to destroy the Angel sisterhood of which she was once a part. While Lee achieves her goal midway through the film, tricking the Angel trio into disbanding, she is ultimately defeated by the film's end when the Angels reunite and fight her as a collective unit. Like the warrior women of “girls with guns,” the Angels appear more proficient in the space of physical action when they fight together as a unit.

According to Lenuta Giukin, masquerade of femininity is a central tool used by the warrior women of “girls with guns” to conceal “a more aggressive heroic identity that grants them the status of heroine in this male-dominated space” (59). Giukin here refers to the work of Mary Ann Doane: Doane argues that womanliness is often “worn as a mask” to “hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it” (25). For example, in *The Heroic Trio* (1994) Mercy (Maggie Cheung) is presented as “girlie,” unassuming, and naive, and this parodic performance supplies her with an advantage in hand-to-hand combat against predominantly male adversaries who underestimate her abilities. Similarly, the women of *Charlie’s Angels*, when engaged in reconnaissance missions in order to gain access to privileged information/spaces possessed or guarded predominantly by white men, are explicitly sexualized and fetishized—i.e. they perform a masquerade of hyperfemininity. David Roger Coon notes that the Angels employ the masquerade, “presenting themselves as excessively feminine (read: weak, passive, helpless, and most important, nonthreatening) to conceal their possession of such traditionally masculine (and therefore threatening) traits as intelligence and physical strength” (5-6). While the Angel trio conveys a self-conscious understanding of the power they yield while engaged in masquerade, presenting femininity and sexuality as one of many skills of their heroic profile (ibid. 3), the film itself sells these performances as a source of comedy. Coon argues that through parody, the “potentially progressive gender images offered by the film” are arguably overturned through the “blending of images that are meant to sexualize with images that are meant to empower” (ibid. 2, 5). Taking this argument one step further, I would argue that masquerade is being used as a tool in the narrative to justify the explicit sexualization

of these action women which, in turn, undermines their heroic achievements in the film series; *Charlie's Angels* presents the notion that audiences should have fun with these fantasy portrayals rather than take the characters and/or their heroic accomplishments seriously. What I term "the parodic Angels" heroic model is premised on the feeble simulation of female heroism which masks Hollywood's inherent attempt to objectify its white action women and subsequently undermine their heroic accomplishments in the space of physical action. In *Charlie's Angels*, comedy is used as a strategy to quell the potential transgressiveness of these action women undermining of male power, authority, and domination of heroism.

In her discussion of *The Heroic Trio*, Giukin notes that Hong Kong warrior women were frequently costumed in formfitting and individually customized black jumpsuits which revealed their slender bodies engaged in martial arts combat. Appearing overtly feminine, the warrior women of *The Heroic Trio* are presented as "faux" action women and their performances are heavily mediated by stunt doubles, wirework, camera angles, and editing. Giukin argues that this "erotic look," inspired by American noir *femme fatales*, aided in the marketability of these heroes (63). Jonathan Ross reiterates this sentiment when he writes, "The whole idea of sexy Chinese girls wearing tight superhero type costumes, fighting and then having sex, is possibly the finest development in the hundred years of cinema history a man could possibly hope for" (7). Similarly, Hollywood's *Charlie's Angels* wear formfitting black costumes while engaged in their most important missions including battling and defeating the arch-villain. Unlike the various gendered and racial costumes/masks worn during masquerade, the black uniforms signal that the parodic Angels are stepping out of parody and engaging in serious heroic

performances. Although customized to reflect each Angel's personal style/personality, these black costumes do not exemplify an expression of individual or authentic heroic identity. *Charlie's Angels* and *Full Throttle* open with similar introductory sequences which outline Charlie's selection and shaping of each woman into *his* Angel mould. Coon notes that "while Angels are set up to be strong women, they are also set up as being under the control of one man" (5). The individual identities of each Angel, informed by the intersection of gender, race, class, and sexuality, are diminished and consolidated into the superficial detailing of their "individualized" costumes, and replaced by the parodic Angel template. While Charlie's face is never depicted on screen, his presence is made known, and the films expose as white and patriarchal, the cultural institution (ie. the Angel family unit) which constructs, repeats, and employs these images.

Although inspired by the character archetypes of "girls with guns," the *Charlie's Angels* series is a distinctly Hollywood product and relates American/Western ideals of heroism. Any Asian characteristics apparent in the series, most notably the casting of Asian American actor Lucy Liu as Alex Munday, are disavowed and whiteness predominates. As I will discuss later in the chapter, the *Charlie's Angels* films employs a number of visual and narrative strategies which work to present Munday as more of a white than Asian character. I will argue that Liu's characterization in the series appears reflective of the "model minority" myth, a popular representation of Asian Americans which highlights their rapid ascension into the public spaces of politics and business, and assimilation into white mainstream culture (Jiwani 186). Peter Feng argues that as model minorities Asian Americans are presented with an "honorary white status" ("Introduction" 2). Thus, it is my contention that Munday, through her representation as a

model minority, is presented as a symbolically white character and granted access to the space of physical action which is typically considered the domain of white action heroes.

Bringing Hong Kong action style to Hollywood, Yuen's work on the film highlights Hollywood's globalizing postmodernist approach to filmmaking, a term defined by Stephen Teo as the transcription of "what is culturally specific in order to diminish certain indigenous qualities (while highlighting others) to make them more presentable [and palatable] to a world-wide audience" ("*Wuxia*" 198). The *Charlie's Angels* franchise may reference "girls with guns" conceptually and stylistically, but—more significantly—it deracinates the warrior woman heroic body by stripping away local Hong Kong identity and translates it into a Hollywood generic version performed by white action women. Hollywood continues to perpetuate the notion that white female performance is preferred in the action genre, and that white action women are more appealing and thus more profitable (or vice versa) than Asian/Asian American heroes.

The Trinity Warrior

Unlike the ironic imitation offered by *Charlie's Angels*, *The Matrix* films employ pastiche—quoting various Hong Kong action films including "girls with guns." Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright define pastiche as the "quoting, borrowing, pilfering, and combining of different styles, genres and forms;" pastiche is predicated on the postmodern notion that since nothing new can be created, the copy is valued equally to the original, and works to subvert the concepts of originality and authenticity (261). Through the cultural practice of bricolage, meaning is created by replicating pre-fabricated images and investing them with new meaning within the film (Hayward 350).

For instance, Woo Ping Yuen was not only hired as the choreographer for *The Matrix* series but also took on second unit directorial duties by scripting, choreographing, and pre-shooting each action sequence with Hong Kong actors. Once the footage was approved by directors the Wachowski Brothers, Woo Ping along with Cheung-Yan taught each cast member their choreography (Hunt, “Hong” 280). While Trinity’s (Carrie Ann Moss) performance, inspired by “girls with guns,” is a second iteration—or copy or a copy—it is also channelled through white Hollywood/American conventions and does not reveal its source(s) of quotation. Exemplary of globalizing postmodernism, *The Matrix* deterritorializes the Hong Kong action woman to construct Trinity’s heroic identity by obscuring the original source. In light of arguments claiming that postmodern multiculturalism opens up spaces for the voices of “others” challenging white Western hegemony, Dyer notes a “countervailing tendency towards a homogenization of world culture” that reinscribes racial hierarchies through the continued dominance of American popular media (“Matter” 541). According to Dyer, genuine hybridity is not possible until the power of whiteness is fully explored and the cultural agendas of white people are no longer ascendant (ibid. 541). Thus, the racial hierarchies in Hollywood are maintained by casting white women within an Asian model rather than Asian/Asian American actresses.

As previously discussed, “girls with guns” presents two versions of female heroism. *Charlie’s Angels* adapts the first version by foregrounding the bonds of sisterhood shared by a collective of women working for an elite crime fighting organization. *The Matrix* adapts the other strain of female heroism (i.e. female partnership) into a Hollywood model of opposite sex partnership; the film features Trinity paired up with a *feminized* love interest, Neo (Keanu Reeves).¹² While the bodies of

Trinity and Neo are presented as androgynous and in iconographic parallel,¹³ they are positioned differently in the film and maintain the active-passive binary associations of ideal beauty/body with male and female forms. Trinity and Neo engage in the same combat training simulations¹⁴ and possess comparable fighting skills, as evidenced in the famous corridor shootout sequence in *The Matrix* whereby Trinity and Neo perform, as equals, mirrored *wire fu* choreography; however, while *The Matrix* chronicles Neo's development as a fighter leading up to this corridor sequence, Trinity's training takes place off screen and before the film begins, and is only implicitly referenced in conversation. Similar to Neo, Trinity's training goes beyond American (boxing-inspired) fighting styles and includes a number, if not *all* styles of martial arts. Since proficiency in martial arts is dependent on precision, skill, and speed of movement, a muscular/built body is not required. Through the trope of "downloading" martial arts, Trinity is able to competently engage in the space of violent action without her body being labelled as "other;" Trinity is not rendered the passive and erotic object the gaze and her identity is centered on her heroic accomplishments in the film.

Trinity—and *not* the Hong Kong warrior women on which she is fashioned—functions as a template for some of Hollywood's most notable white action women including Kate Beckinsale (*Underworld* [Wiseman 2003], *Underworld Evolutions* [Wiseman 2006]), Jaimie King (*Bulletproof Monk* [Hunter 2003]), Jennifer Garner (*Daredevil* [Johnson 2003]), Charlize Theron (*Aeon Flux* [Kusama 2005]), Angelina Jolie (*Mr. & Mrs. Smith* [Liman 2005]), Milla Jovovich (*Ultraviolet* [Wimmer 2006]), and Rhona Mitra (*Doomsday* [Marshall 2008], *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans* [Tatopoulos 2009]). Because they are modelled on the heroine from the *Matrix*, I term this second

group of heroic women “Trinity warriors.” These action women share a remarkably consistent image: a pale white complexion, dark hair often cut shoulder length or shorter, and formfitting black leather or PVC jumpsuits when performing in action. According to Giukin, the body of the Hong Kong warrior woman is rarely exposed; her costume acts as a shield which protects her body while keeping her image modest and thus “plays an important role in defining the moral and physical impenetrability of the hero” (62-63). Inspired by the imaging conventions of “girls with guns,” Trinity’s more reserved appearance is considered less sexualized/objectified by critics. While I am not necessarily arguing that the character of Trinity constitutes feminist “progress,” her representation in *The Matrix* is distinct from her white female counterparts in the genre. Unlike the action women of the 1980s and 1990s which were considered heroic only if in keeping with ideals of masculinity, Trinity is not visually isolated as an “other” and is instead presented as a member of a unique class of male and female heroic fighters who possess extraordinary abilities. Although one might be tempted to read Trinity’s representation as a middle ground mediating masculine/muscular and hyperfeminine performance, Trinity destabilizes conceptual gender binaries governing the genre by not engaging in excessive and/or parodic gender performativity. Instead, she is presented through alternative visual/heroic conventions developed outside of the Hollywood action cinema.

Trinity warrior films not only transcribe the “girls with guns” heroic model, but also appear to maintain broader connections with the Hong Kong gunplay genre.¹⁵ For instance, *Bulletproof Monk* (2003) features Hong Kong action star Yun-Fat Chow as a Tibetan monk in search of a new protector for an ancient Chinese scroll; paralleling the narrative of *The Matrix*,¹⁶ *Bulletproof Monk* is centered on the anonymous monk’s search

for “the one.” Utilizing three prophecies, the monk deduces that Kar (Sean William Scott) is the next guardian of the scroll and begins training him in martial arts. Jade (Jaime King), a Russian mob princess, is positioned as the romantic interest and heroic partner of Kar; fully trained in martial arts, Jade is presented as a superior fighter and even defeats Kar during a street fight at the beginning of the film. Although the monk originally believes that Kar is “the one,” he comes to realize that the prophecies point to romantic partnership of Kar *and* Jade who together form a heroic couple that will protect the scroll together. As a metaphor for the transcription of the Hong Kong action film aesthetic into Hollywood, *Bulletproof Monk* features a Hong Kong action star passing the martial arts torch (or scroll, to be more precise) to a new generation of white American heroes.

With the popularity of *The Matrix*, Hollywood has reproduced this heroic model and in her incarnations, the Trinity warrior has undergone a number of significant changes. The equal weighted partnership featured in *The Matrix* shifts in favour of the female protagonist who becomes the central narrative focus. By the mid-2000s, the male protagonist plays a more supportive role and is relatively disengaged from the film’s action. In *Aeon Flux*, the male counterpart Trevor Goodchild (Marton Csokas) is a politician and scientist, and does not participate in the physical action of the film; instead, Aeon (Charlize Theron) relies on her non-white friend Sithandra (Sophie Okonedo) for sniper cover as she battles the entire army of Bregna in hand-to-hand combat. The film reinscribes traditional race relations within the action genre by casting a white actor as the lead protagonist and a non-white actor as her “helper” or “buddy.” Moreover, the Trinity warriors appear to present a more overtly feminine and sexualized image. For instance, their trademark black jumpsuits feature strategically placed cut-outs which

reveal sleek legs (Jolie in *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*) and/or a bare toned stomach (Jovovich in *Ultraviolet*). This shift in representation and degree of sexualization is influenced, in part, by the popular appeal of films featuring videogame avatars portrayed by Jolie (*Tomb Raider* [2001, 2003]) and Jovovich (*Resident Evil* [2002, 2004, 2007]); their star personas became associated with this image and are evoked in their performances as Trinity warriors. Unlike the confused critical response to masculine/muscular and hyperfeminine performances throughout the 1990s, the Trinity warrior appeals to a broad target audience comprised of male *and* female spectators. In her discussion of spectorial pleasure in the action genre, Gates argues that “the male star is put up on the screen to be looked at as an ideal of masculinity for heterosexual women to desire and heterosexual men to want to emulate. The male star is always good looking, and those good looks are to be envied and/or desired” (*Detecting* 39). Conversely, the Trinity warriors offer men an erotic image of femininity to desire while simultaneously providing women with an ego ideal to which they can inspire.

Successful Assimilation?

The parodic Angel model featured in *Charlie's Angels* was short-lived and by *Full Throttle* became a parody of itself. Due to the generic parameters of the film series, the parodic Angels had little room for character growth outside the bonds of sisterhood they share with one another. *Kill Bill Volume 1* (Tarantino 2003) and *Volume 2* (Tarantino 2004) expand the parodic Angel template by exploring the dissolution of an elite organization, the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad, and the resulting feud within the “sisterhood,” fashioning a derivative heroic model of the solo parodic Angel, what I term

the “martial arts assassin.” When the Bride (Uma Thurman) finds herself pregnant with her boss’s (David Carradine’s) child, she abandons the “sisterhood” to take up her new role as mother. The pregnant Bride is hunted down on her wedding day and assaulted; she avenges the murders of her husband and unborn child by killing each member of the squad. Director and writer Quentin Tarantino drew inspiration from a number of cinematic sources including the Hong Kong action cinema, as evidenced by his hiring Woo Ping Yuen as the project’s choreographer. The Bride engages in the parodic performance of various Hong Kong cinematic identities, appearing most notably as a Bruce Lee clone in *Volume 1*, costumed in the yellow motorcycle jumpsuit from Lee’s film *Game of Death* (Clouse 1979) and fights the Crazy 88 whose masks are reflective of Lee’s opponents in *Fist of Fury* (Lo 1973). In *Volume 2*, the Bride is presented as a warrior woman from the *wuxia pian* who travels to China to be trained by kung fu master Pai Mei and emerges as his protégé. She is entrusted with his lineage, the “five point palm exploding heart technique.” The film’s white heroine is imbued with an Asian action past.

The climax of the film, however, resonates with conventions from “girls with guns.” After killing her fellow “Angels,” the Bride tracks down Esteban Vihaio (Michael Parks) to find the location of Bill, entering the scene wearing a formfitting costume comprised of a black leather jacket, black shirt, and tight dark blue jeans. (On a side note, the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad is similarly dressed in formfitting black leather costumes when they enter the Twin Pine Wedding Chapel and attempt to kill the Bride). Framed in medium shots, the Bride next moves through Bill’s home and enters the backyard to find that her young daughter is still alive. The camera pulls back to reveal

that the appearance of the Bride has been altered from the last scene. Through costuming—with a formfitting leather jacket paired with a floor-length light blue cotton skirt reminiscent of her wedding gown—Tarantino externalizes the internal conflict of the Bride who is torn between her desire to “kill Bill” and her impulse to embrace her daughter. The scene juxtaposes images associated with the heroic/violent/destructive and the maternal, articulations of the female body traditionally presented by Hollywood as contradictory.¹⁷ Employing the parodic Angel model and adapting “girls with guns,” *Volume 2* conflates the heroic with the maternal body without presenting the white action woman as masculine/muscular, hyperfeminine, symptomatic, alien, or “other” through the use of parody. While *Kill Bill* was a critical and commercial success, its imitator *Elektra* (Bowman 2005) was not, despite its use of the female martial arts assassin model. Likely, this was the result of Tarantino’s employment of postmodern aesthetics, his unique collaboration with Woo Ping Yuen, and the parodic nature of his signature style. *Elektra*, on the other hand, attempted to offer a female martial arts assassin in a mainstream and non-parodic form to box-office failure.

While the parodic Angel model and its derivatives have achieved limited success outside of the *Charlie’s Angels* series, it is the Trinity warrior which has provided the template for some of Hollywood’s most popular white action women of the 2000s. With the influence of videogame/avatar-inspired heroes like Lara Croft and Alice in the early 2000s, a more sexualized and feminine Trinity warrior has emerged and been relocated to the centre of the film’s narrative as the character who drives the action forward. Significantly, however, while inspired by Hong Kong action, the Trinity warrior does not reveal the source of its quotation. Western audiences are unlikely to be aware of the

degree to which the warrior women of “girls with guns” (or the Hong Kong action aesthetic) have been appropriated into the heroic profile of the Trinity warrior. Not only does Hollywood maintain its globalizing postmodern approach to filmmaking but also, through pastiche, Hollywood’s generic “copy” glosses over its origins by eliminating the dialogic threads connecting the Hollywood and Hong Kong action cinemas. According to Bliss Cua Lim, Hollywood “has invoked, with great success, a deracinated (that is, uprooted, displaced, de-localized) understanding of ‘Hong Kong Cinema’ as a style, an aesthetic, a mark of polish in certain high concept action films” (114). When discussing Hollywood’s assimilation of Hong Kong action, one should note that Hollywood, despite its purported ‘Asiaphilia,’ has eliminated the Asianness out of these representations.

PART III: HOLLYWOOD’S ASIAN AMERICAN ACTION WOMEN

Racial Stereotyping in Hollywood Action

In the 1990s, Hollywood began featuring Asian American women in principles roles in the action cinema who were envisaged through the racial stereotypes of the Lotus Blossom–Dragon Lady schema. Although featured in more than ten Hollywood action films since the mid-1990s, Ling Bai¹⁸ has been repeatedly cast as a Dragon Lady. This consistency can be attributed, in part, to the fact that Bai is a Chinese-born actress and speaks English with a thick accent; she is both perceived and presented as being an exotic (and hypersexualized) “other” in her Hollywood action films. Bai’s star image was established in the cult-classic *The Crow* (Proyas 1994) as Dragon Lady Myca. As the half-sister and lover of the white villain Top Dollar (Michael Wincott), Myca is presented as a hypersexual sadist with a fetish for killing women and cutting out their eyes. For

instance, she is introduced into the film through a nude shower sequence. As the camera zooms in from a long to medium shot, Myca begins caressing the black tiled shower wall and turns her head to the side to reveal a look of wanton pleasure; from the outset of her characterization, Myca is positioned as the erotic object of the gaze and defined by her sexuality. Myca is also presented as a dominatrix and wears exclusively black formfitting (and often leather) costumes which enhance her cleavage and emphasize her bare stomach and slender legs. Centered in the frame and frequently reclining across furniture, Myca positions herself as a distraction to Top Dollar's henchmen, urging them, as well as audience members, to gaze, objectify, and desire her body. Presented as a Dragon Lady and threat to the male protagonist Eric Draven (Brandon Lee), Myca is punished by Draven for her sexuality and becomes the victim of her own fetish; her eyes are plucked out by the crow, a creature who shares Draven's consciousness, causing her to fall to her death. As in *The Crow*, Bai has been consistently presented as a Dragon Lady and defined primarily by the sexual threat she poses to the white male hero in all of her Hollywood roles.¹⁹

In the same year, Macau-born actor Ming-Na was featured as a lead protagonist in two action films, *Street Fighter* (de Souza 1994) and *Hong Kong 97* (Pyun 1994). Unlike Bai, Ming-Na immigrated to the United States at the age of four where she was raised and educated, speaks fluent and non-accented English. She is considered an Asian American actresses and is not characterized as a Dragon Lady in her films; instead, she tends to be cast as the Lotus Blossom—especially in roles where she had the potential to engage in hand-to-hand combat—which undermines her heroic performance in the film(s). For example, in *Street Fighter*, Ming-Na portrays Chung-Li Zang, a reporter working in a

prominent war-zone.²⁰ Skilled in martial arts, Zang engages in hand-to-hand combat with arch-villain General Bison (Raul Julia) near the end of the film. Prior to their fight, however, General Bison imprisons Zang and dresses her as a geisha girl in a red thigh-length kimono and an odango hairstyle.²¹ Zang is not only sexualized and fetishized through her imagining as a geisha girl, but her heroic proficiency is consequently undermined by the passive image she projects; presented through the Lotus Blossom stereotype, Zang's "Asianness" is contained within a narrative which positions her character in a sexually subordinate relationship to the white man.

In the American action film *Hong Kong 97*, Ming-Na is cast in a similar role. The film utilizes the opposing racial stereotypes of the Lotus Blossom–Dragon Lady schema to differentiate Katie Chung (Ming-Na) and Li (Selena Khoo), two women caught in a love triangle with the white male hero Reginald Cameron (Robert Patrick). As alluded to with its title, *Hong Kong 97* takes place in Hong Kong one day before the handover of Hong Kong to China. The narrative is centered on Cameron, an American hit-man who has had a bounty placed on his head by the triads. Struggling to survive in the city, Cameron relies on the help from two Hong Kong women vying for his affections. On the one hand, Li (Khoo), presented as the lover (and *not* the love interest) of Cameron and is characterized as a Dragon Lady. At the beginning of the film, Li participates in a graphic sex scene with Cameron and appears fully nude on screen. When the couple are interrupted by masked assailants breaking into the apartment, Cameron engages in a gun battle with the intruders while Li takes cover. Once the gunmen are killed, Li walks towards the window, turns to face the camera, and lifts the small pistol she is holding up to her chest; framed through a medium shot, a naked Li poses for the camera and is

positioned as the erotic object of the gaze. On the other hand, Chun (Ming-Na) is characterized as a Lotus Blossom and the true love of Cameron. In contrast with Li, Chun's image is demure and she is costumed in loose-fitting clothes that do not reveal her body: she typically wears baggy pants, turtlenecks, and a floor-length trench coat. Chun is thus defined by her relationship with Cameron and her willingness to fight on his behalf. Cameron is thus caught in a love triangle between two Asian women envisaged through opposing racial stereotypes. The film adheres to the implicit moral hierarchy of the Lotus Blossom–Dragon Lady schema: Li is killed in a gun battle and Cameron is free to marry Chun. When taken together, *The Crow*, *Street Fighter*, and *Hong Kong 97* exemplify Hollywood's reliance on racial stereotypes to both introduce and represent Asian American action women in the 1990s.

Anticipating Change: Lucy Liu's Early Work in Hollywood

In the early 2000s, Lucy Liu became an international star with roles in *Charlie's Angels* (2000, 2003) and *Kill Bill Volume 1* (2003). Starring alongside white female protagonists, Liu is the only Asian/Asian American action woman featured in Hollywood blockbusters stylized by the Hong Kong action film aesthetic. The increase in Liu's star power coincides with the cross-over of Hong Kong action women into Hollywood—Michelle Yeoh, Pei Pei Cheng, and Ziyi Zhang—and Liu offered a direct connection to the Hong Kong action cinema as she had starred in one film, *Rhythm of Destiny*, before returning to Hollywood. This association with Asian film is foregrounded through her casting in the Hong Kong-Hollywood co-production *Shanghai Noon* (Dey 2000); in this Jackie Chan action-comedy, Liu's portrayal of a diasporic Chinese princess in America helped her to

secure future roles in Hollywood action. Liu's subsequent casting in *Charlie's Angels* and *Kill Bill* represents Hollywood's attempt at creating a distinctively American version of the Hong Kong warrior woman in order to capitalize on American interest in the Asian female body in action.

While some critics and fans uphold Liu as a figure of racial progress in Hollywood (see Prasso), others have criticized her work as reinscribing Asian American stereotypes (and "oriental" sexuality) in the action genre (see Madsen). The conflicting and contradictory readings of Liu's characterization in *Charlie's Angels* and *Kill Bill* can be attributed, at least in part, to the expectation of Lotus Blossom and/or Dragon Lady stereotypes that have since been read into her performance. Critics and scholars typically trace the origins of Liu's star image to her break-through television role on *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) where she portrayed the Chinese-American lawyer Ling Woo (Sun 657). Epitomizing the Dragon Lady persona, Woo is depicted as an icy and abrasive sexual predator whose irresistible sexuality resulted in multiple liaisons with white men and a racy onscreen kiss with Ally McBeal (Calista Flockhart). Scholars typically argue that Liu has made a film career out of her "icy TV-screen demeanour" (Prasso 73) and, when is featured as a hero in Hollywood action films, they describe her as an "icy princess" (Prasso 73), "sadistic dominatrix" (Prasso 73), "exotic dragon-lady" (Mizejewski 166-67) and "kickboxing [...] femme fatale" (Wilson *et al.* 204).²² While Carolyn Byerly and Karen Ross discuss Liu's casting in *Charlie's Angels* as an example of Hollywood's response to growing multicultural and global audiences (26), Deborah Madsen suggests the opposite—that the casting of an ethnic minority Angel works to "orientalize" the series and "has nothing to do with any kind of attempt at multicultural representation and

everything to do with the sexualization of the *Charlie's Angels* story" (166). By considering Liu's filmic performances solely through the lens of her television persona, critics and scholars tend to compact and simplify a more complex history of representation over different phases of her career, and overlook the importance of the film industry and the significance of genre in the construction of Asian American screen identities in Hollywood.

Moreover, critics frequently compare and conflate the careers and cinematic performances of Lucy Liu with Anna May Wong. As Hollywood's quintessential Dragon Lady, the star image of Wong continues to live on in popular and critical imagination, and is referenced, to some degree, in cultural discourse describing and/or defining the star image of Liu. While these comparisons shape preconceived expectations of the Dragon Lady stereotype, they also draw attention to the structural limitations that continue to inform Hollywood production. Wong complained to the media about her lack of role choice in Classical Hollywood; over the course of her sixty-film career she was either cast as a slave, temptress, prostitute, or doomed lover (Prasso 8). Liu has recently expressed similar sentiments to the media stating that she has limited role options in Hollywood (ibid. 74). While many critics and scholars blame Liu for perpetuating racial stereotypes—in other words, placing the burden of responsibility on Liu for accepting and performing these parts—the film industry remains relatively unaccountable for their role in the process, for creating and deploying these images. Instead of engaging in the positive/negative debate or indulging in the "myth of individuality," critics should be attentive to the continuing institutional limitations imposed, maintained, and controlled, by corporate-owned and operated Hollywood. Thus, I will explore Liu's career in the

Hollywood action cinema as a whole and examine the phases of her star image as she transitions from playing secondary/supportive characters to lead action protagonists.

When cast in secondary/supportive roles in the male-centered action narratives featuring white male protagonists, Liu's "oriental" sexuality is strongly emphasized. For instance, she plays a stripper *City of Industry* (Irvin 1997) and performs a topless pole dance featuring bondage erotica. In *Flypaper* (Hoch 1997), Liu engages in a masochistic sex scene with her white male lover in a snake pit; the scene features full frontal nudity and vicious snake attacks as the couple make love. Finally, in *Payback* (Helgeland 1999) she portrays a dominatrix prostitute who gains sexual pleasure by inflicting and receiving physical punishment from her (exclusively) white male clientele. On the whole, Liu's characterization in these minor roles appears to be limited to the stereotypes of Lotus Blossom and Dragon Lady and her function is only in relation to the white male hero of the film as a love interest or object of sexual temptation.

A notable shift in terms of Liu's casting occurred in the early 2000s, when Liu played the lead character in male-driven action narratives featuring non-white male protagonists including *Shanghai Noon* (2000) and *Ballistic: Ecks vs. Sever* (Kaosayananda 2002). In *Shanghai Noon*, she plays a Chinese princess (Pei Pei) who seeks refuge in the United States in order to escape from an arranged marriage and, in *Ballistic*, she portrays Agent Sever, a former Chinese orphan who was adopted, raised, and trained to be an assassin by a corporate syndicate in the United States. Second, Liu shares the screen with non-white male action heroes, Jackie Chan and Antonio Banderas respectively. Third, both films explore the development and importance of non-white American life. While *Shanghai Noon* examines the oppression of Chinese-American rail

workers in frontier America, *Ballistic* stresses the importance of Latin-American and Asian American family life for its heroes. Fourth, neither film places emphasis on “oriental” sexuality and Liu is not presented as an object of desire for white male protagonists; instead, she is featured as an example of Asian assimilation and economic ascension into white mainstream American society.

In *Shanghai Noon*, Princess Pei Pei is presented as a model of assimilation for diasporic Asian populations living in the United States. Her transformation from a Chinese immigrant to an Asian American citizen takes place at the level of the body and is presented through costume and make-up. When in China or upon her arrival to the United States, Princess Pei Pei is costumed in flowing silk robes of deep saturated colours (red, black, gold), her hair is styled and pinned up with colourful accessories, and her pale face features painted lips and eyelids. As the film progresses and Princess Pei Pei becomes more sympathetic to the plight of the rail workers, she sheds her decorative costuming; she is costumed in non-saturated and earth-coloured pants and shirts, her hair remains is loose or tied back in a low pony tail, and her now tanned skin is devoid of makeup. Her transformation not only reflects a change in class (as she move from her life of leisure to manual labour) but also a change in consciousness and is accompanied by a narrative that stresses the importance of shedding the “Eastern” or “Chinese” way of life in order to become an American citizen.²³ Considered a member of Mainland Chinese royalty by the railroad workers, Princess Pei Pei’s transformation serves as a model of American assimilation for the diasporic Chinese. What is strikingly absent from her characterization, however, is her representation within the Lotus Blossom–Dragon Lady schema, stereotypes which characterize the Asian/Asian American woman in relation to

white male protagonists. At the end of the film, Princess Pei Pei does not begin a relationship with Roy O'Bannon (Owen Wilson), the dashing white male sidekick; instead, she shows romantic interest in the Asian action hero of the film, Chong Wang (Jackie Chan). *Shanghai Noon* offers a distinct cinematic characterization of Asian American women in the action cinema; however, this can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that *Shanghai Noon* is a Hong Kong-American co-production as opposed to a purely Hollywood film.

Ballistic also diverges from the Lotus Blossom–Dragon Lady schema, but in a different way. Critics like Prasso have read Liu's portrayal of the efficient and rather emotionless Agent Sever as an example of the Dragon Lady stereotype (74). Unlike *Shanghai Noon*, *Ballistic* does not feature a physical/visual transformation indicating a change in Liu's characterization; instead *Ballistic* retains the same conventions throughout the film and relies on narrative disclosure to influence audience perception of Agent Sever. For instance, Sever is introduced into the film without any significant background information; in fact, Sever does not speak a line of dialogue until well after twenty minute mark. Although Sever is initially presented as a "mysterious" and cloaked Asian figure, the film subverts the racial stereotype of the Dragon Lady; as the film progresses, the audience is made aware of Sever's backstory which repositions her in the narrative as a protagonist rather than assumed antagonist. Before the final action sequence, Sever reveals that she gave birth to a son who was later murdered by her then-boss Robert Gant (Gregg Henry); Sever's desire to have a family and identity apart from the (white corporate) syndicate was considered a breach in "protocol," and her child was murdered in order to keep Sever loyal to the organization and retain control over her

identity. Avenging the death of her child, Sever set out to systematically destroy the syndicate and in the process, safeguard Eck's son who was caught in the crossfire. Although initially presented as a mysterious, emotionally reserved, and solitary character, Sever subverts Hollywood's racial stereotype of the Dragon Lady and her characterization does not emphasize "oriental" sexuality. Through narrative exposition, Sever asserts a maternal identity while overturning the negative associations typically associated with Asian villainy in silent and early Hollywood cinema. The film offers an alternative to the racial stereotypes employed in the depiction of Asian American action women.

Through her performances in *Shanghai Noon* and *Ballistic*, Liu appears to be an example of a new model for the Asian American action woman in Hollywood in which assimilation into white mainstream culture is emphasized over racial and ethnic differentiation. This shift in representation is concretely established as Liu enters the peak of her Hollywood career and cast as a lead protagonist in female-centered action film. Critics have overlooked the change in Liu's star image, anticipating that Hollywood would continue to present the Asian American action woman through the Lotus Blossom and Dragon Lady stereotypes. Although Hollywood has traditionally relied on these representations to contain and control Asian American female identity (and sexuality), Hollywood is not necessarily limited to this schema. It is my contention that Hollywood relies on another prominent racial stereotype, the model minority, when presenting Liu in the *Charlie's Angels* and *Kill Bill* films.

Model Minority: *Charlie's Angels*

In his seminal study of race in American cinema, Eugene Franklin Wong discusses how through role segregation, white actors could portray non-white characters (often employing “yellowface” and “blackface”) but non-white actors were rarely, if ever, cast in white roles (11). Through role stratification, white actors were favoured in the casting for larger and more prominent roles while non-white actors were relegated to minor, supportive, and often racially stereotyped parts (ibid. 13). The casting of Asian American actor Lucy Liu in *Charlie's Angels* initially appears to challenge Wong's contention of institutionalized racism since the *Charlie's Angels* films offer a racially diverse trio of heroines compared to the original television series. Casting Liu as “Angel” Alex Munday suggests a shift in the conceptualization and representation of Asian American women in American popular culture.

During the scripting and pre-production stages of *Charlie's Angels*, actors Diaz and Barrymore had signed onto the project prior to the “third Angel” being cast. The role of Munday was originally written for Angelina Jolie who turned down the part due to lack of interest in the project (IMDb). For the second round of casting, producers changed their approach and considered exclusively African-American actresses for the part including Foxy Brown, Jada Pinkett Smith, Beyonce, Aaliyah, and Lauren Hill, before casting British actor Thandie Newton in the role. Due to a shooting conflict, Newton pulled out of the film and Lucy Liu was cast as her last minute replacement (IMDb). This three-phase casting of the “third Angel” complicates the discussion of race in the film; the racial identities of Liu as an actor and Munday as a character appear to be transferrable visual commodities of interchangeable, inauthentic, and arbitrary otherness.

While Hollywood has set a precedent through its presentation of a racially diverse collective in *Charlie's Angels*, race is not an issue in the film; instead of offering a representation of Asian experience, I argue that the film—through the model minority stereotype—ignores and thus contains it.²⁴

In both films, Munday is presented as an indispensable member of the Angel trio and a heroic equal to her white Angel counterparts; however, Liu was paid substantially less for her work on the films, earning \$1 million for *Charlie's Angels* and \$4 million for *Full Throttle* while Diaz was paid \$12 and \$20 million and Barrymore \$9 and \$14 million (IMDb). Salaries are negotiated individually and based on a number of factors including the actor's star power and bankability in relation to a film's budget; therefore, salary differences between actors working on the same film can be expected. What is telling, however, is the degree of difference in salary between Liu and her white female co-stars who earn approximately three to five times more her salary per film. Had Jolie accepted the role of Munday, she would likely have made \$10 million per film based on her previous earnings of \$7 million and \$12 million for her performance in the *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* and *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (IMDb). Although Liu's casting appears to challenge Wong's accusations of role segregation and stratification in the Hollywood, her (relative) earnings draw attention to practices of salary segregation and stratification which work to reinforce institutionalized racism in Hollywood.

When depicting non-white protagonists in the action genre, Hollywood has often insulated the non-hero within a collective of white heroes in order to contain and neutralize the perceived "threat" of their otherness (Guerrero 237). Munday is insulated within a white familial network comprised of her "sisters" (the white Angels), her

surrogate father (the patriarch Charlie), and her white boyfriend Jason Gibbons (Matt LeBlanc). In *Full Throttle* it is revealed that Munday is a multiracial/Eurasian character through the introduction of her British father (John Cleese) into the film. As noted by Wong, Hollywood traditionally presents Eurasian characters with white fathers and Asian mothers, a characterization that reflects and symbolically naturalizes the history of the Western man's sexual access to Asian women. Marchetti further contends that Hollywood presents as desirable paternal (i.e. white) over maternal (i.e. Asian) identification; by associating with their Asian heritage (i.e. the maternal), Hollywood Eurasians are often linked to "a sinister involvement with the occult dangerous of the Asia" (*Romance* 68). Munday's Asian/Asian American cultural legacy is not represented through a maternal figure and her absence in the film further contributes to Munday's (over)identification with her father. Munday's rejection of her Asian heritage works to strengthen her heroic currency in the film by distancing her character from any lingering negative associations of Asia with evil in Hollywood.

Scholars have typically focused on the construction and performativity of gender, and subsequently overlooked the importance of race in the series (see O'Day 2004, Coon 2005). Just as the Angels often enact a masquerade of femininity, so too do they enact a racial one. Like gender, race is a highly visual social construct that can also be used as a performative tool. Michael Rogin, for instance, explores how Irish immigrants sought to improve their racial minority status and promote a white racial identity through "racial masquerade;" by engaging in "blackface" in theatrical productions, these immigrants attempted to visually distance themselves from other non-white minorities (1052). Rogan contends that racial masquerade points to "white privilege" and the "significance of race

in the continuing creation of American identity” (1052-1053). In *Charlie’s Angels* then, all three Angels engage in the performative masquerade of racial identities including that of the geisha girl or Lotus Blossom. Munday’s costuming as a geisha girl does not visually or racially isolate her from her fellow Angels, nor does it work to reinscribe “traditional” Hollywood race relations within the film; instead, Munday engages in what Dyer has referred to as the privilege of being white in a white culture by stereotyping other national, ethnic, and racial identities apart from her own (“Matter” 543). This impression is reinforced through the film’s cinematography which presents in medium close-up all three Angels performing the same racial masquerade of the geisha girl stereotype [Figure 35]. Later in the film, Munday also engages in a masquerade of the “oriental” dominatrix (i.e. Dragon Lady), a performance which works to distance her cinematic identity from the stereotypical representation. By engaging with her fellow Angels in racial masquerade, Munday distances herself from the stereotypes of the Lotus Blossom and Dragon Lady, and deemphasizes her Asian American identity to the point that she comes across as raceless; instead, she is characterized as a model minority, granted “honorary white status,” and is presented as another version of the white female action hero even though she is not racially white.²⁵

Kill Bill Volume 1

In *Kill Bill Volume 1* (2003), Liu similarly plays an Asian American character that is gradually de-raced over the course of the film. The racial, ethnic, and national identities of her character, O’Ren Ishii, are revealed to be constructs from the outset of *Volume 1*. Director Quentin Tarantino is considered a master of pastiche and postmodern parody,

and known for playing with generic conventions and extensively referencing low-budget Hollywood and non-American film texts (Hitchcock 227). Susan Hayward notes that “Tarantino’s orchestration of [...] quotes is so brilliantly achieved that what appears pastiche is in fact parody” (303). Tarantino presents and then brutally overturns his cinematic quoting by employing excessive and graphic violence which creates the impression that the images on screen are as horrific as they are comic (ibid. 303). He introduces Ishii into the film through the conventions of a Dragon Lady in an anime sequence—a brief cartoon biopic which recounts her life’s story. As a child, Ishii witnesses the murder of parents. While still in her youth, she avenges their deaths by seducing her parents’ killer who is also a pedophile, and murders him while they are bed together [Figure 36]. She goes on to build a reputation as a skilled assassin over the course of her adolescence and emerges as the leader of the Tokyo underworld. Tarantino employs and then subsequently overturns the Dragon Lady stereotype by conflating the images of seductress and child, and subsequently distances Liu from this racial stereotype. Tarantino also plays with audience expectations by presenting the film’s “arch-villain” as a sympathetic character justified in her use of violent force to avenge the death of her parents and make her way in the world.

Tarantino also uses parallelism to present the Bride and Ishii as mirror characters. Other than the Bride, Ishii is the only other character in the two-film series presented with significant background treatment. Both women share a similar history which includes witnessing the murder of their families and undergoing a quest for revenge. Through parallelism, Tarantino blurs the boundaries between “good” and “evil,” and subsequently the Bride and Ishii, by presenting both characters applying the same degree of physical

force with the same moral intent. Ishii is thus humanized through her backstory and parallelism with the Bride, and further distanced from the cinematic expectations of the cold and cruel Dragon Lady.

Furthermore, the Bride and Ishii both engage in the racial and gendered masquerade of cinematic identities during their fight sequence at the end of *Volume 1*. Tarantino envisaged *Volume 1* as a 1970s kung fu film;²⁶ one of the classic clichés of kung fu is the confrontation between a lone Chinese hero and a group of Japanese marital artists (Teo, *Hong* 104).²⁷ As previously mentioned, the Bride appears as a Bruce Lee clone: she is costumed in the yellow motorcycle jumpsuit Lee wore in *Game of Death* (Clouse 1978) and fights the “Crazy 88,” whose masks are reflective of Lee’s opponents in *Fist of Fury* (Lo 1972). In comparison, Ishii’s performance is inspired by Ocho Inoshika, the lead protagonist from the Japanese sexploitation film *Sex and Fury* (Suzuki 1973). As a sexploitation hero, Inoshika is explicitly sexualized and fetishized in the film, and her clothes conveniently fall off when she engages in violent combat. Tarantino explicitly cites *Sex and Fury* in *Volume 1*, by staging the final sequence between the Bride and Ishii in the snowy garden featured in the film. However, he also overturns this referencing by never explicitly sexualizing, or placing on display, the naked body of Ishii. Instead, Tarantino ironically fetishizes the feet Ishii by presenting her, in close-up, removing her white platform sandals, briefly revealing her sock-covered feet before hiding them under her kimono. Similar to the Bride, Ishii’s parodic performance of race exposes these images as cultural constructs and works to distance her character from the identities being performed. Through masquerade, both the Bride and Ishii are gradually de-raced in the film, appearing as more of white than Asian characters; they are presented

as “non-racial” or “racially neutral” characters, and reflect the (self-) perception/depiction of “whiteness” as being “raceless” in Western (cinematic) discourse (Frankenberg 477). Moreover, the discussion of Asian American identity in the film is complicated by the fact that *Kill Bill* is parodic—just as *Charlie’s Angels* is comic—and therefore does not present a serious representation of Asian American female identity.

Expanding Structural Limitations

Although Liu was featured as a principle action woman in Hollywood blockbusters of the early 2000s, she was presented as a model minority. While offering Liu upward mobility in Hollywood, the model minority characterization is still an imposed racial stereotype that does not replace but rather co-exists with the Lotus Blossom and Dragon Lady representations. As a non-white actress limited by racial stereotypes, Liu has struggled to procure other leading roles in Hollywood action films. For instance, she auditioned for the part of Chon Lin (Jackie Chan’s sister) in *Shanghai Knights* (Dobkin 2003) but lost out Chinese-born Fan Wong. She was similarly bypassed for the title role in *Elektra* (Bowman 2005) which was awarded to white American actress Jennifer Garner (ImDb).²⁸ Liu is arguably perceived as being too Asian to portray a solo white action hero and not Asian enough to portray a Chinese one. Since 2003, Liu has not been attached to a film project that has generated press or box-office profits comparable to *Charlie’s Angels* and *Kill Bill*. With the box-office disasters *Ballistic* and *Rise*, Liu’s inability to carry a big-budget action film without the aid of white female counterparts draws attention to the limitations of her star power and the continuing role race plays in the Hollywood action cinema.

With her film career in decline, Liu has been relegated to secondary and supportive roles in the action films *Domino* (Scott 2005) and *Lucky Number Slevin* (McGuigan 2006); playing the love interest in the romantic comedy *Watching the Detectives* (Soter 2007) and the drama *The Year of Getting to Know Us* (Sisam 2007); and performing voice work on *Mulan II* (Rooney and Southerland 2004), *Kung Fu Panda* (Osbourne and Stevenson 2008), *Tinkerbell* (Raymond 2008), and *Afro Samurai: Resurrection* (Kizaki 2009). Yet, Liu's post-2003 work may not be the result of a lack of star power but a personal choice to use her (relatively limited) star power to promote smaller-budgeted film projects in which she is passionate.²⁹ Starring in the Canadian drama *3 Needles* (Fitzgerald 2005), she has helped draw attention to the global AIDS epidemic. She executive produced the documentary *Freedom's Fury* (Gray and Raney, 2006), a film exploring the controversial 1956 Olympic semi-final water polo match between Russia and Hungary. In the late 2000s, Liu returned to her television roots starring in the series *Cashmere Mafia* (2008) and *Dirty Sexy Money* (2007-2009).

The Changing Landscape

The decline in Liu's film career corresponds with broader changes in Hollywood. With the success of *Crouching Tiger*, Hollywood has invested in other Hong Kong/Chinese-American transnational film projects in the hopes of gaining a foothold in the burgeoning Asian film market. In the 2000s, Hollywood producers have cast notable Pan-Asian actresses to star in their action films, including Ziyi Zhang (*Rush Hour 2* [2001]), Qi Shu (*The Transporter* [2002]), Li Gong (*Miami Vice* [2006]), Michelle Yeoh (*Sunshine* [2007]), *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* [2008], *Babylon A.D.* [2008]), and

Pei Pei Cheng (*Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun Li* [2009]). The incorporation of Pan-Asian actresses reflects Hollywood's attempt to capitalize on the American and Western interest in Asian action women.

While Liu is admired for her ability to break into Hollywood, she does not embody the qualities associated with ideal femininity in East Asia. According to Prasso, a more Western aesthetic of beauty has become pervasive in East Asia and favours large round eyes, high cheek bones, pointed noses, pale skin, and more curvaceous figures, often attained through cosmetics and surgery (144). As a result, Pan-Asian celebrities tend to appear more Western-looking while some Asian American celebrities are considered more traditionally "Asian" in their appearance. Similar to Asian American fashion models, Liu has small almond-shaped eyes and this feature, as noted by Prasso, is typically considered undesirable in Asia; many women undergo eyelid surgery in order to construct a more Western looking eye (139). The Western aesthetic of beauty in Asia appears to be complimented by Hollywood's recent trend in casting multiracial—typically of white and Asian descent—action women to star in their blockbusters, including Kelly Hu (*The Scorpion King* [Russell 2002], *Cradle 2 the Grave* [Bartkowiak 2003], *X2* [Singer 2003], *Devil's Den* [Burr 2006], *The Undoing* [Lee 2006], *Stiletto* [Vallelonga 2008], *The Tournament* [Mann 2009]), Devon Aoki (*2 Fast 2 Furious* [Singleton 2003], *D.E.B.S.* [Robinson 2004], *Sin City* [Miller and Rodriguez 2005], *DOA: Dead or Alive* [Yuen 2006], *The Mutant Chronicles* [Hunter 2008]), Maggie Q (*Mission Impossible 3* [2006], *Live Free or Die Hard* [2007], *Balls of Fury* [2007]), Moon Bloodgood (*Pathfinder* [Nispel 2007], *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li* [2009], *Terminator Salvation* [McG 2009]), Reiko Aylesworth (*The Killing Floor* [Raff

2007], *AVPR: Alien vs. Predator – Requiem* [Strause and Strause 2007]), and Kristen Kreuk (*Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li* [2009]). Hollywood is arguably expanding upon the model minority stereotype which grants Asian American actors/characters an “honorary white” status; by casting multiracial action women, Hollywood shifts from symbolic to partially embodied white racial identities (i.e. exotic whiteness). By placing the multiracial actresses in contained roles in a white context, Hollywood adopts yet another strategy aimed at “whitening” Asianness in mainstream American cinema.

CONCLUSION

THE HOLLYWOODIZATION AND HONG KONGIFICATION OF ASIAN ACTION WOMEN

In *Planet Hong Kong*, David Bordwell contends that Hong Kong cinema only “began to go global by joining [Hollywood,] the only truly global film industry” (86). Bordwell was commenting on the increased global visibility of Hong Kong creative film talent working in the mainstream American filmmaking system. Writing in the late 1990s, however, Bordwell could not foresee how the migration of people, technology, and action film aesthetics immediately impacted the Hong Kong and Hollywood filmmaking industries and/or their production strategies. A decade later, film scholars such as Michael Curtin, Wing-Fai Leung, and Gary Needham have explored the Hong Kong film industry in a post-1997 context. These projects, however, foreground the continuing importance of *male* action heroes in Hong Kong cinema. In contrast, with *The Warrior Women of Transnational Cinema* I have attempted to redress the exclusion of transnational Asian action women in terms of shaping the identity of post-1997 Hong Kong. Exploring Pan-Pacific connections in a post-1997 context, I have explored how a cultural exchange has taken place—located at the level of the Asian female body—between the action cinemas of Hong Kong and Hollywood at the turn of the new millennium.

Hollywoodization vs. Hong Kongification

In the late 1990s, Hong Kong cinema entered into a state of crisis as local filmmakers struggled to produce commercially viable films. As a result, Hong Kong adopted a more Hollywood aesthetic of filmmaking—CGI, improved production values, inclusion of English-language dialogue, increased attention to scriptwriting, a more formalized system

of filmmaking—for its domestic action cinema in order to capitalize on the increasing regional interest in Hollywood blockbusters. As they adjusted their filmmaking style to suit the changing tastes of the local and Pan-Asian film markets, Hong Kong filmmakers were accused of exchanging their local identity for commercial profit. This resulted in the perception that the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema was facing an identity crisis as it had lost the *essence* which defined local filmmaking in the golden age (1985-1994). What has been overlooked is the fact that Hong Kong cinema has historically borrowed filmmaking techniques, plotlines, and visual elements from various foreign cinemas, including Hollywood, and parlayed them into the “dynamic generic tradition(s)” of Hong Kong cinema (Bordwell 21). Post-1997 filmmakers appear to maintain Hong Kong’s stylistic approach which can be understood as a form of regional postmodernism (Teo, “*Wuxia*” 198)—a visual strategy through which (foreign) references are adapted into a distinctively local product for domestic and/or transnational consumption. In the new millennium, Hong Kong filmmakers have renegotiated their approach to filmmaking in order to keep the industry afloat by catering to local and Pan-Asian filmic tastes. While adopting a more Hollywood *style* of action filmmaking, Hong Kong action directors like Andrew Lau have (re)presented local identity through other means such as Cantonese language, the foregrounding of family trees, employing of pre-existing heroic models, and/or the integration into the local star system.

In the late 1990s, Hollywood also adopted Hong Kong action aesthetics into its generic filmmaking industry. Importing Hong Kong directors in the 1990s and action choreographers in the early 2000s, Hollywood invigorated white heroic performance in its action cinema. Hollywood then sold its blockbusters enhanced by the action aesthetic

of Hong Kong—*The Matrix*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Kill Bill*—back to East Asia for a (large) profit. Critics tend to discuss the “Hong Kongification” of Hollywood differently than the “Hollywoodization” of the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema. This disparity in treatment is based on the consistency of Hollywood’s approach to blockbuster film production and the commercial viability of its action cinema. In contrast, the post-1997 Hong Kong action cinema has employed a variety of production strategies with varying levels of box-office success. Unlike Hong Kong, Hollywood is not accused of losing its “local identity” despite its adoption of a more Hong Kong action aesthetic; instead, Hollywood has notably enhanced the appeal of its generic filmmaking industry by capitalizing on the Hong Kong action phenomenon. Hollywood is known for its globalizing postmodernist approach to filmmaking, a process through which the conventions of (Asian/foreign) film genres are transcribed, commodified, and/or reconstructed for the global film economy (Teo, “*Wuxia*” 198). In many ways, Hong Kong is simply the most recent world cinema from which Hollywood has pillaged creative film talent in order to enhance its domestic film products—and part of this process had been the co-opting of the Asian action woman.

Pan-Asian Action Women

In Hong Kong and Hollywood, the representation of Pan-Asian action women reflects the attempt, on the part of Pan-Pacific filmmakers, to differentiate Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese female identities. During Hong Kong’s the golden age of filmmaking (1985-1994), for instance, Pan-Asian action women like Michelle Yeoh were characterized as masculine heroines; they were expected to match the male performance standard in the

genre in order to be considered “real” action heroes. In contrast, Mainland action women like Li Gong did not assume the masculinized identity associated with Hong Kong heroism; expressing their “Chineseness” through femininity, Mainland action women were denied access to the space of physical action which was presented as the domain of Hong Kong men. During the golden age, the ethnic differentiation of Pan-Asian action women took place at the level of the body and was expressed through gendered performance.

In the late 1990s, Hollywood also relied on gendered performance to ethnically differentiate Chinese action women. On the one hand, Hong Kong action women were featured as transnational mediators facilitating communication between “the East” and “the West.” For instance, Yeoh was presented as gender-neutral action hero who was defined by her physical accomplishments rather than her “oriental” sexuality. On the other hand, Mainland action women were depicted through racial stereotypes—Dragon Lady (e.g. Ziyi Zhang) and Lotus Blossom (e.g. Li Gong)—and presented as erotic objects of the white male gaze. Defined by their “oriental” sexuality, Mainland action women were presented as desirable and/or threatening. By successfully marketing these blockbusters, Hollywood has arguably influenced international perceptions regarding the relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland following the amalgamation in 1997; in recent releases such as *Sunshine*, *Babylon A.D.*, and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*, Hollywood presents the notion that Hong Kong citizens should keep hold of their local identity and continue to embrace Western/American ideology amidst increasing pressures to assimilate with the Mainland. Thus, the heroic identities of Asian

action women reflect Hollywood's different conceptualizations of Hong Kong and Mainland China in the post-1997 context.

Asian American Action Women

The post-1997 Hong Kong cinema featured two co-existing representations of Asian American action women. For instance, multiracial actor and model Maggie Q was presented as a distinctly Asian American star. In the early 2000s, she was featured in a string of high production English-language action films designed to appeal to the commercial tastes of domestic and Pan-Asian film markets which preferred Hollywood blockbusters over local action films. Similar to Hollywood's representation of the Hong Kong action woman as a translator of "the East" to "the West," Hong Kong cinema presented the Asian American action woman as a mediator of "the West" working in "the East." Asian American Marsha Yuen, in comparison to Maggie Q, was marketed as a distinctively local star with strong ties to Hong Kong and its action cinema. Her star image emphasized her filial relation to Hong Kong action star Pei Pei Cheng. Hong Kong producers aspired to create a new "family tree" in Hong Kong cinema which linked the "Queen of Swordplay" with her action star daughter. They established this connection by presenting Yuen as the mirror image of her mother, featuring her as a swordswoman in a number of low-budget Cantonese-language action films. In fact, her image in *Hero Youngster* (2004) bears such a strong resemblance to Cheng that Yuen could easily pass for her mother in the film. Like other action women of the post-1997 cinema, Yuen was presented through a pre-existing heroic model which helped to establish a generational connection between her image and the warrior women of the cinema's colonial past. In

other words, Asian American action women in the post-1997 cinema, like Yuen, embody local identity because they are connected to, and presented through, pre-existing (and pre-amalgamation) Hong Kong heroic models.

Crossing over from Hong Kong cinema into Hollywood, Asian American action women were still subject to Hollywood's racial politics in terms of representation. For instance, in Hollywood blockbusters of the mid-2000s, Maggie Q was characterized through the racial stereotypes of the Dragon Lady (in *Live Free or Die Hard*) and Lotus Blossom (in *Balls of Fury*). Disillusioned by Hollywood's racial politics, she returned to East Asia to pursue other film projects. Lucy Liu was also characterized through a racial stereotype—in this case, as the model minority—which resulted in her representation as more of a white than Asian action woman. She was featured in Hollywood blockbusters stylized by the Hong Kong action film aesthetic including *Charlie's Angels* and *Kill Bill*. In an attempt to capitalize on the international success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Hollywood producers aspired to create a distinctively (Asian-)American version of the Hong Kong warrior woman. The model minority stereotype, however, was limiting for Liu who quickly became doubly typecast in Hollywood; she was considered too Asian to be cast in white roles and too white to be considered for Asian roles. Unable to secure roles in Hollywood action, Liu has since pursued other careers opportunities, notably on television.

Asian Canadian Action Women

Unlike the representations of Asian American action women in the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema, the star personas of Asian Canadian action women foregrounded their (cultural)

connections to Hong Kong. Exemplified through the careers of Asian Canadian beauty queens in Hong Kong, Asian Canadian women were perceived as embodying the qualities—modern, multilingual, cosmopolitan—typically associated with the global image of Hong Kong. They were further localized through their seamless integration into the *ge-ying-shi* (music—film—tv), Hong Kong’s multimedia and Cantonese-language entertainment complex. Asian Canadians Charlene Choi, Karena Lam, Monica Lo, Bernice Liu, and Kristy Yang are intermedial performers who entered the local star system of Hong Kong through the music and television industries, and developed local and/or Pan-Asian film bases before transitioning into action filmmaking. Moreover, these Asian Canadian action women were initially considered returning migrants (i.e. diasporic Hong Kong Chinese) and offered the post-1997 cinema a symbolic and ideological connection to the Western roots of Hong Kong’s colonial past.

In Hollywood, Asian Canadian action women have been depicted similarly to Asian American action women (i.e. they are not nationally differentiated). The late 2000s has seen the casting of multiracial North American action women in Hollywood, typically of white and Asian descent. The characterization of multiracial action women marks an important shift in representation of Eurasian/biracial identity in Hollywood. For example, *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun Li* (2009) stars multiracial Canadian actor Kristin Kreuk as title character Chun Li. Set in Hong Kong and Thailand, the film chronicles Li’s attempt to avenge the death of her Asian father Xiang (Edmund Chung). On the one hand, the film is aligned with other Hollywood action narratives which emphasize paternal identification for the action woman. For instance, the film opens with a ten-minute prologue through which Li describes the close relationship she shared with her father

during her childhood. Her voice over narration is complimented by a montage of childhood moments which showcase Xiang training his daughter in the art of *wu shu*. Paternal identification is further emphasized by Li's mother (Emilze Junqueira) who, on her death bed, comments that Li is just like her father.

On the other hand, the film positively portrays the biracial heroine's identification with her Hong Kong father and offers an alternative to Hollywood's historical representation of biracial characters as being evil and/or villainous if/when they choose to embrace their Asian heritage. According to Mary Beltrán and Camilla Fojas, multiracial action heroes have recently become "associated with notions of cultural mastery and other positive characteristics" (11). Raised by an Asian father, Li is rendered a cultural expert in Hong Kong and Thailand, and granted (cultural) mobility to travel throughout Asia. For instance, Li journeys to Thailand in search of the martial arts master Gen. She lives on the streets of Bangkok and begins to street fight against the gangs oppressing the local merchants. Considered a hero of "the people," Li is quickly integrated into the local Thai community whose members protect her when she is being chased by assailants; they throw their merchandise (i.e. fruit, vegetables) at the gang members which allows Li to escape. Thus, Li is presented as a distinctively local Asian hero and offspring of the Hong Kong action man. According to the logic of the film, Li is presented as part of a new generation of Hollywood action stars fighting in Asia. Kreuk's character appears to straddle the conceptual divide between "the East" and "the West;" unlike Michelle Yeoh who is conceived of as a transnational mediator, Kreuk's character represents Western interest/ideology in "the East" through her characterization as a Hong Kong action woman.¹

The transnational appeal of Kreuk's star image resides in her multiracial identity. On the one hand, Kreuk taps into the Western aesthetic of beauty which has become pervasive in East Asia. On the other, Kreuk appears to represent Hollywood's expansion of the model minority stereotype which grants Asian Americans (and in this case, an Asian Canadian) an "honorary" white status on screen; with the multiracial action woman, Hollywood shifts from a symbolic to partially embodied white racial identity. The multiracial action woman has one foot in East Asia (read: cultural expert) and the other foot rooted in the America (read: Western ideology). Moreover, the casting and characterization of the multiracial action woman in *Street Fighter*, a blockbuster stylized by Hong Kong action (featuring the action choreography of Dion Lam), represents Hollywood's latest attempt to capitalize on the Asian action phenomenon by simultaneously appealing to the market tastes of Eastern and Western audiences. Attentive to casting trends in the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema, Hollywood has once again appropriated a trend in East Asian cinema. It will be interesting to see if Hollywood reproduces this type of Asian-based action narrative featuring Asian North American stars as it might prove to be yet another inroad for Hollywood into the burgeoning Asian film market. More importantly, it will be important to see if Asian North American warrior women starring in Hollywood blockbusters of the new millennium can achieve the same degree of transnational success in East Asia as Asian North American action women working in the post-1997 Hong Kong cinema.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION TO WARRIOR WOMEN

- ¹ In *Asian North American Identities*, Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht argue that Canadians of Asian origins are often subsumed within the broader political category of “Asian American” and this labelling negates national and political differences. Ty and Goellnicht suggest that “Asian North American” is a more suitable umbrella term as it acknowledges collective experiences while emphasizing heterogeneity and national difference (2).
- ² According to Michael Keith, place-based authenticity is frequently invoked in academic, cultural, and political debates as a “trump” card—as if being from a place grants the local critic a privileged position of authority in academic discussions (521). Keith suggests that while this notion of authority is extremely dangerous, especially in academia, it is also a conception that is (still) very difficult to overturn (522). He argues that all “guides” (or critics) should be evaluated for the merits of their arguments rather than for their personal distance to/from their subject matter (526).
- ³ For a detailed discussion of the “docile body” see Foucault’s *Discipline and Punishment*.
- ⁴ For a discussion of the “action babe,” see Chapter 6.
- ⁵ For a discussion of the term “race” and its multiple definitions throughout history, see Michael Banton’s “The Idiom of Race.”
- ⁶ Emphasis in original.
- ⁷ My emphasis of the term “irresistible” in order to draw greater attention to the sexual threat of the Asian woman to the white male hero.
- ⁸ For a detailed discussion of the career of Wong, see Marchetti’s *Romance and the Yellow Peril*.
- ⁹ The development of Asian American stereotypes in Hollywood corresponds to broader social, political, economic, and ideological factors. For instance, the vilifying and conversely victimizing of particular Pan-Asian nationalities, including most notably China, Japan, and Vietnam, corresponds with the changing dynamics of US foreign policy throughout the 20th century.
- ¹⁰ Celine Parreñas Shimizu contends that these images “alert us to the limited definitions of sexuality, race, and representation, and therefore are crucibles for the creative formulations of subjectivity” (6-7).

CHAPTER 1

HONG KONG-HOLLYWOOD GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

- ¹ Although films produced for the global market have a much larger profit potential, there is also increased financial risk for investors. Requiring increased funding to meet narrative and stylistic expectations (set by Hollywood), filmmakers attempt to create a product which will appeal to the global film market without alienating local/regional audiences.
- ² Bollywood is arguably the most prolific film industry in the world.
- ³ Since the 1970s, Hong Kong has regularly exported its film products to Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea. These markets are central to the success of Hong Kong cinema because the local market is simply too small to support domestic industry. The local market typically generates 20% to 25% of a film's total revenues (Fore 41, 45).
- ⁴ In 1995, Hong Kong earned US\$130 million regionally while Hollywood grossed over US\$5 billion abroad (Bordwell 82).
- ⁵ According to David Desser, the regional distribution of Hong Kong films since the 1960s has made Hong Kong a major and long-term source of cultural influence on Asia and especially Asian filmmaking ("Hong" 214).
- ⁶ Ong's emphasis.
- ⁷ Headed by Raymond Chow, Golden Harvest is Hong Kong's largest and most commercial successful production company (Fore 41). Since the 1970s, Chow has had limited success penetrating the American market. His most commercially successful cross-over hits include *Cannonball Run* (1981) and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990; *ibid.* 42).
- ⁸ Emphasis in original.
- ⁹ Describing the economic function of stars, Richard Dyer argues that "stars are made for profit" and offer a "promise of a certain kind of thing you would see if you went to see the film" (*Heavenly* 5).
- ¹⁰ Tashiro argues that Hollywood has attempted to obscure the hierarchy of corporate command and their factory-like (re)production of generic films by promoting the concepts of auteurism and "freedom of expression" (28).

¹¹ See Maltby for a comprehensive discussion on the history of New Hollywood.

¹² Laikwan Pang similarly uses the term “post-1997” in reference to Hong Kong’s filmmaking industry following the amalgamation (55).

¹³ Chow’s starring roles in such films as *City on Fire* (Lam 1987), *Prison on Fire* (Lam 1987), and *Full Contact* (Lam 1993) also reflect the actor’s working relationship with another prolific gunplay director, Ringo Lam.

¹⁴ According to Logan, gunplay films are formulaic and typically feature the same basic plot:

[A]n innocent is drawn, willingly or not, into the underworld. Often, he has a gruff ‘big brother’ figure to look up to within the gang. The hero is betrayed and, in the final reel, takes bloody revenge, often dying in the carnage. Many of the same actors—Andy Lau, Mok Siu Chong, Miu Kiu Wai, and Simon Yam—have appeared in dozens of these films. (126)

CHAPTER 2

TRANSNATIONAL ASIAN MOTHERS

THE HEROIC IDENTITIES OF MICHELLE YEOH AND PEI PEI CHENG

¹ In fact, nearly one third of the fight scenes in *Come Drink With Me* contain Hu’s trademark “confrontational stillness” (ibid. 281).

² I liken this structure to the Megazords featured in the American television series *Mighty Morphin’ Power Rangers* (1993-1996).

³ The term “wire-fu” is in reference to a trend in Hong Kong filmmaking of the 1990s. Wirework became more prevalent during this time and allowed filmmakers to present action heroes defying gravity (Hunt, *Kung* 24).

⁴ In her article “Hong Kong Goes to America,” Staci Ford identifies a second type migration melodrama. These include films which have enjoyed substantial success in the United States and/or the (international) cult market. For the most part, they paint the United States as a “wasteland of racism and violence” in order to reinscribe popular American myths like “Manifest Destiny” and “The city on a Hill” metaphor. These include the films *A Better Tomorrow II* (1987), *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995), and the 1997 film *Once Upon a Time in China and America* (51).

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- ⁵ In 1970, both Golden Harvest and Shaw Brothers were interested in signing Bruce Lee to a contract. The wife of Hong Kong director Wei Lo, Liang Hwa Liu was instrumental in convincing Lee to sign with Golden Harvest. She travelled to LA and stayed in the home of Pei Pei Cheng as she was brokering the deal. Bruce Lee frequently stopped by and became friends with Cheng (Logan 27).
- ⁶ Originally born Yeung Ly Tsing, she changed her name to Cynthia Khan after her predecessors Cythnia Rothrock and Michelle Yeoh/Khan (Logan 161).
- ⁷ Yukari Oshima (aka Cynthia Luster) has worked in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Philippines, but never in Japan. She was frequently cast with Hong Kong action star Moon Lee (Logan 163).
- ⁸ According to Bey Logan, Rothrock was the first blonde American girl to perform martial arts in a Hong Kong film (157).
- ⁹ Like Cynthia Rothrock, Karen Shepherd was an American champion in forms competition and even a rival of Rothrock on the American karate circuit (Logan 164).
- ¹⁰ Yeoh married her D&B Films producer Dickson Poon and retired from the Hong Kong film industry upon his insistence. At the time, it was common for an actress to retire from filmmaking and start a family. After only three years of marriage, Yeoh divorced Poon and returned to the action cinema (Lu, *China* 133).
- ¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of the Bond Girl character type, see my study entitled “‘I Know Where You Keep Your Gun’: Daniel Craig as the Bond-Bond Girl Hybrid in *Casino Royale*” (2011).
- ¹² Emphasis in original.
- ¹³ Although *wuxia* films usually open with an action sequence, *Crouching Tiger* begins with a 15 minute exposition in order to familiarize Western audiences with the time period, setting, and characters (Teo, “*Wuxia*”202).
- ¹⁴ *Crouching Tiger* also sets a precedent for the characterizations of Yeoh and Ziyi who are similarly featured in a mentor-student relationship in the American drama *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Marshall 2005). Since this chapter is focused on the action genre, a close examination of the film goes beyond the established parameters of this study.

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- ¹⁵ Unlike laserdiscs and videotapes which can be played universally, DVDs were allotted region codes in order to limit their screening to the particular region in which they are sold. This system was established to ensure maximum profits for movie producers who could release different formats in each region. There was widespread fear on the part of American film studios that without region codes, people would simply import a film's DVDs from the US instead of viewing the film in the theater and this in turn would hurt the film's profit margin during its international release (Ruh 140).
- ¹⁶ Chan's films featuring wirework and CGI such as *The Tuxedo* (Donovan 2002) also performed poorly with audiences and critics.
- ¹⁷ I will explore Tasker's theory of maternal masculinity in Chapter 7.
- ¹⁸ Director Andrzej Bartkowiak has played a central role in depicting Hong Kong masculinity in Hollywood. He met Jet Li while working as the director of photography on *Lethal Weapon 4* (Donner 1998) and in the early 2000s he directed two of Jet Li's Hollywood action films: *Romeo Must Die* (2000) and *Cradle 2 the Grave* (2003).
- ¹⁹ Cheng's characterization in *Crouching Tiger* is not a strong departure from the star image she established in Hong Kong. Similar to her representation in *Fist Power* (2000), a Hong Kong action film released in the same year as *Crouching Tiger*, Cheng is featured in a solo action sequence which demonstrates her fighting abilities and justifies her title of a martial arts master.
- ²⁰ After 10 years of devotion to her surrogate daughter and pupil, Fox names Jen as her mortal enemy: "You know what poison is? An 8 year-old girl full of deceit. That's poison! Jen, my only family, my only enemy" (Lee 2000).
- ²¹ *Crouching Tiger* contains similar generic motifs including a heroine masquerading as a boy, a stolen sword, deadly poisons, and Taoists sects.
- ²² Pei Pei Cheng portrayed the character Golden Swallow in both *Come Drink With Me* (1966) and *Golden Swallow* (Chang 1968).
- ²³ Dion Lam has worked with some of Hong Kong's greatest action film talent. He has choreographed action sequences for Michelle Yeoh in *Heroic Trio* (To 1993), Ekin Cheng in *The Young and Dangerous* (Lau 1996, 1996, 1996, 1998), and Jet Li in *Black Mask* (Lee 1996). Moreover, he helped Yuen Woo Ping choreograph the action sequences for the *Matrix* trilogy (Wachowski Brothers 1999,

2003, 2003). Like Terence Chang, Lam has arguably served as a liaison between Hong Kong and Hollywood, who has used his action choreography to introduce into American mainstream film Hong Kong stars Francoise Yip (*Romeo Must Die*) and Pei Pei Cheng.

CHAPTER 3

INTERMEDIAL STARS

HONG KONG ACTION WOMEN IN POST-1997 CINEMA

- ¹ Between 1988 and 1996, Hong Kong produced an average of 153 films per year (Leung 71). With a population of six million residents, Hong Kong cannot economically sustain its industry through box-office sales.
- ² Taiwan moviegoers are most interested in Hollywood blockbusters that do well in the US. In the age of digital media and television (i.e. post-martial law which restricted commercial media until 1987), Taiwanese audiences are aware of the latest Hollywood buzz. Thus, distributors attempt to align a film's release date as close in proximity to the U.S. premiere in order to capitalize on the local interest (Curtin 92).
- ³ According to Michael Curtin, 2000 saw a dramatic reversal in box-office draws in Taiwan. During the Chinese New Year holiday, the most important release date for films each year, no Hong Kong had a successful run. A decade earlier, Hong Kong movies were the most popular draw during the New Years season in Taiwan (69).
- ⁴ Examining the 'record-breaker' film phenomenon in South Korea, Chris Howard notes a conspicuous marketing strategy which encourages audience participation via "a suspenseful, stage-by-stage 'countdown' in the newspapers to see if the current record-breaker is still on track to beat previous national records" (94). The audience is positioned as both viewer and record-breaking participant, and share in a collective sense of "patriotic pride" as the South Korean films compete with Hollywood blockbusters in the domestic market (92, 94). Reyna Denison offers a similar line of argument when considering the advertising for the domestic release of *Princess Mononoke* (Miyazaki 1997) and its establishment as a *daihitto* (i.e. Japanese blockbuster). She argues that the foregrounding of running audiences totals for the film in promotional materials represents "a calculated attempt to key into the

nationalistic elements of the film's success, appealing directly to patriotic sentiment within potential Japanese audiences" (109-10). In both instances, record-breaking box-office returns in the domestic market were strongly encouraged by advertisements that link viewership with a broader collective 'national' identity; in these films offer a challenge to the globalizing impulse associated with Hollywood films. In light of the changing tastes of Hong Kong moviegoers who seem to prefer the quality of imported (i.e. Hollywood) films over their domestic fare (TELA 13-14), film spectatorship in Hong Kong is not associated with discourses of 'nationality' or notions ideological resistance.

⁵ At the time, young people in Hong Kong were educated in a British colonial school system and receptive to movies, music, and television from abroad. However, as Michael Curtin notes, Hong Kong youth were most excited about a "local popular culture that reflected on the everyday demands of life in a rapidly modernizing city" (51). Even more unexpected was that this local popular culture would fascinate overseas Chinese who grew up in diasporic communities and were confronting complex issues of their own emerging hybrid identities (ibid. 51).

⁶ As noted in TELA,

Regarding the film investors, focus group participants [were of the opinion] that the film investors should change their attitude towards film investment and should aim to produce good quality films. They should understand that filmmaking was not a short-term investment and should not be excessively speculative. Short production time, for example, would usually imply poor quality products and these films were unable to attract audiences. Participants suggested that the film investors should conduct more in-depth market research and produce a greater variety of films for local audiences. (46)

⁷ Film audiences preferred comedies (50.9%), love stories (29.1%), and action films (26.9%) over other types of films such as "scientific" (12.7%), "friendship" (8.4%), war/military (6.4%) and cartoons which earned a mere 5.5% (TELA 11). The study, however, does not address such popular hybrid genres as the action-comedy. Moreover, it is unclear whether respondents grouped the action-comedy in with the comedy or action film categories, or simply did not express their presence for the action-comedy since they were not asked.

⁸ Hollywood's valuing of its films over its stars reflects the large amount of capital invested into its films and the profit-minded expectations of box-office returns.

⁹ While post-1997 Hong Kong filmmakers began tailoring their products for the youth demographic, South Korean filmmakers generated local revenue with their "multiple-address" strategy. In order to attract large audiences, South Korean record-breaking films address different audiences simultaneously by featuring an ensemble cast and target "an enormous cross-section of the domestic market." (Howard 92). The domestic success of each record-breaking film can be attributed to the film's capacity to read in multiple ways.

¹⁰ Michael Tse, Jordan Chan, and Jason Chu were part of the boy band Wind Fire Sea.

¹¹ Triads or secret societies can be traced back to the political reform movements of the dynastic era in China. Triads were originally patriotic organizations and self-help societies which emerged in response to the corruption of government officials. The triads gradually evolved into protection rackets that "shed the trappings of patriotism to become self-interested enterprises" (Curtin 36). Triad members believe in the importance of giving face to the right people while avoiding attention from competitors or state authorities (ibid. 36). Although triads have long been a part of Hong Kong society, they began to be prominently featured in the *gang-chan-pian* following the signing of the Joint Declaration; these narratives played a role in establishing the golden age of Hong Kong filmmaking by presenting the rebellious spirit of the city. Moreover, post-1997 Hong Kong action films also feature narratives centered on triad organizations, and especially their clan-mentality and self-interested enterprises. The *Young and Dangerous* franchise and *Infernal Affairs* trilogy (Lau and Mak 2003; Lau and Mak 2003; Lau 2004) have played a central role in sustaining the local film industry while redefining Hong Kong (male) identity in the wake of Hong Kong's unification with China.

¹² In a similar way, *Storm Riders* emphasizes the importance of paternal lineage to the development of a hero's local identity. The film chronicles Lord Conqueror's (Sonny Chiba's) quest to enhance his ruling power over China. Acting upon a prophecy, Lord Conqueror murders the fathers of Whispering Wind (Ekin Cheng) and Striding Cloud (Aaron Kwok) in order to raise the children as his heirs, believing that the boys will bring him 10 years of prosperity. Whispering Wind and Striding Cloud are separated by the Lord Conqueror, and each hero independently realizes/remembers that the Lord Conqueror killed

his father. Presented in flashbacks, these scenes of revelation connect the grown up sons with their fathers. Moreover, each father uses his last breath to provide his son with vital information as to how to defeat Lord Conqueror. Both Whispering Wind and Striding Cloud embrace their paternal lines and join forces to defeat their evil surrogate father.

- ¹³ Shu's characterizations arguably reflect the fact that she was never formally trained in martial arts.
- ¹⁴ Qi Shu is featured in films which chronicle the struggle of a young male hero trying to make his way in the world. *Another Meltdown* and *A Man Called Hero* depict the migration and establishment of Hong Kong heroes outside of China in the USSR and USA respectively; both films emphasize the struggles facing diasporic Chinese as they assimilate into predominantly white communities. Local discrimination is exacerbated by the actions taken by Japanese characters who are cast as the primary villains of the film. For instance, in *A Man Called Hero*, Hero Hua (Ekin Cheng) is not only oppressed by the American cowboys but is also targeted by Japanese samurai warriors.
- ¹⁵ In *Young and Dangerous 6* (2000), Chicken Chiu (Jordan Chan), who does not speak Japanese, relies on English to communicate with this Japanese bride, who does not speak Cantonese.
- ¹⁶ This can be attributed to Shu's lack of proficiency in English.
- ¹⁷ *For Bad Boys Only* references *Alien Resurrection* (1999) in its rendering of failed clone experiments. As a horror film, *Alien Resurrection* focuses on the bodily disfigurements of the failed clones and presents their suffering in a sympathetic light; heeding their pleas for death, Ripley euthanizes them. Conversely, in *For Bad Boys Only* the failed clone experiments are physically proportional to human beings but are stuck in a childlike/childish state; the image of Qi Shu remains relatively unaltered and her failed replications, while intellectually underdeveloped, still appear beautiful.
- ¹⁸ For a detailed discussion, see Chapter 6.
- ¹⁹ Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis describe "bullet-time" as "a shot where a single action is viewed simultaneously from multiple vantage points around the action" (139). This technique was first used in *The Matrix* to present the film's hero Neo (Keanu Reeves) dodging bullets. This effect required the use of 122 cameras which were arranged around the action and timed to capture the same moment as still images which were digitally integrated in postproduction (ibid. 139).

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- ²⁰ In fact, director Corey Yuen pays homage to the first girls with guns film *Yes Madam* (1985), which he also directed, by replicating Michelle Yeoh's iconic gymnastics-inspired finishing move in *So Close*.
- ²¹ Andy Lau is a popular Cantopop singer and actor in Hong Kong. Andrew Lau is a prominent Hong Kong filmmaker.
- ²² For a more comprehensive discussion of girls with guns see Chapter 6.
- ²³ The film stars Qi Shu, Kelly Lin, Sandra Ng, Teresa Mak, Rachel Ngan, Amanda Strang, and Rosemary Vanderbrock.
- ²⁴ These love triangles typically result in the death of at least one participating member, and their demise devastates the surviving parties. For instance, in *Martial Angels* Qi Shu competes with her sister Octopus (Kelly Lin) for the love of Lok Chi Yang (Julian Cheung). In the end, Octopus kills Yang and both women are heartbroken. Moreover, these love triangles result in the collision of Shu's personal and professional lives. In *So Close*, Shu is not only part of a love triangle with Yen (Seung-Hun Song) and her best friend May (So-Bik Wong), but she is also involved in a family triangle as she attempts to negotiate the expectations of her lover Yen and her sister Sue (Vicky Zhao). Ultimately, Lynn chooses to safeguard her sister rather than meet her lover, and she is killed in the process.
- ²⁵ In *So Close* Lynn (Qi Shu) is featured as the field agent while her sister Sue (Vicky Zhao) functions as her communications expert. When Sue expresses her desire to work in the field, Lynn dismisses the idea by pointing out that Sue is emotional, reckless, and completely unskilled. Moreover, Lynn sacrifices her life to protect Sue whose reckless behaviour results in her being tracked down by the police.
- ²⁶ Box-office figures were provided by the Hong Kong Movie Database (www.hkmdb.com).
- ²⁷ Box-office figures were provided by the Hong Kong Movie Database (www.hkmdb.com).
- ²⁸ Box-office figures were provided by Box Office Mojo (www.boxofficemojo.com).
- ²⁹ Box-office figures were provided by the Hong Kong Movie Database (www.hkmdb.com).

CHAPTER 4

CHINESE WOMEN AND THE TROPES OF MODERN CHINA

THE TRANSNATIONAL APPEAL OF LI GONG AND ZIYI ZHANG

¹ Since the early 1900s, Hong Kong and Mainland China have developed and maintained their own distinct filmmaking industries; Hong Kong cinema, however, has enjoyed greater commercial success and global exposure, and on the international stage, Hong Kong cinema has typically stood in for Mainland Chinese, as well as Pan-Asian, filmmaking. Mainland cinema differs from Hong Kong filmmaking in terms of government oversight, monetary investment, interest in the commercial market, and preferred and/or promoted genres.

² According to Yingchi Chu, Mainland filmmaking must adhere to policy documents which take many forms including statements issued by the CPC's Central Committee, the State Council, the Ministry of Propaganda, the Ministry of Culture, the Film Bureau, and the General State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT); and speeches and talks presented by party leaders. Chu contends that film policy in the Maoist era was "formulated within the remit of political influence rather than through economic concern for the industry" (45).

³ Although Deng served as the Paramount leader of the PRC, he never officially held the office as head of state. Following the death of Mao, Deng managed to gain a political foothold over Mao's chosen successor Guofeng Hua.

⁴ For instance, the Film Bureau considered *Red Sorghum* contemptuous for its flaunting of traditional sexual norms which elicited a strong audience response. According to Jenny Lau, the film was widely discussed in newspapers and fan magazines, and created a social dialogue in the Mainland regarding issues of Chinese history, chauvinism, sexuality, and violence ("*Ju*" 154).

⁵ Some Western critics have reasoned that the film was too sexually provocative to be screened in China. Others have speculated that Chinese officials were offended by the feudalistic representation of marriage in the film and its allusion to the present autocratic regime (Lau, "*Ju*" 154). Jenny Lau, however, contends that the primary objection resides in the cultural substructure of the film. In Confucian ideology, a "good" Chinese woman gains social recognition by exhibiting *Qing* (considerateness) and *Li* (propriety). Ju Dou (Gong) not only violates the institution of marriage, but also the basic Confucian Code of *Li jie* which is structured around notion of *Zhong* (loyalty to one's country), *Zhen* (loyalty to one's husband), and *Xiao* (filial piety). Consequently, Chinese officials were

uncomfortable with a Chinese heroine who, according to their model, is a “sinner” criticizing and/or proving that their Confucian system is ultimately wrong and/or inadequate (Lau, “*Ju*” 156, 163).

⁶ In the early 1990s, approximately one-third of Chinese films were co-productions. According to Yinghi Chu, this resulted in the production and distribution of Chinese films to the international market even if the products were banned, poorly distributed, or unpopular within China. In 1994, tougher regulations were introduced to increase Mainland control and censorship. In addition to stipulating that postproduction had to be completed in China, these new regulations required that at least 50 percent of the major actors in the film must be residents of Mainland China. These new stipulations resulted in a sharp decrease in co-productions (49).

⁷ Gong is frequently depicted through close-ups and her face expresses the trauma she endures. For instance, in the opening scene of *Raise the Red Lantern*, a tearful Gong is featured in close-up as she directly addresses the camera which serves as a screen surrogate for her character’s step-mother. Although heartbroken by her father’s death, Songlian (Gong) comes to realize her social limitations and accepts the fact that she will have to quit school and get married. Songlian questions if every woman is fated to be concubine and her hopeless despair is expressed through her eyes. Presented through close-up and a long take, Gong’s expressive face is the focal point of the scene.

⁸ As Zhang explains, “women express [oppression] more clearly on their bodies (*zai tamen shenshang*) because they bear a heavier burden than men” (Qtd. in Lau, “*Ju*” 153).

⁹ Jenny Lau contends that Ju Dou’s struggle against gerontocratic and patriarchal power is inevitably futile. Ju Dou’s destiny is determined by the men in her life and whether or not they hate, love, or honour her; tortured by her husband, lover and son, Ju Dou is victimized by a patriarchal systems that ends up destroying her (“*Ju*” 162).

¹⁰ Yimou Zhang and Li Gong are rumoured to have had an affair during the 1990s.

¹¹ According to Bey Logan, Brigitte Lin is one of the few bankable stars of Hong Kong who only has to “wave her arms and smile enigmatically and local audiences will pay to watch” (166). She is best known for her gender-bending martial arts performance as Invisible Asia or some version of the character (ibid. 166).

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- ¹² Throughout the 1990s, Maggie Cheung slowly gained the international reputation as an actor par excellence following her critically acclaimed performances in *Days of Being Wild* (Wai, 199), *Full Moon In New York* (Kwan 1990), and *Center Stage* (Kwan 1992).
- ¹³ During an interview with *Cahiers du Cinema*, Maggie Cheung explains that the Hong Kong viewing public prefers entertainment films over art films, and even resents directors who occupy resources (actors, choreographers, cinema screens, etc) for “anti-commercial” films (Lalanne 51).
- ¹⁴ Box-office figures were provided by the Box Office Mojo (www.boxofficemojo.com).
- ¹⁵ In *God of Gamblers III* (Wong, 1991), Gong is also predominantly presented through close-up shots. This is most evident when Chow Sing Cho (Stephen Chow) reminisces about his relationship with Yu-San (Gong); the resulting montage is exclusively comprised of close-up shots of Gong.
- ¹⁶ In *Operation Cougar*, *A Terra-Cotta Warrior*, and *God of Gamblers III*, Gong’s characters are hit in the face. This blow leaves a bruise on her cheek, tarnishes her beauty, and compels her sympathetic lover into action.
- ¹⁷ In the French drama *Irma Vep* (Assayas 1996), Maggie Cheung plays herself and after viewing a fight sequence from the Hong Kong action film *The Heroic Trio* (1993), she comments that he didn’t actually perform in the fight sequences; instead, the director relied on stunt doubles to produce the effect. Her mediated performance can be contrasted with that of her co-star Michelle Yeoh who performed her own stunts throughout the film.
- ¹⁸ John is stricken with terminal cancer and their love affair inevitably ends with his death. By positioning her lover’s death shortly after Hong Kong’s handover to China in 1997, the film associates Vivian’s liberation with British colonial rule and presents as uncertain Vivian’s future within a Mainland Chinese system which has historically oppressed her.
- ¹⁹ See Wendy Aron’s article, “If Her Stunning Beauty Doesn’t Bring You To Your Knees, Her Deadly Drop Kick Will: Violent Women in the Hong Kong Kung Fu Film.”
- ²⁰ Li Gong is similarly characterized in the horror-thriller *Hannibal Rising* (Webber 2007). In the film, she portrays Lady Murasaki who lost her white husband during the bombing of Hiroshima. Widowed and wealthy, Murasaki is harassed by the local French men who desire to sleep with her. Her honour is restored by her white nephew Hannibal Lecter (Gaspard Ulliel) with whom she has fallen in love. As

time passes, their love becomes 'impossible' as Lecter begins to transform into a cold-blooded killer. Although Li Gong does not portray a Chinese character in the film and her identity is not associated with an oppressed Chinese nation, her character is still treated an "exotic" other living in postwar Europe who is coveted for her sexuality. Moreover, her Japanese identity and more specifically, her connection with her samurai ancestors, play a central role in the film. It is Murasaki who teaches Lecter about the samurai code of honour and sparks his hunger to avenge his sister's murder. Employing the Hollywood/American trope which links the Asian female with occult dangers, the film presents the origin story of Hannibal Lecter and his development as a serial killer.

²¹ The term "revenue-sharing" refers to the adoption of profit-sharing system in China. Each year, a set number of foreign films are distributed throughout China. In return for access of the Chinese film market, the Mainland government keeps a certain percentage of film revenue.

²² One such strategy entailed the development of a new "mainstream cinema" that featured local content at reasonable prices. In November of 2000, Emeri Film Corporation reduced ticket prices by two-thirds and other theaters across China have followed suit in order to boost the number of moviegoers (Chu 43).

²³ Although a VCD (video compact disc) looks like a DVD, it holds only one tenth of the information and offers picture quality comparable to videotape. During the 1990s, VCD players were popular in Asia because they were cheaper than DVD players. Moreover, VCDs only cost \$10, the same price as a theater ticket, and pirated VCDs could be found for less than \$5 on the black market (Curtin 80-81).

²⁴ Laikwan Pang, argues that Hong Kong's desire for 'national' status is double-edged. While the Mainland market is crucial for the development of Hong Kong cinema in the new millennium, Hong Kong's unique identity could potentially be swallowed by the commercial (and political) needs of the Mainland; while attempting to take advantage of its new national status to access the lucrative Mainland market, Hong Kong films risk losing their local identity through Chinese assimilation (63).

²⁵ *Dangqi* was a revolutionary concept to the Mainland. According to this principle, films releases are scheduled around seasonal consumption patterns. For instance, in Hong Kong children's films correspond to summer vacations while patriotic films are released around the National Day. The Lunar New Year typically generates huge box-office receipts in Hong Kong and Taiwan; film companies

typically produce high-budgeted films featuring superstars, light humour, and happy endings to maximize profits. *Dangqi* has fundamentally changed the Chinese film industry. In 1997 and 1998, the most profitable films were released during the Lunar New Year season (Pang 61).

²⁶ The *wuxia* tradition began to flourish in Hong Kong following the Pacific War (Teo, “*Wuxia*” 204).

²⁷ Reviewing the film for *Culturekiosque*, Simma Park writes,

Zhang Zi Yi is ravishingly pretty as the confused and tormented Jen, and her background in dance helps her execute dazzling fight scenes and wire work. Comparisons to established Chinese actress Gong Li may well be justified, however; Zhang's performance, failing at times to arouse sympathy, makes her seem more cold and spoiled than anything else. (¶9)

²⁸ The *Rush Hour* franchise chronicles the transnational co-operation between a Hong Kong policeman (Chan) and an American cop (Chris Tucker).

²⁹ Chinese critics are more critical of Zhang's commercial films *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers*, than his self-orientalising dramas *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern*. According to Kwai-Cheung Lo, *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers* are considered bad copies of Hollywood and Hong Kong action films. In the early 2000s, there was growing consensus within the Chinese film industry that “commercialism” via “globalization” was the only way to progress Mainland cinema especially in light of China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 (“Copies” 131). Moreover, globalization is generally construed as being an “Americo-centric economic and cultural imperial trajectory, on which national borders and local interest groupings are dissolved to promote the circulation of capital” (Pang 56). By championing culturally conservative notions like nationalism, Chinese filmmakers/critics express their disdain and concern regarding the Mainland's commercialization and global aspirations.

³⁰ In 2003, Yimou Zhang's casting for his blockbusters became the norm with the signing of CEPA (Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement), a free-trade agreement between Hong Kong and China. According to CEPA, co-productions will be treated as Mainland motion pictures and distributed on a quota-free basis. Placing no restrictions on the inclusion of Hong Kong “principal creative personnel” (i.e. director, screen-writer, cinematographer), CEPA requires that one-third of the film's “leading artistes” (i.e. leading actor/actress, supportive actor/actress) come from the Mainland³⁰ (Special 1). While promoting

the participation of Hong Kong filmmaking talent behind the scenes, CEPA insists that the film's casting (i.e. the faces of the film) reflects the transnational nature of the co-production.

³¹ In *Hero*, various characters in the film re-tell the same story. Each version of the story is presented through a distinctive colour palette.

³² In *The Legend of Zu* (2001), Ziyi Zhang is characterized in much the same way. She portrays Joy, the only mortal to be trained as a Zu Warrior by an immortal (Lan Shun). Possessing the heart of a warrior, Joy is considered worthy of learning the secrets of Zu.

³³ Since *Crouching Tiger*, there have emerged three prominent types of Chinese co-productions. The first types are action-comedies set against a modern cosmopolitan milieu and reflect Hong Kong's trademark filmmaking style. The action-comedy *Shaolin Soccer* (2001) epitomizes this style and the film's final shot features the advertisement for a new craze in kung fu – that of the kung fu couple. The pairing of a Hong Kong star (Stephen Chow) with a Chinese female action woman (Vicky Zhao) set the precedent for future action-comedy co-productions. The second type includes historical war epics which are set in China's distant past and emphasize the theme of (re)unification. Similar to *House of Flying Daggers*, these films typically feature epic battles and love triangles. For instance, *The Warlords* (2007) stars Andy Lau, Jet Li, and Takeshi Kaneshiro as a group of martial warriors whose bonds of brotherhood are tested by the development of a love triangle with Mainland action woman Jinglei Xu. The third type is this historical epic or drama exploring the life of the royal family and their struggle for power amidst international and external threats. While *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) stars Yun-Fat Chow and Li Gong, *The Legend of the Black Scorpion* (Feng 2006) features Daniel Wu and Ziyi Zhang.

³⁴ In 2006, Li Gong and Ziyi Zhang were cast in *wuxia* inspired films exploring the internal and external threats to the Chinese royal family. The figure of the Empress is positioned at the heart of each narrative, and her differing representation in *Curse of the Golden Flower* (Zhang 2006) and *The Legend of the Black Scorpion* (Feng 2006) offers two co-existing images of Chinese femininity. Moreover, each characterization expands upon the transnational star image of its leading lady. In *Curse of the Golden Flower*, Gong portrays an Empress who is stuck in a loveless marriage with a cruel Emperor (Yun-Fat Chow) who is slowly poisoning her. Her marital situation is further complicated by the affair she had with her stepson and her aspirations for her eldest biological child to ascend the throne. Although she

conspires to overthrow the Emperor during the chrysanthemum festival, she is outsmarted by the Emperor who thwarts her plan by eliminating her allies and subsequently kills all three sons. She is ultimately trapped in a hopeless situation, forced to continue drinking her poison until she dies. While cast as a tragic character, the film presents the notion that the Empress shapes her own fate through her transgressions against the Confucian code and especially filial piety. Unlike Gong, Zhang portrays an empowered but villainous Empress in *The Legend of the Black Scorpion*. In the film, Empress Wan (Zhang) remarries her late husband's brother Li (You Ge) in order to retain her title as Empress. In love with Prince Wu (Daniel Wu), she conspires to overthrow Emperor Li so that Prince Lu can take the throne. While referring to herself as a "helpless woman," the Empress is quite powerful and considered by many to be "more deadly than a viper." Her malevolence is externalized through her sexual impulse to seduce and bed the royal family and the film contains many scenes feature the semi-nude body of the Empress. Her actions ultimately result in the death of the royal family and her temporary ascension to the throne. She is murdered in the final scene of the film by an anonymous assailant. Cast as a selfish and self-entitled Empress, Zhang's characterization is stems from an alternative interpretation of her star persona as presented through her role in *Crouching Tiger*. In the film, Zhang's villainy is externalized through her erotic impulse.

CHAPTER 5

PAN-PACIFIC CONNECTIONS

ASIAN AMERICAN ACTION WOMEN IN POST-1997 HONG KONG

¹ Other female stars enticed to work on Mainland-based co-productions include Celia Cheung (*Zu Warriors* [Tsui 2001], *Big Man* [To and Wai 2003]), Kelly Lin (*Zu Warriors* [Tsui 2001], *Triangle* [Lam and To 2007]), and Kelly Chen (*Infernal Affairs III* [Lau and Mak 2003], *Breaking News* [To 2004], *An Empress and the Warriors* [Ching 2009]).

² According to Bliss Cua Lin, Hong Kong's émigré filmmakers are a "new breed of transnational design professionals" who function as gatekeepers to the doors of global cultural regimes. As cultural specialists, they are based in various 'world cities' and exhibit a degree of homogenization in their procedures and working practices. Moreover, they are "granted access to better financial compensation,

global audiences, positioning in the world's filmmaking capital, and the power to shape global culture as a transnational design professional" (118-119).

³ The Hong Kong-Asian Film Financing Forum (HAF) was held at the 2000 Hong Kong International Film Festival. More than one hundred local directors, producers, layers, and financiers participated and discussed what they saw as being the problems plaguing the local industry. Some felt that Hong Kong filmmakers had lost touch with the commercial tastes of local audiences. Others were concerned that producers were no longer able to cultivate new talent to attract the local film market. Furthermore, a large number believed that hyperproduction in the 1990s led to the overexposure of local stars and the erosion of production values. Calling for the reform of the solipsistic local industry, participants at HAF expressed their desire for "new policies, new technologies, and new trade relationships" in the wake of globalization which had fundamentally changed the Asian film market (Curtin 248).

⁴ In 2007, Golden Harvest founder Raymond Chow sold his controlling share of the company to Chinese businessman Wu Kebo of the Chinese media conglomerate Orange Sky Entertainment Group Holdings Limited. In 2009, Golden Harvest was absorbed into the production unit of Orange Sky and the name of the company was changed to Orange Sky Golden Harvest (Lee ¶3). In the wake of the industry crisis even Hong Kong's most prominent production company, Golden Harvest, has looked to the Mainland for relief.

⁵ Other Hong Kong film companies taking a similar approach and catering to the international, rather than local, film market include Emperor Movie Group (EMG), Filmko Productions and Applause Pictures. According to Bliss Cum Lam, these companies aim "to fashion a pan-Asian [rather than distinctively local] cinema palatable to global, Americanist tastes (118).

⁶ The concept of the "event film" in post-1997 Hong Kong appears notably similar to Justin Wyatt's definition of the "high concept" film. Wyatt defines "high concept" as a post-classical style of filmmaking "molded by economic and institutional forces" (8). He argues that the high concept film has a strong sense of generic style which relies on highly recognizable character types and strongly marketable elements which he refers to as "marketing hooks" (ibid. 22). According to Wyatt, the central narrative idea can be encapsulated into a "one-line concept" and is complimented by a striking visual image or logo featured on publicity materials for the film (ibid 7). Although Wyatt contends that high

concept theory can only be applied to Hollywood filmmaking (60), the “event films” produced in post-1997 Hong Kong appear to be defined along much the same parameters.

⁷ Wing-Fai Leung argues that *Infernal Affairs 3* was produced with the Mainland market in mind. The plot includes a Mainland businessman (Chen Daoming) and has a clear anti-crime message (79).

⁸ In *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience* (2007), Michael Curtin offers the most comprehensive discussion of Media Asia's approach to film production in the early 2000s. Focusing almost exclusively on the development of young male actors, Curtin overlooks the rise of a new generation of action women during the same period. Similar to other studies discussing the Hong Kong cinema, Curtin focuses almost exclusively on the male body in action and only mentions female performance through a passing reference to the cult-classic *Naked Weapon* (2002). Moreover, Curtin does not explicitly demarcate the performances of American-born, British-born, or Canadian-born, Chinese, nor does he distinguish the differences in characterizations within or between these groups.

⁹ In Hong Kong, the ‘big four’ was comprised of Grandview, Tianyi (later Nanyang), Chuen Kou (Global) Film Company, and Nam Yuet (Southern Guangdong).

¹⁰ Guangdong province is located in southeast China and adjacent to Hong Kong. Before becoming a colony of Britain, Hong Kong was part of the Guangdong.

¹¹ The Pacific War (a.k.a. the second Sino-Japanese War) encompasses the events of World War II and the preceding conflict between Asian countries in or adjacent to the Pacific Ocean.

¹² The film features Bruce Lee as an infant.

¹³ Emphasis in original.

¹⁴ Bruce Lee was born in San Francisco in 1940 but raised in Hong Kong until the age of 18. As a child star, Lee appeared in numerous films throughout his youth. In 1958, Lee returned to America to claim his citizenship (Logan 23).

¹⁵ This model of transnational success is based on the legend, potential and fame of Bruce Lee. His final film, the American produced and directed *Enter the Dragon* (1973), was a box-office flop in Hong Kong. Moreover, Bey Logan argues that the films of Bruce Lee had a “negligible” effect on the local film industry. Lee's “most enduring legacy within the industry was proving that Chinese action pictures could succeed on the international market” (43).

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- ¹⁶ Lee's unparalleled screen presence is remarkable in light of the low production values of his films (Logan 23).
- ¹⁷ Beijing Video produced a fan site rating the effectiveness of Bruce Lee clones. See <http://www.beijingvideo.com/clones.html>.
- ¹⁸ Box-office figures were provided by World Wide Box Office (www.worldwideboxoffice.com).
- ¹⁹ Box-office figures were provided by Box Office Mojo (www.boxofficemojo.com).
- ²⁰ Stephen Teo uses the phrase "China syndrome" to refer to the same phenomenon (Hong 207).
- ²¹ Maggie Q is the spokeswoman for Shiseido's line of skin whitening creams, UV White. Shiseido describes this line of products in the following blurb:
- Every woman desires flawless, porcelain skin—a complexion that radiates light from within, coupled with the evenness and delicacy of baby skin. Now, it's possible with Shiseido's new UV White Skincare and Makeup Collection. This outstanding line generously replenishes cell nutrients and eliminates cell residue to ensure a pure, flawless complexion while protecting skin against damage caused by UV rays. ("UV" ¶1)
- ²² In the opening scene of the film, Jack Chen (Daniel Wu) describes this type of assassin as being like Mata Hari, an exotic dancer and courtesan who was executed for spying during WWI. Chen states, "she would use her incredible body to either get your secrets from you or she'd kill you" (Ching 2002).
- ²³ In *Limehouse Blues* (Hall 1934), for instance, Harry Young (George Raft) identifies with his Asian heritage and is presented as a cold-blooded killer.
- ²⁴ Maggie Q was briefly introduced to Hollywood via Jackie Chan who ran her management firm. She played minor roles in *Rush Hour 2* and *Around the World in 80 Days* (Coraci 2004). However, she did not gain a foothold in Hollywood through her association with Chan. Maggie Q auditioned for roles in Hollywood the old-fashioned way but had one advantage, the star vehicle *Naked Weapon*.
- ²⁵ In *Mission Impossible III*, Maggie Q speaks her first lines of Chinese dialogue in an action film.
- ²⁶ In contrast, when Tom Cruise participates in the same mission, his appearance is completely obscured by the mask and body suit he wears, and his voice is altered by the means of a distorter.
- ²⁷ As a Pan-Asian anthology, *Three Extremes II* is comprised of three separate films crafted by three directors from different countries. Yuen stars in Peter Chan's "Going Home" segment of the film where

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- she portrays Hai'er, a young doctor who is caught between the world of the living and the dead. Stricken with liver cancer, her body dies but her soul remains on earth waiting to be revived in three years time by her husband (Leon Lai).
- ²⁸ Yuen also portrays a ghost-like character in the Hong Kong-Thailand horror flick *The Eye 2* which earned her the nomination of "Best Supporting Actress" at the 2004 *Golden Horse Film Festival*. Her character Chi-Kei Yuen is caught between worlds having committed suicide upon discovering her husband's infidelity. She tearfully haunts his mistress (Qi Shu) as she awaits her reincarnation. Her highly acclaimed performance in this film aided in her quick rise to superstardom in East Asia.
- ²⁹ Seven years after collaborating with her mother in *Flying Dragon*, Yuen and Cheng have both been cast in the American independent drama *Shanghai Hotel* (David 2010). Yuen will be featured as the principle star of the film and her casting reflects the degree of transnational star power she has developed through her Pan-Pacific career. Although Cheng has been cast in a secondary/supportive role, her presence in the film will arguably have an impact on her daughter's star persona; in light of Cheng's fame in Hong Kong, it will be difficult to separate Yuen's performance in *Shanghai Hotel* from her identity as Cheng's (non-action star) daughter.
- ³⁰ Ong describes the "multiple-passport holder" as an "apt contemporary figure" that "embodies the split between state-imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets" (2).
- ³¹ Reflecting on the pageant, Marsha Yuen commented, "Everyone knew I was Cheng Pei Pei's daughter [which resulted in] more noise. But it's not necessarily the reason why I earned my title. Because, how much noise you have in the newspapers and how you do in the competition are two completely differently things" (Lanuque 1).
- ³² TVB is Hong Kong's leading television broadcasting station.
- ³³ While the film pays homage to *Tomb Raider* (West 2001), Yuen's characterization shares more in common with early representations of Michelle Yeoh rather than Angelina Jolie. Like Yeoh, Yuen is a former beauty queen whose reputation is playfully integrated into the film. For instance, Yuen's sidekick Mandy (Koinuma Miyuki) expresses her desire to enter the *Miss Hong Kong Pageant* and rank

within the top three; life imitates art when Yuen tells Mandy that she doesn't have a chance, having gone through the experience herself four years ago.

CHAPTER 6

TRANSNATIONAL INTEGRATION

ASIAN CANADIAN ACTION WOMEN IN POST-1997 HONG KONG

¹ Some notable Canadian actors working in Hollywood include Pamela Anderson, Shawn Ashmore, Dan Aykroyd, Cameron Bright, Neve Campbell, John Candy, Jim Carrey, Kim Cattrall, Michael Cera, Hayden Christensen, Elisha Cuthbert, David James Elliot, Michael J. Fox, Brendan Fraser, Victor Garber, Ryan Gosling, Tom Green, Paul Gross, Corey Haim, Natasha Henstridge, Joshua Jackson, Eugene Levy, Rachel McAdams, Dean McDermott, Carrie Ann Moss, Mike Myers, Leslie Nielson, Anna Paquin, Ellen Page, Matthew Perry, Ryan Reynolds, Seth Rogan, William Shatner, Martin Short, and Scott Speedman.

² Box-office figures were provided by Box Office Mojo (www.boxofficemojo.com).

³ The late 1980s also saw the rise of Asian Canadian Michael Chow as an action star. Like Michael Wong, Chow has been featured in more than 70 action films and even directed Françoise Yip in *Mr. Mumble*, a film for which he wrote the script.

⁴ Conversely, Asian American Lucy Liu had limited exposure in Hong Kong but eventually found success in Hollywood with the *Charlie's Angels* franchise after years of portraying secondary, supportive, and racially stereotyped roles. See Chapter 7 for a more comprehensive discussion.

⁵ Yip is cast in the Asian American film *Dim Sum Funeral* (Chi 2008) and plays a prominent role in the film. Yet, she is not mentioned in the international trailer for the film. Actors who are explicitly highlighted include Russell Wong, Kelly Hu, Ling Bai, Steph Song, Lisa Lu, and Talia Shire.

⁶ Françoise Yip has been cast as a secondary character in a number of Hollywood action films. She plays an unnamed motorcycle fighter in *Romeo Must Die*, a news reporter in *Witness to Kill* (Roodt 2001), a villain in *Blade Trinity* (Goyer 2004), and plays a second billed character in *Alien vs. Predator: Requiem* (Strause and Strause 2007).

⁷ For a detailed discussion, see Michael Curtin's *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience* (2007).

⁸ Asian Canadians have continued to place substantially in the pageant throughout the 2000s. In 2003, Rabee Yeung was named first runner-up and won the "Tourism Ambassador Award," while Selena Li was named "Miss Photogenic" and "Miss Talent." Aimee Chan won the pageant in 2006 as well as the titles of "Miss International Goodwill" and "Audience Favourite." In the same year Janet Chow was named first runner-up and won "Miss Photogenic." In 2007, Kayi Cheung won the pageant while Loretta Chow won the "Most Attractive Legs Award." Finally, in 2008 Hilda Leung won the "Miss Trendy Vision Award" ("Miss Hong Kong").

⁹ The *Miss Asia Pageant* originally featured international Chinese delegates but was opened up to include other Asian nationalities and ethnicities in 2004 including India, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Vietnam ("History" ¶1, 3-4).

¹⁰ Box-office figures were provided by the Hong Kong Movie Database (www.hkmdb.com).

¹¹ Nicholas Tse is a popular Asian Canadian star in Hong Kong. He built a fan base with his Cantopop music career before venturing into filmmaking. His breakthrough role came in 1998 when he portrayed a young Ho Nam Chan in *Young and Dangerous: The Prequel* (1998); for his performance, he was named "Best New Artist" at the *Hong Kong Film Awards* ("Nicholas" ¶2). Many consider Tse to be "one of the most promising actors of his generation" (ibid. ¶3).

¹² Although born and raised in America, Lee-Hom Wang has become one of the most important and influential artists in Chinese music. In 1998, he released his first album *Revolution* which earned him the awards of "Best Male Artist of the Year" and "Best Producer of the Year" at the 1999 *Golden Melody Awards* (i.e. the Chinese "Grammies"). He has since written and produced ten Mandarin-language albums and sold millions of records across Asia ("About Leehom" ¶ 2-3). Wang's musical style can best be described as the fusion of Western musical genres and Chinese classical instruments; he is known for "invent[ing] (and continuously reinvent[ing]) his sound, that is distinctly Chinese and international at the same time" (ibid. ¶ 5). Wang sells out arenas when he tours and has performed in Taiwan, China, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia (ibid. ¶ 4). In light of his immense popularity across Asia, he has been featured in a number of Hong Kong films including Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* (2007).

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- ¹³ Although born in Hong Kong, Stephen Fung was raised and educated in America. In the mid-1990s, he returned to Hong Kong and formed by the band *Dry* with Mark Liu. They released four albums in and 1999, Fung released a solo CD. In light of his rising local popularity, Fung was cast in a number of Hong Kong films including *Gorgeous* and *Gen Y Cops*. He has since branched off in to scriptwriting and directing (ImDb).
- ¹⁴ Since 1988, the *Miss Chinese International Pageant* has featured competitors who are either born in China or are of Chinese ethnicity and represent their current city of residence (“Miss Chinese” ¶1). Each delegate first earns the title of “Miss Chinese” from their respective local/national competition and represents a city with a large Chinese population; the reigning Miss Hong Kong also competes for the title of “Miss Chinese International.”
- ¹⁵ Other Asian Canadian title winners have gone on to have careers in the *ge-ying-shi*. Linda Chung, for instance, won the title of “Miss Chinese International” in 2004 and has gone to become a popular TVB actor and Star Entertainment recording artist. After winning the pageant in 2005, Leanne Li was initially hired to host for TVB until her Cantonese improved. She has since starred in a number of TVB sitcoms.
- ¹⁶ Category III is the last level of the Hong Kong motion picture rating system. Only persons ages 18 and older are permitted to see the film.
- ¹⁷ In 2005, Liu began to focus on her music career. She recorded “Truth” which was used as the theme song for the TVB drama *Into Thin Air* (“TVB Princess” ¶2)
- ¹⁸ The trailer can be viewed online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mENc2NvJ8g8>.
- ¹⁹ The film also co-stars Canadian stuntwoman and actor Monique Ganderton.
- ²⁰ Jaycee Chan is the American son of Jackie Chan and Taiwanese actress Feng-Jiao Lin. He is a Cantopop star and actor in Hong Kong.
- ²¹ Twins EPs include *Twins* (August 2001), *Twins’ Love* (November 2001), and *Twins* (January 2002).
- ²² Their Cantonese albums include *Our Souvenir* (May 2002), *Amazing Album* (August 2002), *Touch of Love* (April 2003), *Evolution* (September 2003), *Magic* (January 2004), *Girl Power* (June 2004), *Samba* (June 2005), *The Missing Piece* (December 2005), *Ho Hoo Tan* (September 2006), and *Twins Party* (September 2007).

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- ²³ Their Mandarin albums are entitled *Trainee Cupid* (March 2005) and *Around the World with 80 Dollars* (June 2006).
- ²⁴ Their compilation albums include *Happy Together* (November 2002), *Si Xi Lin Men Xi Ying Chun* (January 2004), *Such a Better Day* (December 2004), *Our Love* (February 2007), and *Twins Chinese New Year* (January 2008).
- ²⁵ *Twins 2004 Live Concert* (February 2004).
- ²⁶ *Such a Better Day* (April 2005)
- ²⁷ Their CDs for children include *Singing in the Twins Wonderland Volume 1* (November 2003), *Singing in the Twins Wonderland Volume 2* (November 2003), *Singing in the Twins Wonderland Volume 3* (April 2004), and *Singing in the Twins Wonderland Volume 4* (August 2004).
- ²⁸ Although Hong Kong appears quite prudish when compared to Western countries (ibid. 2), as I explained earlier, Hong Kong does make films which feature explicit sexuality, nudity, and violence (i.e. the Category III films in the late 1980s).
- ²⁹ Cecilia Cheung is the wife of Asian Canadian Nicholas Tse.
- ³⁰ Asian Canadian Rachel Ngan was featured in small number of Hong Kong action films in the 2000s including *Gen Y Cops* (2000) and *Martial Angels* (2001), and the Japanese flick *Dead or Alive Final* (Miike 2002). She typically played supportive rather than leading characters. Ngan, however, is best known for her involvement in the Edison Chen photo scandal when 13 pictures of the actress were leaked online. In them, Ngan appears naked or engaged in sexual activities with Chen.
- ³¹ Edison Chen was interviewed by CNN on 3 June 2009 (see Rao).
- ³² Following Edison Chen's press conference on 22 February 2008, SINA.com conducted a poll in order to determine public reception of Chen's apology. Within 3 hours, they received over 4000 votes. According to Nickkita Lau, 30% of respondents considered Chen's apology to be sincere while an equal number thought that Chen was insincere and trying to garner sympathy. 21% responded that they were willing to forgive Chen and would continue to support him. However, 9% of respondents thought Chen was retiring from Hong Kong filmmaking in order to pursue a career in Hollywood. Only 6% believed that Chen should be blamed and should not be forgiven ("Edison" ¶ 14-15).

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- ³³ Edison Chen's film work in America and transnational success could help re-establish his star power in Hong Kong by peaking interest in fans.
- ³⁴ Box-office figures were provided by Box Office Mojo (www.boxofficemojo.com).
- ³⁵ Chun Wu is the only non-Taiwanese member of the boyband Fahrenheit. He is best known for his role in the Taiwanese idol drama *Tokyo Juliet* (Wang 2006).
- ³⁶ Film critics often discuss the film in comparison with Tsui Hark's 1994 version which starred Charlie Yeung and Nicky Wu. For instance, the reviewer at *LoveHKFilm.com* describes the film as "a solid disappointment" and an updated version that "wastes a good cast and interesting concept with all-around poor execution" ("Butterfly" ¶ 1). Although criticized by some reviewers, the film was a box-office draw and grossed over \$4 million in China alone (www.boxofficemojo.com).
- ³⁷ *Inner Senses* was Leslie Cheung's final film role before his untimely death on 1 April 2003. Cheung committed suicide by jumping from the 24th floor of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel. The final scene of *Inner Senses* offers an eerie parallel to the death of Cheung as it takes place on the roof of a building. Jim Law (Cheung) confronts the ghost of his ex-girlfriend and tearfully offers to take his own life to be with her. He moves to the edge of the roof but is stopped by the ghost who pardons him. Instead of jumping, he is comforted by Yan Cheung who pulls him away from the edge.
- ³⁸ Lam is also featured in the Taiwanese sci-fi action-thriller *Silk* (Su 2006) which chronicles the experiments undertaken by an "Anti-Gravity Unit" funded by the Taiwanese Government, their primary objective being to observe paranormal activity and to duplicate the energy produced by ghosts. The Anti-Gravity Unit is comprised of five members: Hashimoto (Yôsuke Eguchi), Yuan Shu (Barbie Hsu), Ren Hu (Wilson Chen), Mei Dong (Janine Chang) and Tung Yeh (Chang Chen). Two of the film's stars are renowned Taiwanese actors (Janine Chang and Chang Chen); however, the casting of Taiwanese singers Wilson Chen and Barbie Shu, and Japanese pop star Yôsuke Eguchi demonstrates the popularity of pop idols in Taiwan. According to Michael Curtin, the 1990s saw the rise of youth culture in Taiwan and this was sparked by the popularization of Japanese operas which featured Japanese pop-idols (253). Lam was one such singer who attempted, and subsequently failed, to establish a career as a pop idol in Taiwan in the 1990s. A decade later, she was cast in the Taiwanese thriller *Silk* and her role in the film reflects her "outsider" status in the Taiwanese celebrity system. She is cast as the girlfriend of Tung and

their relationship is tangential to the film's action narrative. As a failed pop star who found success in Hong Kong cinema, and *not* the Taiwanese intermedial star system, Lam is excluded from the space of physical action which is presented as the domain of pop-idols and domestic (i.e. Taiwanese) stars. And yet, Lam is still presented as one of the top-billed stars of *Silk* and her name is listed in the opening credits before Barbie Shu and Wilson Chen. Despite being a failed pop star, Lam gained star power in Taiwan through her performances in Hong Kong cinema.

- ³⁹ Lam reprises her role as a gender-neutral policewoman in the comedy *Super Model* (Kok 2004). In the film she portrays Karena Zhang, a policewoman tasked with protecting male supermodel Mandom (Ronald Cheng). Zhang is the only female cop on the force and she is initially envisaged as a masculine hero via costuming and mannerisms: she wears jean overalls, plaid shirts, and her greasy hair in a pony tail. With her makeover, she is transformed into a more gender-neutral (and hygienic!) policewoman who wears button down shirts, trench coats, and tailored pants. The refining of Zhang's image reflects the refining of her police skills: she is a more competent and personable policewoman.

CHAPTER 7

THE HONG KONGIFICATION OF HOLLYWOOD

ASSIMILATING HONG KONG STYLE FOR THE HOLLYWOOD ACTION WOMAN

- ¹ Box-office figures were provided by World Wide Box-Office (www.worldwideboxoffice.com).
- ² These videogame-inspired action women appear to be visual hybrids of androgyny and hyperfemininity. They downplay the *impossible* bodies of their avatars by appearing quite boyish while costumed in shorts, tank tops and lace-up combats. However, their costumes are also formfitting and emphasize their slender frames while accessories like calf-high boots and thigh-strapped pistols convey a tough yet fetishistic image (O'Day 213).
- ³ Prior to the gunplay film, Hong Kong action films in the *wuxia pian* (1960s) and kung fu (1970s) genres typically featured hand-to-hand martial arts combat, rural landscapes, and were often set in the past (Bordwell 99).
- ⁴ Gates writes that "beneath the scenes of hypermasculinity and violence lie the more profound thematic concerns with male heroism, emotionality and bonding that except through the moment of excess and

give Woo's films a complexity and intensity most often lacking in the Hollywood action genre" ("Man's" 73-74).

⁵ Jackie Chan starred in *Rush Hour* (Ratner 1998), *Shanghai Noon* (Dey 2000), *Rush Hour 2* (Ratner 2001), *The Tuxedo* (Donovan 2002), *Shanghai Knights* (Dobkin 2003), and *Rush Hour 3* (Ratner 2007). Yun-Fat Chow was featured in *The Replacement Killers* (Fuqua 1998), *The Corruptor* (Foley 1999), and *Bulletproof Monk* (2003). Jet Li was cast in *Lethal Weapon 4* (Donner 1998), *Romeo Must Die* (Bartkowiak 2000), *The One* (Wong 2001), *Kiss of the Dragon* (Nahon 2001), *Cradle 2 the Grave* (Bartkowiak 2003), and *Unleashed* (Leterrier 2005).

⁶ Yun-Fat Chow has been partnered with Mira Sorvino (*Replacement Killers*, 1998) and Mark Wahlberg (*The Corruptor*, 1999). Jackie Chan has been paired with Chris Tucker (*Rush Hour* series 1998, 2001, 2007), Owen Wilson (*Shanghai Noon* 2000, *Shanghai Knights* 2003), and Jennifer Love Hewit (*The Tuxedo* 2002). Some Jet Li's partners include Aalyiah (*Romeo Must Die* 2000); Bridget Fonda (*Kiss of the Dragon* 2001); Carla Gugino (*The One* 2001); Anthony Anderson, DMX, and Gabrielle Union (*Cradle 2 the Grave*, Bartkowiak 2003); and Morgan Freeman (*Unleashed* 2005).

⁷ The cinematic interrogation of race and racism is not the prerogative of commercial-minded Hollywood; but rather, it is explored through Asian American, as well as black, independent cinema.

⁸ Woo Ping Yuen (aka. Uncle Eight) is regarded as one of the greatest choreographers of the Hong Kong action cinema. His body of work includes *Drunken Master* (Yuen 1978), *In the Line of Duty 4* (Yuen 1989), *Once Upon a Time in China* (Hark 1991, Hark 1992), *Fist of Legend* (Chan 1994), *The Matrix* (1999, 2003, 2003), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Kill Bill Volumes 1 and 2* (Tarantino 2003, Tarantino 2004) and *The Forbidden Kingdom* (Minkoff 2008). Cheung-Yan has enjoyed a long career in acting, stunt work, and action choreography. He has worked on a number of projects with Woo Ping including *Drunken Master* (1978), *Once Upon a Time in China* (1991), *Fist of Legend* (1994), and *The Matrix* (1999, 2003, 2003).

⁹ *Longhu* is the Cantonese Opera term describing the martial arts choreographer (Hunt, *Kung* 10).

¹⁰ Woo Ping Yuen worked as the action choreographer on *The Matrix* series, *Kill Bill Volumes 1 and 2*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Woo Ping's creative agency in his film projects might account for O'Day's observation of similarities across heroic portrayals.

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- ¹¹ *The Matrix* series earned more than \$1.6 billion in worldwide box-office sales while the *Charlie's Angels* films grossed over \$500 million worldwide (www.worldwideboxoffice.com).
- ¹² The romantic connection of Trinity and Neo is foregrounded through a sex scene in *The Matrix Reloaded* (Wachowski Brothers 2003) which features the male, and *not* the female, body passively and erotically displayed on screen. According to Laura Mulvey, the gaze in mainstream Hollywood film is male and the female occupies the traditional exhibitionist role (62). Mulvey argues for an active/male/gazer – passive/female/gazed dichotomy whereby the woman's "to-be-looked-at-ness" is exemplified through cinematic codes and conventions positioning her as erotic object for spectorial pleasure (ibid. 63). *The Matrix* subverts these codes by presenting the male body as the erotic object of the gaze.
- ¹³ Neo's costuming mirrors that of Trinity. He is dressed in black pants, a black t-shirt, and a long black trench coat.
- ¹⁴ Neo participates in virtually-simulated fighting tutorials through which his mind and *not* his body are trained to fight effectively.
- ¹⁵ For instance, Cheung-Yan Yuen worked as the action choreographer on *Daredevil* (Johnson 2003) starring Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck. Moreover, *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (2005) is a remake of the John Woo gunplay film *The Killer* (1989); the male homosocial bonding and conflict featured in Woo's film is replaced by the heterosexual coupling of, and gendered conflict between, protagonists Jane and John Smith (Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt).
- ¹⁶ Chow turned down the role of Morpheus in *The Matrix* (IMDb).
- ¹⁷ In her discussion of *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, Jeffords notes that in order for Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) to protect her son John (Edward Furlong), she switches domestic and heroic positions with the Terminator who become a surrogate mother to her child. Having relinquished her maternal obligations, Connor takes on the more masculine role of soldier, and distances herself physically and emotionally from her son (162-63). Moreover, during the mid-to-late 1990s, Tasker argues that the maternal body in action was considered symptomatic (*Working* 71). In *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Harlin 1997), actor Geena Davis plays both mother and assassin. Although Davis embodies both identities, her character suffers from amnesia and multiple personality disorder. Personalities Samantha Caine (mother) and Charly Baltimore (assassin) are presented as two distinct, if not opposite, people,

each complete with her own set of memories, imaging conventions, and mannerisms. Moreover, in films like *Species* (1995, 1998) and *Alien Resurrection* (1997) featuring hyperfeminine heroes, the maternal body is depicted as alien and “other,” a foreign and dangerous entity that should be feared, controlled and/or destroyed.

¹⁸ Ling Bai is better known to Western audiences as Bai Ling in Hollywood. For this study, however, I am presenting all personal names through the Western naming order.

¹⁹ Bai consistently portrays hypersexualized characters throughout her Hollywood career. Cast as a vampire in *The Breed* (Oblowitz 2001), a sexy avatar in *Code Hunter* (Cunningham 2002), and a prostitute in *Crank: High Voltage* (Nevelandine and Taylor 2009), Bai is defined by her sexuality and positioned as the erotic object of the gaze; her body is placed on display as she is costumed in mini-skirts, halter tops and high-heeled shoes which emphasize her cleavage, stomach and legs.

²⁰ The 1990s saw the rise in prominence of Asian American female reporters. The most notable was Connie Chung who co-starred on *The CBS Evening News* with Dan Rather. Since then, the Asian female newscaster has become a stereotype of its own, especially along the Western Coast of the USA, and is she typically paired with a much older white man as co-anchor (Prasso 75-76).

²¹ The odango hairstyle (aka “ox horns”) consists of double pigtailed or buns. In Japanese popular culture, Chinese women are typically presented with the odango hairstyle and are visually differentiated from Japanese women. *Street Fighter* (1994) is based on a popular series of Japanese videogames and the inclusion of this visual cliché reflects that fact.

²² In *Hardboiled and High Heeled*, Linda Mizejewski argues that the characterization of each Angel in *Charlie's Angels* is based on the actors' star personas. She writes that “Cameron Diaz is the dizzy blonde, Drew Barrymore the bad-girl redhead, and Lucy Liu the exotic dragon-lady” (166-67).

²³ Chon Wang (Jackie Chan) clearly expresses this sentiment when he states, “This is the West, not the East, and the sun may rise where we come from but here is where it sets.” Wang's revelation and movement away from his Chinese lifestyle takes place in a Catholic Church, a religious institution that firmly upholds Western ideals.

²⁴ For a comprehensive discussion, see Gates' *Detecting Men*.

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- ²⁵ Celine Parreñas Shimizu similarly contends that in *Charlie's Angels* Lucy Liu plays a racially unmarked character that engages in racial masquerades with her fellow (white) Angels. Shimizu, however, argues that Liu's role in the film "build[s] on hypersexual images of Asian women such as the masseuse and the whip-wielding leather-clad dominatrix." (86). Shimizu asserts that the "post-racist logic in the play on various races and genders does not account for the historical continuity in stereotype deployment for the Asian/American figure" (ibid. 86).
- ²⁶ Although Tarantino initially began his career as independent filmmaker, he has since been absorbed into the Hollywood filmmaking industry. According to Peter Hitchcock, Tarantino's films have become their own brand and "one of the strongest reminders that Hollywood manufactures market segmentation or niche marketing where different target audiences are allowed to indulge their fantasies through the reality of exchange" (226).
- ²⁷ *Fist of Fury* (aka *The Chinese Connection*, Wei 1972) takes place in Shanghai during Japanese occupation of the city and recounts the conflict between a Chinese martial arts school and a Japanese judo school. When members of the Japanese school murder the leader of the Chinese school, Chen Zhen (Bruce Lee) single-handedly avenges the death of his master. Of the many remakes and sequels to *Fist of Fury*, Gordon Chan's *Fist of Legend* (1994) starring Jet Li is the most popular and critically acclaimed. *Fist of Legend* features spectacular fight sequences choreographed by Woo Ping Yuen and the film inspired the Wachowski Brothers to hire Yuen as action choreographer for *The Matrix*.
- ²⁸ *Elektra* is based on a Marvel comic series of the same title featuring a Greek ninja assassin who saves the world from evil. The character was initially introduced in the film *Daredevil* (2003) and portrayed by Jennifer Gardner. *Elektra* is a spin off film that explores the relationship between Elektra and the young Abby Miller (Kirsten Prout) and the two characters are presented in narrative parallel.
- ²⁹ Liu's body of work in Hollywood simultaneously reproduces and contests the stereotypical representation of Asian American women in American cinema. As the most popular Chinese-American female actor since Anna May Wong, Liu's public visibility offers a counter to the historical 'invisibility' of Asian American women in American society and popular culture. Moreover, Lucy Liu was the first Asian

American woman to host *Saturday Night Live* (December 2000) and through her opening monologue, she drew (comical) attention to the proliferation of Asian American stereotypes in mainstream media.

CONCLUSION

THE HOLLYWOODIZATION AND HONG KONGIFICATION OF ASIAN ACTION WOMEN

¹ *Street Fighter* also features another multiracial American action woman as a lead protagonist in the film, Moon Bloodgood. Cast as Detective Maya Sunee of Gangland Homicide, Bloodgood portrays a Thai character that fights to purge her Bangkok neighbourhood of organized crime. While Kreuk is envisaged as a gender-neutral heroine and embodies Hollywood's conceptualization of the Hong Kong action woman, Bloodgood is explicitly sexualized and fetishized in her role. Bloodgood is clothed in formfitting costumes which highlight her body and showcase her cleavage. Moreover, her character is presented with a large sexual appetite as evidenced by her use of gold handcuffs to restrain her male lovers. While Hollywood has historically foregrounded the "oriental" sexuality of Asian/Asian American characters, Bloodgood's characterization in *Street Fighter* arguably reflects the Western (sexual) fascination with Thai women as Thailand is a well-known sex tourist destination (Prasso 154). As a result, Bloodgood's character is defined by her sexuality rather than her physical accomplishments in the film.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Pei Pei Cheng in *Come Drink With Me* (1966)

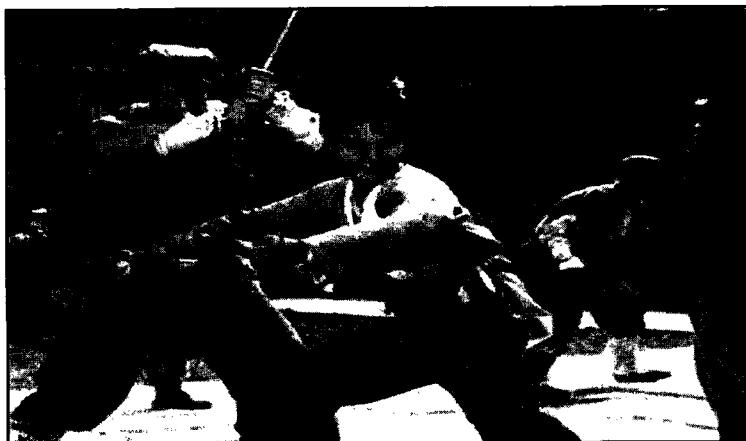


Figure 2: Michelle Yeoh and Cynthia Rothrock in *Yes, Madam!* (1985)



Figure 3: Michelle Yeoh in *Police Story 3* (1992)



Figure 4: Michelle Yeoh and Pei Pei Cheng in *Wing Chun* (1994)



Figure 5: Michelle Yeoh in *Crouching Tiger* (2000)



Figure 6: Michelle Yeoh and Mélanie Thierry in *Babylon A.D.* (2008)



Figure 7: Qi Shu in *Sex and Zen II* (1996)

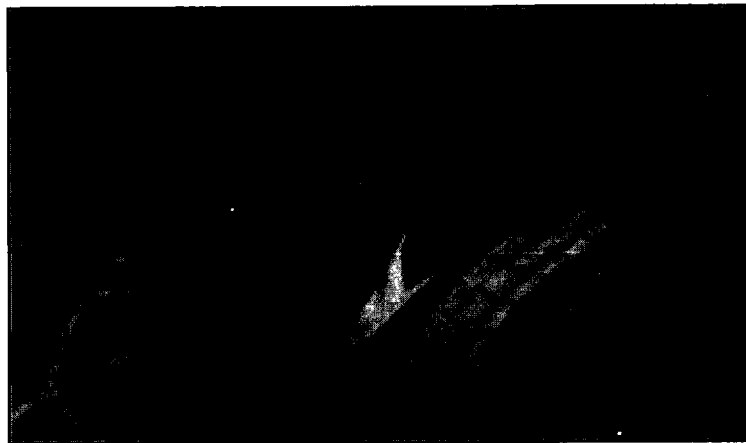


Figure 8: Cover Art for *Another Meltdown* (1998)



Figure 9: Qi Shu in *Gorgeous* (1999)



Figure 10: Qi Shu in *So Close* (2002)



Figure 11: Li Gong in *Ju Dou* (1989)

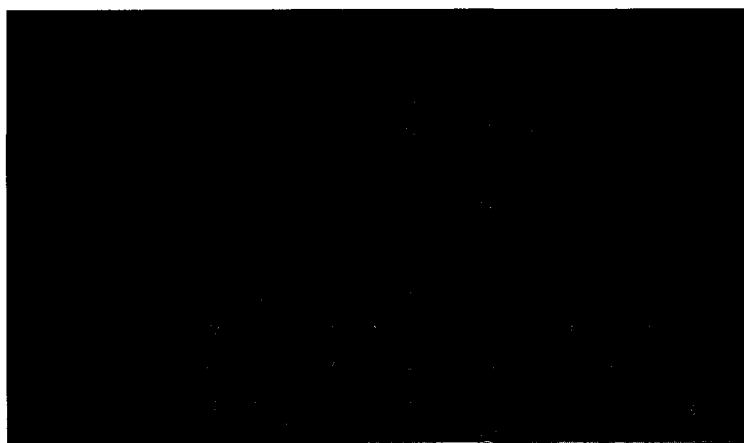


Figure 12: Li Gong in *Dragon Chronicles: The Maidens of Heavenly Mountain* (1994)

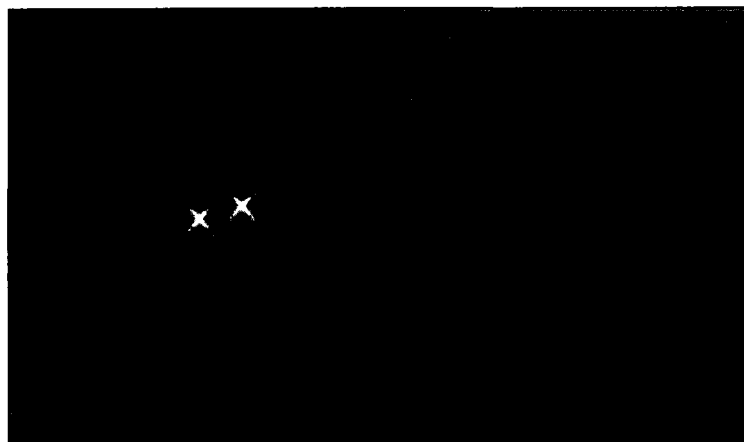


Figure 13: Collin Farrell and Li Gong in *Miami Vice* (2006)



Figure 14: Ziyi Zhang in *Crouching Tiger* (2000)



Figure 15: Ziyi Zhang in *Rush Hour 2* (2001)



Figure 16: Ziyi Zhang and Takeshi Kaneshiro in *House of Flying Daggers* (2004)



Figure 17: Maggie Q as the Face of UV White



Figure 18: Maggie Q and Anya in *Naked Weapon* (2002)



Figure 19: Ming Na in *Street Fighter* (1994) and Maggie Q in *Balls of Fury* (2007)



Figure 20: Eugenia Yuen in *Flying Dragon, Leaping Tiger* (2002)



Figure 21: Marsha Yuen and Pei Pei Cheng



Figure 22: Marsha Yuen in *Undiscovered Tomb* (2003)



Figure 23: Françoise Yip in *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995)



Figure 24: Christy Chung in *The Red Wolf* (1995)



Figure 25: Christy Chung in *Jan Dara* (2000)

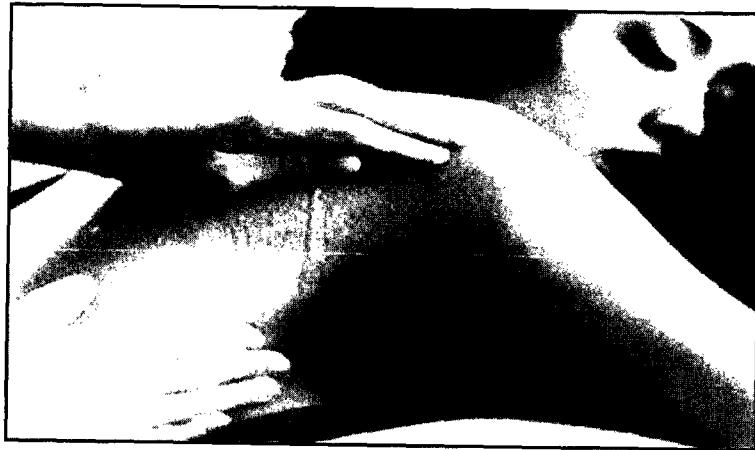


Figure 26: Ekin Cheng and Kristy Yang in *A Man Called Hero* (1999)



Figure 27: Monica Lo (right) in *Naked Weapon* (2002)



Figure 28: Bernice Liu in *Hit Team 2* (2004)



Figure 29: Bernice Liu's Character in *King of Fighters* (2010)



Figure 30: Twins Gillian Chung and Charlene Choi



Figure 31: Charlene Choi and Nicholas Tse in *A Chinese Tall Story* (2004)



Figure 32: Charlene Choi and Gillian Chung in *Twins Mission* (2007)

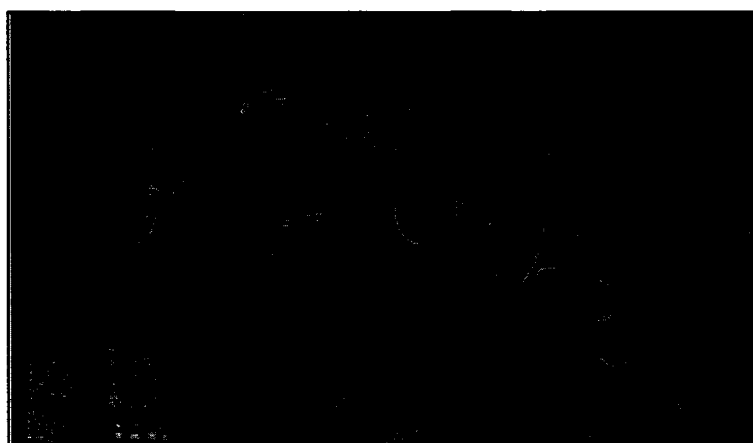


Figure 33: Karena Lam in *Inner Senses* (2002)

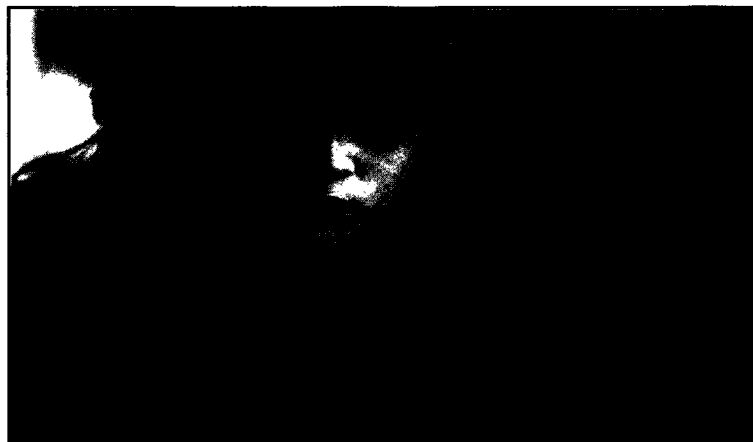


Figure 34: Kareena Lam in *Kidnap* (2007)



Figure 35: Racial Masquerade in *Charlie's Angels* (2000)



Figure 36: O'Ren Ishii in *Kill Bill* (2003)



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Chinese Boxer, The. Dir. Yu Wang. Shaw Brothers, 1970.

Chinese Tall Story, A. Dir. Jeffrey Lau. Emperor Motion Pictures, 2005.

Choking Man. Dir. Steve Barron. Ghost Robot, 2006.

City Cops. Dir. Chia Yung Liu. Movie Impact Ltd., 1989.

City Hunter. Dir. Jing Wong. Golden Way Films Ltd., 1993.

City of Industry. Dir. John Irvin. Largo Entertainment, 1997.

City on Fire. Dir. Ringo Lam. Cinema City Film Productions, 1987.

Code Hunter. Dir. Terry Cunningham. Cinetel Films, 2002.

Come Drink with Me. Dir. King Hu. Shaw Brothers, 1966.

Comrades, Almost a Love Story. Dir. Peter Chan. Golden Harvest Company, 1996.

Confession of Pain. Dir. Andrew Lau and Alan Mak. Media Asia Films, 2006.

Confucius. Dir. Mei Hu. China Film Group, 2009.

Cop on a Mission. Dir. Marco Mak. Film Power Company Limited, 2001.

Corruptor, The. Dir. James Foley. Illusion Entertainment Group, 1999.

Cradle 2 The Grave. Dir. Andrzej Bartkowiak. Silver Pictures, 2003.

Crank: High Voltage. Dir. Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor. Lionsgate, 2009.

Crossings. Dir. Evans Chan. Riverdrive Productions, 1994.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. Dir. Ang Lee. China Film Co-Production Corp., 2000.

Crow, The. Dir. Alex Proyas. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 1994.

Curse of the Golden Flower. Dir. Yimou Zhang. Beijing New Picture Film Co., 2006.

Cut Throat Island. Dir. Renny Harlin. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1995.

D-

D-Project. Dir. Hark Tsui. Emperor Motion Pictures, 2010.

Daredevil. Dir. Mark Steven Johnson. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 2003.

Days of Being Wild. Dir. Wong Kar Wai. In-Gear Film, 1990.

Dead or Alive: Final. Dir. Takashi Miike. Daiei Motion Picture Company, 2002.

Death Curse, The. Dir. Pou-Soi Cheang. Universe Films, 2003.

D.E.B.S. Dir. Angela Robinson. Screen Gems, 2004.

Devil's Den, The. Dir. Jeff Burr. IDT Entertainment, 2006.

Dim Sum Funeral. Dir. Anna Chi. Dim Sum Productions, 2008.

DOA: Dead or Alive. Dir. Corey Yuen. Constantin Film Produktion, 2006.

Domino. Dir. Tony Scott. New Line Cinema, 2005.

Don't Stop My Crazy Love for You. Dir. Wei Tat Hon. Golden Power Productions, 1993.

Doomsday. Dir. Neil Marshall. Crystal Sky Pictures, 2008.

Dr. No. Dir. Terence Young. Eon Productions, 1962.

Dragon Chronicles: The Maidens of Heavenly Mountain. Dir. Andy Wing-Keung Chin.
Win's Movie Production Limited, 1994.

Dragon Inn. Dir. Raymond Lee. Golden Harvest Company, 1992.

Dragon Soaring, Tiger Leaping. Dir. Allen Hai-Han Lan. Golden Sun Films, 2002.

Dragon Swamp. Dir. Wei Lo. Shaw Brothers, 1969.

Drummer, The. Dir. Kenneth Bi. Kenbiroli Films, 2007.

Drunken Master. Dir. Woo Ping Yuen. Seasonal Film Corporation, 1978.

Duel, The. Dir. Andrew Lau. China Star Entertainment, 2000.

E-

East is Red, The. Dir. Siu-Tung Ching and Raymond Lee. Film Workshop, 1993.

Eat a Bowl of Tea. Dir. Wayne Wang. American Playhouse, 1989.

Eight Taels of Gold. Dir. Mabel Cheung. Maverick Films Ltd., 1989.

Elektra. Dir. Rob Bowman. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 2005.

Empress and the Warriors, An. Dir. Siu-Tung Ching. Beijing Poly-bona Film Publishing Company, 2009.

Enter the Dragon. Dir. Robert Clouse. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1973.

Era of Vampires. Dir. Wellson Chin. Film Workshop, 2002.

Executioners from Shaolin. Dir. Chia-Liang Liu. Shaw Brothers, 1977.

Extreme Crisis. Dir. Li Xian Luo. Diagonal Pictures, 1998.

Eye 2, The. Dir. Oxide Pang Chun and Danny Pang. Applause Pictures, 2004.

F-

Face/Off. Dir. John Woo. Touchstone Pictures, 1997.

Farewell China. Dir. Clara Law. Friend Cheers Limited, 1990.

Fatal Attraction. Dir. Adrian Lyne. Paramount Pictures, 1987.

Fearless. Dir. Ronnie Yu. Beijing Film Studio, 2006.

Final Option, The. Dir. Gordon Chan. Harvest Crown, 1994.

Final Run. Dir. Phillip Ko. Tai Seng Entertainment, 1989.

Fist of Fury. Dir. Wei Lo. Golden Harvest Company, 1973.

Fist of Legend. Dir. Gordon Chan. Eastern Productions, 1994.

Fist Power. Dir. Aman Chang. China Star Entertainment, 2000.

Flying Dragon, Leaping Tiger. Dir. Allen Hai-Han Lan. Golden Sun Films, 2002.

Flypaper. Dir. Klaus Hoch. Citadel Entertainment, 1997.

For Bad Boys Only. Dir. Wai Man Yip. Film Business International, 2000.

Forbidden Kingdom, The. Dir. Rob Minkoff. China Film Co-Production Corporation, 2008.

Founding of a Republic, The. Dir. Sanping Han and Jianxin Huang. Media Asia Films, 2009.

Freedom's Fury. Colin K. Gray and Megan Raney. WOLO Entertainment, 2006.

Full Contact. Dir. Ringo Lam. Golden Princess Film Production Limited, 1993.

Full Moon Over New York. Dir. Stanley Kwan. Shiobu, 1990.

Fun and Fury. Dir. Frankie Chan. Movie Impact Limited, 1992.

G-

G.I. Jane. Dir. Ridley Scott. Caravan Pictures, 1997.

Game of Death. Dir. Robert Clouse. Golden Harvest Company, 1979.

Gen-Y Cops. Dir. Benny Chan. Media Asia Films, 2000.

God of Gamblers. Dir. Jing Wong. Win's Movie Productions Ltd., 1989.

God of Gamblers III. Dir. Jing Wong. Samico Films Production Company Ltd., 1991.

Golden Gate Girl. Dir. Esther Eng. Golden Gate, 1941.

Golden Swallow. Dir. Che Zhang. Shaw Brothers, 1968.

Gorgeous. Dir. Vincent Kok. Golden Harvest Pictures (China), 1999.

Great Raid, The. Dir. John Dahl. Miramax Films, 2005.

H-

Hannibal Rising. Dir. Peter Webber. Ingenious Film Partners, 2007.

Hard Boiled. Dir. John Woo. Golden Princess Film Production Limited, 1992.

Heartache. Dir. Esther Eng. N/A, 1935.

Hero. Dir. Yimou Zhang. Beijing New Picture Film Co., 2002.

Hero Youngster. Dir. Kei Law. New Treasurer Films Co. Ltd., 2004.

Heroes Two. Dir. Che Zhang. Shaw Brothers, 1974.

Heroic Duo. Dir. Benny Chan. Sil-Metropole Organisation Ltd. , 2002.

Heroic Trio, The. Dir. Johnnie To. China Entertainment Films Production, 1993.

Heroic Trio: Executioners, The. Dir. Siu-Tung Ching and Johnnie To. China Entertainment Films Production, 1993.

Hit Team. Dir. Dante Lam. Universe Entertainment, 2001.

Hit Team 2. Dir. Dante Lam. Universe Entertainment, 2004.

Hong Kong 97. Dir. Albert Pyun. Filmwerks, 1994.

House of Flying Daggers. Dir. Yimou Zhang. China Film Co-Production Corporation, 2004.

House of Fury. Dir. Stephen Fung. Emperor Multimedia Group (EMG), 2005.

I-

In the Line of Duty 3. Dir. Arthur Wong and Brandy Yuen. D&B Films Co. Ltd., 1988.

In the Line of Duty 4. Dir. Woo Ping Yuen. D&B Films Co. Ltd., 1989.

Infancy. Dir. Kim Chun. Grandview Film Company, 1951.

Infernal Affairs. Dir. Andrew Lau and Alan Mak. Media Asia Films, 2003.

Infernal Affairs II. Dir. Andrew Lau and Alan Mak. Media Asia Films, 2003.

Infernal Affairs III. Dir. Andrew Lau. Media Asia Films, 2004.

Initial D. Dir. Andrew Lau and Alan Mak. Media Asia Films, 2007.

Inner Senses. Dir. Chi-Leung Law. Filmko Pictures, 2002.

Inspector Wears Skirts, The. Dir. Wellson Chin. Golden Way Films Ltd., 1988.

Iron Monkey. Dir. Woo Ping Yuen. Golden Harvest Company, 1993.

Irma Vep. Dir. Olivier Assayas. Dacia Films, 1996.

J-

Jan Dara. Dir. Nonzee Nimibutr. Applause Pictures, 2001.

Joy Luck Club, The. Dir. Wayne Wang. Hollywood Pictures, 1993.

Ju Dou. Dir. Yimou Zhang and Fengliang Yang. China Film Co-Production Corporation, 1989.

July Rhapsody. Dir. Ann Hui. Filmko Pictures, 2002.

Jump. Dir. Stephen Fung. Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, 2009.

Jurassic Park. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal Pictures, 1993.

K-

Kickboxer's Tears. Dir. Da Wei Shen. Jin's Motion Picture Company, 1992.

Kidnap. Dir. Chi-Leung Law. Filmko Pictures, 2007.

Kill Bill Volume 1. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Miramax Films, 2003.

Kill Bill Volume 2. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Miramax Films, 2003.

Killer, The. Dir. John Woo. Media Asia Group, 1989.

Killing Floor, The. Dir. Gideon Raff. Chatzpah Films, 2007.

Kiss of the Dragon. Dir. Chris Nahon. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 2001.

King of Fighters. Dir. Gordon Chan. Double Edge Entertainment, 2010.

Kung Fu Chefs. Dir. Wing Kin Yip. Brilliant Emperor Productions, 2009.

Kung Fu Dunk. Dir. Yen-Ping Chu. Emperor Motion Pictures, 2008.

Kung Fu Girl. Dir. Wei Lo. Golden Harvest, 1973.

Kung Fu Hustle. Dir. Stephen Chow. Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, 2004.

Kung Fu Panda. Dir. Mark Osborne and John Stevenson. DreamWorks Animation, 2008.

L-

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider. Dir. Simon West. Paramount Pictures, 2001.

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life. Dir. Jan de Bont. Paramount Pictures, 2003.

Laser Mission. Dir. B.J. Davis. Azimuth, 1989.

Legacy. Dir. Irving Rothberg. StudioLine Entertainment, 2008.

Legacy of Rage. Dir. Ronny Yu. D&B Films Co., Ltd., 1986.

Legend of the Black Scorpion, The. Dir. Xiaogang Feng. Media Asia Films, 2006.

Legend of Zu, The. Dir. Hark Tsui. China Film Co-Production Corporation, 2002.

Lethal Weapon 4. Dir. Richard Donner. Silver Pictures, 1998.

Limehouse Blues. Dir. Alexander Hall. Paramount Pictures, 1934.

Live Free or Die Hard. Dir. Len Wisemen. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 2007.

Locked. Dir. Juli C. Lasselle. Mandorla Pictures, 2006.

Long and Winding Road, The. Dir. Gordon Chan. Win's Film Co., 1994.

Long Kiss Goodnight, The. Dir. Renny Harlin. New Line Cinema, 1997.

Long March. Dir. n/a. 1995.

Lucky Number Slevin. Dir. Paul McGuigan. Capitol Films, 2006.

Lust, Caution. Dir. Ang Lee. Focus Features, 2007.

M-

Magnificent Warriors. Dir. David Chung. D&B Films Co. Ltd., 1987.

Mail Order Wife. Dir. Huck Botko and Andrew Gurland. Cherry Road Films, 2004.

Man Called Hero, A. Dir. Andrew Lau. Golden Harvest Company, 1999.

Man Wanted. Dir. Benny Chan. Sam Po Film Production, 1995.

Manhattan Midnight. Dir. Alfred Cheung. All In One Productions, 2001.

Martial Angels. Dir. Clarence Fok Yiu-Leung. The Storm Riders Management Co. Ltd.,
2001.

Matrix. Dir. Wachowski Brothers. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999.

Matrix Reloaded. Dir. Wachowski Brothers. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2003.

Matrix Revolutions. Dir. Wachowski Brothers. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2003.

Medallion, The. Dir. Gordon Chan. Golden Port Productions Ltd., 2003.

Memoirs of Geisha. Dir. Rob Marshall. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 2005.

Men From the Monastery, The. Dir. Che Zhang. Shaw Brothers, 1974.

Miami Vice. Dir. Michael Mann. Universal Pictures, 2006.

Missing. Dir. Hark Tsui. China Film Group, 2008.

Mission Impossible II. Dir. John Woo. Paramount Pictures, 2000.

Mission Impossible III. Dir. J.J. Abrams. Paramount Pictures, 2006.

Mission of Justice. Dir. Chun-Yeung Wong. . D&B Films Co. Ltd., 1992.

Modern Romance. Dir. Lun Ah and Andrew Lau. Cameron Entertainment Ltd., 1994.

Moon Warriors. Dir. Sammo Hung. Team Work Motion Pictures Ltd., 1993.

Mr. & Mrs. Smith. Dir. Doug Liman. New Regency Pictures, 2005.

Mr. Mumble. Dir. Chun Man Yuen. EMC Motion Pictures Ltd., 1996.

Mr. Nice Guy. Dir. Sammo Hung. Seasonal Film Corporation, 1997.

Mulan II. Dir. Darrell Rooney and Lynne Southerland. Walt Disney Pictures, 2004.

Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor, The. Dir. Rob Cohen. Universal Pictures, 2008.

Musa the Warrior. Dir. Sung-Su Kim. Beijing Film Studio, 2001.

Mutant Chronicles, The. Dir. Simon Hunter. Edward R. Pressman Film, 2008.

My Dream Girl. Dir. Wai Man Yip. Icon Pictures, 2003.

My Lucky Stars. Dir. Sammo Hung. Golden Way Films Ltd., 1985.

My Name is Modesty: A Modesty Blaise Adventure. Dir. Scott Spiegel. Miramax Films, 2004.

My Wife is a Gangster. Dir. Jin-Gyu Cho. Hyun Jin Films, 2001.

My Wife is a Gangster 2. Dir. Heung-Sun Jeong, Hyeon-Jin Films, 2003.

My Wife is a Gangsters 3. Dir. Jin-Gyu Cho. Hyunjin Cinema, 2006.

My Wife is 18. Dir. James Yuen. Balagan Productions, 2002.

Myth, The. Dir. Stanely Tong. China Film Group, 2005.

N-

Naked Weapon. Dir. Tony Ching. Jing's Production Limited, 2002.

Naraka 19. Dir. Miu-Suet Lai. BIG Pictures, 2007.

New Police Story, The. Dir. Benny Chan. China Film Group, 2004.

O-

Once a Thief. Dir. John Woo. Golden Princess Film Production Limited, 1991.

Once Upon a Time in China. Dir. Hark Tsui. Golden Harvest Company, 1991.

Once Upon a Time in China II. Dir. Hark Tsui. Golden Harvest Company, 1992.

Once Upon a Time in China and America. Dir. Sammo Hung. Dimension Films, 1997.

One, The. Dir. James Wong. Revolution Studios, 2001.

One-Armed Boxer. Dir. Yu Wang. Golden Harvest Company, 1971.

One-Armed Swordsman, The. Dir. Cheh Chang. Shaw Brothers, 1967.

Operation Cougar. Dir. Fengliang Yang and Yimou Zhang. Xi'an Film Studio, 1989.

Option Zero. Dir. Dante Lam. Media Asia Films (Partners I), 1997.

P-

Painted Skin. Dir. Gordon Chan. Golden Sun Films, 2008.

Partners. Dir. Bee Chan. Century Creator Co. Ltd., 2002.

Passion of the Christ. Dir. Mel Gibson. Icon Productions, 2004.

Pathfinder. Dir. Marcus Nispel. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 2007.

Payback. Dir. Brian Helgeland. Icon Entertainment International, 1999.

Pearl Harbour. Dir. Michael Bay. Touchstone Pictures, 2001.

Perhaps Love. Dir. Peter Chan. Applause Pictures, 2005.

Police Story. Dir. Jackie Chan. Golden Way Films Ltd., 1985.

Police Story II. Dir. Jackie Chan. Golden Way Films Ltd., 1988.

Police Story III. Dir. Stanley Tong. Golden Harvest Company, 1992.

Portland Street Blues. Dir. Wai Man Yip. Golden Harvest Company, 1998.

Postmodern Life of My Aunt, The. Dir. Ann Hui. Beijing Poly-bona Film Publishing Company, 2006.

Princess Iron Fan. Dir. Meng Hua Ho. Shaw Brothers, 1966.

Prison on Fire. Dir. Ringo Lam. Cinema City Film Productions, 1987.

Pulp Fiction. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. A Band Apart, 1994.

Purple Storm. Dir. Teddy Chan. Media Asia Films, 1999.

R-

Raise the Red Lantern. Dir. Yimou Zhang. China Film Co-Production Corporation, 1992.

Rapid Fire. Dir. Dwight H. Little. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 1992.

Red Cherry. Dir. Daying Ye. Beijing Current Affairs Cultural Affairs, 1995.

Red Cliff. Dir. John Woo. China Film Group, 2008.

Red Cliff II. Dir. John Woo. China Film Group, 2009.

Red Sorghum. Dir. Yimou Zhang. Xi'an Film Studio, 1987.

Red Wolf, The. Dir. Woo Ping Yuen. Sharp Productions Ltd., 1995.

Replacement Killers, The. Dir. Antoine Fuqua. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1998.

Resident Evil. Dir. Paul W.S. Anderson. Constantin Film Produktion, 2002.

Resident Evil: Apocalypse. Dir. Alexander Witt. Constantin Film Ltd., 2004.

Resident Evil: Extinction. Dir. Russell Mulcahy. Constantin Film Ltd., 2007.

Return to a Better Tomorrow. Dir. Jing Wong. GH Pictures, 1994.

Rhythm of Destiny. Dir. Andrew Lau. Magnum Films Limited, 1992.

Rise: The Blood Hunter. Dir. Sebastian Gutierrez. Mandate Pictures, 2007.

Road Home, The. Dir. Yimou Zhang. Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, 1999.

Rob-B-Hood. Dir. Benny Chan. Emperor Motion Pictures, 2005.

Romeo Must Die. Dir. Andrzej Bartkowiak. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2000.

Royal Warriors. Dir. David Chung. D&B Films Co. Ltd., 1986.

Rumble in the Bronx. Dir. Stanley Tong. Golden Harvest Company, 1995.

Runaway. Dir. Dante Lam. Universe, 2001.

Rush Hour. Dir. Brett Ratner. New Line Cinema, 1998.

Rush Hour 2. Dir. Brett Ratner. New Line Cinema, 2001.

Rush Hour 3. Dir. Brett Ratner. New Line Cinema, 2007.

S-

Sanctuary, The. Dir. Thanapon Maliwan. Film Frame Productions, 2009.

Scorpion King, The. Dir. Chuck Russell. Universal Pictures, 2002.

Secret, The. Dir. Ann Hui. Unique, 1979.

Seoul Raiders. Dir. Jingle Ma. Media Asia Films, 2005.

Seven Swords, The. Dir. Hark Tsui. Film Workshop, 2005.

Sex and Fury. Dir. Norifumi Suzuki. Toei Company, 1973.

Sex & Zen II. Dir. Man Kei Chin. Golden Harvest Company, 1996.

Shanghai Hotel. Dir. Jerry Allen Davis. Cornucopia Productions, 2010S.

Shanghai Knights. Dir. David Dobkin. Touchstone Pictures, 2003.

Shanghai Noon. Dir. Tom Dey. Touchstone Pictures, 2000.

Shaolin Soccer. Dir. Stephen Chow. Star Overseas, 2001.

Shaolin Temple. Dir. Xinyan Zhang. Chung Yuen Motion Picture Company, 1982.

Shaolin vs. Evil Dead 2: Ultimate Power. Dir. Douglas Kung. My Way Film Company Limited, 2006.

Showdown in Little Tokyo. Dir. Mark L. Lester. Little Tokyo Productions, 1991.

Silence of the Lambs. Dir. Jonathan Demme. Orion Pictures Corporation, 1991.

Silk. Dir. Chao-Pin Su. CMC Entertainment, 2006.

Silver Hawk. Dir. Jingle Ma. Tianjin Film Studio, 2004.

Sin City. Dir. Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez. Dimension Films, 2005.

Skyline Cruisers. Dir. Wilson Yip. Golden Harvest Company, 2000.

Snake in the Eagle's Shadow. Dir. Woo Ping Yuen. Seasonal Film Corporation, 1978.

So Close. Dir. Corey Yuen. Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, 2002.

Species. Dir. Roger Donaldson. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1995.

Species II. Dir. Peter Medak. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1998.

Speed. Dir. Jan de Bont. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 1994.

Spirit of the Dragon, The. Dir. Chi-Wai Tam. EMC Motion Pictures Ltd., 1998.

Stealing a Roast Duck. Dir. Siu-Bo Leung. Asia Film Company, 1909.

Stiletto. Dir. Nick Vallelonga. Vallelonga Productions, 2008.

Storm Riders. Dir. Andrew Lau. Golden Harvest Pictures (China), 1998.

Storm Riders II. Dir. Oxide Pang Chun and Danny Pang. Chengtian Entertainment, 2010.

Storm Warriors, The. Dir. Oxide Pang Chun and Danny Pang. Chengtian Entertainment, 2009.

Story of Qiu Ju, The. Dir. Yimou Zhang. Sil-Metropole Organisation, 1992.

Street Fighter. Dir. Steven E. de Souza. Capcom Entertainment, 1994.

Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun Li. Dir. Andrzej Bartkowiak. Legend Films, 2009.

Stuntwoman. Dir. Ann Hui. Mei Ah Entertainment, 1996.

Sunshine. Dir. Danny Boyle. DNA Films, 2007.

Super Model. Dir. Vincent Kok. Abba Movies, 2004.

Sweet Revenge. Dir. Ping Ho. Shanghai Film Studios, 2007.

Swordsman II. Dir. Siu-Tung Ching and Stanley Tong. Film Workshop, 1992.

Swordswoman's World, The. Dir. Chao-Bin Su and John Woo. Lion Rock Productions, 2010.

T-

Tai Chi Boxer. Dir. Woo Ping Yuen and Xinyan Zhang. Film Can Production Limited, 1995.

Tai Chi Master. Dir. Woo Ping Yuen. Golden Harvest, 1993.

Temple of the Red Lotus. Dir. Xu Zenghong. Shaw Brothers, 1965.

Terminator 2: Judgement Day. Dir. James Cameron. Carolco Pictures, 1991.

Terminator Salvation. Dir. McG. The Halcyon Company, 2009.

Terra-Cotta Warrior, A. Dir. Siu-Tung Ching. Art & Talent Group, 1990.

Three Extremes II. Dir. Peter Chan, Ji-Woon Kim and Nonzee Nimibutr. Applause Pictures, 2002.

Three Kingdoms: Resurrection of the Dragon. Dir. Daniel Lee. China Film Group, 2008.

Throw Down. Dir. Johnnie To. China Star Entertainment, 2004.

Thunderbolt. Dir. Gordon Chan. Golden Harvest Company, 1995.

Tinkerbell. Dir. Bradley Raymond. DisneyToon Studios, 2008.

Titanic. Dir. James Cameron. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 1997.

To Seduce an Enemy. Dir. Bowie Lau. S&W Entertainment Limited, 2003.

Tokyo Juliet. Dir. Ming-Tai Wang. GTV, 2006.

Tomorrow Never Dies. Dir. Roger Spottiswoode. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1997.

Touch, The. Dir. Peter Pau. Mythical Films, 2002.

Tournament, The. Dir. Scott Mann. Buzzfilms, 2009.

Transporter, The. Dir. Corey Yuen. Europa Corp., 2002.

Triangle. Dir. Ringo Lam and Johnnie To. Media Asia Films, 2007.

True Legend. Dir. Woo Ping Yuen. EDKO Film, 2009.

Tuxedo, The. Dir. Kevin Donovan. Blue Train Productions, 2002.

Twin Dragons. Dir. Ringo Lam and Hark Tsui. Dimension Films, 1992.

Twin Swords, The. Dir. Xu Zenghong. Shaw Brothers, 1965.

Twins Effect, The. Dir. Dante Lam and Donnie Yen. Pou-Soi Cheang, 2003.

Twins Effect 2, The. Dir. Patrick Leung and Corey Yuen. Emperor Motion Pictures, 2004.

Twins Mission. Dir. To-Hoi Kong. Emperor Multimedia Group (EMG), 2007.

U-

Ultraviolet. Dir. Kurt Wimmer, 2006.

Underworld. Dir. Len Wiseman. Lakeshore Entertainment, 2003.

Underworld Evolutions. Dir. Len Wiseman. Lakeshore Entertainment, 2006.

Underworld: Rise of the Lycans. Dir. Patrick Tatopoulos. Lakeshore Entertainment, 2009.

Undiscovered Tomb. Dir. Douglas Kung. Tai Seng Entertainment, 2002.

Undoing. Dir. Chris Chan Lee. A Space Between, 2006.

Unleashed. Dir. Louis Leterrier. Europa Corp., 2005.

Unshakable. Dir. Stanley J. Orzel. Studio Strada, 2009.

V-

Violent Cop. Dir. Wai-Man Cheng. Jing's Production, 2000.

Viva Erotica. Dir. Tung-Shing Yee. Golden Harvest Company, 1996.

W-

Warlords, The. Dir. Peter Chan and Wai Man Yip. China Film Group, 2007.

Warriors of Heaven and Earth. Dir. Ping He. Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia,
2003.

Watching the Detectives. Dir. Paul Soter. Plum Pictures, 2007.

Web of Deception. Dir. Hin Sing 'Billy' Tang and Yat-Tak Yeung. Martini Film Company
Ltd., 1996.

Wesley's Mysterious File. Dir. Andrew Lau. China Star Entertainment, 2002.

White China. Dir. Ronny Yu. Fu Ngai Film Production Ltd., 1989.

Windtalkers. Dir. John Woo. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2000.

Wild. Dir. Hin Sing 'Billy' Tang. Martini Film Company Ltd., 1996.

Will of Iron. Dir. David Chiang. D&B Films Co., Ltd., 1991.

Wing Chun. Dir. Woo Ping Yuen. Peace Film Production Co., 1994.

Witness to a Kill. Dir. Darrell Roodt. Do Productions, 2001.

Woman's Revenge, A. Dir. Shu-Chien Cheng and Shu-Sun Chiu. Lai Ngai (Li'Er Colour),
1955.

World of Women, The. Dir. Esther Eng. Grandview Film Company, 1938.

World Without Thieves, A. Dir. Xiaogang Feng. Focus Films, 2004.

X-

X2. Dir. Bryan Singer. Marvel Enterprises, 2003.

X-Men. Dir. Bryan Singer. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 2000.

Y-

Year of Getting to Know Us, The. Dir. Patrick Sisam. Grand Army Entertainment, 2008.

Yes Madam!. Dir. Corey Yuen. D&B Films Co. Ltd., 1985.

Young and Dangerous. Dir. Andrew Lau. Art Top Movie Productions Ltd., 1996.

Young and Dangerous 2. Dir. Andrew Lau. Golden Harvest, 1996.

Young and Dangerous 3. Dir. Andrew Lau. Golden Harvest, 1996.

Young and Dangerous 4. Dir. Andrew Lau. Golden Harvest, 1997.

Young and Dangerous 5. Dir. Andrew Lau. Golden Harvest, 1998.

Young and Dangerous 6. Dir. Andrew Lau. Golden Harvest, 2000.

Young and Dangerous Prequel. Dir. Andrew Lau. Golden Harvest, 1998.

Z-

Zatoichi and the One-Armed Swordsman. Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda. Golden Harvest Company, 1971.

Zhan. Gu. Dir. Kenneth Bi. Emperor Motion Pictures, 2007.