

**REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINESE WOMEN
WARRIORS IN THE CINEMAS OF HONG
KONG, MAINLAND CHINA AND TAIWAN
SINCE 1980**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree

of Master of Arts in Chinese

at the University of Canterbury

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2007

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is a cross-disciplinary project of film study and gender study. I cannot thank enough my two main mentors, Associate Professor Chigusa Kimura-Steven and Dr Adam Lam for their support and guidance and assistance in obtaining the Master's scholarship from the University of Canterbury which released me from financial difficulty while working on this thesis. They have also given me intellectual guidance and personal encouragement throughout my study. Associate Professor Kimura-Steven directed me to explore the gender perspectives and theoretical literature in that field. Her supportive criticism helped me to delve more deeply into social issues and refine my arguments. I am also extremely grateful to Dr. Lam who shared with me his knowledge, personal library and his collection of rare Chinese films. I am also grateful to Dr. Xiao Hong for her spiritual support and encouragement.

I also owe a great deal to many friends for their inspiration, encouragement and support. Researching on my own could have been a very lonely time, but they helped me overcome the loneliness by providing me encouragement through e-mails, phone calls and visits. I am much obliged to all the tutors in the Learning Skills Centre at the University of Canterbury, especially Frieda Looser, who guided me through the final revision and editing. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to Colleen Borrie for helping with the final editing of my thesis, and her support in arranging an office for use throughout my research.

Abstract

The subject of this thesis is the depiction of Chinese women warriors in the cinemas of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China since 1980. Women warriors have been a popular feature of Western media since the 1970s influenced by the second wave women's movement, and have become a significant topic of academic study. However, Chinese women warriors are combined with and referred to as 'Asian' women without consideration of their cultural differences. Furthermore, although representations of women warriors in the cinemas of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan may share some similarities, they also exhibit different regional features.

This thesis attempts to reveal regional differences in the representations of women warriors in Chinese language films and their sociocultural contexts since 1980. An important goal of such research is to contribute to the study of the 'woman warrior' phenomenon in Chinese cinemas, in the hope that it will arouse interest in the field. This thesis also aims to focus attention on the changing status of Chinese women in different communities. Since gender is a global issue, it is hoped that the feminist perspective adopted here will stimulate interest among film specialists, not only in Chinese women in films, but also in the broader field of gender studies.

Introduction

The subject of this thesis is the depiction of Chinese women warriors in the cinemas of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan since 1980, and begins by addressing three questions: i) the definition of a ‘woman warrior’, ii) why the regional division of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan is necessary, and iii) what are their significant regional differences.

The Changing Concept of Women Warriors

A warrior may be defined as “a person engaged or experienced in fighting.”¹ When using the term ‘woman warrior,’ a Chinese person would probably visualise such popular fictional figures as Mulan (木兰) and Mu Guiying (穆桂英) from Chinese literature. Mulan is a filial daughter in an ancient Chinese ballad, “Ode to Mulan”, composed in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420– 518), who disguises herself as a son to replace her senile father when he is conscripted to serve in the army. Mu Guiying is a woman general of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) in the novel *The Saga of the Yang Family*.²

¹ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word ‘warrior’ as “[a] person whose occupation is warfare; a soldier, a member of an armed force. Now usu., a person experienced or distinguished in fighting, esp. of the ages celebrated in epic and romance or among primitive peoples; fig a hardy, courageous, or aggressive person.”

² The Yang family saga is an important source of depictions of women warriors in Chinese folk culture. Four of the seven sons of Yang Linggong were killed in battle, while all the widows, their sisters-in-law and mother-in-law became generals who fought on behalf of the Yang family. Their stories have been spread by various anecdotists throughout history. In the Ming Dynasty, Xiong Damu collected their stories and produced the novel *The Saga of the Yang Family* which ended with “The triumphant return of the twelve women generals.”

These women warriors are products of Chinese folk culture rather than the creations of specific authors. It could be said that they are regarded as ‘*nü xia*’ (女侠) who are uniquely Chinese phenomena. ‘*Nü xia*’ characters are found in the ‘*wu xia*’ (武侠, martial arts) novels which are a popular genre in Chinese literature, said to inhabit an imaginary world known as the *jianghu* (江湖, literally meaning rivers and lakes). According to Rong Cai, ‘*jianghu*’ is a symbolic territory which “was often believed to stand in sharp opposition to the oppressive official world of corruption and injustice, hence its resonance with the public.”³

The ‘*nü xia*’ who inhabit ‘*jianghu*’ are women who are masters of various martial arts and altruistically fight for justice, especially at a time when the official order has failed to do so. Since the Chinese word ‘*xia*’ is often associated with positive words such as ‘honourable’, ‘noble’ and ‘merit’—much the same as the English word ‘knight’—this term ‘*nü xia*’ can be translated into English as ‘lady knight.’ When people were disappointed by the failure of their government to protect them in real life, they would imagine rescue by a ‘*nü xia*’ as a means of catharsis.

In the Chinese imagination, altruism is the most important principle of these traditional women warriors’ behaviour, and altruism is in fact part of the central ideal of ‘*ren*’ (仁) in Confucianism, which has always been the nucleus of the Chinese patriarchal order. For centuries, even though these imaginary women warriors had broken the boundaries of female conduct, they were admired by the people because they fought for their nation, their political organisations, and their families without challenging the established patriarchal order. These imaginary characters even engage in warfare when war breaks out and there is a need for their bravery. When the wars

³ Rong Cai, “Gender Imaginations in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and the *Wuxia* World,” *Positions* 13, no.2 (2005): 445.

end, their characters usually return to their private sphere and resume their roles as mother, wife or daughter.

However, since World War II the image of the woman warrior has changed both in Chinese speaking communities and worldwide. To be a warrior has become a professional choice for women in many countries. Women now are able to pursue many professions from which they were previously excluded, such as the military, law enforcement, and professional sport. Women in these professions are required to possess physical power, and are often referred to as 'women warriors'. Thus, the term 'woman warrior' can be used to refer not only to a woman who is fighting for her country, her community and her family, but also resisting an oppressive patriarchal social order. This broadening of the term 'woman warrior' is based on a feminist perspective. It is this modern broader definition of 'woman warrior' that is adopted in this thesis.

The Case of China

The conceptual and actual change in women's social status discussed above has influenced the thematic change in the depiction of women warriors in Chinese films. The evolution in the representation of women warriors has been one of the most fascinating phenomena in Chinese cinemas. The Chinese film industry originated in the early 1900s, and the initial popularity of women warriors was in the 1920s. The pioneers of Chinese cinema adapted legends and historical stories of women warriors for film. From the 1920s to the late 1940s representations of Chinese women warriors showed a thematic continuity of the traditions of Chinese '*nü xia*,' whose altruism and related virtues (such as patriotism) made them acceptable and non-threatening to the then rigid patriarchal social order.

This thematic continuity was appealing because of the national crises within China which lasted several decades until the late 1940s. In China, which is known as the ‘middle kingdom’ (中国), the turmoil had started in the nineteenth century when Western imperial powers forced the ‘middle kingdom’ to open its doors, and was followed by the collapse of the last imperial court, the Qing Dynasty, in 1911. Immediately afterwards, the Chinese people were entangled in wars between ambitious local warlords, the invading Japanese and confrontations between the Chinese Communists and the Nationalists (Guang Min Dang, also known as Kuo Min Tang, thereafter KMT)⁴. The final outcome of this turmoil was the division of the once unified ‘middle kingdom’ into various Chinese communities led by different governments with different ideological systems: the major communities included the British-governed Hong Kong, the Communist-ruled Mainland China and the KMT-led Taiwan⁵.

These three regions began to develop differently in every respect under different leaderships in the 1950s. The change in the concept of ‘woman warrior’ and the influence of women’s liberation also developed differently in these three regions. As a result, the concept of ‘woman warrior’ assumed different connotations in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan. These differences form the regional characteristics of the representations of women warriors produced by their local film industries.

⁴ For further reference to Chinese history, see Henrietta Harrison’s *Inventing the Nation: China* (London: Arnold, 2001) and J. A. G. Roberts’s *A History of China* (New York: Palgrave, 1999).

⁵ The divided Chinese communities should include Macao and many other diasporic Chinese, but this thesis considers only Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan because the film industries in these three regions dominate other smaller and scattered Chinese communities.

The Significance of the 1980s

In spite of their ideological differences and the varied degrees of economic development, the 1980s was a watershed in the history of all three regions. In Hong Kong, negotiations between the British government and the government of Mainland China produced a Joint Declaration in 1984 which declared that Hong Kong would return to Mainland China and become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China from 1997⁶. At the end of the 1970s The Communist government of Mainland China commenced a series of economic reforms and reconnected with the outside world. In Taiwan, the central government lifted martial law in 1987 and relaxed its control of Taiwan⁷ society. These new policies increased the three regions' contacts with the outside world, initiating the first step in their contemporary globalisation process.

Parallel to these sociopolitical and economic developments, from the 1980s to the present—particularly since the late 1990s—the film industries of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan all underwent a similar process of globalisation. When filmmakers from these three regions endeavoured to expand their local markets and distribute their productions globally, they felt the need to cater to the tastes of foreign audiences and follow many of the popular Hollywood elements. When images of women warriors were in vogue in films and television in the West, representations of women warriors became a favourite choice among Chinese filmmakers. Therefore, understanding the popularity and reception of women warriors in the West is an

⁶ For full text of this joint declaration, see the following website:
<http://www.info.gov.hk/trans/jd/jd2.htm>

⁷ I try to use the word 'Taiwan' as an adjective in place of 'Taiwanese' because people in Taiwan cannot easily be categorised as an ethnic group. Before the retreat of the KMT to Taiwan, many people had settled in Taiwan and regarded themselves as "native Taiwanese". Many were from the south coast of China and spoke southern Chinese dialects, one of which has gained domination and become "Taiyu" (means language of Taiwan, often referred to as Taiwanese). Taiwan residents' internal conflicts will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

important step in identifying the thematic change in the characterisation of Chinese women warriors.

With the spread of the second wave women's movement in the West, media images of women began to change, and women warriors possessing physical strength and a wide range of fighting skills (hitherto considered exclusively masculine attributes), began to appear on television and in films from the 1970s onwards. This acceptance of women warriors among Western audiences created the popularity of Asian women warriors depicted in Western films in the 1990s, such as the Chinese agent played by Michelle Yeoh (杨紫琼) in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* (dir. Roger Spottiswoode, 1997), and Mulan in the Disney animation *Mulan* (dir. Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook, 1998). In turn, this acceptance of Chinese women warriors in Western productions paved the way for several Chinese productions of women warriors, such as *Hero* (英雄, dir. Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 2001) and *House of Flying Daggers* (十面埋伏, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2004).

The acceptance of Chinese films and the three regions' efforts to be in contact with the outside world, both inspired and encouraged their industries to focus on a global market. However, different reasons impelled them, although these might initially appear similar to those unfamiliar with Chinese cinemas.

Hong Kong

Hong Kong developed first as a marginal city of China and then for more than 100 years was a colonial city. As a result, as Ackbar Abbas notes, "Hong Kong is an 'open city', exposed to all styles and influence".⁸ This resulted in a melting-pot of both

⁸ Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 80.

conservative and traditional elements brought by the early Chinese migrants who came to this former fishing village and the more recent Western elements. To reflect this ‘melting-pot’ aspect of Hong Kong society, Hong Kong filmmakers often portray the co-existence of two types of women warriors: one representing traditional Chinese values of loyalty and altruism similar to the ‘*nü xia*,’ and a second group concerned with the pursuit of personal freedom, which is believed to be the core of women’s liberation as it originated in the West. The first two films selected for discussion with regard to the Hong Kong cinema, *Peking Opera Blue* (刀马旦, dir. Tsui Hark 徐克, 1986) and *Dragon Inn* (新龙门客栈, dir. Raymond Lee 李惠民, 1992), are typical examples of this combination of Chinese and Western values.

After 1997, Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region under the control of Mainland China, but Hong Kong continued as a Chinese community of “peripheral status”⁹ both geographically and politically, and this peripheral status caused anxiety among the Hong Kong people and motivated them to seek a more important identity for themselves and their city. The promotion of Hong Kong as a global metropolis in a world which was integrating into one global community was a tactic they chose to raise Hong Kong’s status. The depiction of women warriors at this stage followed a global trend. The last film selected for the discussion on Hong Kong, *The Twins Effect* (千机变: 拯救危城, dir. Dante Lam 林超贤 and Donnie Yen 甄子丹, 2003), resembles Hollywood blockbusters both in genre and in its portrayal of girl heroines

⁹ Kwai-Cheung Lo, “Transnationalization of the Local in Hong Kong Cinema of the 1990s,” in *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, ed. Esther C.M. Yau, 261-276 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 265.

as the new “girl power”¹⁰ icons which have become immensely popular in Hollywood in recent years.

Mainland China

While Hong Kong was promoting itself as a global metropolis in an attempt to shed its marginalised identity as a peripheral Chinese community, Mainland China was pursuing a different mission. As Rey Chow has stated, the core of their mission “has always been for China to become as strong as the West, to become the West’s ‘equal’.”¹¹ Since the 1980s, Mainland China focused on catching up with the West in terms of economic and material prosperity. The development of a consumer culture, especially women’s access to goods which enhanced their feminine glamour, became an important index for their economic success. As a result, Chinese women aspired to be equal with their Western counterparts in terms of economic independence and in their capacity to purchase luxury items.

The portrayals of women warriors in Mainland China’s cinema began to reflect this desire to glamorise their images to demonstrate the economic progress they had achieved. The three films selected for the chapter on Mainland China reflect this mentality. *Eight Women Die a Martyr* (八女投江, dir. Yang Guangyuan 杨光远, 1987) still portrays the conventional ‘iron girls’ according to Communist tradition and their collective identity as patriotic soldiers has been emphasised, but 1990s films such as *A Lover’s Grief over the Yellow River* (黄河绝恋, dir. Feng Xiaoning 冯小宁,

¹⁰ Susan Hopkins’s *Girl Heroes: the New Force in Popular Culture* (Annandale: Pluto Press Australia, 2002) is an important work on this “girl power” phenomenon. This work is also an important reference for this thesis.

¹¹ Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 62.

1999) focuses on single women's feminine beauty and their personal relationships, such as love.

However, 1980s and 1990s women warrior films from Mainland China still portrayed women as victims-turned-warriors. This tactic was designed to appeal to the sympathies of Western audiences. Gradually, their country's economic success encouraged the Chinese film industry to make films aimed at the global market. The third film selected for discussion in the chapter on Mainland China, Zhang Yimou's *The House of Flying Daggers* is evidence of Mainland China shedding its victim-oriented identity. This film also focused on universal themes such as personal autonomy and romance which were more attractive and acceptable to the global market than cliché patriotism.

Taiwan

Ackbar Abbas notes, “[o]ne of Taiwan’s strongest claims to political legitimacy has always been to present itself as the true custodian of ‘Chinese culture’.”¹² While Taiwan developed rapidly into an urbanised and Westernised society, there was a sense of guilt at abandoning Chinese traditions. The central government strongly opposed women’s movements especially those originating in the West, because demands for women’s liberation not only challenged the government’s stability but also upset the patriarchal order of Chinese culture. In representations of women warriors the desire to promote ‘Chineseness’ has therefore been an important motif. The first film selected for study, *Women Soldiers* (中国女兵, dir. Liu Weibin 刘维斌, 1981) is a propaganda film funded by the Taiwanese government. In this film, the director emphasises the daughter’s ‘father complex’ and promotes a conservative

¹² Abbas, 80.

version of the Mulan legend in an attempt to maintain the patriarchal social order and strengthen the KMT authority.

After the lifting of martial law in 1987, however, Taiwan society rapidly became globalised, and the encroachment of Hollywood blockbusters urged some filmmakers to combine the ‘Chineseness’ which had been the focus of Taiwan’s film industry with Western values which were appealing to a global audience. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (卧虎藏龙, dir. Ang Lee 李安, 2000) was an interesting example. Ang Lee, who had been working in the United States, chose to make a martial arts film in what is globally recognised as a uniquely Chinese tradition, and combine it with themes popular in Western films. The Taiwan people celebrated Ang Lee’s success and enthusiastically emphasised the ‘*made-in-Taiwan*’ label of the film and the bolstering of a Taiwanese identity. The film was proclaimed by Taiwan’s Government Information Office as “the greatest achievement in the history of filmmaking in the Republic of China.”¹³ Ang Lee was also reclaimed as a filial Taiwan director and received a personal visit from President Chen Shui-bian (陈水扁) when he returned to Taiwan. However, while depicting some traditional Confucian values, Ang Lee also had the film convey his favourite themes such as oppression of women and their ensuing rebellion. The Chinese audience did not react enthusiastically to such themes as women’s liberation,¹⁴ although these appealed more to Western audiences.

¹³ Government Information Office, “The Republic of China Celebrates Taiwan Film’s Success at the Oscars,” <http://www.roc-taiwan.org.za/taiwan/4-oa/20010326/2001032601.html> (accessed 5 October 2006)

¹⁴ Yu Qiong conducted research on the audience reception of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* in her article “Orient/West: Audience Reception Study of the Film *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*,” noting that some Chinese audiences disliked this film and ridiculed it as *Crouching Cat Hidden Snake* by replacing the noble and sacred images of tiger and dragon with dishonourable images of cat and snake. This article is published in *Looking through the Ocean: Hollywood Images in Mirror*, eds. Yan Lu and Yizhong Li, 294-309 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004).

However, although Taiwan filmmakers are keen to target the global market, maintaining and redefining ‘Chineseness’ continues to be an important responsibility for filmmakers, and many of them also endeavour to emphasise local issues by reverting to local social problems. The last film chosen for the Taiwan chapter, *West Town Girls* (终极西门, dir. Alice Wang 王毓雅, 2004) focuses on a unique Taiwan phenomenon, the ‘*tai mei*’ (太妹, rebellious girls) culture. The rebellious girls in this film are similar to the ‘bad girls’ of the “girl power” phenomenon in the West, but through the portrayal of rebellious girls, the director Wang also exposes Taiwan’s anxiety about conflict with Mainland China and the fear of a consequent ‘civil war.’

The discussion order of this thesis, which starts with a brief history of representations of women warriors in Chinese culture before 1980 and Western influence, will move on to Hong Kong, with Mainland China in second place and finally Taiwan. This order does not imply any bias towards the political importance of these three regions. Hong Kong is discussed first because it is where globalisation of local cinema began earlier than the other two regions.¹⁵ While such a process began in Mainland China and Taiwan at almost the same time, one of the major sociopolitical contexts in the discussion on Hong Kong is its relationship with Mainland China. Thus, it seems more logical to analyse the films of Mainland China after the Hong Kong chapter, and finally the study of films from Taiwan.

Another important issue that needs to be clarified before moving on to the detailed discussions of the topic of this thesis is the definitions of a few terms that will occur frequently. The expression ‘Chinese language films’ refers to films which use Chinese

¹⁵ For example, Bruce Lee’s success in the 1970s with his films such as *The Big Boss* (唐山大兄, dir. Lo Wai 罗维, 1971) and *Fist of Fury* (精武门, dir. Lo Wai, 1972).

or its dialects as the communication medium. They are not necessarily made by Chinese filmmakers, but can be made by any nation, such as Singapore and Malaysia. The term ‘Chinese cinemas’ here includes the film industries in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China, which are the three centres of Chinese filmmaking at present, while the division of the cinemas into these three regions mostly bases on the origins of the directors. However, since the contacts and migrations between these three regions are complicated and diverse, if a Mainland Chinese director moved from Shanghai to reside in Hong Kong, his films made in Hong Kong would be rendered as part of Hong Kong cinema. Although the regional divisions are a starting point of this thesis, their interaction and convergence is the central thread that weaves the whole research together.

In this thesis globalisation is singled out as an important element in the development of the film industries of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan. This is because although the film industries in these regions have followed separate paths since the 1950s, they are now aiming for the success in the global market. By comparing representations of women warriors from these regions this thesis aims to highlight both the similarities and differences in their globalisation process.

1. HERstory¹ of Chinese women warriors

When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talk-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen. Even if she had to rage across all China, a swordswoman got even with anybody who hurt her family.....She said I would grow up a wife, a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mulan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman.

-----Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman*

Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts, 19-20

1.1 Basic Imagery

Filmmakers who produce films about women warriors for Chinese cinemas base their creations on three major categories of women warriors from Chinese culture. The first are historical figures documented in various chronicles and historical records. The second category are those fictional female warriors who were created in literature and the performing arts such as the Peking Opera before the concept of film was introduced into China. The last category are characters in contemporary popular culture, such as comics and serialised novels in daily newspapers. All these resources, some factual, some fictional, have inspired filmmakers of successive generations from the beginning of Chinese cinema, to portray unforgettable images of women warriors.

The first sources of inspiration for images of women warriors in Chinese cinemas are historical records. History has been understood by many Western feminists as the

¹ According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (5th ed., 2002), the word *herstory* is a noun by analogy with *history*, referring to “[h]istory as written or perceived from a feminist or women’s point of view”, 1232.

man's story (HIS-Story), where women's stories were marginal. In the masculine 'his-story', women were subordinate to their male counterparts. The Chinese history (his-story), codified in the name of Confucius towards the end of the first millennium B.C., has warmly praised women's obedience to men and celebrated women's delicate nature. When the custom of footbinding commenced during the transitional period between the end of the Tang Dynasty (906) and the beginning of the Northern Song Dynasty (960), women's fragility was considered an essential part of their beauty. The practice of footbinding "transforms a woman into a fetish, thus, a pure object of love."² Yet, historians at different times also recorded another contradictory image—woman warrior—praising her physical power and military ability. Xiao Li and two other scholars compiled the book *One Hundred Women Who Influenced Chinese History* in 1992 from various historical resources. Of the one hundred prominent historical female figures documented, at least fifteen are women generals or soldiers who fought at the frontline at different times in history.³ Playwrights, novelists, and performing artists such as opera experts, have mythologised these historical women warriors, which in turn has inspired filmmakers to create new female cinematic images.

Zhong Lichun (钟离春), the warrior queen of the kingdom of Qi during the Warring States period (475 -221 B.C.) is one such example. Historian Liu Xiang (刘向)

² Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans, Anita Barrows (New York and London: Marion Boyars, 1986; reprint, 1993), 81-82. Citations are from the 1993 edition.

³ These include the warrior Empress Fu Hao in the Shang Dynasty (1700 -1100B.C.) and Empress Xu (d.1407) of the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644); Princess Jieyou (d. 49 B.C.) in the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.- A.D.8); Princess Pingyang (d. 623) of the Tang Dynasty (618 -907); minority ethnic leader Lady Xian in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-581); religious leaders Chen Shuozhen (d.653) of the Tang Dynasty and Lin Heier in the Boxer Uprising in the early 1900s; leaders of peasant uprisings Mother Lü of Western Han and Zhou Xiuying (1835- 1855) in the Qing Dynasty (1644.- 1911); military leader Liang Hongyu (d. 1135) of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127- 1279), and women soldiers in the war of resistance against Japan (1937-1945) and the civil war (1945-1949): Li Lin (1916-1940), Zhao Yiman (1905-1935), Li Zhen (1907-1990), Liu Hulan (1932-1947) and Chen Shaomin (d. 1977).

向) of the Western Han Dynasty (206 B. C.- A.D. 8) first recorded the deeds of Zhong Lichun (also known as Zhong Wuyan (无盐) because she was born in the prefecture Wuyan) in Chapter Six (Skills of Argument) of his book *Lienü Zhuan* (列女传, *Biographies of Exemplary Women*).⁴ According to Liu, Wuyan, originally an ugly girl of low social status, convinced the king of Qi that she could be a worthy queen by making an eloquent speech on how to deal with the military threats to Qi from other states. In the Yuan Dynasty (1271 - 1368), a renowned playwright Zheng Guangzu (郑光祖) reconstructed the historical accounts of this virtuous queen in his play *The Wise and Heroic Zhong Lichun of Qi* (钟离春智勇定齐), and elaborated on Wuyan's military knowledge and her leadership in the victories over the kingdoms of Qin, Yan and Wei. In 2001, Hong Kong director Johnny To (杜琪峰), co-directing with Ka-Fai Wai (韦家辉), also reconstructed the image of Wuyan in a romantic comedy *Wu Yen* (钟无艳) in which the king of Qi is reduced to an ineffectual figurehead, so that the kingdom has to depend on Queen Wuyan.

The second category of women warriors were created in literature and performing arts before cinematic filmmaking reached China. Mulan is a representative figure in this category. The anonymous poem "Ode to Mulan", composed in the Southern and Northern Dynasties, was the basis for all the later adaptations and elaborations of Mulan's image in the performing arts, such as Chinese traditional operas, and later in films. Director Li Pingqian presented the earliest cinematic version of the legend of Mulan in 1927 in his film *Maiden in Armour* (花木兰从军). In 1939, the respected filmmaker Ouyang Yuqian (欧阳予倩) collaborated with the director Bu Wangchang

⁴ This book is divided into seven chapters. The first six chapters are about six virtuous acts by women while the last chapter portrays vicious women.

(卜万昌) to produce *Mulan Joins the Army* (木兰从军). In 1964, the character of Mulan was once again the central character when director Yue Feng (岳枫) remade a Hong Kong version of the film *Lady General Hua Mulan* (花木兰). Hong Kong director Peter Pao (鲍德熹) announced in 2005 that he was making a new version of Mulan which is to be completed in 2007. Another famous Hong Kong director, Stanley Tong (唐季礼) also announced his intention of starting a Mulan project in October 2006 with a huge budget of two hundred million yuan.⁵

The third group of women warriors are characters created for contemporary popular consumption, such as in comics and serialised novels in daily newspapers. This tradition of adopting characters from popular culture began in Shanghai cinema in the 1920s. For example, when Gu Mingdao's (顾明道) martial art novel *Lady Adventuress on a Wild River* (荒江女侠) became a bestseller in the 1920s, a group of directors, Chen Kengran (陈铿然), Zheng Yisheng (郑逸生), and Shang Guanwu (尚冠武) immediately invited Gu to write the screenplays and create a series of films based on his novels. In the 1950s Hong Kong, bestselling novels by popular martial arts novelists such as Jin Yong (金庸) and Liang Yusheng (梁雨生)⁶ inspired many directors to depict women warriors in their films.

The creations and adaptations of women warriors by early filmmakers also inspired the later generations of filmmakers. The director of *Woman Knight Black*

⁵ "Mulan Cools Down Yet Becoming New Hit: Stanley Tong Stops then Resumes His Plan" [*Hua Mulan leng le you re, Tang Jili ting le you pai*], *Beijing Youth Daily*, 8 June, 2006, <http://www.ynet.com/view.jsp?oid=9701709> (accessed 10 June 2006).

⁶ Jin Yong is also known as Louis Cha. He is arguably the most popular writer of martial arts novels in contemporary Chinese literature. All of his books have been adapted for film and TV and are extremely popular throughout all Chinese communities. Liang Yusheng is another popular martial novels writer though with a different style from Jin Yong. The classic film based on his novel is *The Bride with White Hair* (dir. Ronny Yu, 1993).

Peony (女侠黑牡丹, 1928) Ren Pengnian (任彭年)⁷ and the director of *Woman Knight in Black* (黑衣女侠, 1928) Cheng Bugao (程步高) started a subgenre of women warriors who dressed in black. In Hong Kong, when the Cantonese-language cinema reached its heyday in the 1960s, Director Chor Yuen (楚原) combined the images of women-dressed-in-black from earlier Shanghai cinema with women warriors in comic books to create a series of *Black Rose* films. These depicted two orphan sisters who donned black tights and balaclavas to become modern day Robin Hoods, robbing the rich to help the poor. Chor's productions, in turn, inspired a new generation of directors to create a new series of popular parodies such as *92 Legendary La Rose Noire* (92 黑玫瑰对黑玫瑰, dir. Chen Shangzhi 陈善之, 1992)⁸ for 1990s Hong Kong cinema. In *The Heroic Trio* (东方三侠, dir. Johnny To, 1992) and *Executioners* (also know as *Heroic Trio II*, dir. Johnny To and Ching Siu Tung 程小东, 1993), one of the heroines in a mask and black robe implicitly refers to the character of Black Rose in Chor's films.

1.2 Thematic Continuity

1.2.1 'Nü xia' Complex

All of the women warriors discussed above have been reconstructed repeatedly by different writers and filmmakers, and although they vary in personality and status, they share many things in common and can be considered a part of a Chinese tradition known as the 'lady knight' (*nü xia*) phenomenon referred to in the introduction. Some of these lady knights are fictional figures and some are historical figures, but they all

⁷ Ren created his own studio, Yueming Film studio, in 1928 and produced a series of films about women warriors featuring his wife, Wu Lizhu, who gained fame as the first martial arts actress in China.

⁸ Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: the Extra Dimensions* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 55.

enjoyed unconventional freedom to take up arms and fight at a time when Confucian ideology severely restricted women's physical movements. Such a paradox can be explained by the phenomenon which is identified as the 'nü xia' complex in the introduction.

'Nü xia' complex is related to the worship of messiah figures were often beautified fondly referred to in China as 'nü xia' of *jianghu* in Chinese folk culture. The Chinese character for 'xia' in the term 'nü xia' is 侠, which depicts a person (人) on the left, and 夹 on the right, which symbolises a person holding weapons. Thus the character '侠' means warrior. According to *Shuo wen jie zi* (说文解字, an ancient etymology of Chinese characters) compiled by Xu Shen (许慎, d. A.D. 120), this character 'xia' also symbolises those who are willing to pursue a cause with extreme bravery, while at the same time scorning money and greed. Thus, a 'nü xia' is such an altruistic woman and her criterion is excellent fighting skill, chivalry (including courage, honour, and concern for the weak), and generosity (including altruism and indifference to money).

The rules observed by the 'nü xia' are consistent with the central concept of 'ren' in Confucianism. Although the notorious patriarchalism of Confucianism frequently resulted in the cruel treatment of women, its central concept 'ren' is not a gender-specific idea. 'Ren' has a great variety of English translations, including "benevolence, love, altruism, kindness, charity, compassion, magnanimity, human-heartedness, humaneness, humanity, perfect virtue, goodness...."⁹ Although the 'nü xia' violated many social norms that regulated women's behaviour, they were accepted as 'messiah

⁹ Chenyang Li, "The Confucian Concept of Jen and the Feminist ethics of Care: a Comparative Study," *Hypatia* vol.9, no. 1 (winter, 1994), 72.

figures' or at least tolerated by the patriarchal society because they upheld this central concept of 'ren' in Confucianism.

1.2.2 The "Hua Mulan Syndrome"

The lady knight (*nü xia*) phenomenon in Chinese tradition has been sustained by the female practice of 'ren' in Confucianism and acquiescence to the patriarchal hierarchy. This principle of considering the welfare of others before her own also requires a woman to sacrifice her personal quest for freedom in order to serve the male authority. The practice of 'ren' in Confucianism also takes another specific form with regard to the women warriors. This is a daughter's heroism to protect her family. This was identified by Stephen Teo as a psychological aspect of Chinese culture, the "Hua Mulan syndrome."

In order to uphold the family name and honour, the daughter takes up the role of the son, behaving in the fashion characteristic of the 'Hua Mulan syndrome'The legend has her preserving family honour by distinguishing herself on the battlefield against the Mongols, dressed as a man.¹⁰

In traditional Chinese society, the father, the husband, and the son normally play the public role while women play the subordinate roles of mother, wife, and daughter within the private sphere (the family). However, in cases where men could not play their public roles because of unavoidable situations, such as the senility of the father as in the Mulan legend or the death of male family members, women were expected to take the place of male family members.

¹⁰ Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 62.

There are two aspects in this “Hua Mulan syndrome.” The first is based on the biological bonding of the father and daughter, which emphasises the daughter’s filial duties to uphold or restore her father’s name. Like Mulan who joins the army in her father’s place, daughter heroines also maintained their family honour by overcoming challenges to the family from outside or saving the family from a villain’s aggression. If her father or other family members were murdered, “[e]ven if she had to rage across all China, a swordswoman got even with anybody who hurt her family.”¹¹ If a woman warrior is a wife or mother, most important to her is her allegiance to the patriarchal family system where the father is the most privileged member.

The second aspect is more abstract. This is the notion of the nation as the symbolic father. Since the concept of ‘nation’ in Chinese has been identified as *Nation-Family* (国家) where the ruler has been regarded as the ‘father’ of all Chinese citizens, the blood relationship between daughter and father is often used as a metaphor for a woman’s relationship with and her patriotism towards her country. Dai Jinghua notes, “the woman warrior devotes herself entirely to the country by replacing her father or husband in the army.”¹² Women warriors’ patriotism was one reason why their unconventional behaviour outside the private sphere has been accepted.

The ‘*nü xia*’ complex and “Hua Mulan syndrome” are both regarded as virtues in the patriarchal order, and these revealed that traditional women warriors had to fight for everyone except themselves. Because of the restrictions of the patriarchal and hierarchical social system, however, they could not enjoy the autonomy that has been promoted by modern feminism. Julia Kristeva argues:

¹¹ Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Women Warriors: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1st ed. 1976; reprint, New York: Alfred, A. Knopf, 1989), 19. Citations refer to the 1989 edition.

¹² Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Works of Dai Jinhua*, trans and ed. Jing Wang and Tani E. Barrows (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 105.

I know too well that the regimes of the East knew how to use the love of the daughter for the father to turn the passions of young girls into the most reliable support of a policy which accorded them some advantages in exchange for their blind consent. The game of love for the father has two limits: *aphasia* and *prison*.¹³

It is worthy of noting that various cinematic reconstructions of women warriors based on the traditional female knights and the Mulan legend maintained their popularity in the 1980s in all three regions (Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan). However, influenced by the women's movements in the West, women's voices began to be heard even in these three regions, and there were calls to release women from the patriarchal "prison". Therefore, the '*nü xia*' complex and "Hua Mulan syndrome" assumed new meanings. As the film industries in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan gradually joined the global market, more Western ideas became incorporated in depictions of the women warriors, modifying both the '*nü xia*' complex and the "Hua Mulan syndrome."

1.2.3 Goddess, Witch and Fox Spirit

Another factor in Chinese society which could not be neglected in depictions of women warriors is the influence of Taoism and Buddhism. Although Confucianism has remained a dominant ideology in Chinese culture, Taoism and Buddhism were also worshipped. Taoism, which was formed within China and Buddhism, which originated in India, retained many images of goddesses that are important elements in Chinese culture. For example, Taoist legend states that human beings were created by the goddess Nüwa (女娲) who mended the sky with coloured stones, and that the

¹³ Kristeva, 181 (my italics).

Kingdom of Heaven was ruled by the Jade Emperor and his wife, the Queen-Mother of the West. In Buddhism, the bodhisattva Guanyin (观音) is the philanthropic deity who saves those who suffer in their lives. These legendary goddesses were prototypes for many women warriors in literature and film.

In addition, supernatural beings, either evil or good in various folk mythologies, which were considered to exist outside the human realm and therefore outside Confucian control, also influenced the portrayal of women warriors. There are numerous stories and folk tales of animal spirits taking female forms either to return a favour or to take revenge.¹⁴ From the first warrior queen recorded in Chinese history—Fu Hao (妇好) of the Shang dynasty—to the many female leaders of peasant rebellions throughout Chinese history they were often perceived as witches who possessed magical powers.

As in most societies, the existence in China of the goddesses, witches and other forms of supernatural women warriors is closely connected with the agrarian economy and peasant customs. In the agrarian society, the land's fertility was the source of all life and according to Simone de Beauvoir nature seemed to men "like a mother: the land is woman and in woman abide the same dark powers as in the earth."¹⁵ In ancient times, as men felt their powerlessness to control birth and death, nature was worshipped as a life-giver and feared as a life-taker. Therefore, the supernatural woman also has two opposite images, as de Beauvoir states, "She is the queen of heaven, a dove her symbol; she is also the empress of hell, whence she crawls forth,

¹⁴ *Strange Stories of Liao Zhai (Liao Zhai zhi yi)* by Pu Songling (1640-1715) in the Qing dynasty is the most influential book depicting stories about women warriors in the supernatural world.

¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (published by Jonathan Cape, 1953; Reprint, London: Everyman's library, 1993), 72.

symbolized in a serpent.”¹⁶ This was also the case in China. Thus the depiction of women warriors often has both positive/goddess and negative/witch images.

Since these positive-negative images were common to most societies, some Chinese directors aimed for the global market by exploiting this in their films and created women warriors in the likenesses of goddesses or witches. As the world moves to one global community, directors in many countries are choosing to depict women as goddesses or witches who possess magical powers when they want to be successful in a global market. Goddesses and witches are universal cultural images, although they have different names. De Beauvoir states, “She is called Ishtar in Babylonia, Astarte among Semitic peoples, and Gæa Rhea, or Cybele by the Greeks. In Egypt we come upon her under the form of Isis.”¹⁷ As filmmakers in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan endeavour to attract a global audience, portraying women with supernatural powers has become one tactic. An example is the female vampire-slayers in *The Twins Effects* (Hong Kong in 2003), which will be examined in Chapter 3.

1.3 A Brief History of Women Warriors in Chinese Cinemas

From the 1920s to the present time, depictions of women warriors in Chinese cinemas have shared a common basis, as discussed above. However, various historical and social phenomena at different stages of cinematic development also helped to modify their images. In order to examine characteristics of the representations of women warriors in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan since the 1980s, a brief survey of their representations before the 1980s is necessary to identify the thematic continuity, as well as the discontinuity and changes.

¹⁶ De Beauvoir, 74.

¹⁷ Ibid.

1920s

After the first Chinese film was produced in 1905¹⁸, the Shanghai-based Chinese film industry took over a decade to mature. The latter 1920s saw the first peak of the women warrior genre in Chinese film history. The chivalric heroine Li Feifei in the first martial arts film which was also the first film about a woman warrior— *The Woman Knight Li Feifei* (女侠李飞飞, dir. Shao Zuiweng 邵醉翁, 1925, Tianyi Film Studio¹⁹) became the classic model of women warriors in Chinese cinema history. The representations of Li Feifei and other women warriors fascinated the audiences, and the film industry exploited this genre to the extreme. They created twelve sequels to *Lady Adventuress on a Wild River*, while *Heroic Daughters and Sons* (儿女英雄, dir. Wen Yimin 文逸民) and *Woman Escort* (女镖师, dir. Ren Pengnian) have four and five sequels respectively.

Heroines in those films were marked by two crucial virtues— their benevolence and their filial piety, reflecting the ‘*nü xia*’ complex and “Hua Mulan syndrome”. The 1920s version of *Woman Knight Black Peony* is a good example. Black Peony is a woman warrior trained by a Taoist monk in magic and sword fighting techniques. After mastering these skills, she searches for her father’s murderer and avenges his death. At the same time, she plays the role of a traditional vagrant knight who is a social outlaw but who also protects the weak and the poor by fighting for justice that has not been upheld by the established order.

¹⁸ The film is Opera feature *Ding jun Shan* (dir. Ren Jingfeng).

¹⁹ Tianyi Film Studio was the forefather of Shaw Brothers Studio. It was famous for the prolific production of martial arts films, including the depiction of women warriors, from the earliest stage of its establishment. A fire in 1936 destroyed the Tianyi Studio, but the Shaw brothers re-established it under different names. When the youngest brother Run Run Shaw established the Shaw Brothers Studio in 1956, they continued to produce a great number of martial arts films centred on women warriors.

Film critic Chen Mo identified three major factors to explain the popularity of women warriors in 1920s Chinese cinema.²⁰ First, women warriors have always been a part of Chinese cultural history; second, the gradual acceptance of women in the film industry because of social reforms and ideological changes during the Republic period (1912-1949) was another factor; and the potential monetary profit from depicting images of women warriors was the third factor. The first factor has already been explained, so it is necessary to examine Chen's second point on social reforms of the Republic period (1912-1949). The women's movement in China had developed rapidly as early as 1898 at a time when the Reform Movement (also known as the Hundred Day Reform) aimed to reform the corrupt Qing imperial court into a democratic government.²¹

It was the time of the first wave of Western feminism, and under this influence, the Chinese women's liberation movement was gaining strength. The Public Benevolence Society was established to ensure education for girls, and women's newspapers and magazines were also features of that period. Western missionaries and feminists supported an anti-footbinding campaign to protect women from the physical damage caused by this brutal patriarchal practice.²² British suffragettes telegraphed the Chinese women's suffrage movement to indicate their respect for Chinese women fighting for gender equality within the newly founded Republic of China in 1912.²³ At

²⁰ Chen Mo, *The History of Chinese Martial Arts Films [Zhongguo wuxia dianying shi]* (Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Chubanshe, 2005), 82.

²¹ Lu Meiyi, "The Awakening of Chinese Women and the Women's Movement in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Holding up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present and Future*, eds. Tao Jie, Zheng Bijun and Shirley L. Mow, trans. Amy Russell (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004), 57.

²² According to Zhang Zhen, Wang Hanlun was the first actress who showed her unbound feet on the silver screen in 1922, and she also unbound herself from the family and became one of the 'modern girls' at that time. "An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: the Actress as Vernacular Embodiment in Early Chinese Film Culture," *Camera Obscura* 48, vol.16, no. 3 (2001): 253-254.

²³ Yenlin Ku, "The Changing Status of Women in Taiwan: A conscious and Collective Struggle toward Equality," *Women's Studies International Forum* vol.11, no.3 (1988): 180.

the outset of the film industry female characters were played by males, but from the 1920s, women became accepted as actresses. Thus when women played the leading roles of women warriors in films, it indicated that women's role in Chinese society was also changing.

Chen Mo's third factor was the potential commercial profit from the images of women warriors. 1920s' Shanghai was the most prosperous metropolis in China, and urban culture in Shanghai at the time was influenced by the Western ideology of modernity and industrialisation, while Chinese cultural traditions were becoming exotic consumer goods.²⁴ The women warriors' images were such exotic consumer goods that charmed Shanghai audiences. Thus, the genres of swordplay and costumed fantasy films featuring women warriors were in vogue in the 1920s, and generated large profits for film studios in Shanghai.

Apart from these three factors mentioned by Chen, there are other reasons for the popularity of women warriors in 1920s' films. The 1920s was a chaotic era in Chinese history, following the overthrow of the last imperial dynasty as a result of the 1911 rebellion. Although a new Republic was established, warfare between ambitious warlords did not cease, and the powerlessness of central government led to a failure to protect the normal social life of ordinary people. Warfare was regarded as a masculine pursuit, and masculine power in times of war was often identified as aggressive and destructive. In the meantime, women were assigned opposing images of saviour and pacifier. Like most women warriors who appeared at times of war and turbulence, their popularity in 1920s films was an implicit response to the craving for a messiah among the audiences suffering from warfare between ambitious warlords.

²⁴ According to Chen Mo's *The History of Chinese Martial Arts Films, their crave for Chinese traditions was reflected in the numerous productions of films in ancient settings. According to Chen's counting, martial arts and costumed films made from 1928 to 1931 reached 277. (58)*

1931-1949

From the 1930s the ever intensifying social turmoil of the war of resistance against Japan and civil wars that dragged on until 1949, altered the film depictions of Chinese women warriors. During these periods, the popular martial arts films of the 1920s were banned by the KMT government, the ruling party in China in the 1920s. The KMT government further restricted production of martial arts and costumed fantasies films from the early 1930s. From 1933 onwards, apart from fragmented productions of martial arts films that still presented strong female fighters together with marginalised depictions of their male counterparts, presentations of women warriors almost disappeared from film.

The KMT government's prohibition of martial arts films was motivated by a desire to stabilise its rule. In addition to wars among local warlords, serious natural catastrophes and domestic unrest challenged the rule of the KMT government, especially in the 1930s. Droughts in the west and floods in the east in 1931, together with conflict with the Communist Party, were heavy burdens for the KMT government. It is perhaps understandable that because most of the heroes and heroines in martial arts films were social outlaws practising different rules from the official system, such films were regarded as anti-government and politically subversive. Therefore, the KMT government denounced the martial arts films as a residue from the feudal period that would erode the progressive achievements of Chinese society. Some early film critics supported the government and stated that "the martial arts

films have deteriorated into the roles as the basis of superstitions and vicious discourse.”²⁵

Although images of women warriors of the ancient past were out of favour in film productions controlled by the KMT government, the national crises called for courageous heroes and heroines. The war of resistance against Japan broke out in 1937, forcing cooperation between the ruling party (the KMT) and the Communist Party. It also highlighted patriotic compassion as a major motif in government-produced propaganda films. When the KMT government was forced to retreat from Nanking (also known as Nanjing) to Chongqing, a group of progressive filmmakers cooperated with the government to make films to encourage the people to fight the Japanese invaders. Shen Xiling (沈西苓) directed a well-received film *Sons and Daughters of China* (中华儿女, 1939) praising the heroism of everyone—the young and the old, women and men. Women soldiers involved in real battles rather than the mythical battles of the past, became the central images of women warriors in films in this wartorn period.

Shanghai cinema, on the other hand, continued to produce martial arts and costumed fantasy films, irrespective of the KMT government’s prohibition because from 1937 to 1941 it was in a unique position. When the Chinese troops withdrew from Shanghai in November 1937 because of the Japanese invasion, Shanghai cinema was still located in the European concessions of Shanghai. Because the European countries still retained a neutral stance in the war between Japan and China prior to Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbour, Japan occupied the surrounding regions of Shanghai without taking the European concessions. Thus, Shanghai became an “orphan

²⁵ The original quotation is in Chinese. It was first cited by Junli Zheng, “A Simple History of Chinese Modern Films,” published by *liangyou tushu yingshua gongsi* in 1936. This current quotation is from Chen Mo’s *History of Chinese Martial Arts Films*, 49.

island”²⁶ from 1937 to 1941, trapped in the fragile balance between European powers and Japan.

The Shanghai film industry was also trapped in this orphan island, and because of their fragile position even progressive filmmakers could only reproduce the ancient tales without *explicit* reference to the current circumstances. They therefore expressed their patriotism through characters in ancient tales. For example, the film *Liang Hongyu* (梁红玉, dir. Yue Feng 岳枫, 1940) depicts a historical figure, Liang Hongyu, who follows her general husband in the campaign against the invading kingdom during the Southern Song Dynasty. The story of Mulan was still very popular and she was depicted not only as a filial daughter, but also a patriotic general who fought a foreign invader, making implicit reference to 1930s China.

Hong Kong, a British colony at that time,²⁷ became the centre of martial arts films after the KMT government prohibited such films.²⁸ One reason is that people from the film industry took refuge in Hong Kong to escape from the war of resistance against Japan and the civil war. However, martial arts films produced in Hong Kong during the 1930s and 1940s had themes and plots which imitated those from the old Shanghai cinema of the 1920s. Women warriors were certainly a popular topic in those replicated films. *Lady Adventuress on a Wild River* (dir. Yang Gongliang 杨工良, 1940) and *Woman Knight Red Butterfly* (女侠红蝴蝶, dir. Hong Zhonghao 洪仲豪, 1939) were such two remakes of 1920s Shanghai cinema.

²⁶ Jay Leyda, *Dianying: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), 140.

²⁷ The history of Hong Kong will be analysed further in Chapter 3.

²⁸ In 1933, the first Cantonese talking picture *White Golden Dragon* (*Bai jin long*, dir. Tang Xiaodan), produced by the Tianyi Studio, was a huge success, encouraging some filmmakers to produce Cantonese-speaking films for the Hong Kong audience. Although the KMT government banned martial arts films from the early 1930s and Cantonese movies from 1936, the KMT influence in Hong Kong was much weaker because Hong Kong was ruled by the British government. Hong Kong as a community distinguished from China ruled by the KMT was evolving because of differences in language and governance.

1950s-1970s

Chinese filmmakers continued to base their portrayals of women warriors on early cinematic representations as well as traditional resources. However, differences between the films made in British-governed Hong Kong, Communist-ruled Mainland China, and KMT-led Taiwan became increasingly apparent.

Hong Kong

From the 1950s, new themes depicting rebellion among women in urban life became popular in Hong Kong. As discussed earlier, in traditional martial arts films, the essential virtues of the women warriors were altruism, patriotism and filial piety. From the 1950s however, women warriors depicted in Hong Kong films became less patriotic, while women's desire for free love became an important theme, although their pursuit of free love was in conflict with filial piety and patriotism. For example, director Xu Zenghong (徐增宏) created the first coloured Shaw Brothers swordplay film *The Temple of the Red Lotus* (江湖奇侠, 1965), portraying a female warrior Lianzhu (联珠) who rebels against her father and her clan in order to be with her lover. *Teddy Girls* (飞女正传, dir. Lung Kong 龙刚, 1969) portraying a juvenile girl delinquent who resorts to violent revenge against her shabby boyfriend, was a popular youth movie, representing a break from the traditional servility.

The unenthusiastic attitude toward patriotism exemplified by *The Temple of the Red Lotus* and *Teddy Girls* reflected the close bond developing between the Hong Kong film industry and that of Taiwan. From the 1950s, Hong Kong cinema developed around the confrontations of Left-wing and Right-wing ideologies.

However, left-wing films “criticizing class oppression, lampooning financial capital, telling stories of class and *feminist* struggle”²⁹ were less popular with the audiences, whereas Right-wing groups favouring political ties with the KMT government, which was then the ruling party in Taiwan, were gaining more support. The KMT government that had been defeated by the Communists and retreated to Taiwan, boycotted left-wing films made in Hong Kong. Thus, export-oriented Hong Kong filmmakers from the 1950s to 1970s became reluctant to express political sentiments in their films. Economic pressure forced the Hong Kong film industry to move “towards accommodating market conditions rather than ideological and patriotic imperatives.”³⁰

Many left-wing films, including those depicting feminist themes were unpopular in Hong Kong, not only because the Taiwan market favoured right-wing films, but also because of the social situation in Hong Kong. For example, it was not until 1971 that the Marriage Reform and related ordinances were passed, “establishing *monogamy* as the only legal form of marriage and recognizing a woman’s right to inheritance.”³¹ Therefore, films depicting women’s rights were less popular with the Hong Kong audience.

Gradually, however, images of rebellious young heroines struggling for personal liberation began to win audiences’ sympathy. Film critic Kar Law used *The Temple of the Red Lotus* as a case study to show how a complicated combination of conservatism and liberal ideas in Hong Kong is expressed in this film. He argues that

²⁹ Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover, *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* (London & New York: Verso, 1999), 21 (my italics).

³⁰ Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 26.

³¹ Veronica Pearson, “The Past is Another Country: Hong Kong Women in Transition,” in *The Future of Hong Kong*, Special editor: Max J. Skidmore, the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science vol. 547, (London: Sage Periodical Press: 1996), 93 (my italics).

the female protagonist Lianzhu is “torn between her father and lover.”³² According to Law, Lianzhu is an ambivalent figure because she rebels against her father in favour of her husband, although “Lianzhu still functions within a Confucian hierarchical order.”³³ In spite of this conservative compromise to a patriarchal order, there is a significant change in the case of Lianzhu, because she defies her father in order to realise her dream of personal happiness, whereas the traditional formula of a girl’s rebelling against the father was usually motivated by her choice to fulfil her duty to her country.³⁴

Women warriors portrayed in the martial arts film genre began to reflect women’s desire for personal freedom in real life. New films portraying urban youth culture also showed sympathy to women, as in *Teddy Girls*. The urban culture which developed in Hong Kong as a result of the urbanisation which began in the 1950s was more sympathetic toward women.

Economically speaking, the 1950s was an epoch-making decade in Hong Kong history. “It was not only the golden age of industrial growth of the city but also of modernization, urbanization, and commercialization.”³⁵ The rapid development of the

³² Kar Law, “The Origin and Development of Shaw’s Colour Wuxia Country”, in *The Shaw Screen: a Preliminary Study*, ed. Ain-Ling Wong (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archives, 2003), 132, quoted in Catherine Gomes, “Crouching Women, Hidden Genre: an Investigation into Western Film Criticism’s Reading of Feminism in Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*”, http://www.limina.arts.uwa.edu.au/current_volume?f=79246, 50 (accessed 5 July 2006).

³³ Catherine Gomes, “Crouching Women, Hidden Genre,” 51

³⁴ The Chinese belief that the interest of the “NATION” was higher than family bonding is best illustrated by the legend of Fan Lihua, a woman general in the folk legend of the Xue Family in the Tang Dynasty. Lihua’s father is a general in a small country to the West of China in the Tang Dynasty, guarding a strategic pass when his country attacks the Tang border, but Lihua leaves home after her father forces her to marry an unworthy man. She returns home after she receiving training in martial arts from a Taoist nun who prophesises her marriage with a young general, Xue Dingshan on the opposing side to her father. However, according to Chinese philosophy, the Tang emperor was sanctified by the mandate of heaven and he represented the orthodoxy of heaven. Lihua’s rebellion against her father and her marriage are all believed to be her destiny arranged by the mandate of heaven.

³⁵ Natalia Chan Siu Hung, “Rewriting History: Hong Kong Nostalgia Cinema and Its Social Practice,” in *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*, eds. Poshek Fu and David Desser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 254.

Hong Kong economy was propelled by the expansion of manufacturing and service industries, both of which contributed to a rapid increase in demand for female workers. With women's increased economic power came an increase in their visibility within popular culture. Fashion, rock music, the hippy movement, and other forms of cultural phenomena worshipping personal liberation and free will, streamed into Hong Kong from the West, altering popular culture, especially the youth culture in Hong Kong. Reflecting such social changes, the Hong Kong film industry began to produce a new genre of youth film which included new images of women warriors.

The paradox of Hong Kong was that it could accommodate both modern and old values at the same time. Abbas argues that rapid industrialisation impelled Hong Kong to become a postmodern metropolis where “‘old’ and ‘new’ are easily contemporaneous with each other, and ‘continuities’ and ‘discontinuities’ can exist side by side,”³⁶ and “the local and the global are [also] becoming more and more intimately imbricated with each other.”³⁷ When negotiations between Mainland China and the British government began in the early 1980s about Hong Kong's fate after 1997, Hong Kong faced the fate of returning to Mainland China. The Hong Kong culture that celebrated diversities and hybridity would come into conflict with Mainland China's collectivism. Hong Kong women in turn, would be involved in these conflicts in realising their idealism and independence. These political changes affecting the portrayals of women warriors in Hong Kong films will be discussed in Chapter 3.

³⁶ Abbas, 75.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

Mainland China

When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the West attempted to isolate Mainland China by refusing to recognise the Communist government and terminating connections with it. Feeling isolated, Mainland China attempted to enhance national solidarity by promoting collectivism as the fundamental social norm. In addition, to show that the Communist government had made progressive reforms, it claimed to have liberated Chinese women by a new marriage law in 1950 which pledged to protect the equal rights of women in every aspect of life. Chairman Mao's (毛泽东) observation that "times have changed, and today men and women are equal. Whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can too"³⁸ was the motto of a top-down empowerment of women. Women who served their country as soldiers continued to be called upon to play other unconventional roles, formerly reserved for men. According to feminist scholar Tao Jie,

...the government encouraged women to train as tractor drivers, airline pilots, electricians, and engineers, trades that used to be for men only.... Because of such government policies and representations in the public sphere, Chinese women seldom suspected that there was any gender discrimination in their society.³⁹

From the 1950s, as Mainland China's state-owned film industry rapidly became an important mechanism of the highly planned economy and propaganda of socialist ideology, they promoted masculinised 'iron girl' role models. One director, Ling Zifeng (凌子风), based a film on the true story of eight women soldiers who chose to

³⁸ Cited by Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 24.

³⁹ Tao Jie, Introduction to *Holding up Half the Sky* (see note 21 in this chapter), xxvi-xxvii.

drown themselves rather than surrender to the Japanese. This film *Daughters of China* (中华女儿, 1949) reconstructed their female heroism. Another director, Feng Bailu (冯白鲁), created *Liu Hulan* (刘胡兰) in 1951, also based on the true story of a fifteen year old civil war heroine who faced death courageously without betraying her comrades.

These productions based on true stories seemed to appeal to both filmmakers and audiences, especially after the Communists' victory over the KMT, because revolutionary realism was the central theme after the civil war, and 'iron girls' who took up arms to protect China were typical 'official heroines'. This promotion of genderless 'official heroines' reflected the real situation of Chinese women in times of national crises. Chinese women had been in the battle front for almost a century, from the mid-1800s. Various rebellions, campaigns between warlords, battles and wars against imperial forces, as well as against each other, dragged on until the 1950s. Feminist critic Dai Jinhua comments:

The road from slave to warrior was the only one available to women; they would share equality and equal status with men not as women but as warriors....the only female figure whose gender identity remained secure and 'legitimate' was the endlessly devoted and persevering mother—the mythical Earth Mother, mother of the male soldiers, mother to the 'people, nation, and land.'⁴⁰

According to Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, these women as genderless warriors were based on the idea that "a woman's worth should be measured by a

⁴⁰ Dai, 111-114.

man's standard."⁴¹ Film critic Chris Berry noted further that the 'iron girl' tradition, imposed the women's liberation by the Communist Party's autocratic power in Mainland China, ignored the individual needs of women.

These women's liberation discourses were and are primarily concerned with women as social beings whose ability to contribute to the society and the project of socialist construction must be maximised, rather than as individuals, whose individual rights must be protected against incursions by other individuals and whose individual empowerment must be developed.⁴²

The ignorance of and denial of individual rights were taken to extremes during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when the so-called Gang of Four proclaimed their absolute worship of Mao and controlled political discourse. However, Mao's statement about women, as mentioned earlier, re-affirmed the male value system as the standard and encouraged women to behave like men. Louise Edwards notes, at the height of Mao worship in "the early 1970s women were dressed in shapeless, drab Mao-suits and wore no cosmetics—any deviation from Communist androgyny was politically dangerous and morally reprehensible."⁴³ Thus, Communist China endeavoured to promote a unisex culture and deny gender identity as well as individual identity to women.

History has proved that such ignorance of individual rights could not consolidate the Communist Party's autocratic power, but would rather damage the whole country

⁴¹ Honig and Hershtatter, *Personal Voices*, 24.

⁴² Chris Berry, "Representing Chinese Women: Researching Women in the Chinese Cinema," in *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, eds. Antonia Finnane and Anne McLaren (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), 201.

⁴³ Louise Edwards, "Women in the People's Republic of China: New Challenges to the Grand Gender Narrative," in *Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity and Globalization*, eds. Louise Edwards and Mina Roces (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 2000), 81.

politically, culturally and economically, as seen in the economic and cultural poverty during the ten chaotic years of the Cultural Revolution. Intellectuals, including talented filmmakers, were sent to the countryside to be farmers. Film production almost ground to a standstill and the only widespread film genre consisted of ‘model films’ (样板戏) which had to follow a monotonous formula set by the government. Zhou Xing calls this decade of the Cultural Revolution a “disaster era of Chinese film history.”⁴⁴

However, Mainland China re-adjusted its policy from the late 1970s, following the Cultural Revolution. The Communist government introduced a series of reforms, and more importantly, reconnected with the outside world through open-door policies, and a comparatively liberal social context allowing an infiltration of Western popular culture into Mainland China. As a result, the genderless ‘official heroines’ were reconstructed from the 1980s and Western influence became an issue of concern. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Taiwan

Taiwan developed neither a profit-oriented film industry like Hong Kong nor a monotonous official film industry like Mainland China from the 1950s to the 1970s. The origins of the Taiwan film industry were different from the commercially orientated Hong Kong cinema. Chiao Hsiung-Ping notes:

[The] roots of the Taiwanese feature film industry lie in the documentarists and newsreel film-makers who worked with the KMT Nationalist

⁴⁴ Zhou Xing, *Art History of Chinese Film* [Zhongguo dianying yishu shi] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), 206.

government in Chungking (Chongqing) during the Second World War and accompanied the KMT to Taiwan.⁴⁵

Films produced by these state-owned studios were mainly propaganda and education documentaries.

The Taiwan government used the film industry to counter the drastic changes and socialist movements of Mainland China. When the Cultural Revolution in Mainland China flared in 1966, Taiwan president Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) launched a Cultural Renaissance. Warren Tozer notes, “The Renaissance embraces the neo-traditionalist position, rejecting liberal democratic thought, Marxism and wholesale westernization, while defending Confucianism and Chinese civilization.”⁴⁶ Therefore, while genderless, tough, ‘iron girls’ with no regard for personal beauty or romance were promoted as official heroines in Mainland China, Taiwan advocated and glorified women’s femininity and their devotion to men.

The dominant theme of Taiwan films in the years between 1950 and the late 1970s was unconsummated young love. Female roles were essential in these productions in which women lament the loss of their lovers or husbands, or shed tears when they are prohibited from being with the men they love. Those female images were popular because of their suffering. Because tears were the most important ingredients of those films, they were given the name “Taiwanese weepies.”⁴⁷

These ‘weepie’ films required women “to play supportive and subservient roles both at home and in society, and thus a maternal image of women has been

⁴⁵ Chiao Hsiung-Ping, “The Distinct Taiwanese and Hong Kong Cinemas,” in *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, ed. Chris Berry (London: BFI Publishing, 1991), 155

⁴⁶ Warren Tozer, “Taiwan’s ‘Cultural Renaissance’: a Preliminary View,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 43. (Jul-Sep, 1970): 96.

⁴⁷ Chiao, 156.

propagated and glorified,” because the KMT “determined to preserve the patriarchal and Confucian tradition in a tightly controlled society.”⁴⁸ So prevalent were these conservative ideals that when the women’s movement started in Taiwan in the 1970s, it had to compromise by “praising the stereotypically ‘feminine’ virtues such as being tender, sweet, graceful, and loving.”⁴⁹

Under such circumstances, the portrayal of women warriors was not popular among Taiwan filmmakers, but such productions still emanated from the Taiwan market because of Taiwan’s cooperation with Hong Kong, where films about women warriors were a popular genre. After 1949, many filmmakers moved back and forth between Taiwan and Hong Kong, and Taiwan cinema shared the resources (including monetary investment), filmmaking talents and markets with Hong Kong, especially in the production of Mandarin language films. When the genre of martial arts films resembling 1920s Shanghai films was revived in Hong Kong, Taiwan immediately became a potential market. In addition, films produced by the state-owned film industry in Taiwan did not have popular appeal and flopped at the box office during the early 1950s. Chiao Hsiung-Ping remarks, “To combat this phenomenon, the Taiwanese studios used the American funds made available to them in 1955 to work with the Hong Kong industry.”⁵⁰

A second reason for government acceptance of martial arts films and the depiction of women warriors was that these films often depicted traditional values. The Taiwan Cultural Bureau encouraged productions about traditional virtues rather than censor against them. By so doing, Taiwan tried to distinguish itself from Mainland China and

⁴⁸ Yen-lin Ku, “Feminist Movement in Taiwan, 1972-87,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 21, (1989): 13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁰ Chiao, 155.

promote itself as the authentic representative of China and its culture. While the martial arts film genre was banned in Mainland China from the 1950s to the 1970s, the Taiwan government encouraged it in Taiwan as a way of displaying the ancient Chinese culture flourishing there. This was interestingly the opposite of the KMT government's 1930's policy to ban such productions in Mainland China before it retreated to Taiwan.

Martial arts films made corroboratively by Hong Kong and Taiwan filmmakers from the 1950s to the 1970s made two important contributions to the presentations of women warriors. One is that many films about women warriors in the 1990s and 2000s were remakes of the 1950s to 1970s films, albeit with more liberal attitudes toward women. An outstanding example is King Hu (胡金銓)'s *Dragon Gate Inn* (龍門客棧, 1967), which was remade and released in 1992 as *Dragon Inn* (dir. Raymond Lee), which will be examined in detail in Chapter 3. The other contribution is the international fame and attention it brought to the depiction of women warriors when King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* (俠女, 1971)⁵¹ won a Cannes award in 1975.

However, most of those films were about the mythical past, and their images seemed to be less significant in the local social context in Taiwan. Unlike Hong Kong where there was a new genre of youth films about urban culture reflecting the reality of the 1950s to 1970s Hong Kong, or Mainland China where the 'iron girl' were promoted in film as role models for women, there was only a small portion of the films produced in Taiwan after the 1970s portraying women warriors. Even in the 1980s when the martial law was in force and filmmaking was still under government surveillance, depictions of women warriors by local filmmakers were limited to the

⁵¹ The Chinese title means "a chivalric woman", which can reveal the gender significance better than the English translation.

embodiment of nationalism and patriotism. After the lifting of the martial law, representations of women warriors would be quickly globalised.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the image basis of the representations of women warriors in Chinese history. No matter how diverse their personalities and social status, there were some common themes in the depictions of women warriors in the early films. The “Hua Mulan syndrome” conceptualised by Stephen Teo and the ‘*nü xia*’ complex were two important criteria for measuring the unconventional actions of the women warriors. They were accepted because they took unconventional actions to ultimately uphold the central Confucian ideal of ‘*ren*’.

However, towards the end of the 1970s, the regional characteristics of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan became apparent. Hong Kong filmmakers created hybrid images of women warriors, and began to focus on their personal liberation. Mainland China had created genderless and collective women warriors rooted in its Socialist traditions, refusing to acknowledge the existence of gender issues and restricting outside influence. The Taiwan authority cherished the Confucian traditions in order to promote itself as the true heir of Chinese civilisation. Hence, only a limited number of films presented women warriors within Taiwan cinema and such images were conservative in the 1970s, while ‘women’s tears’ films were popular.

From the end of the 1970s, Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan cinemas all had more contact with the wider world, especially Hollywood. As a result, Western themes began to appear, altering the traditional themes concerning women warriors in Chinese language films. At the same time, Chinese films depicting women warriors began to receive recognition in the West, and some such Chinese films won

international awards. Therefore, the understanding of Western influence is essential in understanding changes in the representations of women warriors in the films of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan. The next chapter discusses the acceptance of the women warrior in the West and the process of Chinese women warriors being accepted into Hollywood.

2. Western Influence

We in the West are the heirs of a tradition that assumes an affinity between women and peace, between men and war.... Thus, in time of war, real men and women—locked in a dense symbiosis, perceived as beings who have complementary needs and exemplify gender-specific virtues—take on, in cultural memory and narrative, the personas of Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls.

----*Jean Bethke Elshtain, Women and War, 4*

Chapter 1 has shown that although the ‘woman warrior’ phenomenon has a long history in Chinese cinemas, from the late 1970s the new sociopolitical context, especially the growing cultural communication between different Chinese communities and their increasingly frequent contact with Western culture, also influenced the representations of women warriors in Chinese films. As Western film industries, especially Hollywood, are widely recognised as leaders in the formation of global cinema, when filmmakers in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan exert themselves to be successful in the globalised film market, they often incorporate Hollywood elements into their projects, including their characterisations of women warriors. Therefore, in order to draw a comprehensive picture of the portrayals of women warriors in Chinese language films since 1980, it is necessary to first examine the changes in the depiction of women warriors in film and television in the West and their acceptance of Chinese women warriors.

2.1 Western Women Warriors

2.1.1 Western Feminism

Both in the West and in China women as warriors were marginalised figures in history. The traditional Western ideology¹ seemed to show a clear division between the masculine/ war and feminine/ peace. According to Jean Bethke Elshtain, men have assumed the role of the just warriors, while women as the ‘other’ are regarded as the “beautiful souls,” and she argues that if women take up arms as men do, they are demonised:

The woman who acts violently (in ‘malelike’ fashion)—for example, when Clytemnestra murders her husband, Agamemnon—the response (of the chorus in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*) is horror. Male revenge and killing is public, sanctioned, has a larger purpose. Female killing is disorderly conduct, private revenge spilling beyond the bounds of the household, ... to threaten the bases of social order.²

The role-playing of men as “just warriors” and women as “beautiful souls” was maintained by traditional warfare where men marched to the battlefields in order to protect the women and children at home. However, two World Wars have expanded the battlefields to indefensible frontiers. The distinction between the home front and the war zone became blurred and women could not be protected “in the old sense of

¹ In Western ideology, the contradiction of ‘one’ and ‘other’ seems to be an important feature. The concept of “One” and “Other” emphasises the relationship as one between an entity and everything else outside. Western scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir and Jacques Lacan have elaborated the concepts of “One” and “Other” in their influential works. However, in Chinese philosophy, the concepts of ‘Yin’ and ‘Yang’ are more important. “Yin” and “Yang” refer to two elements that form one single entity. Eclecticism is the central characteristic of Chinese culture.

² Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 50.

being ‘immune’ from possible destruction.”³ The dichotomy of man as protector, woman as victim, collapsed and women had to be armed to defend themselves.

It is also important to note that since the First World War, women have been recruited into the army. In Britain, women were first in the Army’s Auxiliary Corps (AAC), but as in the United States and many other countries their military tasks have gradually expanded to more dangerous arenas. For example, on 6 April 1992, the Women’s Royal Army Corps in Britain was disbanded and all the women soldiers were dispersed into mixed-sex units. “In this way many of the barriers that prevented male and female soldiers from doing the same jobs and being treated as equals were swept away overnight.”⁴ Women now shared responsibilities in areas which had been limited to men in the past, including the role of active protector and fighter.

Theoretically speaking, the second wave women’s movement and the movements that followed have criticised the objectification of women’s bodies as passive and erotic, while at the same time emphasising the importance of women gaining physical power. This second wave also emphasised that “the personal is political”, and was concerned about women’s acceptance of their ornamental roles. They organised a demonstration against the Miss America Beauty Contest in 1968, which “directly challenged the ethos of a beauty industry exemplified by an event where women were ‘rewarded’ and valued purely on the basis of their looks.”⁵

Naomi Wolf focuses on the topic of the exploitation of the female body in her influential work *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*,

³ Ibid., 244.

⁴ George and Anne Forty, *Women War Heroines* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1997), 160-161

⁵ Imelda Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to ‘Post-Feminism’* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 5.

stating that beauty “is a currency system like the gold standard, like any economy.”⁶

According to her, women’s physical appearance has been standardised and hierarchicalised by the particular beauty values which devalue and negate the physical strength of real women. She also notes that society has been imposing a double standard on women:

They grew up as women and fought their way into the masculine work force. They learned to affirm the values of women and master the work of men...Gender roles, for this generation of women, did not harmonize so much as double: Young women today are expected to act like ‘real men’ and look like ‘real women.’⁷

In 1993, two years after the publication of *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf wrote *Fire with Fire: the New Female Power and How it Will Change the 21st Century*, in which she argues that women must dismiss what she called “victim feminism” where “women are supposedly encouraged to see themselves rendered passive by oppression within a second wave formulation.”⁸ Wolf was an influential figure who not only inherited the second wave doctrines but also inspired the so-called “third wave feminism”⁹ in the 1990s. Although third wave feminism was not a cohesive or well-organised campaign,

⁶ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women* (London: Vintage Books, 1991), 12.

⁷ Wolf, *Beauty Myth*, 211.

⁸ Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 170.

⁹ Third wave feminism is a controversial concept and has numerous definitions. Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan recorded a common one in their book *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, “Third wave feminism...is best described in the most general terms as the feminism of a younger generation of women who acknowledge the legacy of second wave feminism, but also identify what they see as its limitations.” (169.) The latter part of the 1990s was regarded as the burgeoning period of the third wave because a large number of theoretical works of the third wave were produced in this decade. Examples are Barbara Findlen’s *Listen up: Voice from the Next Feminist Generation* (Seattle: Seal, 1995), Rebecca Walker’s *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Force of Feminism* (New York: Anchor, 1995), Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake’s *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminist* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1997).

it was marked by some common doctrines. One of these is “a refusal to accept victim status,”¹⁰ as Wolf argues, and “promotes physical action over theorizing.”¹¹ So-called “Sports feminism,”¹² which is one of the sub-branches of the third wave, seems to be influenced by Wolf and promotes women’s physical power, and this “Sports feminism” is important to this thesis because female athletes who show physical splendour are often referred to as women warriors.¹³ This branch of feminism argues that men’s domination in sport and the exclusion of women has been used to justify the view that women are biologically weaker than males.¹⁴ Therefore, women who excel at sport can help other women to achieve “physical confidence and a sense of enjoyment and fulfilment”¹⁵ and fight against the discrimination of women that was based on their perceived physical weakness. Feminist scholar Debra L. Gimlin states that since society equates one’s body with identity, “[e]fforts to transform the body become efforts to transform identity and to alter the relationship between body and self.”¹⁶ She therefore argues that women’s self-will in building a strong body and their participation in sport not only “provides confidence and empowerment,” but is also an efficient way to resist the beauty myth.¹⁷

¹⁰ Cristina Lucia Stasia, “‘Wham! Bam! Thank You Ma’am!’: the New Public/Private Female Action Hero,” in *Third Wave Feminism: a Critical Exploration*, eds. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford (New York: Plagrave Macmillan, 2004), 182.

¹¹ Kimberley Roberts, “Pleasure and Problems of the ‘Angry Girl’,” in *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice: Cinema of Girlhood*, eds. Frances K. Gateward and Murray Pomerance (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 230.

¹² Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women’s Sports* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 26-28

¹³ A typical example is a website attributed to Canadian women athletes with the address:
<http://www.womenwarriors.ca>

¹⁴ Hargreaves, 26-28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁶ Debra L. Gimlin, *Body Work: Beauty and Self-image in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 72.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 51 and 72.

Another important development from third wave feminism is girl power feminism which encourages women to gain physical power and use it if necessary. Susan Hopkins, an advocate of girl power feminism, asserts:

The current generation of girls and young women won't accept submissive, weak and dependent role models. Their heroes are active and aggressive in pursuit of their own goals....[T]he new girl hero doesn't need a man to define her—she has staked her own claim to the privileges of both femininity and masculinity. She is not the overly emotional victimised heroine—she does her own hunting, fighting and monster-slaying.¹⁸

Clearly, women's physical strength is now widely celebrated as empowering women and has become an important symbol of women's identity.

It is worth noting that the concern with women's physical power by the second and third wave women's movements seems to have been influenced by de Beauvoir. She states in *The Second Sex* that “[t]his lack of physical power leads to a more general timidity”¹⁹ in women,

...but if she could assert herself through her body and face the world in some other fashion, this deficiency would be easily compensated for. Let her swim, climb mountain peaks, pilot on airplane, battle against the elements, takes risks, go out for adventure, and she will not feel before the world that timidity which I have referred to.²⁰

¹⁸ Hopkins, 3.

¹⁹ De Beauvoir, 348.

²⁰ Ibid., 350.

The regaining of physical strength in such activities restores the confidence women need to establish a strong identity free from their attachment to men.²¹ However, physical power has both positive and negative sides: the positive side is employed in sport and some professions that require physical strength, while the negative side is violence; the latter might appeal to some women. According to de Beauvoir, physical activities like sport “which means specialization and obedience to artificial rules, is by no means the equivalent of a free and habitual resort to force”.²² Instead, they favour violence, because they see violence as a male privilege, as de Beauvoir notes, “the male has recourse to his fists, to exposure of himself to blows: he does not let himself be transcended by others, he is himself at the heart of his subjectivity.”²³ Therefore, some women believe that if women want equality, violence should be their recourse as well. This could explain why some (men and women) choose violence to destroy the rules in order to be absolutely free, although such a choice could be extremely destructive. The understanding of both the positive and negative aspects of physical power is an important guideline for this thesis, as it will not only deal with films that depict women warriors who use their physical strength positively according to the “obedience to artificial rules” as de Beauvoir argues, but will also discuss women’s violence and the consequences of such acts.

2.1.2 The Portrayal of Women Warriors in the West

Since filmmakers in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan gradually incorporated Hollywood elements in their depictions of women warriors, as stated in

²¹ Ibid., 348.

²² Ibid., 347.

²³ Ibid., 348.

Chapter 1, it is necessary to examine how some women warriors are depicted in Hollywood films.

In response to the development of the second wave women's movement, various writers, television producers and filmmakers in the West began presenting women warriors possessing physical splendour and muscular strength. For example, the 1970s television series *Wonder Woman* (dir. Barry Crane, et al., 1976-1979) and *Charlie's Angels* (dir. Bill Bixby, et al., 1976 to 1981) depicted female characters who rescue victims and uphold justice by wielding weapons and using their physical power. These characters were extremely popular, not only among feminists, but also with the general public.

Since television was competing with cinema and programmes like *Wonder Woman* and *Charlie's Angels* were attracting viewers, Hollywood began to take women warriors more seriously and the 1980s was a transitional decade during which films depicting women warriors were raised from the marginal and 'trash cinema' genres to become mainstream Hollywood films. According to Mary Beltrán, "[t]he 1980s brought physically assertive and generally Anglo female characters into the bigger budget and thus more mainstream 'muscular cinema' of the decade."²⁴ Representative actresses are Brigitte Nielson who acted in *Red Sonja* (dir. Richard Fleischer, 1985), and Sigourney Weaver who played the lead in *Aliens* (dir. James Cameron, 1986).

After the 1980s, presentations of women warriors became more diverse than ever. For example in *Terminator* (dir. James Cameron, 1984), the girl played by Linda Hamilton is simply destined to become the mother of a future leader who will fight against the machines. However, in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (dir. James

²⁴ Mary Beltrán, "Más Macha: the New Latina Action Hero," in *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (New York: Routledge, 2004), 189.

Cameron, 1991), she is transformed into a fearless woman warrior, implying that even a girl raised to assume the traditional passive female role can become a fighter if circumstances dictate. Other aspects also began to be portrayed more positively. For example, it was thought that women were jealous of one another and were once reluctant to work together, but since the 1970s many women warriors have been portrayed working together in groups. A typical example is the television series *Charlie's Angels* which portrays three women working as a harmonious team. In 2000, a feature-length film was made of *Charlie's Angels* (dir. McG), emphasising the friendship between the three angels.

In the 1990s, portrayals of women warriors became even more diverse in Hollywood productions; some portrayed a woman fighting alone, while others depicted women fighting a common foe. For example, the female protagonist, Jane, played by Demi Moore in *G. I. Jane* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1997) is a lone female soldier struggling for acceptance in an all-male training camp. A similar character is Trinity in *The Matrix* (dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, 1999), who is seriously engaged in saving the world from domination by machines and computers, and seldom betrays emotion, whereas in *X-men* (dir. Bryan Singer, 2000), women characters such as Jean and Storm work together. Reflecting the popularity of female pop groups, in the light-hearted comedy *Spice World* (dir. Bob Spiers, 1997), the Spice Girls dress up as Charlie's Angels and Wonder Woman, and enjoy the fun of being women warriors.²⁵

The diversity of the representations of women warriors also includes women involved in extreme violence. For example, in *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (dir. Jonathan Mostow, 2003), the powerful cyborg enemy of human kind who is depicted

²⁵ Hopkins, 19.

in female form kills without mercy. The depiction of female violence is also alarming in *Kill Bill* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 2003 and 2004). The contemporary women warrior phenomenon reflects both a celebration of women's physical power and an alarming concern about their capacity for violence.

2.1.3 A Brief Survey of Research on Women Warriors

The increasing number of women warriors portrayed in Western films attracted the attention of a number of critics, who began a series of studies on the 'woman warrior' phenomenon. Cristina Lucia Stasia, for example, divides women warriors into two personae, "the public action hero, who acts on the *offensive*, and... the private action hero, who acts out of self-*defence*."²⁶ She uses these two models to justify women's use of physical power (or violence), arguing that the offensive mode is often used by those who regard physical action as a career, such as a soldier or explorer, whereas the defensive mode is used to describe those who seek revenge for injustice such as rape or domestic violence.

Sherrie A. Inness, who has studied television drama, comics and films about women warriors, also views women's displays of physical power positively. She says that the juxtaposition of women and violence "breaks down the essentialist argument that gender and sex are indissolubly linked. Instead, any subject who presents an effective performance of toughness can be tough, despite the body's sex."²⁷ She and many other critics also celebrates female protagonists who are "athletic and feminine,

²⁶ Stasia, 175 (my italics).

²⁷ Sherrie A Inness, *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 22.

tough but soft, fearless and physically flawless, made-up but natural”²⁸ as new role models for women.

However, portrayals of women warriors in the media are not always positive. Some feminist critics have criticised Hollywood’s tendency to represent women’s bodies including that of women warriors as sexual objects. Inness also argues that such cinematic portrayals of women warriors could undermine women’s power because of the emphasis placed on the sexual appeal of these powerful women. She contends that revealing clothes and images of femme fatales with flawed personalities undermine the positive effects of women’s empowerment in the representations of women warriors²⁹. Martha McCaughey and Neal King agree with Inness that the portrayal of women warriors as overtly sexy and emotional³⁰ implies that “*all* tough women are not as tough as they appear and therefore pose no significant threat to male hegemony.”³¹ The negative implications of these portrayals of women warriors have also stimulated internet debates, and one internet commentator, Tom Loftus, who has examined newer films which are not in Inness’ study, such as *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (dir. Simon West, 2001) and *Resident Evil* (dir. Paul Anderson, 2002), declares that these sexy women warriors are “for the fan boys”³² despite their physical strength.

²⁸ Chadwick Roberts, “The Politics of Farrah’s Body: the Female Icon as Cultural Embodiment,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* vol.37, no.1, (2003): 85.

²⁹ For detailed discussion, please refer to “chapter 4 Lady Killers: Tough Enough? 66-82, in Sherrie A Inness, *Tough Girl* (see note 27 above).

³⁰ Neal King and Martha McCaughey, “What’s a Mean Woman Like You Doing in a Movie Like This? in *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies*, eds. Martha McCaughey and Neal King (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 12.

³¹ Inness, *Tough Girls*, 81.

³² Tom Loftus, “For the Fan Boys: a Look Back at the Golden Years of Video-game Inspired Movies,” <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9726659> (accessed 2 December 2005).

A newspaper article published in *The Press* in Christchurch, New Zealand, also notes: “Teenage boys are more likely to be attracted by her scanty clothing and big guns.”³³

Ethnic inequality is another negative point. Scholars such as Kathleen Kennedy criticise Orientalism and Imperialism in depictions of women warriors. Using Xena in *Xena, the Warrior Princess* (dir. John Schulian, et al., 1995-2001) as an example, Kennedy argues that Xena “enters the East as the ‘Destroyer of nations’ and eventually dies there for her imperialist sins.”³⁴ Frances Early, on the other hand, notes that Western portrayals of women warriors, such as Buffy, concentrate on the acceptable women warriors being those who represent the “market-driven, consumerist and white-privileged medium of television.”³⁵ Such cultural preferences for white women warriors have also had a negative effect on depictions of Asian women warriors in Western cinema.

2.2 Chinese Women Warriors in Hollywood

2.2.1 Representations of Chinese Women Warriors in the Western Media

After Western audiences had accepted white women warriors in Hollywood mainstream films, some filmmakers began to incorporate exotic elements into their portrayals of women warriors in order to gratify the audience’s curiosity and draw them back to the cinema. For example, in the Disney cartoon *Mulan* (1998) and its sequel directed by Darrell Rooney and Lynne Southerland in 2004, *Mulan* was transformed into a sweet Chinese girl in an exotic land of the ancient ‘Chinese

³³ “Action Women Give Hollywood Hunks Heave-ho,” *The Press*, Christchurch, November 7, 2005. Examples of the sexy female protagonists are *Aeon Flux* (dir. Karyn Kusama, 2005) and *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (dir. Alexander Witt, 2004)

³⁴ Kathleen Kennedy, “Love Is the Battlefield: the Making and the Unmaking of the Just Warrior in *Xena, Warrior Princess*”, in *Athena’s Daughters: Television’s New Women Warriors*, eds. Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 41.

³⁵ Frances Early, “The Female Just Warrior Reimagined: from Boudicca to Buffy,” in *Athena’s Daughter* (see note 34 in this chapter), 58.

empire,' and her romance with a fellow officer was emphasised, although there was no such romance in the original Chinese story.

The exotic characteristics of Chinese women warriors were stereotyped. Charlene Tung discusses the stereotypical Chinese women in her article, "Embodying an Image: Gender, Race and Sexuality in *La Femme Nikita*." She agrees with filmmaker Renee Tajima-Pena's view that early depictions of Asian/ Asian-American women in the West were categorised into two types: "the lotus blossom baby and the dragon lady".³⁶ The former refer to those women depicted as exotic feminine beauties while the latter are depicted as evil and cold-blooded killers.

When the second wave women's movement began, however, there arose a demand for diversity and criticism of white superiority. The latter part of second wave feminism acknowledged the diversities of feminism, which inspired the development of black feminism and third wave feminism in the 1990s. Both black feminism and third wave feminism vigorously criticised second wave feminism, saying that it remained "too exclusively white and middle class."³⁷ As a result, third wave feminism has embraced diversity as an essential feature of feminism. Patricia Pender notes: "From some of its earliest incarnations academic third wave feminism has presented itself as a movement that places questions of diversity and difference at the centre of its theoretical and political agenda."³⁸

The third wave feminists' criticism of white superiority in second wave feminism, and their demand for diversity provided a theoretical base for more positive representations of Asian women in film. Thus, when women warriors became the

³⁶ Charlene Tung, "Embodying an Image: Gender, Race and Sexuality in *La Femme Nikita*," in *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 113.

³⁷ Pilcher, 169.

³⁸ Patricia Pender, "'Kicking Ass is Comfort Food': Buffy as Third Wave Feminist Icon," in *Third Wave Feminism*, (see note 10 in this chapter), 171.

vogue in the West, the demand for diversity provided opportunities for the propagation of Chinese women warriors in Hollywood cinema, and their characters were depicted more positively.

In the 1990s, closer ties between Chinese communities and the West developed enabling Hollywood filmmakers to infiltrate their productions into Chinese markets. Such developments made them aware of the need to respect Chinese cultural dignity and the cultural differences between people in various Chinese communities.

Close ties with the West also encouraged Chinese filmmakers to create films specifically for the global market. Hong Kong filmmakers were first to seize this opportunity. After Bruce Lee became a Hollywood star in the 1970s by overcoming various difficulties and prejudices, the ‘Hollywood complex’ has been an interesting characteristic of Hong Kong films. Filmmakers there were eager to learn from Hollywood films and began seeking opportunities in the global market. Meanwhile, Taiwan’s lifting of martial law in 1987 and Mainland China’s loosening of restrictions on the importation of international blockbusters in the 1990s assisted the expansion of Hollywood films into those markets. Mainland China formerly prohibited the importation of foreign films, but in 1994, the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television authorised the importation of ten international blockbusters,³⁹ thus giving Hollywood studios broader access to the Chinese market.

As a result of this access, some Western filmmakers soon abandoned derogative images such as “lotus blossom baby” and “dragon lady” which were offensive to the Chinese audiences and would hinder the sale of their productions to the enormous Chinese market. They also began producing films starring attractive Chinese actresses and showing more positive and diverse images of Chinese women. Michelle Yeoh in

³⁹ Ying Zhu, *Chinese Cinema during the Era of Reform: the Ingenuity of the System* (London: Praeger, 2003), 21.

the role of a righteous government agent from China in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* personifies the virtuous woman warrior. It is no longer unusual for Chinese actresses to be given equal billing with other leading characters in Hollywood action cinema, for example, Lucy Liu in *Charlie's Angels*.⁴⁰

2.2.2 *The Global Appeal Chinese Women Warriors*

The popularity of positive Chinese women warriors who differ from the stereotypes of “lotus blossom baby” and “dragon lady” indicated that Western audiences were ready to accept non-stereotypical Chinese women warriors, including those created by Chinese filmmakers. Many Chinese filmmakers have also received opportunities in the relatively friendly environment in Hollywood. The director of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Crouching Tiger)* Ang Lee is a notable example. This film’s female protagonist, Jen, has also been recognised as a role model in a global girl culture. The success of *Crouching Tiger* inspired more Chinese filmmakers to promote Chinese films through fascinating portrayals of women warriors. Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* (2002) and the *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) are two classic examples. (These three films will be analysed in later chapters.)

However, Chinese filmmakers’ efforts to sell their productions on the global market through attractive images of women warriors have also been viewed negatively as part of the ‘Hollywoodising’ process of Chinese cinemas, including that of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan. This Hollywoodising process depends heavily on Western acceptance of Chinese women warriors. Therefore, many directors feel the need to incorporate popular aspects of women in Hollywood films into their own

⁴⁰ Of course, the “lotus blossom baby” and “dragon lady” are not abandoned completely. For example, Zhang Ziyi’s (章子仪) role as a geisha in *Memoirs of a Geisha* (dir. Rob Marshall, 2005) represents a “lotus blossom baby.” Her another role as a woman gangster in *Rush Hour II* (dir. Brett Ratner, 2001), referred to a typical “dragon lady.”

depictions of Chinese women warriors, including the feminist aspect. According to film critic, Yu Qiong, many Western women loved *Crouching Tiger* because they found “a fresh, enlightened perspective of women’s liberation.”⁴¹ Chinese critics and audiences, however, have expressed concern about some ‘Hollywoodising’ elements in Chinese films, especially the feminist elements. Yu Qiong, for example, notes that Chinese film critics routinely ignore the feminist perspective in their reviews of *Crouching Tiger*. She also argues that Chinese audiences did not like the film because the male character Li Mubai (李慕白) was not heroic enough.⁴² Chinese audiences regarded martial arts as a world that should be dominated by men, and they could not accept women as the dominant characters, although in Western feminist reading, the female characters in this film were praised as ‘new women’.⁴³ Yu summarises the attitude of Chinese audiences by arguing that “although the women in *Crouching Tiger* have become the central characters galloping in the world of *Jianghu*, the Chinese audience do not, however, pay more attention to the women’s fate.”⁴⁴

According to Yu, the feminist perspective is unpopular among Chinese audiences and critics alike because it is often identified as part of Western tradition and they regard globalisation as a process of Westernisation and a negation of Chinese civilisation.⁴⁵ Therefore, many Chinese critics and academic reject the feminist perspectives as a sign the hegemony of Western culture. As a result, interpretations of

⁴¹ Yu Qiong, “Orient/West: Audience Reception Study of the Film *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*,” in *Looking through the Ocean: Hollywood Images in Mirror*, eds. Yan Lu and Yizhong Li (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004), 301. The original text is written in Chinese.

⁴² According to Yu Qiong’s statistics, the box-office of *Crouching Tiger* was poor in Mainland China, where it lost four million yuan. Stephen Teo argues that Li Mubai’s death is regarded as accidental rather than heroic. “Love and Swords: The Dialectics of Martial Arts Romance.” *Senses of Cinema* [on-line serial]. <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/11/crouching.html> (accessed July 15 2006).

⁴³ Yu, 301.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 304.

Chinese women warriors have relied heavily on the Western feminist interpretations, which are also influenced by Orientalism. Thus, there is a danger of bias, especially undue criticism of Chinese civilisation, instead of focusing on the depictions of Chinese women warriors.

The purpose of this research is to promote the feminist reading of Chinese films without glorifying Western feminist views. The author of this thesis agrees with Chris Berry, an expert on Chinese cinemas, regarding his understanding of the purpose of studying representations of Chinese women:

The implicit purpose here is usually not to confirm western superiority, but to seek out alternative cultural models that undermine any sense of naturalness or givenness that still clings to western, Christian-derived patriarchal models, and to globalise the feminist movement, transforming it from a eurocentric to a multicultural enterprise.⁴⁶

Western theories and criticism of Chinese films are only a starting point. This thesis, by examining the sociocultural context of different Chinese communities, hopes to promote an understanding of Chinese women warriors in the regions of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the development of feminist theories and their influence on women's images in various media. In the West, the acceptance of women warriors in the media began with the development of second wave feminism, and the

⁴⁶ Berry, "Representing Chinese Women," 202.

acceptance of Chinese women warriors in both Western and Chinese films was part of the globalisation of the film market. Hollywood has gradually developed into a leader in this global cinema, and in order to secure a share of the profitable Chinese market, Hollywood filmmakers began depicting positive images of Chinese women warriors. Meanwhile, such changes paved the way for Chinese filmmakers to introduce their own productions to the global market, including depictions of the age-old popular images of women warriors in Chinese civilisation.

From the 1990s, the film industries in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan underwent a rapid transformation from local to Hollywoodised cinema, and this globalisation process altered the ways in which women warriors were portrayed. The next three chapters will analyse in detail the transformations of concepts of women warriors in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan, in order to understand some of the thematic continuity in the delineation of traditional women warriors and the new images of women warriors developed under the influence of globalisation.

3. Hong Kong

[N]o matter how unique and strong their characters, [Hollywood women] usually end up falling into some kind of conservative, traditional romance. In Hong Kong, we are never 'threatened' by the females in our films and there is no bias in choosing which gender is making the interesting things in the story.

Tsui Hark, cited in Stokes, Lisa Odham and Michael Hoover (1999).

City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema. London: Verso, 28.

3.1 *Peking Opera Blue*¹:

Hong Kong as an “Imagined Community”² in the 1980s

3.1.1 The Feminisation of Hong Kong’s Identity

Hong Kong Filmmakers did not perceive Hong Kong as a distinctive “imagined community” until the end of the 1970s when a group of young, energetic directors launched a new wave movement. Unlike the earlier migrant filmmakers from Mainland China who regarded Hong Kong “as a base whence to address China as the main market, intending to return to Shanghai when peace resumed,”³ most of these

¹ The Chinese name for *Peking Opera Blue* is *Dao ma dan* (a woman warrior, or literally, a sword steed woman), while Dan refers to a female role in Peking opera, which was originally played by a male actor dressed as a woman.

² “Imagined community” is Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘nation.’ In his works *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev ed. (London: Verso: 1983; reprint, 1991), he says, a nation “is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”, 6. Citations are to the 1991 edition.

³ Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 13.

young directors were born or raised in Hong Kong. Thus, they identified Hong Kong as home, but their 'home' had been exposed to Western culture because of the British colonisation of Hong Kong. When the Hong Kong filmmakers endeavoured to reconstruct Hong Kong as their own "imagined community" they had to deal with issues of colonial assimilation.

To understand how these young directors dealt with colonisation issues, it is important first to note that the Western imperial powers generally carried out colonisation under the prevailing ideology identified by Edward Said as "Orientalism." According to Said, "Orientalism ... encouraged a peculiarly...male conception of the world,"⁴ which resulted in feminisation of the colonies. Hong Kong, which consists of Kowloon Peninsula, the New Territories, Hong Kong Island and an additional 254 small islands, was colonised by Britain at different stages. Hong Kong Island and the tip of Kowloon Peninsula were ceded to Britain in 1841 when the Qing government was defeated in the First Opium War with Britain (1839-1841), and the New Territories were annexed to Britain in 1860 following the Qing government's defeat in the Second Opium War (1856-1858). In 1 July 1898 the Qing government was forced to agree to a ninety-nine year lease of the New Territories to Britain. Thus, the entire region of Hong Kong officially became a British colony, and had to accept an assimilation policy which also encompassed the cultural sphere. Agreeing with Said's gendered analogy of the colony being feminised by the coloniser, Catherine Jean Gomes argues that, Hong Kong, under colonial domination, "has never really

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1978; reprint, New York: Random House, 1994), 207. Citations are to the 1994 edition.

been able to divorce itself from its historical roots as the exoticized and eroticized conquered Other in the gendered binary relationship with its western conquerors.”⁵

Because the ninety-nine year lease was to expire in 1997, the British government and Mainland China started a round of negotiations in the 1980s, to decide Hong Kong’s future. Unfortunately, neither government consulted with the people of Hong Kong, and all discussion remained confidential.⁶ On 19 December 1984, the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher and the premier of the People’s Republic of China, Zhao Ziyang (赵紫阳) signed the “Sino-British Joint Declaration on the Future of Hong Kong” which would end the colonial history of Hong Kong and prepare Britain’s retrocession of Hong Kong’s sovereignty to China in 1997. This declaration, understandably, did not bring joy to the Hong Kong populace. Many of them began to experience anxiety at being colonised again, this time by Mainland China. Although the Joint Declaration stipulated that “one country two systems, Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong” would be the governing principle to remain unchanged for fifty years, the Hong Kong people distrusted the intention of this declaration because they had been totally ignored during its formation.

Some critics believed that Hong Kong was again being treated as a feminised other by the British government and Mainland China, especially by the latter. The programme coordinator of the Hong Kong International Film Festival, Li Cheuk-to, for example, says that “the performance of Chinese negotiators and leaders during this period [early 1980s] reminded Hong Kong people of the long feudal, patriarchal

⁵ Catherine Jean Gomes, “Doing It (Un)like a Lady: Rethinking Gender in Martial Arts Cinema,” *Graduate Journal Of Asia-Pacific Studies* 2, 1 (2004): 12.

⁶ Ian Scott, *Political Change and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Hong Kong* (London: Hurst, 1989), 207.

tradition of China and the country's backwardness."⁷ Another film critic, Stephen Teo, also expresses a similar concern of China's treatment of Hong Kong during the negotiations and argues that "the territory had to endure the squint-eyed gaze of the Chinese fatherland."⁸ Teo used a gendered metaphor to describe Mainland China's attitude toward Hong Kong and stressed that this father's "squint-eyed gaze" demanded "consensus, deference, discipline and obedience"⁹ from Hong Kong, requiring them to behave like docile, dependent females.

However, some filmmakers rejected this view of Hong Kong as a fragile female and presented images of women warriors in their films as alternative images for the Hong Kong people. The portrayals of courageous women warriors were embodiments of their wish for the Hong Kong community to become strong so that they could win the right to govern their own affairs. Hong Kong audiences welcomed these films and accorded stardom to the actresses who played these women warriors. For example, Michelle Yeoh in her role as a police officer in *Yes, Madam* (皇家师姐, dir. Corey Yuen 元奎, 1985) and as a pilot in *Magnificent Warriors* (中华战士, dir. David Chung 钟志文, 1986), and Brigitte Lin (林青霞) who played the patriotic secret agent Cao Yun (曹云) in *Peking Opera Blue*, were highly acclaimed.

3.1.2 *Peking Opera Blue* as a Metaphor for 1980s Hong Kong

Peking Opera Blue has been chosen as the focus of analysis here, not only because it was a popular film in 1980s Hong Kong, but also because its producer and director

⁷ Cheuk-to Li, "The Return of the Father: Hong Kong New Wave and its Chinese Context in the 1980s," in *New Chinese Cinema: Forms, Identities, Politics*, eds. Nick Browne, et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 165.

⁸ Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 66. Chinese term for "motherland" is "zuguo", which is closer to "fatherland". The character "zu" represents ancestry, and in Chinese tradition, the father figure is the centre of this ancestry.

⁹ Ibid.

Tsui Hark—well-known for his nationalist consciousness—believed that the Hong Kong people needed to assert a separate identity. In an interview in 1988 he said:

In the early 1980s the material for film was more personal, about daily life. Suddenly now we're talking about the nation. Recently, Hong Kong audiences have become concerned over what will happen in 1997.... So suddenly a character in a film is more politically conscious, more reflecting that anxiety [of political disorder after 1997].¹⁰

In the same interview, Tsui Hark's wife Nansun Shi, an important member of Hong Kong's major film studio, Cinema City, says that "the film [*Peking Opera Blue*] also takes a sly poke at the *current* government."¹¹

Tsui Hark produced *Peking Opera Blue* in 1986, two years after the signing of the Joint Declaration, and he chose to set his film in 1913, two years after the 1911 Revolution to overthrow the Qing imperial government led by Sun Yat-sen (孙中山). His time frame for his film was important because the two-year gap between 1984 and 1986 and that of 1911 and 1913 had implications. Tsui depicts the chaos of 1913 to refer to 1986 Hong Kong society. Historically speaking, although the overthrowing of Qing government in 1911 gave the Chinese people some hope that democracy and liberty could be achieved in this newly founded Republic, the autocratic warlord, Yuan Shikai (袁世凯), quickly seized power and became President of the Republic in 1912. He conspired to destroy the southern army that supported Sun and Sun's ideal of democracy so that he could restore the monarchy.¹² Thus, the Republic was

¹⁰ Pat Aufderheide, "Dynamic Duo," *Film Comment* 24, 3 (Jun 1988): 44

¹¹ *Ibid.* Italics in original text.

¹² Yuan is regarded by many people as an opportunist. He served at the Qing court as a Han military leader, but when he foresaw the fall of the Qing Dynasty, he chose to support to the anti-dynastic revolution and betray the Qing court. Without his military support, the Qing Court would be more

governed by a democratic government in name only. Many local warlords—some survivors of the Qing period and some recipients of power during the chaos in the decaying Qing court— wanted power for themselves and refused to submit to Yuan. Armed struggles erupted throughout the nation. Tsui used these events of the early 1910s as the background for *Peking Opera Blue*, creating a fictional event which could be read as a metaphor for 1980s Hong Kong, where people were facing the risk of autocratic rule by Mainland China.

The film centres on a female secret agent, Cao Yun, who is working for Sun Yat-sen's southern army to oppose Yuan's corrupt government. However, her father, General Cao, is a powerful supporter of Yuan, and their opposing political ideals separate them. When examined further, it becomes apparent that Cao Yun's relationship with her father, General Cao, symbolises the Hong Kong-Mainland China relationship: Cao Yun, who returns from overseas to Peking, symbolising Hong Kong, while her father, General Cao, pursuing an opposing political ideology to his daughter, embodies Communist China. This is confirmed by their first conversation in the film.

General Cao: Yun, are you scared?

Yun: I'm alright, papa.

General Cao: You've been away and living in comfort for years. Now you have to get used to the way of living of your native lands.

Yun: I'll certainly make it.

difficult to overthrow. As a result, Sun Yat-sen gave up his claim to the presidency and Yuan was nominated as President of the newly founded Republic. Sun continued to organise democratic ventures and moved to Guangzhou in 1916 to continue his revolutionary activities.

General Cao's speech symbolises Mainland China's attitude toward Hong Kong's return to China, whereas Cao Yun's speech reflects Hong Kong's acceptance of their return to Mainland China.

3.1.3 *Peking Opera Blue: Hong Kong's New Mulan Ballad*

The threat of Hong Kong's feminisation by Mainland China would seem to have inspired director Tsui to empower the women characters in his film. As well as her depiction as a symbol of Hong Kong, the central character, Cao Yun, is also presented as a courageous woman warrior. Tsui implies that Cao Yun is a righteous successor to the courageous women warriors of Chinese tradition because she resembles the legendary Mulan who joins the army disguised as a man to protect her country. Cao Yun, too, always dresses in either male army uniform or a gentleman's formal suit. Just as Mulan in a soldier's uniform is bestowed with feminine virtues in the original ballad¹³, director Tsui stresses Cao Yun's feminine virtues as a nurturer/ life-saver. She has studied gynaecology abroad so that she can save lives, and in her first meeting with the soldier Dongmin (董民), who has been wounded by gunfire, she uses her Western medical training to save his life. Her commitment to saving people's lives is one of her reasons for joining the southern army, which she believes to be a righteous force fighting for democracy for her people against the selfish dictator and his corrupt government. In this respect, she also resembles the traditional 'nü xia' (lady knights) who were committed to altruism and strongly opposed the official order.

However, the director also portrays Cao Yun as a modern woman who is clearly aware of the limitations placed on women, as is evident in her choice of putting on male attire. In the original ballad Mulan conceals her female identity with male attire

¹³ Original text is "Click, Click, and click, click, click; By the doorway, Mulan weaves (唧唧复唧唧, 木兰当户织)." Weaving was regarded as a woman's job.

because she wishes to be a filial 'son' to her father, but Cao Yun dresses in male clothing because she is aware of the restrictions placed on women in the public sphere, and comments that "it is easy to act when people cannot tell whether you are male or female." She is acutely aware of the inequalities between women and men, and challenges the patriarchal traditions by donning male clothing. However, she does not pretend to be a man, and does not object to others referring to her as "Lady Cao."

It is important to note that Cao Yun dressing in male attire also has the same negative connotations as Mulan, because, although the male attire enables her to cross the gender boundary and venture into political and military spheres that had excluded women, this is an implicit acknowledgement of the privileges embodied in male clothing. Cao Yun is certainly aware of gender inequalities and challenges male power, including military power, but does not attempt to overthrow the system that restricts women. Such conservatism would become controversial when women's consciousness was raised in the 1990s, which will be dealt with in the discussion of 1990s Hong Kong films in this chapter.

The second distinction between Mulan and Cao Yun is the latter's challenge to her father's political beliefs. In the story of Mulan, she joins the army and fights to fulfil her obligations to protect her father, as a son would, and continues to remain loyal to her father after her return home. However, after returning home, Cao Yun begins to question her father's political ideology. She joins the southern army to fight for democracy and opposes his support of an autocratic power. When she discovers that her father is an intermediate negotiator with five foreign banks to obtain loans for Yuan so that he can strengthen his military power, she plots with her fellow soldiers to steal the loan document from her father and destroy Yuan's conspiracy of using foreign loans to support his attack on the southern army.

However, in spite of rebelling against her father, she is emotionally attached to him. She never stops loving him because he has given her not only love and financial support, but also freedom and the opportunity to study overseas: a freedom undreamed of by the majority of Chinese women at the time. When Cao Yun witnesses her father's death, her love for him transforms her from a gentle lifesaver into a violent warrior. General Cao is killed at his residence by Liu (刘组长), the head of the secret police who discovers Cao Yun's involvement in anti-Yuan activities and breaks into the General's residence to arrest her. Enraged and grieving, Cao Yun draws her gun to shoot Liu. This first attempt to kill Liu fails and she is imprisoned, but after she is freed by her friends, Cao Yun manages to kill Liu in their second encounter.

Cao Yun rebels against her father because of their different political beliefs, but when he is killed, she determines to avenge his death. The complexity of Cao Yun's conduct seems to reflect the dilemma faced by the Hong Kong people in the 1980s. Separated from Mainland China, Hong Kong had undergone a capitalist process of modernisation and Westernisation and embraced a totally different ideology from the Communism of Mainland China. The Hong Kong people opposed Communism. Many new wave directors who became established in the 1980s, including Tsui Hark, the director of *Peking Opera Blue*, had grown up in Hong Kong and received their education overseas and accepted Western ideas, as mentioned earlier. It could be said that the character of Cao Yun, who has studied overseas and embraced Western democracy, embodies the experience of many Hong Kong people, including that of the director Tsui.

At the same time, the Hong Kong people had to acknowledge their close connection with Mainland China in almost every way, despite their differing political

ideology. Hong Kong was built by Mainland immigrants and its ethnic composition was undeniably Chinese. The economic ties between Mainland China and Hong Kong were strong. When Mainland China re-opened its doors and pursued economic reforms following the Cultural Revolution from the end of the 1970s, this created many economic opportunities for Hong Kong, which rapidly became prosperous. Hong Kong in the 1980s was therefore economically indebted to Mainland China. Such economic indebtedness was portrayed in the attitude of General Cao towards his daughter Cao Yun as he passionately tells her that “the father works like a dog to make money so that the children can enjoy the fortune.” The political differences have created the split between father / Mainland China and daughter/ Hong Kong, but the emotional, ethnic ties and economic connections still drew the latter to the former. Hong Kong in the 1980s was facing the dilemma of either becoming filial to Communist China or, rebelling against it to preserve a Hong Kong democracy.

The dilemma also reflects the ‘fatherless’ anxiety of the Hong Kong people. Although they disagreed with the Communist Mainland and distrusted its rule, they did not choose to break with Mainland China but accepted their fate of returning to it in 1997. The long separation from China formulated a unique Hong Kong identity that is defined as a “floating” identity by Ackbar Abbas¹⁴ who argues that the people of Hong Kong “live its own version of the ‘floating world.’”¹⁵ The uncertainty of this floating existence accelerated the growth of a ‘fatherless’ anxiety; Hong Kong was anxious to find a protective ‘father’.

In the film, following the murder of Cao Yun’s father, she seeks revenge against his murderer in order to fulfil her duty as a filial child and restore her father’s name. Her action implies that she still recognises her strong bond with her father, symbolising

¹⁴ Abbas, 80.

¹⁵ Ibid., 143.

Hong Kong's recognition of its bond with Mainland China. After killing her father's murderer Liu, Cao Yun decides to take the loan document to the southern army and continue as a soldier to fight for her political idealism. She has chosen for herself a symbolic father. She identifies with the southern army as her new home and the leadership of the army as a replacement for the loss of her father. Cao Yun's identification with this southern army fighting for true democracy also embodies the director's wish that Hong Kong people together with their local government fight to protect democracy against the hegemony of Communist Mainland China.

3.1.4 A Search for Personal Liberation

Other important women characters in *Peking Opera Blue* who merit our attention are Xianghong (湘红, played by Cherie Chung 钟楚红) who works as a songstress, and Bainiu (白妞, played by Sally Yeh 叶倩文) the daughter of a Peking Opera house owner. Of these two characters, Xianghong as a financial-minded woman will be compared with women warriors in 1990s Hong Kong films, while Bainiu is more significant here because she is different to Cao Yun. Cao Yun embraces Western political ideals and breaks into the political sphere from which women were excluded for centuries, but she ignores the need for personal liberation. Cao Yun's action in *Peking Opera Blue* is understood as Chinese heroism, stressed by L.S. Kim: "heroism comes from the ability to do for others, not for the self; victory comes from sacrifice for the group, not from self-aggrandizement."¹⁶ Another scholar, Vance Cope-Kaste, also stresses that within this Chinese philosophy there is no atomistic, independent

¹⁶ LS. Kim, "Making Women Warriors: a Transnational Reading of Asian Female Action Heroes in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 48 (winter, 2006), <http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/womenWarriors/text.html> (accessed 16 October, 2006)

self, and “[b]eing related to others is necessary, ... in fact, individuals can be much better thought of as different centers of webs of relationships.”¹⁷

Bainiu, however, struggles to attain personal liberation based on the Western model. According to Cope-Kasten, in the West an

image of the individual is that of an atom—a thing which is complete and independent by nature. Each ‘atom’ might join with other atoms to form such molecules as family, society, or government, but it must always worry about the infringements that the other atoms and molecules pose to its own integrity, its own rights and independence.¹⁸

This metaphor of an atom is also an appropriate description of Bainiu as she single-handedly pursues her personal liberation from patriarchal tradition. She wants to be as free as an independent atom and to be able to choose her career freely without infringing the movement of other individuals (other atoms).

As the daughter of a Peking Opera master, Bainiu loves this art and dreams of becoming a professional performer. There are two significant aspects of Bainiu’s pursuit of a career in Peking Opera performance. Women were traditionally prohibited from performing on stage, and even female audiences were banned from the opera house until 1900. There was a brief relaxation of these regulations and females were allowed into the theatre as audience from 1900-1902, but it was only after 1914 that women were officially permitted to attend the theatre as audience. The

¹⁷ Vance Cope-Kasten, “Meeting Chinese Philosophy,” in *An Introduction to Chinese Culture through the Family*, eds. Howard Giskin and Bettye S. Walsh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 45.

¹⁸ Cope-Kasten, 44.

authorities only lifted the ban on women and men performing together in 1930.¹⁹ In Tsui's film, even the role of the woman general, Mu Guiying, in a traditional Peking Opera clip *Mu Guiying Catch Herself a Husband* (穆桂英招亲) is to be played in a historically correct fashion by a male. When the actor is forced to flee the theatre due to Commander Liu's harassment, Bainiu sees this as an opportunity to perform, and dresses herself up as Mu to make her stage debut.

The second significant aspect of Bainiu's behaviour is her modification of this traditional opera. This piece is based on a novel, *The Saga of the Yang Family*, written during the Ming Dynasty;²⁰ although Mu Guiying is an eminent female army general, she is also celebrated as an ideal daughter-in-law and wife, and the opera is supposed to end with Mu's wedding to a young general, Yang Zhongbao (杨忠宝). However, Bainiu improvises a new ending to conceal Xianghong's fall from the balcony to the stage. In Bainiu's improvisation, the protagonist, Mu Guiying, triumphs in the final scene as an independent and powerful woman, not as a submissive wife to Yang Zhongbao. Bainiu concludes her performance by singing: "I met no opponent. I'm the king of the universe." Her song is a celebration of her triumph in breaking with tradition to perform on the male only stage as well as a reclamation of woman power.

Although Bainiu cooperates with Cao Yun and her other friends to help defeat and kill Liu, she decides to return to her father and their opera house. This reveals that like Cao Yun, she is also attached to her father. The film does not reveal whether Bainiu's father allows her to continue performing in the Peking Opera, but Bainiu's conduct in the film has demonstrated her love for it and her courage in seeking opportunities to

¹⁹ Huang Yufu, "Chinese Women's Status as Seen through Peking Opera", in *Holding up Half the Sky*: (see note 21 in Chapter 1), 31-33.

²⁰ See footnote 2 in the Introduction.

perform. It is reasonable to predict that she returns to her father's opera house to seek further opportunities to perform.

Judging from their creation of the two courageous women characters, it could be concluded that director Tsui and his team were encouraging the Hong Kong people to be more courageous. The empowerment of women characters in *Peking Opera Blue* conveys the message that although Hong Kong has been marginalised as a feminine other by Mainland China and the British government, they must empower themselves and fight for democratic rule for Hong Kong in the same way as Cao Yun. The image of Bainiu represents the importance of personal freedom, especially for women: they must break the restrictions placed on them. This is a criticism of the gender inequality in traditional Chinese culture. As Hong Kong filmmakers reconstructed Hong Kong society as a 'better Hong Kong' and a more liberal community, they were also emphasising gender equality as an index of progress. This aspect of Hong Kong cinema will be examined in the next section.

3.2 *Dragon Inn*: Hong Kong's New Aspirations in the 1990s

3.2.1 Thematic Continuity

The portrayals and renovations of the two types of women warriors personified by Cao Yun and Bainiu in *Peking Opera Blue* continued to be popular in 1990s' Hong Kong cinema. In many films the first group of women warriors are similar to Cao Yun, who is endowed with a modern consciousness of gender inequality but also embodies the virtues of Mulan and the 'nü xia' in fighting for their country and families. The second group of women warriors resemble Bainiu in *Peking Opera Blue*, who fights

for personal liberation. However, notable differences exist between the portrayal of Bainiu and her 1990s counterparts. While the director of *Peking Opera Blue* explores only one aspect of women's personal struggle to attain a career choice in the portrayal of Bainiu, during the 1990s other social issues relating to women's liberation, such as financial independence and sexual freedom, were included in the presentation of women warriors in Hong Kong cinema, to better illustrate the experience of Hong Kong women. The second film to be analysed, *Dragon Inn* (1992), directed by Raymond Lee and co-written by Cheung Tan (张炭), Xiao He (晓禾), and Tsui Hark (director of *Peking Opera Blue*), is an excellent example that conveys the above mentioned aspects of women warriors.

3.2.2 Tradition vs Anti-tradition

The film *Dragon Inn*, a remake of the 1967 film *Dragon Gate Inn* (dir. King Hu), retains the historical background of the original film which is set in the reign of emperor Jingtai (1450-1456) during the Ming Dynasty (1368- 1644), at a time when eunuchs often manipulated the emperor to oust their enemies. Both films begin with the execution of a lord who has been wrongly accused by the head eunuch Cao Shaoqin (曹少钦, hereafter Cao), and a group of warriors, both men and women, endeavour to rescue the offspring of this lord before Cao assassinates them. The main difference between the two films is that in the 1992 remake director Lee incorporates uniquely 1990s women's issues into his version.

While the director of the original 1967 film depicts only one woman warrior, simply known as Miss Zhu (朱小姐), to indicate that her personal identity is unimportant, in the new version there are two women warriors who can be said to be respective variations of Cao Yun and Bainiu in *Peking Opera Blue*. The first character,

Qiu Moyan (邱莫言, played by Brigitte Lin who also played Cao Yun), leads a group of warriors who rescue the children of the lord executed by head eunuch Cao. Thus Qiu Moyan (hereafter Qiu) is a typical ‘*nü xia*’ (lady knight) who embraces traditional virtues of loyalty and altruism. The second woman warrior, Jin Xiangyu (金镶玉, played by Maggie Cheung, 张曼玉, hereafter Jin), is the owner of the Dragon Inn who fights for financial gain and sexual freedom, whereas in the 1967 film, the owner who organises the rescue mission is a middle-aged man. Jin is an anti-traditional heroine who violates all the taboos against women. In order to highlight the differences between Qiu and Jin, director Lee creates two sub-plots: the first plot centres on Qiu’s courageous act in rescuing the children and her subsequent death in desert quicksand, while the second plot focuses on the conduct of Jin who survives all the turmoil.

a). *Bury the Outdated Women Warriors*

Although director Lee attempts to preserve a ‘*nü xia*’-like image of a woman warrior through his depiction of the patriotic and selfless Qiu, he also has her embody the more progressive qualities to be found in 1990s Hong Kong. This is apparent when she is compared with Miss Zhu in the original 1967 film. In the 1967 film, Miss Zhu is a powerful fighter with no leadership role, whereas Qiu is not only a gifted swordswoman, but also a group leader. During their mission to rescue the children, she assumes the most difficult and dangerous task of attacking the head eunuch Cao and his powerful bodyguards. When Cao’s three strongest bodyguards attempt to capture her, she successfully repels them with her sword. This scenario clearly reflects the increasingly important roles women began to play in Hong Kong in the 1990s. According to two sets of research conducted in the 1990s, a typical Hong Kong woman at that time was pursuing a career and running a “double-employment

household.”²¹ By depicting Qiu as the pivotal figure in the rescue team, Lee seems to indicate that women in 1990s Hong Kong were playing a vital role in developing Hong Kong society.

Another difference between Miss Zhu and Qiu is their femininity. Miss Zhu is highly masculinised, dressing in male attire, behaving like a man, sharing the same beliefs as the male warriors, and even using male speech. It seems that director King Hu, who made this film when polygamy was still legal in Hong Kong, was trying to not offend patriarchal rules by creating a woman warrior who shared all their values. According to film critic Rong Cai, “[m]asculinized and consequently legitimized, the woman’s outstanding ability, though miraculous, upsets none of the gender distinctions that stabilize the traditional social system.”²² However, in contrast to the masculinised Miss Zhu, director Lee of *Dragon Inn* stresses Qiu’s femininity. Her commitment to save the young and the weak minimises her violence, and her maternal and nurturing role is emphasised when she shields the children with her body in battle. The juxtaposition of Qiu’s martial arts skills as a warrior and her femininity challenges the patriarchal hierarchy which reserves the identity of warrior to men. The character of Qiu proves that femininity can co-exist with physical strength.

Although Qiu represents a more progressive woman than her prototype Miss Zhu in the 1967 film, she is still depicted as a conservative ‘*nü xia*’. Firstly, her maternal role in protecting children is a legitimate social function for women in a patriarchal system. Secondly, her involvement in rescuing the children is partly motivated by her love for Zhou Huaian (周淮安, played by Tony Leung Ka Fai 梁家輝), the right-hand

²¹ Gary McDonogh and Cindy Wong, *Global Hong Kong* (London: Routledge, 2005), 155. The two studies refer to the work done by Janet Salaff and Ching Kwan Lee. For detailed analysis, please refer to Janet Salaff’s *Working Daughters of Hong Kong: Filial Piety or Power in the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) and Ching Kwan Lee’s *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

²² Cai, 446.

man of the beheaded lord. Thirdly, she is still an altruistic heroine who represses her own desires. When Zhou pretends that he loves Jin and proposes marriage in order to discover a secret tunnel hidden by Jin to cross the border, Qiu feels extremely sad because she is afraid that she will lose Zhou, but she represses her feelings and accepts Zhou's plan to marry Jin. Her conservatism is not only revealed by the repression of her feelings, but is also demonstrated by her unsupportive attitude toward women who seek personal freedom. She does not appreciate Jin's carefree life, and especially disagrees with her moneymaking and sexual freedom. Those aspects identify Qiu as a conservative woman warrior.

Qiu is also depicted as a typically self-sacrificing '*nü xia*'. Her self-sacrifice is magnificently illustrated in the final battle in the desert against the powerful enemy Cao. Together with Zhou and the innkeeper Jin, Qiu becomes trapped in the quicksand and cannot move. When Cao thrusts his sword to end their lives, Qiu, summoning up all her strength, lifts Zhou towards the sky and Cao's sword penetrates her heart instead. Her body sinks into the sand to be buried in the desert forever. The slow motion of her sinking into the sand is a homage to her and the altruistic and self-sacrificing '*nü xia*' she represents.

Self-sacrifice similar to that of the '*nü xia*' is a characteristic of the patriotic women warriors depicted in 1990s Hong Kong films. In the 1993 film *Executioners* directed by Johnny To and Ching Siu Tung, a woman warrior sacrifices her life in order to save her two friends and a little girl. In the case of Qiu, her ultimate self-sacrifice to save the man she loves embodies an extremely conservative yet important virtue of traditional women warriors, celebrated by Chinese cinemas since the silent Shanghai films of the 1920s. That is, while a woman may violate the patriarchal norms her purpose is to serve the patriarchal order. Like Mulan, who sacrifices her personal

happiness and serves for twelve years in the army in order to fulfil her filial duties, Qiu and many other self-sacrificing women warriors are willing to die for a man they love and respect. These self-sacrificing women reaffirm the patriarchal system.

As discussed previously, Hong Kong was a melting-pot where conservative and modern values co-existed, and director Lee depicted two women warriors representing two different value systems. Qiu, who is altruistic, self-sacrificing and represses her personal desires, represents the traditional ‘*nü xia*’ who uphold the ideology of ‘*ren*’ of Confucianism. On the other hand, carefree Jin, who vigorously pursues personal freedom and violates the altruistic virtues of the traditional ‘*nü xia*,’ embodies more modern values.

In the end, Qiu dies buried in the desert, whereas Jin survives her ordeal. By contrasting their destinies, the director seems to use Qiu’s tragic death to convey the message that the patriarchal tradition that made women into martyrs is outdated and thus should be buried forever.

b). Woman’s Individual Identity

Compared to Bainiu, Jin is a more radical figure, as mentioned earlier. She is an effective boss and ruthlessly pursues profit. She welcomes many customers, even those with dubious backgrounds, as long as the transactions are profitable. Jin also endeavours to maintain political neutrality in order to increase her profits. Her almost obsessive accumulation of wealth is criticised by the conservative Qiu who accuses Jin of opening an inn as a decoy to rob her customers, saying: “you could be another Mrs. Sun.” Mrs Sun (孙二娘) is a well-known character in the Chinese novel *The Water Margin* (水浒传) by Shi Nai’an (施耐庵, 1290-1365), who operates an inn and

kills her customers to steal their money. Sun even uses her victims' flesh to stuff buns to sell for further profits.

However, Jin's actions did not scare the audiences away, but rather charmed them. The critic of martial arts films, Chen Mo, argues that 1990s audiences favoured the newer version rather than the 1967 film, and, in particular identified with the character of Jin, noting that the audience liked her personality and her lifestyle.²³ Of course, her lifestyle not only includes her efforts to secure financial security, but also her attempts to maintain her sexual freedom, which in fact reflected the women's changing aspirations in 1990s Hong Kong.

In the film, she forms a romantic union with the general overseeing the defence of the border, hoping that his power will protect her from danger, although this does not prevent her from pursuing other men she fancies. She falls for Zhou instantly when he comes to her inn to meet Qiu, and fancies a one-night stand with him. However, when Zhou suggests that they should marry first before consummating their sexual relationship, she accepts his proposal immediately for two reasons. One is that she regards the wedding ceremony as a kind of carnival rather than a serious commitment to marriage because she sees marriage as a way to enjoy sexual pleasure rather than as a commitment to be a wife and mother. Second, she is fully aware that Zhou is merely using their wedding to deceive his enemy, Cao; therefore Zhou will not take this wedding seriously and Jin will not be firmly bonded in marriage.

In order to fully comprehend Jin's behaviour, it is important to understand two aspects of 1990s Hong Kong relating to women's financial ambition and their desire to attain sexual freedom. A new concern of the women's movement in the 1990s stemmed from the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989. After witnessing the

²³ Chen, *Martial Arts Films*, 273-274.

Communist government's brutal suppression of the student democracy movement in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the Hong Kong people held increasing fears about their 1997 return to China. Mainland China's repression of the student movement seemed to resemble the patriarchy that had suppressed women's needs so that male privileges could be retained. Some social critics believe that Mainland China's treatment of the student movement in 1989 intensified the Hong Kong leaders' and citizens' concerns about the importance of protecting individual rights.²⁴ As a result, the issue of women's rights began to be considered as part of human rights.²⁵

This growing awareness of women's rights gradually expanded from political rights to other domains. Gina Marchetti summarised the progress made by Hong Kong women in the 1990s, saying: "[Hong Kong] women, traditionally more likely to circulate among various groups in patriarchal communities in which men stayed put, now, riding in the advances of feminism, can venture even further from hearth and home."²⁶

The issues vigorously pursued by women after they left their sphere of "hearth and home" were in the economic domain. More women in Hong Kong came to realise that "[w]omen were inferior not just because they were women but because they were poor."²⁷ This awareness of their inferior economic status saw them demand the right to inherit land in the New Territories, part of Hong Kong in the early 1990s. As a result, a New Territories Land (Exemption) Ordinance (No. 55 of 1994) came into

²⁴ Sally Engle Merry and Rachel E. Stern, "The Female Inheritance Movement in Hong Kong: Theorizing the Local/Global Interface," *Current Anthropology* vol.46, no.3, (June 2005): 2, <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/CA/journal/issues/v46n3/053002/053002.web.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2006)

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ Gina Marchetti, "Buying American, Consuming Hong Kong: Cultural Commerce, Fantasies of Identity, and the Cinema," in *The Cinema of Hong Kong* (see note 35 in Chapter 1), 307.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

force on 24 June 1994, making it possible for all women to inherit land there.²⁸

Although it was not discussed earlier in this thesis because she was a minor character in terms of women warriors, Xianghong in *Peking Opera Blue* is a forerunner of the fiscal-minded women of Hong Kong. Similarly, director Raymond Lee reflects such financial pursuits by women in the 1990s in his emphasis on Jin's business sense.

Apart from their political rights and economic rights, also of concern to women is sexual freedom. Film critic Stephen Teo notes that a theme found in 1990s Hong Kong cinema was "a new sexual awakening arising from an increasing awareness of women's human rights."²⁹ Jin's free expression of her sexuality reflects this trend.

Women's sexuality also became an issue of concern in the 1990s when it became apparent that women were delaying marriage. Hong Kong's flourishing economy was providing more employment opportunities for women, leading "women who work before marriage to attach more value to their careers and less value to their roles as housewives and mothers."³⁰ As a result, more women were choosing to marry later and delay child-bearing. According to some statistics from various censuses, by the 1990s, few women in Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and other Asian regions, were marrying before the age of twenty-six.³¹

Against such social background, Jin's casual attitude towards marriage is understandable. Jin's conduct, including her obsession with economic independence and sexual autonomy, reflects Hong Kong women's struggle to build a 'better Hong Kong' with no gender discrimination. Through the character of Jin, the director

²⁸ Carol Jones, "The New Territories Inheritance Law: Colonization and the Elites," in *Women in Hong Kong*, eds. Veronica Pearson and Benjamin K. P. Leung (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1995), 175-177.

²⁹ Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 246.

³⁰ "Tradition and Change in Marriage and Family Life", www.eastwestcenter.org/stored/misc/FuturePop04Marriage.pdf (access 14 August. 2006), 31.

³¹ Ibid.

conveys the idea that by choosing to marry late and delay child-bearing, women not only relieved themselves of family commitment, but also transformed their identities from those of wives and mothers to independent individuals.

Such changes in representations of women warriors portrayed by Jin in *Dragon Inn*, not only reflected the social changes in Hong Kong but also coincided with the development of new feminist theories in the West. Jin's conduct shows similar characteristics of Naomi Wolf's concept of "power feminism" as defined in her 1993 book.³² Wolf's theorises that poverty is not glamorous, and women should acquire money, both for their own dreams, independence, and security, and for social change; this power feminism is also "unapologetically sexual...[and] understands that good pleasures make good politics."³³ It is reasonable to assume that in the 1990s Hong Kong as a city open to new ideas was as concerned about gender politics as the West.

c). The Hong Kong Political Situation and the Portrayals of Qiu and Jin

The representations of the two women warriors Qiu and Jin not only symbolise women's issues in 1990s Hong Kong, but are also politically significant in articulating Hong Kong people's perception of Mainland China at the same decade. As discussed above, in the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident, the students in Mainland China carried out their demonstration to draw public attention to government corruption, but were brutally suppressed by the Communist government. This event would have made many Hong Kong people, including director Lee, assume that the pursuit of political idealism was dangerous and hopeless. Lee's depiction of Qiu as a woman warrior pursuing a political ideal by rebelling against a corrupt and autocratic power, could be

³² Naomi Wolf, *Fire with Fire: the New Female Power and How it Will Change the 21st Century* (New York: Random House, 1993), 137.

³³ Ibid.

interpreted as an embodiment of the rebellious students battling corruption in Tiananmen Square. Lee also expresses the futility of pursuing political idealism through Qiu: she sacrifices her life but is unable to overthrow the corrupt government.

Jin's survival assumes significance in terms of Hong Kong's post-Tiananmen Square political climate. The suppression of student movements in 1989 and the aftermath³⁴ made the Hong Kong people aware that their survival after unification depended on the economic success of Hong Kong society as a whole and themselves. Ackbar Abbas notes that after the Tiananmen Square Incident, instead of pursuing political ideals, Hong Kong citizens began to direct their energies towards the economic sphere. He notes that Hong Kong people's "belief that they might have a hand in shaping their own history, gets replaced by speculation on the property or stock markets, or by an obsession with fashion or consumerism."³⁵ The economic sphere is the safest arena for people to enjoy power and freedom without being embroiled in political struggle.

Director Lee probably tried to capture Hong Kong's obsession with financial success through Jin who makes herself agreeable to people from different factions who come to stay at her inn. Interestingly, Jin also avoids political activity and concentrates on managing her inn as a strategy to stay out of danger. Moreover, director Lee sets Jin's Dragon Inn in the desert, possibly because Hong Kong has been stereotypically identified as 'a cultural desert.' Therefore, it is possible that Jin, a lady boss in the desert, symbolises a Hong Kong resident living in a cultural desert.

In the film's final scene, Jin decides to burn down her inn and leave the desert, so that she can catch up with Zhou who is now an outlaw because of his rebellion against

³⁴ After the Tiananmen Square Incident, Article 23 was added to the Basic Law that would become constitutional law in Hong Kong after the handover in 1997. This Article 23 was an anti-subversion law which would ban many individual rights.

³⁵ Abbas, 5.

the corrupt government and has to leave the country. This ending is significant in two respects. On the one hand, Jin, an epitome of single women, chases a man who has lost his social status, implying a trend by modern women to marry beneath themselves. This motif also appears in some films in Mainland China and Taiwan and will be discussed in the following chapters. On the other hand, in leaving her country with Zhou, Jin reflects the migration of many Hong Kong people as they became anxious about their fate under Communist rule after witnessing the brutal suppression of the students in 1989. Zhou and Jin's choice to leave their country is thus symbolic in terms of the increased migration of the Hong Kong people.

Director Lee and his screenplay writers created Qiu to represent conservative values and Jin to represent new social phenomena and destroy the former. However, Qiu's self-sacrifice is respected. According to Benedict Anderson, a nation "is an imagined political community" that "inspire[s] love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love."³⁶ Qiu's conduct is motivated by such love. Unfortunately, her pursuit of political ideals endangers her life and she is ultimately destroyed by the opposing power, indicating the futility of opposing the ruling power (the Communist government). Jin, on the other hand, is a survivor of political turmoil. Her economic commitment prevents her from becoming embroiled in political conflict, and her economic independence gives her freedom. Her liberation through economic activity reinforces Hong Kong people's belief that they can retain some individual rights through economic success. Hong Kong people sought independence through economic achievements and this trend became more obvious after reunification in

³⁶ Anderson, 6 and 141.

1997 when Hong Kong aspired to become a global metropolis. Films made since then have reflected this trend, which is analysed in the next section.

3.3 The Twins Effect:

Hong Kong as a Global Metropolis in the New Millennium

3.3.1 The Hollywoodising of the Woman Warrior

As exemplified by Cao Yun in *Peking Opera Blue* and Qiu in *Dragon Inn*, depictions of women warriors in Hong Kong cinema between 1980 and 1997 were still influenced by traditional portrayals of women warriors such as the ‘*nü xia*’ and Hua Mulan. However, after Hong Kong’s return to China in 1997 popular images of women warriors in Hong Kong films more closely resembled those in Hollywood blockbusters as Hong Kong filmmakers adapted ‘Hollywoodising’ tactics to present women warriors in a way that would appeal to a global market.

Film critic Yingchi Chu noted that after 1997 Hong Kong filmmakers adopted three major strategies to ensure their survival in the globalised market: attract overseas investment, cooperate with other regions and countries in Asia, and “secure the domestic market through ‘Hollywoodising’ local cinema.”³⁷ Using these strategies, Hong Kong cinema has remained relatively successful. In 2003, box office revenue for Hong Kong productions was \$US 5, 200,000, while the revenue from foreign language films totalled \$US 5,800,000.³⁸ The market shares of Hong Kong productions and foreign productions were almost equal, whereas Hollywood

³⁷ Yingchi Chu, *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 124-125.

³⁸ “2004 Hong Kong Films Box Office,” <http://gbcode.tdctrade.com/gb/hkfilmart.com/newsread.asp?newsid=562> (accessed 5 March 2007). This will be compared with Mainland China and Taiwan.

productions diverted most of the profits in some European countries such as Germany, where the box office revenue of Hollywood productions was eighty-six percent even in the early 1990s.³⁹ The relatively equal takings from local productions and foreign films indicate that Hong Kong cinema is relatively healthy, despite the trend of globalisation.

The representation of women warriors in the Hong Kong cinema should also be examined in respect to the globalisation of the Hong Kong film industry. Many films about women warriors were funded by overseas investors, such as the action film *So Close* (夕阳天使, dir. Corey Yuen, 2002) which was funded by Columbia Pictures Film Productions which had produced *Charlie's Angels* in 2000. Eastern elements, including Chinese martial arts and the American-Chinese actress Lucy Liu, contributed to the worldwide success of *Charlie's Angels*, and motivated Columbia Pictures' cooperation with the famous martial arts master and film director, Corey Yuen, to produce a Chinese version of *Charlie's Angels*. As Jin Na notes, although the storylines of the two films differ slightly—*Charlie's Angels* depicts three female detectives whereas the protagonists of *So Close* are a policewoman and two assassins—the temperaments of the three female fighters in *So Close* resembled those in *Charlie's Angels*.⁴⁰ Director Yuen also invited a famous Korean actor to play the lover of one of the female protagonists to target markets outside the Chinese communities. This cooperation with other Asian countries is also apparent in *Tokyo Raiders* (东京攻略, dir. Jingle Ma 马楚成, 2000). The two protagonists are Chinese

³⁹ Yin Hong and Xiao Zhiwei, "The Globalisation Strategies of Hollywood and the Development of Chinese Films," [Haolaiwu de quan qiu hua celüe yu zhongguo dianying de fazhan], in *Globalisation and the Destiny of Chinese Films and Televisions* [Quan qiu hua yu zhongguo ying shi de mingyun], eds. Zhang Fengzhu, Huang Shixian and Hu Zhifeng (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chenban she, 2002), 131.

⁴⁰ Jin Na, "Hollywood Globalization in 'Columbia Phenomena'," in *Looking through the Ocean*, (see note 41 in Chapter 2), 178.

detectives, but the director invited several Japanese actors to participate in this film which depicts a group of Chinese and Japanese women fighters assisting the male detectives.

Those films indicate that attracting foreign investment was important for the survival of the Hong Kong film industry. Furthermore, many Hong Kong filmmakers followed the Hollywood vogue, and in some of their films the women warriors resembled new girl heroines in Hollywood films who embodied girl power feminism rather than resembling women warriors in earlier works such as *Peking Opera Blue* and *Dragon Inn*, in which patriotism and familial bonding were important features. In 1980s and 1990s films, Hong Kong's identity as a colony and later as a special administrative region of Mainland China was still important, but in new productions such as *So Close* and *Tokyo Raiders*, regional boundaries dissolved, and Hong Kong is portrayed as a glamorous metropolis. The film chosen for analysis here, *The Twins Effects* (*Twins Effect*), directed by Dante Lam and Donnie Yen in 2003 was one such production which reflected this 'Hollywoodising' trend.

Twins Effect, starring Gillian Chung (钟欣桐) and Charlene Choi (蔡卓妍), is an amalgamation of action, comedy, and romance. These two actresses were originally singers in a musical group called 'Twins', formed in 2001. The band was successful and the two singers became extremely popular in Hong Kong. The English title of their first action film used the name of their band.

Twins Effect is set in 2046⁴¹ when vampires from another planet invade a metropolis on earth (without hint that it is Hong Kong), and two carefree girl teenagers—Helen (played by Charlene Choi) and Gypsy (played by Gillian Chung)—transform into mature vampire-slayers. Helen and Gypsy share similarities with popular Western vampire-slayer television programmes and films, such as Buffy in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (dir. Neal Batali, et al, 1997-2004) and Selene in *Underworld I and II* (directed by Len Wisemen in 2003 and 2006 respectively). As film critic Derek Elley says, “[w]ith the right marketing, [the] pic [*Twins Effect*] could have some chances in the West, especially on ancillary with inquisitive ‘Buffy’ buffs.”⁴²

According to Susan Hopkins, “Buffy represents a new pop stereotype of the ‘perfect’ girl: a middle-class teen queen who is both beautiful and ‘empowered’.”⁴³ Like Buffy, Helen and Gypsy in *Twins Effect* are beautiful, fashionable and independent modern girls from comfortable middle class families. Throughout the film, when not involved in killing vampires, they enjoy dressing up, dating, and attending parties, and reveal no life stresses such as financial insecurity. Helen and Gypsy also embody “empowered” womanhood as does Buffy. Hoskins notes, “[t]he current generation of girls and young women won’t accept submissive, weak and dependent role models.”⁴⁴ Helen and Gypsy embody this “girl power feminism”.

⁴¹ Under Mainland China’s guarantee that Hong Kong would remain “unchanged” for fifty years after 1997, 2046 will be the last year of this guarantee. Therefore, the number 2046 carries very sensitive implications regarding Hong Kong’s destiny and identity. Director Wong Kar-wai (王家卫), for example, made a film titled *2046*. *The Twins Effects* starts with a narrator introducing the story’s background, specifying that it is set in 2046. However, in the DVD version sold in New Zealand, this reference to 2046 has been removed, implying that Hong Kong tried to dilute part of the Hong Kong background of the film and globalise it before selling to a global market.

⁴² Derek Elley, “The Twins Effect,” *Variety* 392, no.7 (September 29- October 5, 2003).

⁴³ Hopkins.117.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

3.3.2 The Uniqueness of Hong Kong Cinema

Although some critics are positive about ‘Hollywoodisation’ as a means of survival for Hong Kong cinema, others express concern. They fear that this Hollywoodising method of presenting women warriors may threaten Hong Kong’s traditional values as a Chinese community. Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover note that after 1997, “Hong Kong cinema portrays a post-traditional people whose social structure is weakening and whose cultural values are being challenged.”⁴⁵ However, in *Twins Effect*, although Helen and Gypsy resemble many Western women warriors, especially vampire-slayers, they also possess Hong Kong characteristics, which become more apparent when compared with similar Hollywood productions. The film also reveals the social contexts of the time when it was made.

It is true that women warriors characters are diverse in Hollywood, but within the genre of vampire films, most Hollywood productions present women warriors living in solitude in an apocalyptic universe and worrying about the end of the world. An example is Selene in *Underworld*, released in 2003, the same year as *Twins Effect*.

A difference between those solitary vampire-slayers in Hollywood productions and the two girl vampire hunters in *Twins Effect* is their emotional state. Director Dante Lam chose to introduce a happy image of the woman warrior to the vampire-slayer genre in *Twins Effect*, partly to establish his style of depicting women warriors in the global market, and also to provide some relief for the depressed Hong Kong society. The SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic broke out in Hong Kong in March 2003,⁴⁶ forcing film production in Hong Kong to close for almost four months, and film critic Li Cheuk-to notes that “[m]ore than just a public health crisis,

⁴⁵ Stokes and Hoover, 304.

⁴⁶ McDonogh and Wong, 3.

SARS plunged the whole territory into a state of fear and despair.”⁴⁷ He also observes that tragic events, such as the suicide of famous actor Leslie Cheung (张国荣), intensified the despair of the Hong Kong people.⁴⁸ They needed cheerfulness and optimism to disperse the gloomy ambience of the new millennium.

Helen and Gypsy represented *happy* girlhood: their cute, energetic but slightly naughty characters made them immensely popular among teenagers and parents in Hong Kong and other Asian regions. Wendy Kan notes:

The Twins are two women in their 20s...who are not even related. But that seems not to matter much, thanks to an image of pale-faced wholesomeness and perennial happiness that has won them fans across Hong Kong....[P]arents have allowed the Twins to become idols for their kids because they have such a nice image. So parents are fans, too.⁴⁹

Exploiting the two actresses' cheerful images, director Lam produced a happy, postmodern fairy tale in *Twins Effect*. Even before *Twins Effect* was released at the end of the SARS crisis on 24 June, the Hong Kong audiences were anticipating some distraction from their troubles having seen previews of the 'Twins' perennial happy images. This representation of happiness in women warriors in post-1997 Hong Kong society was an important element in visualising a 'better Hong Kong' at an unhappy time.

To meet the audience's expectations, Helen, in particular, is depicted as a vivacious carefree teenager. There is no mention of her parents, and her vampire-slayer brother Reeve (played by Ekin Cheng 郑伊健) seems to be her only family, so she is free

⁴⁷ Cheuk-to Li, "Hong Kong," *Film Comment* 40, no.5 (Sep-Oct 2004): 10.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Wendy Kan, "Wholesome Twin Act Woos Auds," *Variety* 391, no.7, (June 30- July, 2003)

from familial obligations and constraints. Although Helen's boundless energy and her girlish naughtiness are always misinterpreted as aggressive and 'bossy' by her boy friends all of who always choose to break up with her, her ability to recover with miraculous speed and enjoy life again is an expression of her extreme optimism. These qualities in Helen stirred Hong Kong people's nostalgia for the happiness of youth as well as satisfied their desire to be relieved from duty-burdened reality.

The other protagonist, Gypsy, is also depicted as an energetic girl, who although portrayed as more mature than Helen, embraces life just as enthusiastically. When asked by Helen's brother Reeve, who teams up with her on vampire-slaying missions, about her reasons for choosing to become a professional vampire hunter, she replies, "My parents were killed by vampires. I swore I would avenge them....Do you believe me? I was just kidding.... [because] you are the best-looking vampire hunter....That is a fib too." Her last comment is a reference to an earlier scene when Gypsy meets Reeve for the first time. She shows Reeve his poster and says enthusiastically, "you're my pin-up", revealing her infatuation with him since before their first meeting. Her story resembles the Grimm fairy tale "Faithful John" in which a young king falls in love with the princess of the Golden Palace after seeing her portrait in his palace.⁵⁰ Gypsy's subsequent actions also confirm that she has joined the vampire-slaying institution because she finds Reeve attractive, and there is no hint of a personal grudge against the vampires. The director has created a happy story to dispel the gloom enveloping Hong Kong society.

3.3.3 Subversion of a Fairy Tale

⁵⁰ J.L.C. & W. C. Grimm, *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2003), 47-55.

The depiction of happy Helen and Gypsy also subvert typical fairytale images of women waiting for prince charmings to rescue them from danger. According to Jack Zipes, author of *Fairy Tales and the Arts of Subversion*, the typical norm of traditional fairy tales has been “[t]he male acts, the female waits.”⁵¹ The subversion of this fairy tale convention has been a common feature in post-1997 Hong Kong cinema. The film *Wu Yen* (dir. Johnny To and Ka-Fai Wai, 2001), for example, tells an ancient legend of a queen leading the country’s army, while her husband remains in the capital leading a safe and extravagant lifestyle. Another film *The White Dragon* (飞侠小白龙, dir. Wilson Yip 叶伟信, 2004) depicts a young woman discovering a plot to assassinate the prince she loves. She is not afraid to track down the assassin herself to protect the prince. These films featuring empowered women were part of Hong Kong filmmakers’ efforts which began before 1997 to construct a ‘better Hong Kong’ in their films.

This new mode of ‘the female acts, the male waits’ was also the main feature of *Twins Effect*. Helen falls in love with the vampire prince Kazaf (played by Edison Chen 陈冠希), and her action subverts the fairy tale “Sleeping Beauty”, as Helen assumes the role of protector while the vampire prince Kazaf is given a passive role normally assigned to a girl in traditional fairy tales. When Kazaf’s father is forced into exile by the rebellious Duke and is no longer able to supply blood to Kazaf, he steadily weakens as he refuses to suck blood from a living person. Helen carries the semi-conscious Kazaf on her back and steals blood from the hospital. When the Duke’s followers attempt to abduct Kazaf, Helen uses her martial arts skills to defend him, while he is depicted either seated in a wheelchair or lying on a stretcher on the

⁵¹ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: the Classical Genre for Children and Process of Civilization* (New York: Methuen, 1988), 25.

verge of unconsciousness, like the sleeping princess in “Sleeping Beauty.” In the major battle with the Duke, Kazaf once again becomes paralysed when attacked by the Duke. He lies prostrate, assuming the Sleeping Beauty position in the fairy tale, while Helen, wielding her sword, plays the role of invincible rescuer.

While the story of Helen and Kazaf subverts “Sleeping Beauty”, that of Gypsy and Reeve could also be interpreted as a subversion of the fairy tale where a courageous young man rescues an enchanted princess; Grimm’s fairy tale “Raven” is an example. The structures of the two stories can be illuminated by the following table:

Common points	“Raven”	Storyline of Reeve and Gypsy
Becoming a monster	A curse turning a princess into a non-human creature (for example: a raven)	Reeve is turned into a vampire
Initial failure	A young man promised to save the princess, but forgetting the princess’s warnings of temptation, he initially fails to save her.	Gypsy has taken the wrong antidote to Reeve, so, he is losing consciousness and transforming into an evil vampire. Gypsy stabs him in the chest and he regains consciousness. The wound is not fatal.
Second	The young man searches for the mysterious castle where the princess is imprisoned and saves her, using mysterious	Gypsy finds her way into a mysterious castle where Reeve is turning into an evil vampire. Gypsy is forced to stab Reeve

rescue	weapons he has acquired on the way.	through the heart a second time, and kills him.
Rewards	A kiss from the princess and they live happily ever after.	No “kiss miracle” from Reeve; Gypsy is transformed from a “rookie” to a qualified vampire-slayer.

Unlike the traditional ‘rescue’ fairy tale which celebrates manhood and emphasises that male protagonists always learn from their mistakes and transform into successful rescuers, Lam’s film celebrates courageous womanhood. Gypsy is initially an immature vampire hunter who ‘messes up’ her earlier missions, but eventually learns to kill the evil vampire invaders without male assistance.

Although the stories of Helen and Gypsy tell of women in an imaginary world in which supernatural beings are regarded as normal, their experiences actually reflect reality, in a similar way to fairy tales. According to Jack Zipes, in fairy tales, “their configurations and symbols were already marked by a sociopolitical perception and had entered into a specific institutionalized discourse before they were transformed into literary tales for children of the European upper classes.”⁵² Similarly, as a contemporary fairy tale about the new millennium Hong Kong, the gender subversions of traditional fairy tales in *Twins Effect* must be understood within the changing sociocultural circumstances of Hong Kong in the new millennium.

Having become highly industrialised and urbanised, Hong Kong began to have increasing numbers of young people, financially well supported by their families, whose consumer power provided a large market for film culture. Furthermore, this

⁵² Zipes, 7.

young generation has been heavily influenced by global urban culture so that when starting their careers, they tend to choose an independent life apart from their parents. Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover note that under such circumstances, “*Fealty* is giving way to what Macpherson termed ‘possessive individualism,’ as the young seek higher-income occupations and professions to place them outside of family control.”⁵³ This life is also shared by those women who choose to delay marriage and child-bearing, as mentioned previously. Such women, no matter what their ages are, actually enjoy a prolonged adolescence. Thus fairy tales depicted on films have become a very popular form of youth culture. Such films create an illusion of Hong Kong as a fairy land as well as a universal metropolis.

For Hong Kong women, films which subvert fairy tales have added appeal because their female characters enjoy better lives as independent women. As Jack Zipes argues, fairy tales “were symbolic acts in which they enunciated their aspirations and projected the magic possibility in an assortment of imaginative ways so that anyone could become a knight in shining armor or a lovely princess.”⁵⁴ Similarly, the subversive acts of the women warriors in fairy-tale like films, such as *Twins Effect*, embody “symbolic acts” in which a “magic possibility” of gender equality would be realised “so that anyone [including women] could become a knight in shining armor,” although the reality is still not as rosy as that portrayed on film. Hong Kong women still have many obstacles to overcome, and total gender equality is still a hope rather than a reality.

⁵³ Stokes and Hoover, 304 (my italics).

⁵⁴ Zipes, 8.

Chapter Summary

From the 1980s to the present, Hong Kong has undergone much political, economic, and sociocultural change. This former British colony before 1997 which became part of the Peoples' Republic of China in 1997 has endured political and psychological crises. However, Hong Kong people successfully overcame their plight and established a distinctive cultural identity. Amid such changes Hong Kong filmmakers, using women warriors as their protagonists, tried to encapsulate people's aspirations and anxieties and re-examine issues relating to nationalism and patriotism. At the same time, they endeavoured to reflect the changing roles of women in Hong Kong society and explore gender equality in the political and economic spheres, as well as personally, as part of an effort to construct a 'better Hong Kong' through their films. In other words, women warriors were important instruments through which filmmakers could express their visions as well as capture the sociopolitical and cultural changes in Hong Kong. In the new millennium, globalisation and 'Hollywoodisation' began to influence how women warriors were presented in Hong Kong cinema with the new girl heroes resembling the popular "girl power" role models of Hollywood productions, indicating Hong Kong's transformation into a global metropolis.

4. Mainland China

[W]oman and the feminine often serve as allegory. Women often stand in for the nation's suffering and oppression. Strength-hidden-as-weakness and the woman's body often becomes emblematic of the body of the nation.

L. S. Kim, "Making Women Warriors: A Transnational Reading of Asian Female Action Heroes in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon", in Jump Cut, No. 48,

Winter 2006

4.1. *Eight Women Died a Martyr*¹: Femininisation of the 'Iron Girl'

After coming into power, the Communist Party in Mainland China executed autocratic control over all aspects of life. The state also controlled the film industry and representations of women in films produced by the industry up to the 1970s featured masculinised 'iron girls', as discussed in Chapter 1. However, the financial slump of state-funded films became an issue of concern in the latter half of the 1980s, one reason being audience rejection of state-imposed female role models. The film *Eight Women Died a Martyr* (dir. Yang Guangyuan, 1987) is made to accommodate the changing audience taste and the demand by the state.

¹ This English title is exactly as printed on the DVD version purchased in Beijing in early 2006. The correct translation of the Chinese title should be "Eight Women Die Martyrs."

4.1.1 The Demand for Feminisation of the ‘Iron Girls’

As discussed in Chapter 1, the masculinised ‘iron girls’ depicted in Mainland Chinese films made between the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and the 1970s were the female role models. However, sociopolitical changes after the Cultural Revolution made it both possible and necessary to change this ‘iron girl’ role model.

The Cultural Revolution was destructive on many levels, and from the late 1970s, to repair the tattered economy, the Communist government under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping began implementing a range of economic reforms. However, the effects of these reforms were limited, mainly due to the country’s enormous population. The Communist government therefore decided to implement a one-child policy and enforce it throughout the nation, with the exception of ethnic minorities.² As a result, the education of the single child in each family became an important social issue, and the government began emphasising the need for women to be noble, self-sacrificing mothers and dedicate themselves to the raising of their single child. Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin Winckler regard this phenomenon as an official revival and reinforcement of the traditional notion of the “virtuous wife and good mother (*xian qi liang mu*).”³

Given such economic and political changes, the state-controlled film industry started depicting female protagonists as a combination of ‘iron girls’ and maternal nurturers. There were other changes in the depiction of women in films, as those intellectuals sent down to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution began questioning the validity of the masculinised ‘official heroines’ in the new era of social

² Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler, *Governing China’s Population: from Leninist to Neoliberal biopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 100.

³ *Ibid*, 238.

economic development. Filmmakers in a position to recommence filmmaking also did not want to continue to embrace the monotonous revolutionary saints as the sole female role models. Instead, they focused on women's life experiences and on what Yingjin Zhang identified as "the genuine pursuit of *humanism*".⁴ In *Yellow Earth* (黄土地, 1984), Chen Kaige (陈凯歌) portrays a girl who tries to escape an impending arranged marriage. Director Xie Jin (谢晋) explores issues around a woman's pursuit of love and re-marriage during the Cultural Revolution in *Hibiscus Town* (芙蓉镇, 1986). Yingjin Zhang notes that a common characteristic of these female protagonists is their portrayals "not as 'saintly' revolutionaries exemplifying abstract Communist ideas but as *ordinary individuals* struggling with common problems in human relationships, such as love, marriage and sexuality".⁵

Furthermore, the younger generation raised after the Cultural Revolution also appreciated the Westernisation of their culture. As a result of China's economic reforms and its re-engagement with the world, Western culture began to influence Chinese popular culture, which was welcomed by the younger generation. Beverley Hooper notes this cultural change in China:

...a dramatic occurrence in China [in the 1980s], is the use of photographic posters of Chinese women in calendars. These include not just film stars but a wide range of unidentified attractive women, dressed either as traditional beauties or as 'modern young women' with permed hair, Western clothing and high heels.⁶

⁴ Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 228.

⁵ Ibid. Italics in original texts.

⁶ Beverley Hooper, *Youth in China* (Ringword: Penguin Books, 1985), 107.

Such changes provided the younger generation with glamorous individual role models to idolise, including film stars, popular singers, and top sportswomen. Hooper emphasises that this star system was part of the “individualistic Western culture and normally suppressed in Communist countries”.⁷ As a result, the younger generation rejected the genderless ‘iron girl’ role models promoted by Mao during his reign.

Last but not least, reforms in the film industry contributed further to modifications in the portrayal of masculinised ‘official heroines.’ In the early 1980s, Mainland China’s film production was still state-funded: the Film Cooperation would provide 700,000 yuan per title to the state-owned studios if they produced films approved by the Film Bureau.⁸ However, many of these films failed to attract audiences. One ticket seller noted that there were only thirteen customers at the premiere of one particular film in 1987.⁹ Thus more filmmakers became concerned about box office success and began modifying the genderless ‘iron girl’ heroines to attract audiences. The film examined in this section, *Eight Women Died a Martyr* (hereafter *Eight Women*), is an example of a state-owned studio’s cautious response to censorship by the Film Bureau in order to obtain government financial support, while at the same time the director attempted to change the official masculinised ‘iron girl’ model.

4.1.2 The New ‘Official Heroine’

Eight Women is based on the true story of eight patriotic women soldiers of the Resistance Alliance during the invasion by Japan of Northeast China in the 1930s, who chose to drown themselves rather than surrender to the enemy. As early as 1949,

⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁸ Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 239.

⁹ Chris Berry, “Market Forces: China’s ‘Fifth Generation’ Faces the Bottom Line,” in *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (see note 45 in Chapter 1), 126.

director Ling Zifeng had adapted this story and created the film *Daughters of China*. In 1987, August First (八一) Film Studio was funded by the government to make an updated version.

a). Patriotism

Both the 1949 film and the 1987 production were so-called ‘leitmotif’¹⁰ films produced by state-owned studios for propaganda in which women were depicted as patriotic ‘official heroines.’ The concept of ‘official heroine’ is close to Lisa Rofel’s definition of a “national woman”: she is a revolutionary “who had reached an elevated status through commitment to class politics and wholehearted support for state policies.”¹¹ According to Dai Jinhua, women in Mainland China were expected to lead a life similar to that of ‘national women’ in Rofel’s definition:

[L]iberation’s arrival did not mean, or did not only mean, that women would enjoy freedom and happiness as new women. Rather it meant that they should devote their newly freed hearts and bodies without restraint to their saviors, their liberators—the CCP, socialism, and the grand Communist Project.¹²

In accordance with this official concept, the 1949 film and its 1987 version *Eight Women* both depict the women protagonists as defenders of political ideals and the public good when their nation is subjected to the Japanese invaders. Women’s suffering during the Japanese invasion, in particular, has often been described in

¹⁰ ‘Leitmotif’ films is a translated term for the Chinese ‘*zhu xuanli dianying*’, referring to the state-funded films that promoted government ideologies.

¹¹ Lisa Rofel, “Liberation Nostalgia and a Yearning for Modernity,” in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, eds. Christina K. Gilmartin, et al (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 238.

¹² Dai, 111.

nationalistic discourse as symbolising the victimisation of the Chinese nation. Lisa Rofel notes that “the subjugation of Chinese women came to symbolize the subjugation of China in a world of nations.”¹³ Therefore, women who opposed the Japanese invaders were extolled as champions of national dignity.

The female protagonist Hu Xiuzhi (胡秀之), in the 1949 version, follows this official ideology: she witnesses the Japanese invaders burning down her village and killing her husband, but she refuses to be conquered. Instead, she joins the Resistance Alliance to defend China and maintain the national dignity. In the 1987 film, although director Yang Guangyuan emphasises a common devotion to the war of resistance against Japan in all of his female characters, including Hu Xiuzhi, he begins his narrative with Leng Yun (冷云) who gives up her luxurious middle class lifestyle to join the army. She also rejects her husband who is a police official in the employ of the Japanese, declaring, “I have had enough of living as a slave of a conquered nation.”

Although the two protagonist Hu Xiuzhi in the 1949 film and Leng Yun in the 1987 film become patriotic soldiers, their most significant difference is their class backgrounds which reflected the government policies of the time. Hu Xiuzhi in the 1949 film is a peasant woman, whereas Leng Yun in the 1987 film is an intellectual woman from a wealthy family. This is because in the 1940s Mainland China was wartorn, with a Communist Party proclaiming itself as the saviour of China’s peasantry, whereas in the 1980s, Mainland China was focusing on economic reform and the development of private enterprise, which would lead to prosperity for some individuals. In order to achieve economic success in the 1980s without weakening the collective identity of the individuals, Mainland China needed to promote patriotism

¹³ Rofel, 236.

among those who had become rich because of the economic reforms. By portraying a woman from a middle class family, Leng Yun, who abandons her comfortable lifestyle to fight for her country, the director Yang Guangyuan intends to awaken patriotism towards the Communist nation among the new 1980s generation, and remind them of the need to always put the national interest before their personal enjoyment of economic success.

b). Genderless Women

Another difference between the 1949 film and the 1987 remake is their gender focus. The director of the 1949 version ignores the women's personal and gender identities, as many of the female soldiers (as well as male soldiers) are referred to only by their surnames or are nameless, implying that individual identity is unimportant in Communist China, especially at times of national crisis. The two female characters who are identified with personal names are Hu Xiuzhi and the group leader, Leng Yun, because of their importance in promoting the Communist ideology. Leng Yun is a spiritual leader who teaches novice soldiers such as Hu Xiuzhi to become mature Communist Party members, whereas Hu Xiuzhi is a typical soldier who is initially politically naïve but fights courageously and is ultimately accepted as a 'glorious' member of the Communist Party.

In addition, the 1949 film also depicts everyone in unisex uniforms, omitting any references to women's femininity. The young widow, Hu Xiuzhi, is depicted not only abandoning her gender identity by donning a soldier's uniform, but also cutting her hair bun—the symbol of a married woman—and transforming into a masculinised 'iron girl.' Meanwhile, the group leader Leng Yun is desexualised via her social relationship. Although she is the lover of a male group leader, their farewell is a

highly politicised discussion of their commitment to the Communist Party. Their personal relationship is no longer that of a man and a woman in love, but an idealised version of Communist comradeship. The stories of Hu Xiuzhi and Leng Yun are intended to portray China as a genderless utopia. According to Rey Chow, in times of national crises, such as the Japanese invasion, if a woman appears in a film or in other forms of cultural media, “she does not appear as ‘woman’ but as ‘Chinese.’”¹⁴ The 1949 version certainly depicts the female characters in that fashion.

c). *Women as Mothers*

In the 1987 version women’s politicised identity as masculinised revolutionary saints of Communist China is no longer its focus, because an audience influenced by the diversity of popular Western culture rejected the glorification of homogenous revolutionary saints. Director Yang Guangyuan endeavours to portray eight *women* with distinctive personalities. He also feminises them by emphasising their biological ability to bear children, although they suffer from witnessing the death of their children. Leng Yun is pregnant when she joins the army and later undergoes a stillbirth in the camp. An Fushun (安抚顺), on the other hand, is a young mother who witnesses her child’s death at the hands of the Japanese, and the youngest female character, Wang Huimin (王惠民), experiences her menarche in the winter, although she never becomes pregnant in the course of the film. *Eight Women* is notable as the first Chinese film about women at war to mention their procreative bodies by referring to menstruation.

¹⁴ Rey Chow, “Violence in the Other Country: China as Crisis, Spectacle, and Woman,” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 88.

The emphasis on women's procreative roles in this film may have related to the official agenda to control women's fertility by instituting the one-child policy. Greenhalgh and Winckler suggest that in the 1980s, the one-child policy was based on a natural science model by "reducing people to biological objects of control".¹⁵ Although the Communist Party had pledged to protect women's equality, in practice the one-child policy revealed the hidden discrimination against women, whose bodies became the targets of control. In a scene in *Eight Women* the female team leader, Hu Xiuzhi, tells Wang Huimin to halt her menstrual bleeding by immersing her feet in icy water.¹⁶ This is a symbolic act representing the control of women's fertility which was identified as the cause of rapid population growth. Women were expected to bear the burden of contraception and sterilisation to enforce the birth control policy¹⁷, while men's procreative roles were sanctified by the age-old tradition of male heir lineage. The emphasis on women's procreative role was supposedly to restore women's gender identity in 1980s Mainland China, but the one-child policy revealed the negative view of women's fertility. *Eight Women* conveys this negative view, although the director attempts to feminise his characters by glorifying their maternal roles.

¹⁵ Greenhalgh and Winckler, 195.

¹⁶ This is not a scientific method, but, in Chinese practice, girls would be advised to avoid cold water, especially on their feet, during their period in order to protect their fertility. This act of immersing her feet into ice water is supposed to control her period, but it is a symbolic act to control women's fertility rather than a treatment.

¹⁷ For example Ellen Judd carried out research in Huaili, Shangdong province, and exposed the surveillance of women's fertile bodies. She notes, "The birth-planning worker was required to maintain a monthly record of each woman's menstruation, in order to identify any pregnancy at an early stage." *The Chinese Women's Movement: between State and Market* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 97.

d). The Pursuit of Personal Happiness

Another method adopted by Yang Guangyuan to feminise his characters was by focusing on their love stories. As mentioned earlier, in the 1980s many directors began portraying the common areas of women's personal lives, such as love, marriage and sexuality, in order to counter the public rejection of the female 'iron girl' images. Yang employed a similar method, and although women's patriotism was still an important theme in his film he also developed a subplot to depict the romantic love between men and women. For example, Yang Guizhen (杨贵珍) is a young widow who loves her husband so deeply that even after becoming a soldier to avenge his death, she retains a small white flower in her hair all the time as a token of her love for him. Another young mother, An Fushun, joins the army to follow her husband. During a night break in a march, she and her husband snuggle together in a gesture of intimacy and love. The female army chef, Guo Guiqin (郭桂琴), joins the resistance army to escape from life as the bride of a little boy, a result of an arranged marriage motivated by money, but finds true love in the army.

The subplots of these love stories, however, reveal both the progressive aspects and the limitations of the director. Although only subplots, they were evidence of Yang Guangyuan's efforts (as many of his fellow filmmakers did at the same decade) to, reject the conventional formula of depicting women purely as masculinised 'iron girls.' In this sense his film was progressive, especially since this vision of women finding happiness in romantic relationships would then become the central plot in the 1990s rather than the subplot.

However, Yang is limited in his film by his attempts to enhance male superiority, although he claims that his intention is to "produce a film about women's tragedy

from women's perspective."¹⁸ For example, when Leng Yun leaves her husband to fight the Japanese invaders, she is placed under the guidance of a senior male captain. When she discovers she is pregnant by her traitor husband, she rolls down the hill deliberately in an attempt to miscarry the foetus, because she does not want her child to grow up having a traitor father, but her action is severely criticised by the male captain from a humanistic point of view. It seems that the director created the senior male captain as Leng Yun's moral guide in order to reaffirm male superiority.

The reaffirmation of male superiority can also be found in the representations of other women warriors in this film. Yang depicts, Hu Xiuzhi, the team-leader as the archetypical masculinised woman, who regards feminine traits as weak and declares furiously, "Why are you acting like a woman? Act as a man!" She is frustrated because the young women in her charge are accustomed to either submitting to male authority or seeking male protection. The young mother, An Fushun, who loses her baby, for example, becomes a soldier because she wants to follow her army officer husband, whereas the young widow, Yang Guizhen, joins the army because she regards it as her duty to kill the Japanese to avenge her husband's death. The runaway bride Guo Guiqin, who finds true love in the army, enjoys the protection provided by her lover who helps her with heavy duties, and cares for her when her feet are wounded. Wang Huimin, the youngest girl in the camp, admires her heroic father who was killed in battle and motivated her to become a soldier to avenge his death. This tactic of employing a male fighter as an enlightener or protector, as Dai Jinhua points out, "contains a latent gender order (man/woman, respected /vilified, high/low,

¹⁸ Bai Ruixue, Xu Zhuangzhi and Zhang Baoyin, "Eight Women Died a Martyr: War has not Kept Women in the Distance [*Ba nü tou jiang: zhangzhen wei rang nüren zou kai*]", <http://military.people.com.cn/GB/8221/51757/51719/51724/3630280.html> (accessed 19 May 2006).

enlightener/enlightened, leader/follower), which establishes the legitimacy of both its narrative and its reception.”¹⁹

4.1.3 Returning to Conservatism

Considering the conservatism of this film, which is apparent in the depiction of the women warriors who are usually guided by males or endeavour to fight as a means of restoring their deceased male family members' dignity, it is not difficult to understand the director's conservative ending. Although the director highlights a sub-theme of women pursuing happiness, he ultimately reaffirms the view that a virtuous woman is self-sacrificing and patriotic. At the film's end, he reverts to an androgynous identity for women when the eight women soldiers are forced back by the enemy to the edge of a turbulent river, without an escape route. Plastered with mud, they continue to fight until their ammunition is exhausted. The director captures their ragged clothing and muddy faces using varied cinematic techniques: close-ups, medium shots, pan shots and slow motion. This detailed depiction of their unkempt and genderless appearance is to convey the message that an 'official heroine' is one who courageously defends her country without regard for feminine glamour. When they decide to drown themselves rather than surrender to the Japanese, they shout a slogan typical in propaganda films, "We would rather die than be captives!" The slogan masks their gender identity, as they choose death to preserve their dignity as Chinese.

It is important to note that the women choose to drown themselves to avoid the risk of sexual violation by their captors. This seems to be related to Yang's attempt to feminise the 'iron girl' by drawing attention to women's gender-specific bodies. Although Yang bestowed a gender-specific identity on his female characters, in the

¹⁹ Dai, 117.

end he endeavoured to erase it by emphasising their genderless images in the muddy swamp, an indication that Yang feared of breaking away completely from the official 'iron girl' model.

The depiction of women warriors in the state-funded film *Eight Women* reflects director Yang Guangyuan's struggle to balance state demand with the popular demand for more individualised heroines, but in the end he seems to have capitulated to the demand by the state. Although Yang has amended the state-sanctioned masculinised 'iron girl' idol, and showed concern for women's pursuit of personal happiness, he still adheres to the collective identity of women as patriotic soldiers. His modification of the masculinised 'iron girl' role model is partly influenced by the state's concern for women's procreative role under the implementation of family-planning policies in the 1980s. At the same time he attempts to incorporate popular demand for more individualised characters following audiences' rejection of the monotonous 'official heroines' in state-funded propaganda films by depicting women's pursuit of personal fulfilment. However, this was only a subplot, not the main one, although this and the relationship between women's sexualised bodies and their identity would become central themes in the 1990s.

4.2 *A Lover's Grief over the Yellow River: Single Women's Dreams*

4.2.1 Emergence of a Personal Story

Conflicts between the Communist government's autocratic rule to control film production and the popular demand for more commercial entertainment continued to influence the depiction of women warriors in the 1990s. Together with the further opening of the Chinese economy to the outside world in the 1990s, in 1993 the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television permitted the annual importation of ten international blockbusters into Mainland China²⁰, endangering the already vulnerable state-controlled film industry and forcing productions to become more commercialised. As filmmakers had to seriously consider audiences' preferences for financial reasons, many of them began to move away from the 'iron girl' images in the 1980s, instead developing subplots of women's personal happiness as the main themes. Many films depicted unmarried women, focusing on personal concerns and experiences, especially the attainment of feminine beauty and romantic fulfilment.

The second film examined here, *A Lover's Grief over the Yellow River* (*Lover's Grief*), directed by Feng Xiaoning, is an example of such phenomena. This film portrays a romantic relationship between a Chinese female soldier, An Jie (安洁, played by Ning Jing 宁静), and a wounded American pilot, Owen (played by Paul Kersey), during the war of resistance against Japan. The film was funded by the Shanghai Yong Le Film and Television Corporation, which was the first state-owned film company to be restructured into a share-holding corporation during the reformation of the film industry. This funding arrangement gave the director of *Lover's Grief* Feng Xiaoning an opportunity to combine the requirements of a

²⁰ Zhu, 20-21.

'leitmotif' film with those of a commercial film. To meet the requirements of a 'leitmotif' film, he continues to present the female protagonist as a patriotic soldier and emphasises her devotion to the fight for the public good and national dignity, whereas the profit-orientated funding system demanded that he cater to the market and audiences' tastes. Thus, Feng Xiaoning incorporates elements which would appeal to a wider audience, as, in this case, a 'love story' between a Chinese woman and an American soldier.²¹

4.2.2 The Continued Transformation of 'Official Heroines'

a). *Thematic Continuity: Patriotism*

As patriotism is a simple and straightforward motif for an official film, Feng Xiaoning also chooses the Japanese invasion as the background against which to develop his characters. Although *Lover's Grief* was made more over a decade after *Eight Women*, Feng's portrayal of his female protagonist An Jie was similar to that of an 'official heroine.' Like the women soldiers in *Eight Women*, An Jie is a patriotic soldier who joins the Eight Route Army (八路军) under the leadership of the Communist Party.

However, Feng modified the masculinised 'iron girl' by emphasising An Jie's qualities as a nurturer: she studied at a city medical school to pursue a career of saving lives before joining the army. Together with several other Communist soldiers, she rescues Owen when his jet crashes in the Japanese-occupied zone while on a mission to gather information for the American Air Force. An Jie cares for Owen during their journey to escort him out of the Japanese-occupied zone.

²¹ An Jie's love for an American pilot is a significant element in this section. The American pilot embodies the Westernisation of Chinese society; this will be expanded further.

An Jie's commitment to saving lives has prompted her to join the army to help save the nation under Japanese invasion. However, she rebels against her father because he has chosen opposing political ideals. She is still respected as a true heroine because, according to L.S. Kim, in Chinese philosophy a true hero "proves her/his worth, her/his heroism, by living up to a filial pledge to a larger order, and heroic action is practiced for a higher ideal."²² An Jie rebels against her father in order to fulfil her filial pledge to a higher order: the Communist nation, and confronts him because he does not support nationwide resistance against Japan. Her father tries to keep peace with the Japanese by bribery in order to protect his small community, but An Jie cannot accept such cowardly actions and chooses to follow the Communist Party, a symbolic father.

As a qualified 'official heroine,' An Jie also resembles the women depicted in *Eight Women* because of her martyrdom. During the dangerous journey to escort Owen to security, An Jie's fellow soldiers one by one are killed by the Japanese. Only An Jie, Owen and a small girl have survived when they arrive at the bank of the Yellow River, but An Jie is wounded and she cannot swim. As Owen tries desperately to save her by roping her to him, An Jie realises that she is a burden to Owen in the turbulent waters. She therefore decides to drown herself by cutting the rope in the middle of the river, in order to save him. Like the eight women martyrs who sacrifice their lives to safeguard their national dignity in *Eight Women*, An Jie also dies a heroic death in her defence of China against the Japanese invader.

²² Kim, "Making Women Warriors."

b). *Glamorising the ‘Official Heroine’*

Although Feng follows the limitations of an official ‘leitmotif’ film, when his work is compared with the 1980s film *Eight Women*, the changes he has made in that genre become apparent. While the latter focus on the collective actions of the women soldiers while subordinating their personal stories to less significant subplots, *Lover’s Grief* focuses on the story of just one woman: the love story between An Jie and Owen, the American pilot.

Furthermore, although both directors challenge the masculinised ‘iron girl’ role models and feminise their women warriors, their motivations differ. *Eight Women* was a 1980s production, when women’s procreative bodies were an important topic in state policies and director Yang Guangyuan emphasised this maternal role in his portrayals of women warriors. However, although many 1980s policies were still operative in the 1990s, those related to economic development seemed to be central. Yingjin Zhang notes that after the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989, “PRC [People’s Republic of China] attempted to get over a political crisis by speeding up economic reforms nationwide”.²³ Two conspicuous developments resulting from those economic reforms were the rapid growth of urbanisation and the flourishing consumer economy. Luxurious lifestyles and a consumer culture led to a unique economic phenomenon, identified by Xu Hong and Lu Tian as an “eyeball economy” or “beauty economy,” where women’s beauty and glamour were considered “prosperity indexes of the fashionable society.”²⁴

This “eyeball economy” phenomenon created a demand for new feminine role models. Many female images were used in advertisements for cosmetics and other

²³ Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 259.

²⁴ Xu Hong and Lu Tian, *Economy Belles [Mei nü jingji baogao]* (Beijing: Zuoja chuban she, 2003), 1.

beauty products. Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen describe the ideal female image in 1990s Mainland China as having “an attractive, regular face, a pleasant smile, and sparkling eyes....She wears beautifully applied makeup that emphasizes her prettiest features and is garbed with grace in the season’s fashion.”²⁵ While this “eyeball economy” was growing rapidly, the audiences’ tastes were also changing and they rejected the ragged women warriors of the 1980s. Director Feng discarded the frugal ‘official heroines’ promoted in the 1980s, and presented a more glamorous and feminine woman warrior in his film.

Compared with the ragged women soldiers in *Eight Women*, the character An Jie in *Lover’s Grief* is depicted as beautiful and feminine. Her hair is neatly braided, and one particular scene is dedicated to her combing her hair beside a shallow river. Although An Jie and her small group encounter several attacks by the enemy and engage in fierce combat, her clothing remains spotless, while her face still shows traces of make-up. This depiction of the immaculately groomed woman warrior helps to repackage the woman warrior into an elegant and feminine woman who replaces the masculine ‘iron girl’ role model. As a new ‘official heroine’ in the leitmotif films in the 1990s, An Jie’s femininity and her glamorous screen image reflect the growing prosperity of 1990s Mainland China.

4.2.3 The Sexualised Body of the Woman Warrior

a). *The Right to Be Feminine*

The feminising and glamorising of An Jie, however, is not an entirely positive move as it risks transforming women warriors into ‘sexual objects’ for display. In the

²⁵ Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, “the New Chinese Women and Lifestyle Magazines in the late 1990s,” in *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in the Globalizing Society*, eds. Perry Link, Richard P. Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 149.

West, the glamorising of women could be criticised as “exploitation for commercial purposes and in particular, of the ‘sex object’ syndrome.”²⁶ The most influential work on this topic is Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*²⁷. However, the feminising and glamorising of women warriors in Mainland Chinese films have a unique function in empowering women.

The feminised body of a woman warrior in 1990s Mainland Chinese films was a signifier of a relaxation of the state control of women’s culture. Mainland China’s women’s culture had been controlled by the official organisation “Women’s Federations”, and, for decades the pursuit of a glamorous appearance had been condemned as capitalist corruption and exploitation of women, as discussed in earlier chapters. Women were forced to identify with a genderless ‘iron girl’ role model. Ellen Judd notes, however, that for Chinese women, “[a]chieving equality in practice involves more than is usually implied by civil and political rights.”²⁸ Louise Edwards also notes: “Feminism in 1990s China asserts and celebrates feminine difference.... The assertion of the right to be feminine has become central to women’s studies in the PRC.”²⁹ The glamorisation of women was considered liberating to many Mainland Chinese women in the 1990s.

This assertion of feminine beauty was also a unique feature of a new economic phenomenon in the 1990s popularly known as the “single women economy”³⁰, which refers to a growing stratum of single, well-educated, middle class women with independent incomes to support their consumption of luxury goods and their pursuit

²⁶ Beverley Hooper, “Researching Women’s Lives in Contemporary China,” in *Dress, Sex and Text*, 243-262 (see note 42 in Chapter 1), 254.

²⁷ There is more discussion of her works in the Chapter 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁹ Edwards, “Women in the People’s Republic of China,” 81.

³⁰ Xu and Lu, 217.

of glamorous lifestyles. They could now afford international brands such as L'Oréal and Shiseido to glamorise and feminise their bodies. They regard their freedom to pursue glamorous and luxurious lifestyles and to enjoy reasserting their femininity as the celebration of their newly achieved liberation. Xu Hong and Lu Tian categorise them as “petty bourgeois ladies”³¹, and an important signifier of their success was their glamorous appearance.

The film industry also orchestrated this glamorisation of women warriors, gradually formulating a ‘star system’ that celebrated individual glamorous female stars. *Lover's Grief* was produced in such a social context. The leading female actor Ning Jing, who plays An Jie, was a celebrity in this growing ‘star system’ following her performances in two important films produced in the 1990s: *Red Firecrackers, Green Firecrackers* (炮打双灯, dir. He Ping 何平, 1993), and *In the Heat of the Sun* (阳光灿烂的日子, dir. Jiang Wen 姜文, 1995). It was her popularity that led director Feng Xiaoning to offer her the role of a Tibetan noblewoman warrior in his *Red River Valley* (红河谷), which became a nationwide hit in 1997. Ning Jing's popularity made the women warriors she played in films more attractive to the audience, and she has become a new idol in the “single women economy.”

b). A Romance with the West

Romantic relationships with men are often a popular theme of films depicting single women. Director Feng Xiaoning seems to be well aware of this and in his film concentrates on the female protagonist's romance, portraying the growing love between An Jie and Owen. The choice of a Western male as An Jie's ‘love object’ is meaningful to both Chinese women and to Mainland China. An important aspect of

³¹ Ibid., 223.

the “single women economy” in Mainland China is an admiration of the West. This admiration is reflected in a range of areas, including the acquisition of foreign languages, the desirability of Western fashion and luxury brands, listening to Western music, watching Western films and reading Western literature and magazines.

Glamorous Western women’s journals such as *Elle* (in China from 1993), *Cosmopolitan* (1993), and *Metropolis* (1998)³² became available, delivering more glamorous idols for women to imitate. By consuming the same cultural products as their Western counterparts, Chinese women began to nurture the myth that they had not only become as prosperous as their Western sisters, but had also become their ‘equals’. Furthermore, the Chinese opportunity to consume the same cultural products as the West seemed to signify that China had caught up with Western modernisation.

The protagonist of *Lover’s Grief* An Jie is the epitome of modernised Mainland China and its Westernised ‘single women’ culture of the 1990s. She knows some English, and is able to speak to Owen in English and help him learn Chinese. In addition, Owen also refers to An Jie as ‘Angel’ because the Chinese pronunciation of her name resembles ‘angel’ in English. The plot reflects a romantic wish of successful Chinese women to have a Western lover and become his angel.

This fantasy of romance between a Western man and a Chinese woman appeals to the Chinese, including ‘single women’ who cherish their independence, because the single women face a dilemma. Mainland Chinese women had been forced to follow the ‘iron girl’ role model, who, according to Greenhalgh and Winckler, “could compete successfully in the public sphere long dominated by men, while continuing to shoulder primary responsibilities for domestic work.”³³ These double responsibilities and the same dilemma continue to be a burden for Chinese women; there is a myth

³² Andrews and Shen, 146-149.

³³ Greenhalgh and Winckler, 238.

that Western men could release them from their burden because they seem more liberal than their Chinese counterparts.

An Jie's romantic relationship with Owen also has a meaning unique to Communist China. Owen's love for An Jie could be interpreted as the embodiment of the dream of a Mainland Chinese government to be loved by the West. When China re-adjusted its policies and endeavoured to catch up with the world in terms of its economic, cultural and social development, the Communist government was desperate to 'break the ice' and win sympathy from the West. In addition, as Mainland China began participating international affairs, it wanted international recognition to replace the criticism it had formerly received for its autocratic rule. In particular, its use of military power to suppress the student demonstration in Tiananmen Square in 1989 had not only horrified people in Hong Kong and Chinese communities abroad, but also resulted in severe censure from the international community.

In order to soften the masculinised and brutal image of Communist China, many filmmakers attempted to construct a feminised victim identity for China and deconstruct Mainland China's identity as a perpetrator. The director of *Lover's Grief* chooses the female protagonist An Jie to emphasise the victimisation of the Chinese by the Japanese invader. An Jie was raped by Japanese soldiers when the Japanese occupied the city where she had studied medicine. This prompted her to join the army to avenge the brutality committed against her by the enemy. Tormented by her past, she always carries a grenade with her; she could pull the trigger to destroy herself rather than be raped again. An Jie's rape is symbolic of China's invasion by the Japanese and An Jie is a metaphor of Mainland China as a victim. Director Feng seems to use a woman warrior who has been a victim of war and of a sex crime to arouse sympathy for Mainland China, which desires acceptance and respect from the

international community. Film critic Dai Degang also suggests that the director of *Lover's Grief* has used the love of the American pilot, Owen, for a Chinese woman as a metaphor for United States' sympathy and support for the Chinese people's anti-invasion war efforts during the war of resistance against Japan.³⁴ Although An Jie saves his life, it is Owen who offers her spiritual salvation: when he becomes aware of her suffering stemming from being raped; he promises to take her to the United States after the war. Owen confiscates An Jie's grenade and passionately exclaims in Chinese, "I will stay beside you to protect you. I won't allow you to be threatened by death." This vow is the clichéd expression of a masculine male's love for a fragile woman. It seems that by selecting the feminine An Jie as a symbol of Mainland China, director Feng has attempted to soften the harsh image of Communist China and win the respect and love of the West.

A woman embodying a nation is a cliché, but director Feng Xiaoning successfully creates a heroine to appeal to the new women of Mainland China who are single and economically independent, while retaining the official propaganda elements of a patriotic woman. In *Eight Women*, the director depicts a group of Chinese women warriors who die a dignified death and whose shabby, drab uniforms and muddy appearance conceal their femininity. However, Feng focuses on one woman and her romance, and through the portrayal of An Jie's femininity and glamour, he celebrates the development of the "single women economy", the flourishing consumer economy, and the prosperity of Mainland China. An Jie's romance with a Western pilot not only embodies Chinese women's dream of finding personal happiness through romance,

³⁴ Dai Degang, "Americans' Images in PRC's Films," in *Looking through the Ocean* (see note 41 in Chapter 2), 78-79.

but also symbolises Mainland China's desire to gain the Western powers' approval and love.

4.3 *House of Flying Daggers*: the Glamour of a New Woman Warrior

4.3.1 Hollywoodising Mainland China's Cinema

Mainland China continues to reform its film industry in the new millennium. Immediately after joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, it promulgated new regulations for film distribution and implemented the internationally accepted practice of 'theatre chains,'³⁵ in order to encourage the production of privately funded films and their distribution through a commercial private network. In addition, entry into the WTO meant a gradual increase in the importation of Hollywood blockbusters into the country and the globalisation of Mainland China's film market.

According to Zhou Xing, under this trend of globalisation, an important survival strategy for Mainland China's film industry was to adjust its ideologies, to communicate with the outside world, and to seek universal themes in film language.³⁶ Therefore, themes such as humanism and individualism that could cross cultural boundaries became in vogue. Compared with Hong Kong, the film industry in Mainland China was also relatively successful in adjusting its policies and strategies. According to statistics from the State Administration of Radio Film and Television, box office revenue from domestic production totalled 1.5 billion yuan in 2004, taking

³⁵ Zhan Bin, "Comparative Study of the Chinese and American Theatres Chains," in *Looking through the Ocean* (see note 41 in Chapter 2), 204.

³⁶ Zhou, 358.

fifty-five percent of the total box office, while imported blockbusters shared forty-five percent.³⁷

Representations of women warriors also reflect this globalisation process. The central theme of patriotism in 1980s and 1990s 'leitmotif' films embodied a Chinese nationalism that emphasised national boundaries. Benedict Anderson argues, "[t]he nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations."³⁸ The 'leitmotif' films in the 1980s and 1990s promoted the kind of nationalism specified by Anderson, in part because Mainland China still felt insecure in the international community at that time. However, in the advent of globalisation, filmmakers who depict women warriors attempt to move away from the exploration of patriotism, and focus on more globally recognisable themes, such as gender issues. *House of Flying Daggers* (2004, hereafter *Flying Daggers*), directed by the celebrated Mainland Chinese director Zhang Yimou, famous for his portrayals of women, is an example of the internationalisation of Mainland China's cinema. *Flying Daggers* is no longer funded by the government, but by two Hong Kong companies and a private enterprise in Mainland China. The cast includes Andy Lau (刘德华) from Hong Kong, half-Japanese, half-Taiwanese Takeshi Kaneshiro (金城武), and Zhang Ziyi from Mainland China, and its costumes were designed by a Japanese artist, Emi Wada. Its main theme also focuses on universal issues such as women's pursuit of personal freedom and happiness instead of the clichéd theme of patriotism.

³⁷ "Box Office Revenue of China's Domestic Films Surpasses that of Imported Blockbusters in 2004," [2004 Zhongguo dianying piaofang guo chan yingpian shou ci chao guo jinkou da pian], <http://ent.sina.com.cn/2005-01-07/0250621638.html> (accessed 5 March 2007).

³⁸ Anderson, 7.

4.3.2 A New Mainland Chinese Woman Warrior

Director Zhang Yimou, hailed internationally as a Maestro of Chinese contemporary cinema, is famous for his portrayal of rebellious women and his concern for specific women's issues, such as marriage and sexuality. In an interview in 1992, he commented:

The Chinese woman had always to submit to others' orders. Very few did not obey. But nowadays there are more and more women who have the courage to oppose the established authority. It is appropriate to show this in a moment where women become aware of it.³⁹

While other filmmakers in the 1990s continued to promote patriotic women warriors, Zhang was able to attract funding from outside Mainland China after winning the Golden Bear award in the Berlin International Film Festival in 1988. He produced works challenging 'official heroines', and distributed them on the international market.⁴⁰ In his earlier productions known as the Red Trilogy, *Red Sorghum* (红高粱, 1987), *Ju Dou* (菊豆, 1990), and *Raise the Red Lanterns* (大红灯笼高高挂, 1991), he dealt with women's rebellion against arranged marriage and their efforts to break away from the patriarchal family system.⁴¹ Using transnational funds Zhang Yimou

³⁹ Frances Gateward, ed. *Zhang Yimou: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 22.

⁴⁰ Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, "National Cinema, Cultural Critique, Transnational Capital: the Films of Zhang Yimou," in *Transnational Chinese Cinema: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, ed. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 109. Zhang's films were nominees and award winners at major international film festivals such as Cannes and Venice. His films such as *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* were periodically banned in China.

⁴¹ *Red sorghum* is about a young girl sold to a leper; the leper is mysteriously murdered and the female protagonist develops an unlawful relationship with a member of the sedan-bearers. In *Ju Dou*, the female protagonist, Ju Dou, is a young woman sold to an impotent old man. She enters an incestuous relationship with her husband's nephew. In *Raise the Red Lanterns*, the female protagonist is a young woman sold to a landlord as his fourth concubine; she fakes pregnancy to deceive her husband.

continued his depiction of rebellious girl heroes in *Flying Daggers*, portraying the life of a woman warrior, Xiao Mei (小妹, played by Zhang Ziyi).

a). *Abandoning Political Commitment*

At the beginning of the film, Zhang Yimou depicts Xiao Mei with certain ‘official heroine’ qualities. He sets the story around A.D. 859 when the Tang Dynasty is in decline and the incompetent government is crippled by corruption. Xiao Mei belongs to a rebellious underground organisation called the House of Flying Daggers (飞刀门) that earns the support and admiration of the suffering populace. She follows an order from her organisation to pose as the blind daughter of their deceased leader in order to deceive the police officer Jin (金捕头), who in turn thinks he has successfully concealed his true identity by rescuing her from prison. In fact, Xiao Mei is a decoy to lure the police into an ambush set by her organisation. She is ordered to seduce Jin with her beauty and seeming powerlessness so that he will escort her back to the place he thinks is the headquarters of the House of Flying Daggers, and the police can follow.

Xiao Mei’s commitment to her organisation and her devotion to the public good resembles heroines such as Cao Yun in *Peking Opera Blue* and Qiu Moyan in *Dragon Inn*, as well as patriotic ‘official heroines’ in 1980s and 1990s Mainland Chinese films. A common characteristic of these women warriors is their resemblance to the traditional altruistic ‘*nü xia*’ who sacrifice their happiness to save their communities or nations. As Luo Xu notes, “individual ideals were regarded as inherently integrated with transcendent idealism, and individual values could be realized only when the goals of the larger society were accomplished.”⁴²

⁴² Luo Xu, “Farewell to Idealism: Mapping China’s University Students of the 1990s,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 13, No. 41, (2004): 792.

However, Xiao Mei betrays this ideal when she falls in love with the man she is ordered to deceive and desires her own freedom. The head of her organisation has ordered her to execute Jin when they reach the ambush set for the police, but she realises the contradictions between her individual happiness and her loyalty to the House of Flying Daggers. In the end she chooses to release Jin and consummate their love.

After she releases Jin, who has given up his job as a policeman to become a hermit so that he can “be neither official nor citizen being governed, belonging to no faction; come and go without a trace,”⁴³ Xiao Mei decides to follow him. She is disillusioned with her organisation and tired of a life of deceit and intrigue, both in her organisation and the police force. She is ordered to deceive Jin, just as Jin is ordered to deceive her and realises that neither organisation intends to protect them. As Jin points out, both he and Xiao Mei are “just pawns on a chessboard. Nobody cares if we live or die.” Therefore, Xiao Mei decides to betray her organisation and share Jin’s hermit life, considering the betrayal of her organisation as a humane liberation from dark political struggle.

Through Xiao Mei’s desire to stay away from the political struggle, Zhang Yimou seems to portray the political apathy in contemporary Mainland China. As Luo says, “[c]orresponding to the political apathy and commercial order of the post-1989 China, the once appealing political idealism of the 1980s featured by intellectual and cultural enlightenment quickly disappeared.”⁴⁴ The government’s brutal suppression of the students’ political demonstration in the Tiananmen Square Incident forced many people to abandon futile political struggle and seek their fortunes in more practical

⁴³ The original lines are 非官非民, 无门无派, 来无影, 去无踪.

⁴⁴ Xu, “Farewell to Idealism,” 799.

areas, such as the economic domains. In the contemporary Mainland Chinese society, most people regard political idealism as empty and futile (*xu*) and one's individual career and work as real and pragmatic (*shi*).⁴⁵ Women are no exception. As discussed in the section on *Lover's Grief*, the flourishing of the single women economy signifies women's economic aspirations and their choice to avoid political commitment. Xiao Mei appears to be the epitome of people's disillusionment and rejection of political idealism in contemporary Mainland China.

b). The Glamorisation and Feminisation of Martial Arts

In *Flying Daggers*, Zhang Yimou invited Zhang Ziyi⁴⁶ who has become a glamorous global idol after her performance in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in 2000, to play the beautiful resourceful woman warrior Xiao Mei, to attract a worldwide audience. Ang Lee feminises the martial arts through his central character played by Zhang Ziyi, which will be analysed further in the next chapter, and Zhang Yimou employs similar tactics to make his film appeal to the West. Zhang Ziyi has received training in Chinese traditional dances, and it is clear that Zhang Yimou used her dancing extensively (although some dances were performed by another professional dancer) to glamorise and feminise the martial arts. Her movements are choreographed to emphasise her elegance and power simultaneously. This is first demonstrated in the scene where her character, Xiao Mei, performs a

⁴⁵ Judd, 185. The Chinese word '*xu*' (虚) means empty or nothing, indicating abstract ideas and concept, whereas '*shi*' (实) means real, referring to concrete things and pragmatic ways.

⁴⁶ Before playing Xiao Mei in *House of Flying Daggers*, Zhang Ziyi had already been an international star for her performances as various women warriors in *Crouching Tiger, Hero* and *Rush Hour 2* (dir. Brett Ratner, 2001). Her body appeared in various advertisements, but did not simply represent a "sexual object." She is also a successful girl role model for her international fame. She has been chosen as a spokesperson for several international beauty brands, such as Maybelline and Garnier from L'Oréal. As one of the few Chinese women able to represent these international beauty products, her success is an empowerment of Chinese women.

drum dance then draws a sword to kill police officer Liu (刘捕头) who had ordered her to dance. (They are in fact only posing as enemies.) During the journey to lure the police into the trap, Xiao Mei frequently needs to protect herself, even though Jin is fighting alongside her; in these fights she demonstrates varied martial arts skills, such as her mastery of throwing daggers.

Xiao Mei's fighting movements also feature somersaults and leaps, but these emphasise Zhang Ziyi's grace rather than her muscular power, and contribute to the feminisation and glamorisation of the martial arts. The employment of special effects has made many complicated body movements appear possible and many martial arts films employ these techniques. Zhang Yimou creates dazzlingly beautiful fighting scenes featuring Zhang Ziyi who look more elegant and glamorous while demonstrating her powerfulness.

It is also noteworthy that although Zhang Yimou glamorises Xiao Mei, he does not objectify her body. Xiao Mei always appears fully clothed. Apart from her appearance in extravagant dancing costumes, Xiao Mei mostly dresses in male's attire, and is always fully clothed, although she is beautifully made up throughout the film. Her body is not the focus, in contrast with many Western women warriors who often wear scanty clothing, such as Halle Berry in the James Bond film *Die Another Day* (dir. Lee Tamahori, 2002). However, even in male attire, Xiao Mei does not look masculine. It is not her clothes, but powerful and graceful fighting moves that enhance her glamour and femininity.

c). A Woman's Autonomy of Her Own Body

There are two scenes in *Flying Daggers* where the upper part of Xiao Mei's naked back is revealed, which could easily be interpreted as displaying her body as a sexual

object for the audience. However, Xiao Mei, not the male character Jin, controls these scenes. She is seducing Jin who has become her object of desire. This celebration of a woman controlling her glamorised body in *Flying Daggers* corresponds with remarks made by the famous film critic, Yvonne Tasker, who has done considerable research on women warriors in cinema:

Both beauty and body culture have responded then, though perhaps in contradictory ways, to the success of the women's movement, most particularly in the repeated invocation within advertising of the figure of the (sexually) independent woman.⁴⁷

Similarly, Rebecca Munford suggests that unlike second wave feminism, which was cautious about women's sexuality, the girl power phenomenon from the 1990s onward is characterised by "the paraphernalia of *sexualised* femininity."⁴⁸

Initially in *Flying Daggers*, Xiao Mei's body is not her own, because she is forced to use her sexuality to seduce men in the interests of her organisation. This aspect of the film corresponds with Naomi Wolf's comment that "women's bodies are not our own but society's."⁴⁹ Xiao Mei rebels against her organisation and stops their exploitation of her sexualised body by escaping so that she can regain full autonomy, including over her body.

It is important to emphasise that regaining control of the sexualised body has alternative political meaning in Mainland China. In 1995, Rey Chow rightly noted that "contemporary Chinese films, even though they are always made with the

⁴⁷ Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 141.

⁴⁸ Rebecca Munford, "'Wake Up and Smell the Lipgloss': Gender, Generation and the (A)politics of Girl Power," in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, eds. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 142. Italics in original texts.

⁴⁹ Wolf, *Beauty Myth*, 187.

assumption that they represent the ongoing problems within China, became the space where 'China' is exhibited in front of audiences overseas."⁵⁰ In this exhibition space at a time when Mainland China felt powerless and isolated from the international community, many filmmakers chose to identify China as a female victim in order to win sympathy, as mentioned earlier. In his Red Trilogy, Zhang Yimou, too, depicted his female protagonists as victims of a brutal patriarchal order. The three female characters use their bodies to seduce powerful male characters to secure places in the patriarchal society. The fact that his films were highly acclaimed in the West and won several international awards, was regarded by many film critics as a means of gaining sympathy for Mainland Chinese through the depiction of women as victims of the patriarchal social system.⁵¹

However, Mainland China's overall national power has increased dramatically in recent years, and it has become more confident in the international community. Its acceptance into the WTO and a successful bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games are examples of the international recognition. Consequently, many Mainland Chinese filmmakers have reflected this confidence through their portrayals of women warriors. In 2002, the director of *Lover's Grief*, Feng Xiaoning, depicted the warrior heroine in his film *Gadameilin* (嘎达梅林) as a courageous wife who rescues her husband from imprisonment. Zhang Yimou also moved on from the women as victims and focused more on their active roles in society, such as the courageous women warriors in *Hero* who are masters of sword-fighting. Although they are devoting themselves to the cause of assassinating the emperor Qin, not fighting for their own liberation, Zhang Yimou portrayed them as independent and resourceful women warriors as powerful as

⁵⁰ Chow, *Primitive Passion*, 37.

⁵¹ A famous example of reading Zhang's female character as a sexual body that needs to be liberated is Rey Chow's work *Primitive Passions*.

their male counterparts. In *Flying Daggers*, Zhang Yimou goes even further, depicting Xiao Mei as not only a skilful woman warrior fighting for the public good with the other members of her organisation, but also as a woman who chooses to pursue her own happiness instead of being a puppet of her organisation that uses her sexuality to benefit their cause. It is a remarkable development in Mainland China's cinema, although it might appear insignificant to Western audiences who are accustomed to seeing women in control of their sexuality.

4.3.3 Dilemma of a Single Woman

a). *To Be Independent or to Be with a Man*

Although Zhang Yimou describes how Xiao Mei's regains autonomy of her own sexualised body, he places her in a dilemma: whether to be alone or with the man she loves. Xiao Mei's dilemma is not unique but is shared by many young women around the world. In his book on childhood, Gerard Jones includes a chapter on girl power and notes:

Life for girls has changed drastically over the past few decades, and it goes on changing. They are shown more opportunities than ever by the adult world, but they also face higher expectations to perform academically, athletically, and personally. They no longer expect to marry and be supported while raising a family, but rather to work as hard as any man and still raise a family, often without much help.⁵²

The high expectations of women and the heavy pressure on them lead to a desire for a 'double fantasy.' Gerard Jones points out, "in fantasy they [girls] know that they want

⁵² Gerard Jones, *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes, and Make-believe Violence* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 95.

to step into a world of power and equality but still bring with them the qualities that they've come to understand as feminine."⁵³ This "feminine" fantasy often "included some romances."⁵⁴ The girl power feminism which emphasises the importance of independence does not reject romantic relationships with men.⁵⁵ What is noteworthy is the popularity of a fantasy among successful young women of marrying below oneself, that is, to find an ideal man with an equal or lower status than their own.

A similar parallel can be found in Xiao Mei's decision to stay with Jin. The two men she meets are very different. Jin is a policeman who eventually decides to become a hermit, in order to be free, whereas Liu is successful in the police force and an important member of his political organisation. In this respect, Liu should appear more promising and attractive. However, Jin does not force Xiao Mei to be with him, allowing her to decide herself, even though he loves her deeply. Liu's love for Xiao Mei on the other hand, is driven by his desire to possess her and keep her as a fetish object. Jin is the epitome of a liberal man who respects women's rights, whereas Liu represents the conservative and chauvinistic male who likes to control and possess women. Xiao Mei prefers her more equal relationship with Jin.

Xiao Mei's choice to seek happiness with a socially humble man is similar to the action of the girl heroes in *Twins Effect*. Helen and Gypsy seek their ideal loves, but prove themselves more powerful than their lovers. In the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in 2000 (to be analysed in the next chapter), director Ang Lee portrays the romantic love affair between a young noble woman and her outlaw lover, and she also surpasses him in martial arts. In *Flying Daggers*, Zhang Yimou presents

⁵³ Ibid., 91.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁵ Of course this girl power feminism has been received with suspicion. According to Rebecca Munford, in "'Wake Up and Smell the Lipgloss', this faction of feminism is given various negative names such as "babe feminism" and "'girlie' feminism." 149.

a similar story, of a heroine pursuing personal happiness through union with a man who has discarded society in search of utopia.

b). Single Women's Difficulty in Mainland China

Xiao Mei's desire to seek happiness with a man rather than be independent also reflects the difficulty of fighting for women's liberation in Mainland China. Chinese people tended to uphold traditional Confucian values even more when their economy began to flourish. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu points out that not only China but other Asian countries and regions reaffirmed Confucianism in order to maintain their uniqueness in the advent of globalisation. Lu also notes that the International Confucianism Association (ICA) was founded in October 1994 to promote Confucianism in Asia; its membership consists of Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Korea, Japan, and other Asian countries and regions. Lu states:

Confucian, Eastern values are called on to redress the excesses of Western values and account for the economic success of East Asia. Confucianism is seen no longer as an obstacle to modernization in Asian societies as was formerly thought, but rather as its driving force....The revival of Confucianism, then, is the occasion for the reassertion of Chinese cultural identity and the resistance to the Eurocentric Conception of modernity and modernization.⁵⁶

The revival of Confucianism certainly helped to retain the patriarchal tradition in Mainland China, and under such circumstances, women's liberation became more

⁵⁶ Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, "The Intellectual, the Artist, and China's Condition," in *Postmodernism and China*, eds. Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 150. The revival of Confucianism is not a unique issue in Mainland China, but it is outside of the scope of this thesis.

difficult. Communist China has always controlled women through the Women's Federations, which imposed government policies on women rather than fighting for their interests. Ellen Judd points out that "a considerable amount of the work of the Women's Federations has revolved around working toward general societal goals, such as economic development, rather than working on women's specific issues."⁵⁷ This particular political system in Mainland China has created mistrust towards a collective movement for women's liberation. As a result, women in Mainland China seek solutions to their problems alone rather than fight collectively against the patriarchal system. This makes their struggle harder, and women often oscillate between two choices: to be independent and live in solitude or to search for the ideal husband who will accept their equal rights.

In *Flying Daggers*, Xiao Mei decides to seek happiness with her ideal man Jin, but even this choice is lethal because she is killed by a conservative man, Liu. Xiao Mei tells Liu before she dies that "I knew you would do that (kill me)!" This conveys a message that women's pursuit of autonomy, including autonomy of their own bodies and their choice to be with men who respect their autonomy and equal rights, will result in confrontation with age-old patriarchal traditions. Nevertheless, for Xiao Mei the gaining of personal freedom is worth dying for.

It is clear that Xiao Mei's betrayal of her organisation in *Flying Daggers* shifts the focus from a political struggle to a personal story of a woman pursuing autonomy. Jin, too, leaves the political struggle. Such a shift in both characters reflects the spread of political apathy among the Chinese people and their search for personal happiness. Zhang Yimou himself may have been disillusioned by political struggle, especially

⁵⁷ Judd, 17.

after the Tiananmen Square Incident. However, *Flying Daggers* is much more political than it appears on the surface, and Zhang Yimou has broadened the way women warriors were depicted in Mainland China by including themes such as women's sexuality and their desire to maintain sexual autonomy, as well as their dilemma of whether to retain independence or seek an ideal husband. Zhang Yimou also makes this film appeal to both Chinese and foreign audiences by minimising the theme of nationalism and focusing more on a universal theme (a girl pursuing autonomy) to direct it at the global market. The success of *Flying Daggers* indicates how the Mainland China film industry has become internationalised and competitive in the global market, while Chinese actresses, such as Zhang Ziyi⁵⁸ are now sought after by Hollywood.

Chapter summary

Mainland China has undergone tremendous transformation during the past three decades during which time the state-funded film industry has become partially privatised. This transformation of the film industry and other economic reforms have affected representations of women warriors on films, as the masculinised 'iron girl' models advocated by officialdom began to change. In *Eight Women*, made in the 1980s, women's maternal roles and love relationships were important subplots, although the main focus of this film was women's patriotism and their heroic sacrifice to defend the dignity of their nation. In *Lover's Grief*, made in the 1990s, the 'iron girl' model was further feminised: it reveals the many changes occurring in the country such as increasing economic prosperity, the subsequent development of the single women's culture, and their fascination with Western consumer products. In the

⁵⁸ A typical example is *Memoirs of a Geisha* (dir. Rob Marshall, 2005), where Zhang Ziyi takes the major role of a Japanese geisha.

new millennium production *Flying Daggers*, the internationally renowned director, Zhang Yimou further feminised and glamorised the representations of women warriors and the martial arts which had been formerly considered masculine pursuits. He also included new themes to appeal to a global audience such as women's sexuality, their desire to control their own sexualised bodies as well as other single women's concerns, in his portrayal of the main character Xiao Mei. His internationalisation of Chinese women warriors proved successful, and his film proved that Mainland China's film industry could compete in the global market. It is therefore safe to claim that the transformation of women warriors in films produced in the last three decades in Mainland China is a good index of its achievements of reforms and its internationalisation.

5. Taiwan

I began to think much more about the taste of global art film market....Therefore, I found myself caught between the Chinese and the Western.

Ang Lee, in A Ten Year Dream of Cinema [Shi nian yi jiao dianying], ed.

Zhang Jingbei (Taipei: Shibao, 2002), 130—131.

5.1 *The Women Soldiers: the KMT's China*

In the 1980s, Taiwan's film industry like Mainland China's, was also under government control and depicting women warriors as patriotic 'official heroines'. However, Taiwan's political situation was similar to Hong Kong in the 1980s in that the KMT government also feared Mainland China. Mainland China's influence in the international community was increasing, and it began to replace Taiwan in important international institutions, such as the United Nations. The KMT was powerless to maintain its international importance, and was beginning to feel anxious about the loss of its sovereign power which resembled women's loss of power in a rigid patriarchal order. Due to this anxiety of being feminised by Mainland China, the KMT government promoted strong women characters to symbolise Taiwan, as had Hong Kong filmmakers in the 1980s. Therefore, Mulan-like women warriors fighting for the public good, similar to Cao Yun in Hong Kong film *Peking Opera Blue*, were important features of 1980s Taiwan cinema.

5.1.1 The KMT's Fear of Feminisation

The President of the Republic of China, Chiang Kai-shek and his KMT government were defeated by the Communists in the civil war in 1949. Chiang therefore retreated to Taiwan. In fact, Chiang and his KMT government took over the control of Taiwan after Japan's defeat. They then imposed martial law on the Taiwan people as a result of a violent confrontation in 1947 (known as the February 28 Incident) between local Taiwan people and so-called 'Mainlanders'.¹ Martial law remained in force for forty years until 1987, and as Ku Yen-lin has pointed out, under military rule all democratic movements and activities were limited or censored:

...public meetings had to be authorized by the government; formation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) was strictly limited; marches were banned; strikes were outlawed....Practically speaking, all channels of reform or normative change were closed.²

This political control inhibited people's demand for reform, including that relating to gender inequality. Nevertheless, the autocratic rule eventually provoked rebellion and the domestic challenges began to weaken KMT rule. In the 1970s demands for democracy from members of the *tang-wai* (outside the party) became widespread. There were demands from feminist activists for gender equality and, importantly, some prominent feminist activists were influential members of the *tang-wai* which was endeavouring to establish a new order in Taiwan. Lu Hsiu-lian (吕秀莲), founder of the women's movement in Taiwan in the 1970s and an eminent member of *tang-*

¹ Generally speaking, 'mainlanders' refers to those who came to Taiwan from Mainland China after the defeat of Japan in 1945 and those who retreated to Taiwan after Mainland China fell under the control of the Communists.

² Ku, "The Feminist Movement in Taiwan," 12-13.

wai, was a role model for many women. However, the KMT government suppressed *tang-wai* activities and during a rally in Gao-hsong in 1979 Lu was arrested and imprisoned.

While the KMT government confronted domestic challenges, Taiwan's international status declined further. Although the Republic of China in Taiwan continued to represent China in the international community after the KMT's retreat to Taiwan, the KMT government was powerless to prevent the deterioration of its international status. In 1971, the United States withdrew support for Taiwan's seat on the United Nations' Security Council, which was taken by the People's Republic of China. In 1972, Japan normalised diplomatic relations with Mainland China and recognised the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China, a second setback to Taiwan's international status. In December 1978, the United States President Jimmy Carter announced his country's formal recognition of the People's Republic of China. Rubinstein claims that "[t]his meant the withdrawal of formal U.S. diplomatic recognition of the Republic of China, abrogation of the ROC/U.S. defense treaty, and withdrawal of military personnel as of January 1, 1979."³ Taiwan had lost crucial support from powerful countries like Japan and the United States, while Communist China gained increasing recognition.

From the 1970s domestic challenges and the deterioration of its international status impelled the KMT government to legitimatise and strengthen its rule in Taiwan by promoting "patriotic cinema".⁴ A series of state-sponsored films were produced on topics designed to strengthen KMT-centred nationalism in Taiwan. For example, in *Battle for the Republic of China* (辛亥双十, 1981), director Ding Shanxi (丁善玺)

³ Murray A. Rubinstein, "Political Taiwanization and Pragmatic Diplomacy: the Era of Chiang Ching-kuo and Lee Teng-hui, 1971-1994", in *Taiwan: a New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 441.

⁴ Zhou, 435.

depicts the 1911 revolution led by the founder of the KMT, Sun Yat-sen, to overthrow the Qing government, in order to legitimise the KMT's claim to sovereign power. He also endorses a more liberal attitude towards women by including a female revolutionary in the patriotic group. Films such as *Battle for the Republic of China* not only legitimised the KMT's rule in Taiwan, but also endorsed women's liberation by allowing them to cross the gender boundary and act in a man's field.

Women Soldiers (dir. Liu Weibin, 1981) is another example of this "patriotic cinema." This film is set in contemporary urban Taiwan, focusing on three energetic girls from affluent middle class families: Liu Xiaohui (刘小惠, played by Ying Cailing 应采灵), Wen Jingyi (温静仪, played by Brigitte Lin) and Peng Bitao (彭碧桃, played by Zhang Xiaoyan 张小燕), who decide to attend military school instead of university. Critics have shown no serious interest in this film because it is clearly a propaganda film and contains many technical defects, including half the bodies of the main characters in some scenes missing or blocked out. In spite of such flaws, this film is an important example of the KMT government's attempt to evade feminist criticism and find a scapegoat to bear the guilt of obstructing women's progress.

5.1.2 Women's Free Choice to Become Soldiers

The KMT government funded the film's director (Liu Weibin) to portray women volunteers joining military school in an attempt to encourage Taiwan women to defend Taiwan under KMT rule. This encouragement is important as it is supposed to demonstrate both the KMT's progressive attitude toward women and its superiority over Mainland China. Historically, the KMT government had always valued women's maternal role and glorified it even before the retreat to Taiwan in 1949. According to Ku Yen-lin, since the 1920s, "women's interests have been directed toward child care

and homemaking.”⁵ In *Women Soldiers*, director Liu tries to emphasise the progressiveness of the KMT government by showing its acceptance of women’s participation in male occupations such as soldiering, a profession formerly dominated by men. This glorification of the KMT’s liberal leadership was supposed to make it worthy of women soldiers’ dedication.

Director Liu also attempts to show how the liberalism of the KMT government extended not only to Taiwan women but to women from all Chinese communities. The title of this film *zhongguo nü bing*, translating as ‘women soldiers of *China*,’ reflects his intention: he uses the two characters ‘*zhong guo*’ (中国) which indicates ‘middle kingdom’ instead of the sovereign title of Taiwan ‘*zhong hua min guo*’ (中华民国) that represents ‘the Republic of China.’ The Chinese title thus indicates Liu’s promotion of the KMT government as the rightful sovereign of the ‘middle kingdom’ which is an imagined community of all Chinese, including Mainland China, and therefore its liberal attitude towards women includes all Chinese women.

Liu’s intention to promote Taiwanese superiority over Mainland China through his female characters is also clear. In the 1980s Mainland China’s international status was surpassing Taiwan’s. Taiwan, therefore, needed to bolster its position through proclamations of superiority, and women’s higher status was an important index to demonstrate Taiwan’s superiority over Mainland China. At that time, although Communist China was opening up to the outside world and launching economic reforms, it still maintained a conservative attitude towards women. In their film *Eight Women* discussed earlier, women were forced to be warriors only under special circumstances, such as a national crisis, and soldiering was not a career choice for woman. Thus, in order to portray Taiwan as a more progressive society, the director

⁵ Ku, “The Feminist Movement in Taiwan,” 13.

of *Women Soldiers* stresses that the growing prosperity of Taiwan society and its liberal atmosphere offer women more *free* career choices by emphasising that his heroines choose to become soldiers of their own volition.

Taiwan's more liberal atmosphere is an undeniable fact because the Taiwan economic miracle offered more opportunities to women. According to Christopher Howe, Taiwan's economic performance from the mid-1950s to mid-1980s is "an archetypal Asian Newly Industrializing Economy (ANIE)."⁶ Taiwan's economic miracle also transformed gender relationships and raised women's status to meet the needs of an industrialised and urbanised society. Murray Rubinstein, who has studied socioeconomic changes in Taiwan since the 1970s, argues that the urbanisation process drove individuals, both men and women, to migrate to the cities; such change had a greater impact on women because women had also assumed the role of breadwinner. He states that "older views of male/female responsibilities in the home gave way to the realities of the two bread-winner families."⁷ Women also enjoyed greater freedom because higher education was freely available and a wider range of occupational choices was available because of the flourishing economy. Women's contribution to the economic miracle in Taiwan proved their ability to bear responsibilities outside their home and they could venture into the fields which formerly excluded women, such as the army.

⁶ Christopher Howe, "The Taiwan Economy: The Transition to Maturity and the Political Economy of its Changing International Status," in *Contemporary Taiwan*, ed. David Shambaugh (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 127.

⁷ Murray A. Rubinstein, "Taiwan's Socioeconomic Modernization, 1971- 1996," in *Taiwan: a New History* (see note 3 in this chapter), 385.

5.1.3 Taiwan's Mulan Ballad

a). Patriotic Women of Taiwan

The plot of women joining the army has been a common theme in the depiction of women warriors since China's early history, as demonstrated by the Mulan legend. Like many films about women warriors in Hong Kong and Mainland China which have made reference to the Mulan legend, *Women Soldiers*, made in Taiwan, was no exception. A direct reference to Mulan is made by a woman soldier who refers to the women's barracks that she joins as "Mulan Village" (木兰村). In the original Mulan ballad, Mulan decides to become a soldier when her elderly father becomes too weak to bear military responsibility and her country is under threat of invasion by an enemy. In the case of modern Taiwan, the symbolic father—the Taiwan government—is threatened with marginalising and feminisation by Mainland China. Thus, the women soldiers in the film were Mulan in modern Taiwan, fighting to defend their KMT-governed father nation.

As in 1980s' Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese films, patriotism was the main theme in the representations of these Mulan-like women warriors in *Women Soldiers*. Director Liu first glorifies these female characters willing to devote themselves to the Taiwan 'nation' through music. The main theme song is a military march that accompanies various shots of women soldiers participating in military training; the lyrics include the repeated expression "*zhonghua ernü ai guo qiang* (中华儿女爱国强)" which means "the sons and daughters of China love their country passionately." Other songs are inserted as the story develops, including one entitled "I Wish I was a Woman Soldier (我愿是个女兵)." Part of the translation of the lyrics is "Don't look down upon me as a little girl....I wish I was a woman soldier.... I will boldly rush towards the blue sky and I will conquer the ocean bravely...."

The second method used to glorify the women is the patriotic discourse of the film's female characters. One female protagonist, Liu Xiaohui, declares that "no other honour is more glorious than the honour of defending one's country." Another, Wen Jingyi says enthusiastically, "I don't believe that marriage and child-bearing are the only choices for a woman.... She can also bear the responsibilities to defend her country." Such speeches reveal the purpose of these women's unconventional career choice to be soldiers: they are motivated by patriotism rather than a concern for personal liberation. Like Mulan who bears arms to defend her country, or Cao Yun in Hong Kong film *Peking Opera Blue*, and other patriotic women warriors, the women soldiers in Liu's film are fighting for their country's wellbeing.

b). Comparison with the Hong Kong Version of the Mulan Legend

Although patriotism and a reference to the Mulan legend were two similar aspects of representations of women warriors in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan films in the 1980s, their emphasis were different. The Hong Kong version of the Mulan legend depicted in 1980s *Peking Opera Blue* portrays the conflict between father and daughter, because Hong Kong would be under the rule of Mainland China after 1997, and this unequal relationship resembles the daughter-father relationship of Cao Yun and her father General Cao. Through the daughter's rebellion against her father Hong Kong filmmakers expressed the Hong Kong people's desire to have an independent voice. However, both the director of *Eight Women* in Mainland China and the director of *Women Soldiers* in Taiwan defended and legitimised their government's position, in each case a symbolic father, because their works were state-funded propaganda designed to defend their governments (the symbolic father). Both

directors discourage women's rebellion (i.e. daughter's rebellion) and promote a harmonious relationship between women and their father nation.

In the case of Taiwan, Liu has transformed the senile and weak father of the Mulan legend into a magnanimous and strong father. He depicts the fathers in *Women Soldiers* as the pillars that sustain the liberal environment for the female family members, especially daughters. One protagonist, Wen Jingyi, quarrels twice with her mother and grandmother, who strongly oppose her wish to attend military school; only her father supports her decision and encourages her to enrol. During training she discovers that military life is harsher than anticipated and she misses the comfortable life she has left behind, so she returns home. Although her family welcome her return, the only person she apologises to and embraces is her father. When she regrets coming home and decides to return to training camp, her father is still the one from whom she seeks encouragement. In director Liu's film, this image of a liberal father can be read as an idealised epitome of the KMT government.

c). Comparison with the Mainland China's Version

Both Mainland China and Taiwan films promoted a harmonious relationship between women and government in an attempt to conceal the prevalent disturbance in their societies from the latter part of 1970s. Mainland China was facing women's rejection of the genderless 'iron girl' role models promoted by the government, as discussed in Chapter 4, while in Taiwan the KMT government was receiving feminist criticism of their policies. The two governments therefore used propaganda films appropriating the Mulan legend to respond to women's challenges.

As discussed in Chapter 4, because women in Mainland China were not demanding more political power but more private freedom (such as freedom in

fashion), it was easier for filmmakers in Mainland China to accommodate their demands to be feminine by feminising the ‘iron girl’ images. However, the attainment of more political power was the core demand of Taiwan’s feminist movement which had started in the 1970s, and their alliance with other political activists to demand a more democratic government was threatening the KMT’s one-party dictatorship, which preferred to suppress feminist and other political activists. In his film *Women Soldiers*, director Liu portrays female characters who conscientiously transform themselves into identical, disciplined heroines ready to serve the Taiwan government. This is his attempt to create images of women which contrast with the feminist ‘trouble-makers’ who are challenging the patriarchal social order and rebelling against the KMT government.

Liu’s female characters resemble both the ‘iron girl’ models promoted in Mainland Chinese films and the faithful daughter of the Mulan legend. In his film, Liu includes many scenes portraying women acquiring discipline and obedience through military training in order to quash their rebellious spirits. The women soldiers first have to assume identical uniforms and haircuts so that they all look like identical commodities from assembly lines. The regular drills, including line-up, left-turn and right-turn, stress identical moves obeying command. The punishment for breaking training camp rules is combined with education on discipline. When Wen Jingyi and Tong Bitao sneak out to their friend’s birthday party they are caught and ordered to perform drill routines in the stormy night. Their lieutenant interrogated them:

Lieutenant Li: What is the most important thing to being a soldier?

Wen Jingyi: Obedience!

Lieutenant: What’s the artery of an army?

Wen: Discipline!

Lieutenant: What's the most powerful weapon to defeat the enemy?

Wen: Iron discipline!

By learning the army discipline, the women soldiers have transformed from spoiled, indulged daughters living in a luxurious lifestyle to 'iron girls' who have renounced their personal identities and rebellious spirits.

The film begins with three ordinary girls⁸ admiring a parade of well disciplined women soldiers in identical uniforms and hairstyles on television, and ends with the same girls in another glorious military parade. The final freeze-frame captures the solemn salutes of the newly graduated women soldiers, mirroring the gestures of the female soldiers in the opening scene. The film has a circular structure, indicating an endless relay in which new women soldiers inspired by the women soldiers they saw in an earlier parade become new idols for the next generation of women. Thus, the entire women's community would be disciplined to serve their country rather than challenge the government. This is certainly a utopian vision not only for the KMT government, but also for any autocratic government.

5.1.4 Scapegoat

Another important aspect of Liu's film is that the main female characters in *Women Soldiers* view their choice to be patriotic soldiers as a liberation because they are able to enter a field dominated by men. According to Elshtain, in the patriarchal system, "tales of courage, duty, honor, glory as they engage in acts of protection and defense"⁹ have featured only men and excluded women for centuries. Whether Liu is aware of

⁸ In fact, the film is a comedy and at the beginning the three girls are portrayed as naïve. The director emphasises the inexperience of his women characters by humour, but his humour is badly conveyed and sometimes makes the girls look stupid. This is another shortcoming of this film.

⁹ Elshtain, 165.

such a convention is unclear, but he does portray women as patriotic soldiers to indicate that women and men are treated as equals in Taiwan. However, feminists could identify misogynistic attitudes prevalent in Taiwan society. Liu therefore tries to divert blame away from the patriarchal social system by portraying Wen Jingyi's obdurate grandmother as the major hindrance of a woman wishing to pursue an unconventional career as a soldier. One of the reasons she objects to her granddaughter becoming a soldier is because it violates feminine values, as she declares, "Getting sunburned and muscular is what you'll get as a woman soldier." She is portrayed as a stubborn defender of women's traditional image. The director refuses to acknowledge that such a notion of gender difference stems from patriarchal ideology. Instead, he tries to undermine the unity of women by mildly criticising a female character—the grandmother—whose conservatism hinders the progress and freedom of the younger generation.

Wen Jingyi's grandmother, a narrow-minded and conservative old woman who objects to her granddaughter's choice, is in sharp contrast to Wen's father, an open-minded and liberal man who embraces his daughter's unconventional decision to be a soldier. By contrasting Wen Jingyi's grandmother and father, Liu attempts to create the illusion that the patriarchal system is supportive of women's liberation. He tries to convey a message that in order to realise women's liberation, the younger generation of women should embrace the liberal patriarchal system and fight against the conservative matriarchy. When her grandmother objects to her becoming a soldier, Wen Jingyi declares, "Grandma, you're getting old and your opinions on many things are out-of-date." This comment implies that the real obstacle for women's liberation is the generation gap within the women's own community. Liu's film is motivated to

protect the patriarchal hierarchy that had been criticised by the feminist movement since the 1970s.

As a propaganda film, as far as the storyline is concerned, *Women Soldiers* is well made, although it has many artistic flaws. From the 1970s, the KMT government was repeatedly humiliated in the international community and was forced to accept passivity in the power struggle, which resembled the aging father in the original Mulan ballad. Therefore, Liu has created Mulan-like women who volunteer to protect the fragile father nation as the saviours of the patriarch in crisis. The reality was different, however. Unlike the magnanimous and liberal father in Liu's film, the KMT government brutally repressed popular demands for democratic reform. The Taiwan feminist movement criticised its repressive policies toward women and demanded gender equality. Liu certainly has served the KMT well in his film by glorifying it as a magnanimous father to justify its existence as well as emphasise its superiority over Mainland China. However, Liu portrayed the government as lenient and caring towards women, and reduced women in Taiwan to speaking with the single voice of patriotism.

5.2 *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*: Ang Lee's Better 'China'

5.2.1 Taiwan's Hollywoodising tendencies

The depiction of women warriors in 1980s' Taiwan films, as shown by *Women Soldiers*, was still conservative. The government seemed able to influence the construction of gender identity through the state-funded film industry by endorsing patriotic Mulan-like heroines. However, the economic miracle and the lifting of

martial law in 1987 helped Taiwan transform into a highly urbanised society. Sung-Sheng Yvonne Chang points out that 1987 was a watershed in Taiwan's history, because "[t]he lifting of martial law in 1987 opened a 'Great Divide' in Taiwan's cultural development, ending four decades of politically dominated cultural production".¹⁰

This change allowed the importation of foreign films and, as described by film critic Ti Wei, "the global Hollywoodization of the popular cinema market"¹¹ began to greatly affect the Taiwan cinema. Table 1 indicates the popularity of Hollywood films in the Taiwan market.

Table 1: Taipei Market Share of Box Office Revenues (by percentage)¹²

	1992	2000
Chinese language films ¹³	50	2.5
Hollywood	50	93
Independent films		4.5

Taiwan filmmakers attempted to survive through art-house cinema because they could not compete at the box office with Hollywood blockbusters. For example, films by Tsai Ming-liang (蔡明亮), which were highly acclaimed by critics and received

¹⁰ Sung-Sheng Yvonne Chang, "The Terrorizer and the Great Divide in Contemporary Taiwan's Cultural Development," in *Island on the Edge: Taiwan, New Cinema and after*, eds. Chris Berry and Feii Lu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 13.

¹¹ Ti Wei, "Generational /Cultural Contradiction and Global Incorporation: Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman*", in *Island on the Edge* (see note 10 in this chapter), 108.

¹² Michael Curtin, "The Future of Chinese Cinema: Some Lessons from Hong Kong and Taiwan," in *Chinese Media, Global Contexts*, ed. Chin-Chuan Lee (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 245.

¹³ This category of Chinese films included Hong Kong films, reducing further the market share of Taiwan films. According to Yingjin Zhang's investigation, in 1994, in terms of films on exhibition, Hong Kong films shared thirty-five percent, Hollywood films fifty-seven percent, while Taiwan films took only eight percent or twenty-four titles altogether.

awards overseas, failed in Taiwan box office.¹⁴ The box office failure of Chinese films in Taiwan showed that Taiwan audiences had lost interest in Chinese films.¹⁵ According to Yingjin Zhang, statistics “confirm the disappearance of the market demand for Taiwan productions.... In short, the decline of Chinese cinema in Taiwan was simply irreversible.”¹⁶ Realising that Chinese language films were much less profitable than Hollywood blockbusters, Taiwan film companies managed to survive by negotiating to obtain box office shares for the distribution and exhibition of foreign films, rather than developing local productions for profit.

In order to survive, some Taiwan filmmakers began to aim at markets in other Chinese communities by working with film talents from Mainland China, Hong Kong and the diasporic Chinese, crossing regional boundaries. This gradual integration of filmmaking in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan required filmmakers to seek common themes rather than focusing on narrow regional topics.¹⁷ As a result of globalisation, there was an increasing demand for an abstract cultural identity for the Chinese among audiences in many Chinese communities.

¹⁴ Tsai Ming-liang’s films focusing on the absurdity of urban life and the psychological traumas of modern people, did not appeal to popular taste. Although his films won applause from film critics and awards, such as his film *Vive L’amour* (爱情万岁) which won the Golden Lion at the 1994 Venice Film Festival, they performed poorly at the box office. *Vive L’amour*’s revenue did not even recover production costs.

¹⁵ For more statistics on the poor box office of Chinese language films, refer to Yingjin Zhang’s *Chinese National Cinema* and Yueh-yu Yeh, Zhuo Botang and Wu Hao, (eds.) *Romance between Three Territories: Chinese-language Cinema in the Past Two Decades* [*San di chuanqi: huayu dianying er shi nian*] (Taipei: Guojia dianying ziliao guan, 1999).

¹⁶ Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 173.

¹⁷ Under such circumstances, even the prominent Taiwan director Hou Hsiao-hsien (侯孝贤), famous for his construction of a Taiwan identity through his films, has shown the difficulty of establishing a new identity for Taiwan. His earlier works, *City of Sadness* (悲情城市, 1989), *The Puppet Master* (戏梦人生, 1993) and *Good Men, Good Women* (好男好女, 1995), have been identified as the “Taiwan trilogy” and centred on Taiwan history. However, according to Gang Gary Xu, in Hou’s 1998 project *Flowers in Shanghai* (海上花) which portrays a Shanghai brothel at the end of the Qing Dynasty, Taiwan is invisible and a Taiwan identity “had to be built from scratch using the ‘imported materials’”. See Gang Gary Xu, “*Flowers of Shanghai: Visualising Ellipses and (Colonial) Absence*,” in *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, ed. Chris Berry (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 105.

Ang Lee's internationally successful film project *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Crouching Tiger* thereafter) made in 2000, was created in this sociocultural context. He intended his film to appeal to a global audience and those who preferred art-house cinema, by focusing on women in the martial arts world, a popular genre in Chinese films. Ang Lee, a diasporic Chinese working in the United States, used this theme to reaffirm his Chinese cultural origins.

Ang Lee's film was adapted from a popular pre-World War II martial arts novel by Wang Dulu (王度卢, 1909-1977). It is the story of a rebellious aristocratic young woman, Jen¹⁸ (玉蛟龙, played by Zhang Ziyi), who falls in love with a desert bandit, Lo¹⁹ (罗小虎, played by Chang Chen 张震). Jen is secretly learning martial arts and steals the Green Destiny Sword that belongs to a *Wudang* (武当) martial arts master Li Mubai (李慕白, played by Chow Yun-Fat 周润发). Together with the woman warrior with whom he is in love, Yu Xiulian (俞秀莲, played by Michelle Yeoh) who attempts to repress her passion for him, Li Mubai (thereafter Li) tries to retrieve the sword and tame Jen's rebellious spirit in an effect to prevent her becoming 'a poisonous dragon.'

Ang Lee set this story in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) period, when the 'middle kingdom' was still an intact entity, reflecting his "dream of China." According to him, *Crouching Tiger* "is a kind of dream of China, a China that probably never existed,

¹⁸ The Chinese name of this character is Yu Jiaolong which means 'Jade Dragon', referring to the 'Hidden Dragon' in the film title. She will henceforth be referred to as 'Jen,' because it is her name in the subtitle of the film, and is used by most critics. The characters' names in *Crouching Tiger* are not based on Pinyin as are the characters' names in others films discussed in this thesis. Instead their names in the film subtitles are used because most of the critics use them.

¹⁹ His first name means 'little tiger'. He will henceforth be referred to as 'Lo' for the same reason as above.

except in my boyhood fantasies in Taiwan.”²⁰ The China in his dream was held together by the legacy of Chinese civilisation dispersed in various Chinese communities, including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and among Chinese diasporas such as his. Lee believes that in spite of political differences, Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan have all inherited parts of this cultural legacy. By depicting a story when the ‘middle kingdom’ is still a united empire, he is attempting to re-integrate the divided Chinese into a mythical unity. His choice of cast (Chow Yun-Fat from Hong Kong, Zhang Ziyi from Mainland China, Chang Chen from Taiwan, and Michelle Yeoh from the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia) also reflects his dream of such a unity.

5.2.2. ‘Nü xia’ Complex and “Hua Mulan Syndrome” in *Crouching Tiger*

For Ang Lee, the martial arts culture was a distinctive part of the ‘middle kingdom’ legacy, a world in which women warriors were common features (See Chapter 1). Ang Lee also depicts such traditional themes as the ‘*nü xia*’ complex, the “Hua Mulan syndrome” and even the ‘fox spirit’ phenomenon through his female characters, as part of an affirmation of his Chinese cultural heritage.

The lady knight Yu Xiulian (hereafter Yu) in this film, is the epitome of a conservative ‘*nü xia*’ who upholds patriarchal values. She is a female martial arts expert, but strictly follows the Confucian codes; she tells Jen that “although I was not born in a noble family, I have been following all the feudal moral and ethical codes for women as any of the noble ladies.” Her fiancé was a sworn brother of Li, and sacrificed his life to save him. Thus, Yu lives her life as his virtuous despite his death

20 Ang Lee et al., eds., *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Portrait of Ang Lee Film* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), 7, quoted in Kenneth Chan, “The Global Return of the *Wu Xia Pian* (Chinese Sword-Fighting Movie): Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*”, *Cinema Journal* 43, no. 4, (Summer 2004), 7.

before their wedding. She regards it as her duty to mourn her fiancé for the rest of her life and represses her love for Li. She is not only a ‘sacred’ widow, but also a filial daughter who carries on the family’s goods delivery business after the death of her father to uphold her family name as the sole heir.

Although Yu is a martial arts expert surpassing many men, she treasures only her identity as a widow and daughter. Like the traditional ‘*nü xia*’ and the legendary Mulan, Yu upholds patriarchal values despite finding them stiflingly oppressive. Only when Li is dying from poisoning at the end of the film does she release her feelings. She is able to do so because, with Li’s death her admission of love for Li can not result in a union and she will not violate the patriarchal codes.

Jade Fox (碧眼狐狸), on the other hand, represents the stereotypical evil woman warrior of Chinese tradition. ‘Fox’ is a synonym for ‘seductress’ in Chinese. As presented in the Chinese classical novel *The Investiture of the Gods* (封神榜) by Lu Xixing (陆西星, 1520-1606), the notorious seductress Daji (妲己), who uses her beauty and magic to seduce the last king of the Shang Dynasty and destroy the kingdom, is a famous example of a fox taking the form of a beautiful woman to destroy the patriarchal social order. Similarly, in *Crouching Tiger*, Jade Fox uses her sexuality to seduce the *Wudang* master so that she can learn martial arts, and murders him when he refuses to teach her. After stealing his secret manual, she embarks on a crime spree during her years of hiding from the police. Jade Fox likes to indulge in absolute freedom without considering the morality of her actions, as she tells her disciple Jen that “We’ll get rid of anyone in our way. Even your father.” Jade Fox’s motto “to kill or be killed” makes her a terrifying character.

5.2.3. Ang Lee's 'Father Complex' ²¹

In Ang Lee's portrayals, Yu is regarded as a virtuous woman warrior because of her commitment to Confucian values, whereas Jade Fox is diabolic because of her violation of such codes. This portrayal suggests that Ang Lee still retains his cultural roots in the patriarchal Chinese traditions. In fact, Ang Lee's "dream of China" has always been characterised with a "father-always-wiser" theme.²² His early non-women-warrior films *Pushing Hands* (推手, 1991), *The Wedding Banquet* (喜宴, 1993) and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (饮食男女, 1994) have been labelled as his "father knows best" trilogy.²³ In *Crouching Tiger*, Ang Lee also idealises Li as a fatherly figure embodying ideal Confucian values who attempts to guide the rebellious Jen. Like the father-daughter relationship depicted in 1980s film *Women Soldiers*, the father figure in *Crouching Tiger* embodies the patriarchal authority²⁴ who upholds this order and endeavours to guide the women warriors.

Ang Lee also expresses his 'father complex' through the absence of a father in *Crouching Tiger*. Yu's father has passed away and she is running his business in his honour. Rebellious Jen has an aristocratic father, but in the film he is mostly absent,²⁵

²¹ This 'father complex' is a theme that could be further developed, but is beyond the scope of this thesis.

²² Personal communication with Adam Lam, 13 February, 2007. 'Father Complex' is a common theme among Chinese diaspora, and the patriarchal traditions are preserved carefully among the diaspora. For further reading, see Kam Louie's "Floating Life: Nostalgia for the Confucian Way in Suburban Sydney," in *Chinese Films in Focus* (see note 17 in this Chapter), 97-103.

²³ The original term is from Mal Vincent's "Pushing Hands," in *The Virginian-Pilot*, 10 August 1995; the current reference is taken from Wei Ming Dariotis and Eileen Fung, "Breaking the Soy Sauce Jar: Diaspora and Displacement in the Films of Ang Lee," in *Transnational Chinese Cinema*, (see note 40 in Chapter 4), 212.

²⁴ Ang Lee's acknowledgement of paternal authority seems related to his strained relationship with his father. For further reading, see Christina Klein's "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Diasporic Reading," *Cinema Journal* 43, no.4, (summer 2004): 25.

²⁵ His appearance is only depicted in his meeting with the prince and their discussion on the Green Destiny Sword, indicating that a separation of men's field and women's place. Jen is depicted with her mother visiting friends in the private world of the family, whereas the men are active in the official relationship.

and her mother only appears occasionally. Furthermore, Li's master (the head of the *Wudang*-style martial arts and Li's symbolic father) has been murdered, and Jen eventually causes the death of the idealised fatherly figure, Li. His death at the end of the film could be interpreted as Ang Lee's grief over the decline of the father's status and the traditional Chinese culture. As a boundary-crosser between Chinese civilisation and Western values, he has helped to dissolve these boundaries and blend Chinese civilisation with Western culture. However, Ang Lee has remarked, "You become a Westerner and you betray your parents. Something you feel unable to deal with: total guilt."²⁶ It can be seen that Ang Lee is anxious about Western cultural encroachment on Chinese tradition as well as a sense of guilt at betraying his Chinese origin, which can be a possible reason why he has glorified the death of the idealised father figure Li, and have the two women warriors, Yu and Jen, mourn his death.

5.2.4 Subversion of the Patriarchal Values

However, Ang Lee does not wholeheartedly vindicate Chinese patriarchal values because he subverts Chinese martial arts films which have glorified men's mastery of the martial arts. In the discussion on Zhang Yimou's *Flying Daggers*, the glamorisation and feminisation of Chinese martial arts appears to be an important feature of the Hollywoodisation of Chinese language films. Ang Lee did this before Zhang Yimou, and pursued feminisation of martial arts to the extreme through the flying abilities of his characters; they leap from the roof, to the bamboo tops, and glide down with ease. Lee emphasises the lightness of their bodies rather than their muscular power in wielding the weapons.

²⁶ The original source is in "Ang Lee: Pushing Hands," in *My First Movie: Twenty Celebrated Directors Talk about Their First Film*, ed. Stephen Lowenstein (New York: Pantheon, 2000), 372-73. This quotation is cited by Kenneth Chan in "The Global Return of the *Wu Xia Pian*," 8.

As well as subverting the muscular characteristics of martial arts into feminine glamour, Lee also place a greater focus on the female characters than the males, saying “from the very beginning, I wanted to focus on two women”²⁷ and “Jen is the real hero.”²⁸ Jen learns martial arts from the female criminal, Jade Fox, and from a stolen martial arts manuscript. Furthermore, she forms an illegitimate relationship with a bandit and flees a marriage arranged by her father. She also steals the Green Destiny Sword, each time disrupting the world of *jianghu*²⁹ which is based on patriarchal values. Ang Lee’s intention in placing a rebellious girl character at the centre of his film drew praise from the West. According to critic Fran Martin:

Jen’s rebellion against the patriarchal structure of family and marriage, her yearning for personal freedom, and her gender-crossing in becoming a superior fighter and itinerant ‘warrior-boy’ make her, in this view, less a descendant of the legion celluloid *nüxia* dating back to Chinese cinema of the 1920s, than a far-flung sister to Buffy, Max, Lara, and Xena: creations of a decidedly 1990s Euro-American pop culture.³⁰

Ang Lee shows an awareness of this modern “girl power” culture and portrays Jen as a modern ‘girl heroine.’ Like *Twins Effect* made in Hong Kong, and *Flying Daggers* made in Mainland China, Ang Lee depicts Jen’s life as a woman’s empowerment and subversion of patriarchal values, both cross-cultural themes. Jen ventures into the

²⁷ Zhang Yue, “Tiger Crouching in *Jianghu*, Dragon Hiding in Hearts [*Jianghu li wo hu, ren xin li cang long*]”, <http://www1.thebeijingnews.com/news/2005/1116/12@090515.html> (accessed 20 July 2006).

²⁸ Ang Lee et al., eds., *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Portrait of Ang Lee Film* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), 138, quoted in William Leung, “Crouching Sensibility, Hidden Sense,” *Film Criticism* 26, 1 (Fall 2001).

²⁹ See Introduction for more detailed explanation.

³⁰ Fran Martin, “The China Simulacrum: Genre, Feminism, and Pan-Chinese Cultural Politics in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*,” in *Island on the Edge* (see note 10 in this chapter), 156.

men's world to demonstrate her mastery of sword-fighting. When Lo robs her of her comb in the desert, she leaps from her carriage without hesitation and runs into the desert alone to retrieve it. This action can be seen as subverting the fairy tales such as "The Frog Prince." Their parallels are shown below.

	"Frog Prince"	<i>Crouching Tiger</i>
trigger	The loss of the princess's golden ball triggers her meeting with the enchanted frog.	The loss of Jen's comb triggers the meeting of Jen and Lo.
negotiation	The frog offers conditional help to retrieve the ball.	Jen battles with Lo to retrieve her comb.
promise	The princess promises to love the frog and be his companion.	They fall in love, and Lo promises to be successful in order to earn Jen's aristocratic parents' respect, so that he can be with Jen.
failure	The princess breaks her promise and bars the frog from the royal castle.	Lo fails, and remains an outlaw in the desert.
Dreams come true.	The frog does <i>not wait</i> patiently but strives to release the spell. The frog regains his princely identity and lives happily ever after with the princess.	Lo <i>waits</i> in <i>Wudang</i> , while Jen gains her freedom by stealing the Green Destiny Sword and retaining it. No "happy ever after" ending, and Jen follows a legend to jump from a cliff in order to be a girl hero.

In the “Frog Prince”, it is the *man* who helps the princess, but the princess breaks her promise. The story has a strong element of misogyny. However, in *Crouching Tiger*, the roles played by the prince and the princess are reversed. Jen endeavours to regain her own comb, whereas Lo breaks his promise. This is a subversion of the misogynic message in the “Frog Prince,” and glorifies women who act independently.

As the story proceeds, Jen’s theft of Li’s Green Destiny Sword is another subversion of male values. Jen losing her comb does not cause anxiety in society, while the loss of the Green Destiny Sword is a grave problem. The different reactions to the loss of the comb and the sword are based on various meanings assigned to them. The comb is a female symbol rendered trivial from a male perspective, whereas the sword is a male symbol of power and heroism. When Yu presents the Green Destiny Sword to a royal member, Sir Te (贝勒爷), as a gift, he remarks, “Only a real hero is worthy of carrying a fine sword.” Thus, its loss grieves the male-dominated society.

However, Lee creates Jen as a woman who reacts in a reverse manner to the loss of the comb and the sword. When Lo robs her of her comb, she risks her life to reclaim it, obdurately insisting that it is *her* comb because she regards it as a symbol of her female dignity. When she steals the sword, she tells her master that her reason for stealing it “was just for fun.” Men steal a feminine symbol, such as a comb, to tease a woman, and Jen steals the sword from a male owner also for fun. Her purpose is to ridicule a society that assigns a sacred meaning to this male symbol.

After she has stolen the sword, she refuses to accept an arranged marriage, fleeing on her wedding night. Unlike the traditional plot that a runaway bride always elopes with her true love or encounters true love afterwards, Ang Lee arranges a series of fighting scenes where Jen encounters various warriors and social outlaws, in order to demonstrate her supremacy in the martial arts. Thus, she finds her identity not through

her romance with Lo, but through her adventures breaking into the male-dominated sphere and defeats the masculine warriors.

5.2.5. The Controversial Ending

This film has a controversial ending which has caused heated debate among critics. Towards the end, Jade Fox attempts to kill Jen with poisonous needles, but instead kills Li who has come to confront Jade Fox in order to avenge his master's death. Jen feels guilty at endangering Li's life and hurries away to seek an antidote. She fails to save Li and goes sadly to meet Lo who is staying in the temple of the *Wudang* mountains according to Li and Yu's arrangement. More controversially, after a short reunion with Lo, she chooses to throw herself off the cliff instead of returning to the desert with Lo. Kenneth Chan analyses two possible readings of this ending:

On the one hand, Li Mubai's death may be read as a 'noble' sacrifice to bring Jen Yu back to the fold; even in death, the patriarch maintains his legitimacy and moral authority. On the other hand, one could view the notion of 'responsibility' as not just an ideological tool of patriarchal hegemony (which it often can be). Lee may be saying that Jen Yu regrets that she has hurt individuals by her actions but that this regret need not to be at the expense of her greater quest for personal freedom.³¹

One possible reading is that the sacrifice of the symbolic father Li redeems the rebellious woman and assists her return to patriarchal society. Others interpret Jen's effort to save Li as an act of saving another individual, whether male or female, without sacrificing her freedom.

³¹ Chan, 13.

Freedom is one of Jen's desires but, if *Crouching Tiger* is compared with *Flying Daggers*, it becomes clear that her freedom does not include the freedom to be with a man of her choice. In *Flying Daggers*, Xiao Mei decides to be with Jin who respects her right to choose, so she could expect to lead a free life with such a liberal man. In *Crouching Tiger*, Jen's union with Lo might have offered her a similar freedom, especially as Lo is relatively weaker than Jen. However, Jen abandons this choice and throws herself from a cliff of the *wudang* mountains, because even if he respects her freedom, being with a man is not what Jen really wants.³²

What she really wants must be understood through the significance of the legend of a person leaping from a cliff. According to this legend, anyone who is courageous enough to do this will have a wish granted by the gods; the legend told by Lo in this film has a filial son as the protagonist who jumps from a cliff in order that the gods grant his wish to heal his parents. Ang Lee replaces the filial son with Jen to express two themes. In the original legend, the son won love and respect from society because of his heroic act. It is therefore possible to say that by undertaking a similar heroic act to the filial son, Jen wishes to revive the symbolic father, Li, from death, and receive the same respect and love that was bestowed on the filial son. Jen not only desires freedom, but also society's love and respect, an indication that women are fighting not only to gain freedom, but also love and respect from their community.³³

Jen's desire to be a hero who is loved and respected by society also seems to reflect Ang Lee's own wish. In the film, Jen is tortured with guilt for causing the death of Li,

³² According to Wang Dulu's original novel, Jen does not join with Lo, but chooses to leave him. It could be this ending that attracted Ang Lee. However, according to the original novel, Jen's departure is a result of her unwillingness to be the wife of a robber. She regards her husband's status as her own and desires a husband with a higher social status, the opposite to the choice of modern single women.

³³ This may be why Jen refuses to go with her master Jade Fox who only cares for women's freedom without consideration of the social morals. Women who embrace absolute freedom and destroy everything in their path, such as Jade Fox, are not depicted positively in Ang Lee's film.

her symbolic father, symbolising Ang Lee's own guilt as a boundary-crosser. By depicting Jen emulating the actions of the filial son in order to revive her symbolic father, Ang Lee seems to be hoping for some relief from his guilt at betraying his cultural origin.

According to legend, the son did not die but floated away. Similarly, Jen floats away and this floating image is significant in two respects. The first is relevant to Ang Lee's personal identity as a diasporic Chinese. Kenneth Chan argues that, as a Taiwanese living in the United States, Ang Lee "does not map easily onto the political boundaries of any single nation-state or the cultural boundaries of any region or civilization."³⁴ Ang Lee is floating in a third realm that is neither Chinese nor Western. The second aspect is that Chinese women's liberation is still a 'floating' issue that has not yet been definitely settled.

Ang Lee creates *Crouching Tiger* for the global market, and through this film he attempts to simultaneously retain his cultural origin and occupy a place in the globalised cultural domain. He depicts two idealised Confucian characters, Yu Xiulian and Li Mubai, as proof of his Chineseness. Yet, he also creates the rebellious girl hero, Jen, and subverts both patriarchal values and the traditional gendered fairytale model by presenting Jen as an active pursuer using her power to regain her dignity. She refuses to accept the view that women who violate the patriarchal codes can only be free if they remain outcast. She replaces the legendary filial son and attempts to be a girl hero. Jen's actions are a true subversion of the patriarchal Chinese tradition and resemble the universal girl power culture.

34 Chan, 22.

5.3 *West Town Girls: An Apocalyptic Imagination*

5.3.1 'Tai mei' Culture

As discussed in *Crouching Tiger*, Chinese language films have performed poorly at Taiwan box office. Many Taiwan actors and directors seek opportunities in Hong Kong and Mainland China, and co-productions with these two regions have continued to be common practice in the new millennium to expand markets outside Taiwan. A typical example is *The Knot* (云水谣, 2006), funded by China Film from Mainland China, Emperor Group from Hong Kong and Long Shong of Taiwan, directed by Yin Li (尹力) from Mainland China, performed by actors from Taiwan and Mainland China, portraying the love story between a man and two women (one being a soldier from Mainland China). A Taiwan identity is difficult to detect in such productions. This invisibility of the Taiwan identity resulted in anxiety among people in Taiwan about being engulfed by other Chinese communities and Hollywood. As a result, Taiwan filmmakers are feeling the need to explore local culture in order to regain a regional identity.

Another issue which should be acknowledged is that not only was a Taiwan identity elusive in these co-productions but the Chinese traditions were also weakening. As shown in *Crouching Tiger*, the traditional masculine martial arts have been glamorised and feminised, and Jen, the female protagonist, resembles the new girl heroes of "girl power" feminism in the third wave women's movement rather than traditional Chinese women warriors such as Mulan. There was a large gap between the official propaganda of patriotic heroines in the 1980s and the global "girl power"

role models presented in films made towards the end of the twentieth century and the new millennium.

Against this background, in 2004 Taiwan-born female director Alice Wang produced the film *West Town Girls*. This is a good example of Taiwan filmmakers attempting to not only produce films that compete for box office revenue, but also to delve into local culture in search of a Taiwan identity. In *West Town Girls*, Wang examines women's violence through teenage female gangsters, stigmatised as '*tai mei*' in contemporary Taiwan society. '*Tai mei*' is Taiwan slang, referring to girl delinquents who rebel against the adult world. They pursue a rebellious teenage culture which encompasses hair-dying, tattoos, truancy, forming factions to engage in criminal acts such as robbery, and meaningless gang fights. Through these criminal acts, they want to wield power over others and fulfil a desire for superiority, despite being a marginalised group in society.

5.3.2 Comparisons with Hong Kong

It is possible that director Wang chose to depict the '*Tai mei*' culture for several reasons. First, it is an important part of teenage culture in Taiwan. Another possible reason is the need for market success. As Michael Curtin has noted, the majority of film-goers are teenagers,³⁵ and one of their favourite genres is gangster films. Therefore a film depicting '*tai mei*' would have a better chance of becoming a box office hit. Another consideration for Wang might have been that since '*Tai mei*' in Taiwan corresponds to the '*guhwo nü*' (古惑女, girl rebels) in Hong Kong, and

³⁵ Curtin, 246. He notes that as early as 1994, sixty percent of theatregoers were under the age of eighteen, and only teenagers still attended the cinema in large numbers.

gangster films are also popular there, she could easily export her film to Hong Kong.³⁶ Although financial considerations would have been important to Wang in creating a film to appeal to teenage girls in both Taiwan and Hong Kong who love gangster films, her film is politically significant on many levels.

Wang's most important contribution was her focus on violence among girls. The majority of gangster films produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan have male protagonists, with female characters being in most cases, the love interests of the male characters. There has, however, been a small segment of gangster films which focus on women gangsters, who can be roughly divided into two types. The first are active fighters and positive characters who pursue women's solidarity and friendship despite their enemies' constant attempts to destroy them. The second group are non-fighters, or eager to detach themselves from the bloodstained world of gangsters. Although these two groups of women regularly feature in both Taiwan and Hong Kong gangster films, Hong Kong and Taiwan appear to demonstrate different attitudes towards women's rebellion.

In Hong Kong, from *Peking Opera Blue* in the 1980s to *Dragon Inn* in the 1990s, women's rebellious actions were well-received by audiences there. For example, Bainiu who violates the social norm that restricted women from performing in Peking Opera in *Peking Opera Blue*, and Jin Xiangyu who breaks the codes of female sexual behaviour in *Dragon Inn*, are portrayed positively. In Hong Kong films, such as *Sexy and Dangerous II* (古惑女 II, dir. Leung Wan Fat 梁荣发, 2000)³⁷ and *Mob Sister* (阿

³⁶ Filmmakers in Mainland China made few gangster films, because the local censor does not allow productions of this genre.

³⁷ *Sexy and Dangerous* is about the friendship of four girls who meet a nice male gangster leader; they plan to open a pub together and stay away from bloodshed. The male gangster falls in love with one of them, but is wrongly accused by his rival and killed. One of the four girls sacrifices her life intending to help the rest escape, but the others die in a battle to avenge the dead gangster.

嫂, dir. Wong Ching Po 黄精甫, 2005), female gangsters are depicted as positive heroines, especially when they fight to save or avenge friends, family or lovers.

Hong Kong is, as discussed previously, a melting pot of every imaginable style and influence, including contradictory values, and female gangster films reflect these contradictions. *Mob Sister* illustrates this point. There are two women characters in this film, one being an avenger who swears to kill everyone related to the man who killed her husband, while the other is pacifist whose death stops the fighting of those who use violence to gain power.³⁸ They are opposite characters, and although a website that sells this film's DVD describes them as "two rabbits that fell into a herd of wolves,"³⁹ one of them turns into one of the wolves, while the other redeems the wolves through her sacrificial death. The director portrays the older woman's violence and the younger woman's fragility, and her aversion to violence, in a positive manner.

However, rebellious girls did not enjoy such favourable treatment in Taiwan films. In most Taiwan films, women are gentle and non-violent⁴⁰ and if they rebel, their suffering and loneliness rather than their joy or freedom is emphasised.⁴¹ Even in *Crouching Tiger*, although Ang Lee endorses women's rebellion against patriarchal values, his heroine Jen jumps from a cliff and floats away when she seeks freedom, indicating the difficulties they face when trying to rebel against the patriarchal social

³⁸ In *Mob Sister*, the older woman swears to kill everyone related to the murderer of her husband, including an infant girl. In order to save the girl, a gangster leader claims that the little girl is his future wife. The Chinese title of *Mob Sister* actually means 'the big boss's wife'; there is a firm rule in the gangster world that the wife of the big boss enjoys the same respect as her husband. She is raised as the adopted daughter of the gangster leader, and eighteen years later, has become a beautiful young woman. When the gangster leader is murdered, she is obliged to take over the leadership and is dragged into the bloodshed of a power struggle. She does not want to see the sworn brothers become sworn enemies; therefore, she dashes into the middle of a chaotic car chase to stop them and is killed in the subsequent car crash.

³⁹ See the website <http://global.yesasia.com/gb/PrdDept.aspx/code-c/section-videos/pid-1004061052/> (accessed 8 March 2007).

⁴⁰ For example, see *Accidental Legend* (飞天, dir. Wang Xiao-di 王小棣, 1995).

⁴¹ For example, see *Millennium Manbo* (千禧曼波, dir. Hou Hsiao Hsian, 2001).

order. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 1, the depiction of women warriors was a relatively weaker feature of Taiwan cinema. Therefore, Alice Wang's work is important not only because it is a film about women warriors, but also because she focuses on women's violence. By depicting women's participation in bloodshed in the gangster underworld, Alice Wang attempts to explore the serious social problem of 'Tai mei' in Taiwan, and the negative aspect of women's violence. The protagonists, Porsch (played by Annie Wu 吴辰君) and Gucci (played by Charyl Yang 杨谨华), are half sisters who share the same father, Tong Wei (童威), but grow up in different places—Gucci in Taiwan and Porsch in the United States—with no knowledge of each other's existence. They lead two gangster groups, Ximen Tang (西门堂) and Ermei Tang (峨眉堂) which battle for supremacy. Although Porsch, the leader of Ximen Tang, does not initially favour violence, she organises an internet brothel to financially overpower her rival, without consideration for the collective welfare of the women. In addition, their grudge against each other is utterly destructive and they show no concern for the empowerment of women.

5.3.3 The 'Bad Girls' in the "Girl Power" Phenomenon

Many feminists are concerned about this 'bad girl' phenomenon that "privileges individual over collective empowerment" of women, as it could cause a "backlash"⁴² for women's liberation. In the eight films examined in this thesis, the women warriors, whether traditional 'nü xia' or anti-traditional heroines, are all depicted as positive models either fighting altruistically for their community/nation or for personal liberation. However, in recent years, the negative side of women's violence has sometimes been glorified in the cinematic presentations. A typical example is the

⁴² Munford, 149 and 142.

Hollywood blockbuster *Kill Bill* which depicts a woman using extreme violence to kill everyone in her way as she search for her daughter.

According to de Beauvoir, the will to dominate and conquer the weak and unknown through physical power has been stereotyped as the core of male culture since antiquity, and “[t]he only employments worthy of him were war, hunting, fishing; he made conquest of foreign booty and bestowed it on the tribe.”⁴³ By using violent action to conquer and transcend nature, men have found their identity as humans who are superior to animals. For centuries, this notion has bolstered and sanctified men’s privileges. Some women, however, began to see their inability to use violence as men do as a sign of weakness, and chose to establish a distinctive identity for themselves by using force to subdue others.

The craze for supremacy through violence and material gain among the bad girls/ ‘*tai mei*’ depicted in the film *West Town Girls*, partly equates with Susan Hopkins’ description of the new “girl power” feminism. Hopkins notes:

To some extent the new girl hero is in fact an anti-heroine....These new-generation power girls are not necessarily selfless, co-operative pacifists—they are competitive, combative and as capable of violence as any male characters. In contrast to the invariably pro-social, altruistic behaviour of the classic heroine, the new girl hero *may exhibit verbal and physical aggression in relationships of power over others*. In contrast to the caring, sharing ‘good’ girl, the new-style female hero is often driven by revenge, anger or a lust for material gain.⁴⁴

⁴³ De Beauvoir, 78.

⁴⁴ Hopkins, 3 and 6 (my italics).

The three female gangsters in *West Town Girls*: Porsch, Gezi (鸽子, played by Cecelia Hsiao 萧淑慎) and Gucci, are three girl heroes who fit Susan Hopkins' definition of "the new-style female hero". The grudge between Porsch and Gucci has originated with their mothers, who were rivals in both their struggle to gain control of the gangland and for the love of the gangster leader, Tong Wei. Porsch's mother is killed by Gucci's mother, and Gucci's mother is killed by Tong Wei. Gucci avenges her mother's death by killing her father Tong Wei. The two half-sisters continue the bloodshed while Porsch's childhood friend Gezi constantly provokes conflict between Porsch and Gucci because Gezi and Gucci have been stubborn rivals for supremacy since childhood. To use Hopkins' words, Gezi from Ximen Tang and Gucci who leads Ermei Tang "*exhibit verbal and physical aggression,*" enjoying hurting each other physically in order to wield power over each other. The introductory scene of this film is a fight between Gucci and Gezi, which starts with Gucci's ridiculing Gezi through a Chinese pun, which belittles Gezi and her gang by mockingly calling them "malt sugar".⁴⁵ Malt is a symbol of things sweet but soft and weak, so 'malt sugar' implies that Gezi's gang is powerless.

Gucci wins the admiration of her fellows and solidifies her claim to gang leadership by demonstrating both her fighting skills and verbal aggression. Gucci and her gang beat Gezi severely to demonstrate their physical supremacy, and also assault Gezi during an illegal motorcar race in which Gezi is seriously injured. This leads to an attempt by Gezi's boyfriend to kill Gucci, but he is killed by her. The death of her boyfriend inflames Gezi into launching a suicidal act to kill Gucci. The physical aggression between Gucci and Gezi does not cease until Porsch's and Gucci's deaths

⁴⁵ Gucci uses a Chinese pun to mock Gezi's gang. Gezi's gang's name is Xi men Tang (堂) in Chinese, while the last word "Tang" also sounds the same as the character for sugar or sweet things (糖). Gucci says, "What 'Tang' did you said? Oh 'mai ya tang' (malt sugar)!"

and Gezi's insanity. Gezi and Gucci insist on using violence to gain power over others and Porsch's material gains through illegal business are extreme behaviour by the 'bad girls.'

5.3.4 Taiwan Contexts

No matter how much the female characters' behaviour in *West Town Girls* resembles the 'bad girl' culture, this film can also be interpreted as a unique means of depicting Taiwan's sociopolitical situation with regard to the controversy over Taiwan's identity. There are two voices in Taiwan in respect to its relationship with Mainland China. One urges unification with Mainland China, identifying the Taiwan people as 'Chinese' together with the people in Mainland China, while the other advocates continued independence for Taiwan and stresses that the Taiwan people are 'Taiwanese'. However, most people in Taiwan assumed a more pragmatic view of their mixed identity as 'Taiwan's Chinese'. Director Wang uses two spoken languages in her film to emphasise this mixed identity. When Gezi and Gucci speak, they constantly shift between the Taiwan dialect (台语)⁴⁶ that has become a symbol of Taiwan and Mandarin which is also the language of Mainland China. Gezi and Gucci's alternating between the Taiwanese and Mandarin reflects their mixed identity as 'Taiwan's Chinese'.

It should be noted that many people in Taiwan are pragmatic about the matter; a woman interviewed by *Time Magazine* expressed the prevailing view: "Who cares if you are Chinese or Taiwanese.... As long as we all have a good standard of living,

⁴⁶ This dialect is often referred to as Taiyu, also called Minnan Yu in Chinese, which was originally a southern dialect of China, but has developed with Taiwan traits and was regarded as a linguistic symbol of Taiwan.

either unification or independence will be good.”⁴⁷ However, since Chen Shui-bian came to power in 2000, he has been pursuing the politics of confrontation directed at independence for Taiwan. His confrontational attitude is at odd with the Taiwan people’s desire for peace and their indifference to the political distinctions between Chinese and Taiwanese. *Time Magazine* reporters, Bill Powell and Tim Culpan, note, “Taiwan’s voters are tiring of the island’s rancorously divided politics and of President Chen’s provocative stance towards China,” and there is “combat fatigue”⁴⁸ among Taiwan people.

Alice Wang’s film *West Town Girls*, could be read as an apocalyptic vision of a devastating war if the rancour between Taiwan and Mainland China continues to intensify. The half sisters, Porsch and Gucci, resemble Mainland China and Taiwan, both descended from the same Chinese civilisation, but they lead two rival gangs, which are battling for supremacy, like the Communist and the Taiwan governments, although the director does not specify who represents Mainland China or Taiwan.

The consequences of the discord between Porsch and Gucci could be interpreted as a civil war. In the film, Gezi’s conflict with Gucci intensifies the aggression between the two groups after Gezi tries to kill Gucci but is instead captured by Gucci’s gang. Porsch leads her group in an attempt to rescue Gezi, and thus the half sisters engage in fatal combat. There is a hint of reluctance by Porsch and Gucci to kill each other, because they recall their blood relationship, symbolising the hesitation of the Taiwan people and Mainland China to fight one another. Yet, Gezi harbours irreconcilable animosity towards Gucci, which could symbolise any group bearing resentment

⁴⁷ Bill Powell and Tim Culpan, “Combat Fatigue: Taiwan’s Voters Are Tiring of the Island’s Rancorously Divided Politics and of President Chen’s Provocative Stance towards China,” *Time* (3 April 2006): 47.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

toward either Mainland China or Taiwan. The Chinese meaning of Gezi is ‘dove or pigeon,’ which is a symbol of a messenger or peace, but Gezi who is supposed to be the peace messenger to harmonise the relationship between Gucci and Porsch, provokes enmity and fails in her peace mission. This failure could be interpreted as the intensification of the conflict between Mainland China and Taiwan, which create the risk of civil war. In the film, both Gezi and Gucci take up a gun from the floor and fire at each other, but both bullets hit Porsch who is attempting to stop the violence. After killing Porsch by her own hand, Gucci is left without family and commits suicide, while Gezi loses her sanity.

The deaths of the half sisters and Gezi’s miserable fate are not only metaphors for the disaster of a civil war between Mainland China and Taiwan; their meaning can also be extended to a wider sphere of today’s global society. Porsch and Gucci represent rival factions descended from the same ancestry, whereas Gezi symbolises the peace messenger who is driven by a desire for revenge; she ignores her mission and supports violence to solve conflict. The desire for revenge, which has been abused as a righteous excuse to launch attacks against each other, is a common theme in the contemporary international community. However, no matter how pervasive the excuse or how deep the hatred, a civil war is a war between sisters (Gucci and Porsch). There is no victor or winner, and the survivor is no more fortunate than the dead. Alice Wang accentuates this message by depicting the only survivor, Gezi, as a physical and mental cripple wandering aimlessly around like a homeless pigeon. As discussed above, Gezi embodies a peace messenger, but fails to deliver her message, and is destroyed by the confrontation she provokes. Nevertheless, she does survive, indicating Alice Wang’s hope that peace will survive.

5.3.5 Epilogue: Return to a Universal Anti-war Message

Alice Wang's expression of concern over the outbreak of war through female characters is modern and appropriate because women's role in the military sphere is changing. According to traditional patriarchal beliefs, men and women function differently in society, and one of women's social functions is "to soften the brutishness of male culture and protect the gentler aspects of civilization."⁴⁹ Elshtain also notes:

The role women play in this dominant narrative is that of Spartan mothers and civic cheerleaders, urging men to behave like men, praising the heroes and condemning the cowardly. Women are also official mourners, lamenting the destruction of the war...⁵⁰

In contemporary society, women can be soldiers and participate in combat. In the new millennium, women's violence gained recognition as a new social phenomenon, which is sometimes glorified in popular culture. A typical example is the Hollywood blockbuster, *Kill Bill*, which is mentioned earlier in this section. In video games, rewarding women's violence is also quite common. For example, players of a Playstation 2 game *Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven* (2002-2003), can choose the girl ninja, Ayame, to carry out missions; she kills everyone in her way and receives handsome rewards for her assassination skills. The view that women are 'beautiful souls' and promoters of peace is lost in these games.

The popularity of women warriors on film reflects the endorsement of women's physical strength and the arrival of "girl power" feminism. However, the acceptance of women's violence has undermined women's role as pacifists, and some people

⁴⁹ Jones, *Killing Monsters*, 78.

⁵⁰ Elshtain, 121.

condemn aggressive women as ‘bad girls.’ The question is how can women celebrate their physical power without being stigmatised as ‘bad girls’?

Wang adds an epilogue to her film to show that these two points are not contradictory. In the epilogue, Porsch and Gucci revive and jog happily together down an evening street in a peaceful city. Their sharing sporting activities celebrates women’s physical power, which is the essence of sports feminism in the third wave women’s movement. Wang indicates through Porsch and Gucci that women’s physical power should be directed at building healthy bodies. The peaceful scene portraying healthy, happy Gucci and Porsch conveys the message that people can co-exist peacefully. No one survived when they continued to fight for supremacy, but they could have survived if they put aside their enmity.

The contrast between the tragic finale in the film and the peaceful scene in the epilogue is also reflected in the film title. The film has two different Chinese titles: *Apocalypse of West Town* (终极西门), indicates the tragic ending while the other; *New Town* (新堂口⁵¹), refers to the peaceful co-existence of Porsch and Gucci. Wang uses this epilogue as a metaphor for her wish for the peaceful co-existence of Taiwan and Mainland China. Wang also seems to imply that neither party would survive if they insisted on using military power to settle their differences, but if they reconcile without fighting, both can survive and prosper.

As globalisation threatens the loss of local identity, Taiwan filmmakers such as Alice Wang endeavour to preserve Taiwan’s uniqueness by exploring contemporary Taiwan society. By portraying Taiwan’s ‘*tai mei*’/ ‘bad girl’ culture, director Alice

⁵¹ Most sources identify the film as *Apocalypse of West Town*, but the DVD version I bought from Mainland China is named *New Town*. It seems that there is a more optimistic view of the Taiwan-Mainland China relationship in Mainland China.

Wang endeavours to draw the audience's attention back to local social issues. In this film, Wang reveals that the global women's culture, especially the 'bad girl' phenomenon, can also be seen in Taiwan, where it is not only an important aspect of the "girl power" phenomenon, but can also be interpreted as anxiety over the possibility of a civil war between Mainland China and Taiwan. Furthermore, as women's role in the military sphere is changing, *West Town Girls* is a timely vehicle through which to explore the contradictory issues of whether female physical power empowers women, and their roles as aggressors in war.

Chapter summary

In the three decades from the 1980s, during which Taiwan society has undergone an enormous transformation, filmic representations of women warriors also underwent many changes. In the 1980s, Taiwan's international status had been lower and domestic upheavals were challenging the KMT's governance. The state-owned film industry emphasised patriotism and upheld the national identity. After the relaxation of martial law in 1987, Taiwan rapidly became a globalised community, and filmmaking in Taiwan gradually integrated with other Chinese communities and was later 'Hollywoodised.' During this process, Taiwan filmmakers had to face the cruel reality of their films' declining popularity in the domestic market. Another problem they faced was that Taiwan was no longer the guardian of Chinese culture, a role which had been cherished by both the Taiwan government and its people.

Ang Lee attempts to rescue the 'Chineseness' of the Taiwan films through portrayals of traditional women warriors such as Yu Xiulian in his film *Crouching*

Tiger. He also incorporates Western values in his depiction of the central character, Jen, to demonstrate that Taiwan filmmakers can also produce successful films of high artistic merit for the global market. While Ang Lee was aiming at the global market and focusing on universal themes, such as women's liberation, in his depiction of women warriors, other Taiwan filmmakers were endeavouring to re-locate their narrative in Taiwan in order to capture Taiwan's unique features. A good example is the methodology used by Alice Wang in her film *West Town Girls*, which depicts Taiwan's 'tai mei' culture and explicitly refers to Taiwan's relationship with Mainland China. The global box office success of *Crouching Tiger* may encourage other filmmakers in Taiwan to depict women warriors in their films so that they may survive in the globalised market. It is hoped that great works are produced in that genre in the future.

Conclusion

This thesis, “Representations of Chinese Women Warriors in the Cinemas of Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan Since 1980,” has explored both the uniquely Chinese characteristics and the Hollywood influences on representations of women warriors in the films of the above-mentioned regions. This study began by finding that filmmakers from these three regions often drew inspiration from cultural images of women warriors in Chinese civilisation, such as the ‘*nü xia*’ (lady knight), Mulan, and other equally patriotic and altruistic women in fiction and history, as well as supernatural beings of Chinese mythology and folk culture. Chapter 2 dealt with the acceptance of Chinese women warriors in Hollywood films as well as the Western influence in films made in the above-mentioned regions. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 focused on detailed textual analyses of the nine representative films which were produced in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan in the last three decades. By exploring the sociocultural contexts of the selected films and analysing the film texts, this thesis compares and contrasts representations of women warriors in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan.

From a detailed examination of the nine films, it became apparent that film industries in the above three regions have undergone similar transformations from regional to global, although Taiwan’s local film industry declined as a result, while Hong Kong and Mainland China were able to maintain relatively healthy film industries. This thesis also revealed that during the past three decades, filmmakers in those regions took initiatives to cross regional boundaries to work together and combine resources. In the 1990s, cooperation between Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan became common practice. For example, the actress Brigitte Lin, who

played a principal character in the 1981 Taiwan government-funded film *Women Soldiers*, was invited to play the leading roles in two Hong Kong films, Cao Yun in *Peking Opera Blue* in 1986 and Qiu Moyan in *Dragon Inn* in 1992, which have been analysed in this thesis.

The cooperation between those three regions gradually developed into global cooperation. The production of *Crouching Tiger* in 2000 was convincing evidence of this global-scale cooperation. The director, Ang Lee, is a diasporic Chinese who immigrated to the United States, and the screenplay was written by two Chinese and a Westerner, James Schamus, while its financial investors were the Japanese media conglomerate Sony, Hollywood Columbia Pictures and its Hong Kong division. The cast included Chow Yun-Fat from Hong Kong, Zhang Ziyi from Mainland China, Chang Chen from Taiwan, and Michelle Yeoh from the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia. It is therefore impossible in this film to identify the dividing lines denoting the regional boundaries.

Another important change that occurred during the past three decades was the depiction of 'woman warrior'. Initially, depictions of women warriors were coloured by the unique features of each region, but filmmakers gradually began to incorporate themes of more appeal to global audiences. For example, in the 1980s, a central theme in the portrayal of women warriors in Hong Kong was the exploration and confirmation of their identity as a colonised people, whereas in Mainland China it was their Communist identity, and in Taiwan it was their Nationalist identity. Thus, patriotism motif was of equal importance in films from these three regions.

However, when filmmakers in these three regions began collaborating in order to survive in an increasingly globalised market, they avoided a focus on political themes that might create conflict among different Chinese communities. Instead, their

depictions of women warriors focused more on their personal pursuit of independence and free choice. In Hong Kong, during the 1990s women's financial independence and sexual autonomy were important themes, as can be seen in *Dragon Inn*, whereas free love was a primary theme in films produced in Mainland China, such as *Lover's Grief*. In the new millennium, a new phenomenon of "girl power" feminism became significant feature in the women warrior genre in all three regions. Helen and Gypsy in *Twins Effect*, Xiao Mei in *House of Flying Daggers*, Jen in *Crouching Tiger* and Porsch in *West Town Girls* are all aggressive and independent girls. They no longer represent victimised women in need of rescue, but rather take the initiative in rescuing others or even attack male adversaries.

However, the gender equality and "girl power" feminism which originated in the West were delicate issues in Chinese communities. In Western academia, feminist reading on films about women warriors is common, whereas Chinese academia still lags behind in this respect, and the interpretation of Chinese films about women warriors requires much work from feminist perspectives. Although Western academics have done some work on women warriors depicted in Chinese films, their study is still limited to those portrayed in the narrow range of martial arts films that are currently popular in the West, such as *Crouching Tiger* and *Flying Daggers*. In recognition of those problems, this thesis has attempted to introduce to readers and Western critics a variety of less well-known works, including propaganda films, martial arts epics, comedies, and gangster films depicting women warriors.

This thesis also attempts to combine textual analyses of films with an examination of specific sociocultural contexts in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan, in order to obtain a better understanding of Chinese women warriors on film. Through analyses of the women warriors, this thesis also explored the development of a

feminist consciousness among Chinese women. As the world is evolving into one global community, Chinese women in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan now share many common experiences with women outside the Chinese communities. They have achieved a great deal in terms of economic, political and cultural equality and have changed the concept of women in their communities. Some issues relating to the characterisation of women warriors in the Chinese films examined herein, including women's celebration of autonomy, their pursuit of more free choices, female violence, and women's military roles, are also common themes for many women in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan.

However, due to constraints of time, length and themes in this research, it was impossible to examine every aspect of importance to the 'woman warrior' phenomenon. Because gender studies is a new discipline in China, the exploration of the representations of Chinese women warriors in cinema still requires a reliance on many Western theories and critical research. It is important to emphasise that before embarking on this research the author was aware that a heavy reliance on Western theories might result in a negation of those values important to Chinese culture, as Western feminist theories tend to do. Kathleen Kennedy, for example, is critical of the attitude of some Western feminists who are disdainful of the non-Western feminists:

Western feminists have tended to represent themselves as the sole authorities on feminism and have positioned themselves as leaders of the global women's movement, resulting in the suppression of third-world women's agency and voice. They traditionally have constructed third-world women as 'Other,' incapable of obtaining the status of first-world women

because of what are perceived to be the unusual harshness of the Orient's patriarchal structures and their lack of a feminist consciousness.¹

As Western academia continues to dominate the study of the 'woman warrior' phenomenon, there is a need to encourage more non-Western study in order to obtain a fresh and balanced view of Chinese women warriors. One of the aims of this research is to stimulate more study of the 'woman warrior' phenomenon in Chinese cinemas by non-Western scholars. It is also hoped that an understanding of Chinese women warriors in films can provide a common platform for communication between people from different political, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, so that together they can find common solutions for many gender issues.

¹ Kennedy, "Love Is the Battlefield," 47.

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Filmography

NB: S = scriptwriter, d = director, c =cinematographer

1905

- *Ding jun Shan* (定军山)
 - d. Ren Jingfeng (任景丰)
 - Fengtai Photo Shop (丰泰照相馆)

1925

- *The Female Knight Li Feifei* (*Nü xia Li Feifei* 女侠李飞飞)
 - d. Shao Zuiweng (邵醉翁)
 - Tianyi Film Studio (Tianyi yingpian gongsi,天一影片公司)

1927

- *Maiden in Armour* (*Hua Mulan cong jun* 花木兰从军)
 - d. Li Pingqian
 - Tianyi Film Studio
- *Heroic Daughters and Sons* (*Ernü yingxiong* I to V, 儿女英雄, 1927-1931)
 - d. Wen Yimin (文逸民)
 - Youlian Film Studio (友联影片公司)

1928

- *Female Knight Black Peony* (*Nü xia Hei Mudan* 女侠黑牡丹)

- d. Ren Pengnian (任彭年)
- Yueming Film studio (Yueming yingpian gongsi, 月明影片公司)
- *Female Knight in Black* (*Hei yi nü xia* 黑衣女侠)
 - d. Cheng Bugao (程步高)
 - Mingxing Film Studio (明星影片公司)
- *Female Escort* (*Nü biaooshi* 女镖师)
 - d. Ren Pengnian
 - Yueming Film Studio

1930-31

- *Lady Adventuress on Wild River* (*Huangjiang nü xia* 荒江女侠, I to XIII)
 - d. Chen Kengran (陈铿然), Zheng Yisheng (郑逸生), Shang Guanwu (尚冠武)
 - Youlian Film Studio

1933

Hong Kong

- *White Golden Dragon* (*Bai jin long* 白金龙)
 - dir. Tang Xiaodan (唐晓丹)
 - Tianyi Film Studio

1939

Hong Kong

- *Female Knight Red Butterfly* (*Nü xia Hong Hudie* 女侠红蝴蝶)

- d. Hong Zhonghao (洪仲豪)
- Golden Mountain Company (金山公司)

Mainland

- *Mulan Joins the Army* (*Mulan Cong jun* 木兰从军).
 - d. Bu Wangchang (卜万昌)
 - Xinhua Film Studio
- *Sons and Daughters of China* (*Zhonghua ernü* 中华儿女)
 - d. Shen Xiling (沈西苓)
 - Central Film Studio (中央电影摄影场)

1940

Hong Kong

- *Lady Adventuress on Wild River* (*Huang jiang nü xia* 荒江女侠)
 - d. Yang Gongliang (杨工良)
 - Golden City Company (金城公司)

Shanghai

- *Liang Hongyu* (梁红玉)
 - d. Yue Feng (岳枫)
 - Yihua Yingye gongsi (艺华影业公司)

1949

Mainland

- *Daughters of China* (*Zhonghua nüer* 中华女儿)

- d. Ling Zifeng (凌子风); s. Yan Yiyan (颜一烟)
- c. Qian Jiang (钱江)
- Northeast Film Studio(东北电影制片厂)

1951

Mainland

- *Liu Hulan* (刘胡兰)
 - d. Feng Bailu (冯白鲁)
 - Northeast Film Studio

1964

Hong Kong

- *Lady General Hua Mulan* (*Hua Mulan* 花木兰)
 - d. Yue Feng
 - Shaw Brothers (香港邵氏影业公司)

1965

Hong Kong

- *The Temple of the Red Lotus* (*Jianghu qi xia* 江湖奇侠)
 - d. Xu Zenghong (徐增宏)
 - Shaw Brothers

1967

Co-productions:

- *Dragon Gate Inn (Longmen kezhan 龙门客栈)*
 - d. King Hu (胡金銓)
 - Taiwan Lianbang Yingye youxian gongsi (台湾联邦影业有限公司)

1969

Hong Kong

- *Teddy Girls (Fei nü zheng zhuan 飞女正传)*
 - dir. Lung Kong (龙刚)

1971

Hong Kong

- *The Big Boss (Tang shan da xiong 唐山大兄)*
 - d. Lo Wai (罗维)
 - Golden Harvest (Hong Kong) 嘉和电影(香港)有限公司

Co-productions

- *A Touch of Zen (Xia nü 侠女)*
 - d. /s. King Hu
 - Taiwan Lianbang Yingye yonxian gongsi

1972

Hong Kong

- *Fist of Fury (Jin wu men 精武门)*

- d. Lo Wai
- Golden Harvest (Hong Kong)

1981

Taiwan

- *Women Soldiers (Zhongguo nü bing 中国女兵)*
 - d. Liu Weibin (刘维斌) ; s. Chang Yung-Hsing (, 张永祥)
 - c. Chan Chong Yuan (陈钟源)
 - Golden Gate Film Co. (金门影业公司)

Co-productions

- *Battle for the Republic of China (Xinhai shuang shi 辛亥双十)*
 - d. Ding shanxi (丁善玺)
 - Central Motion Picture (台湾中影公司); Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong)

1984

Mainland:

- *Yellow Earth (Huang tudi 黄土地)*
 - d. Chen Kaige (陈凯歌)
 - Guangxi Film Studio (广西电影制片厂)

1985

Hong Kong

- *Yes, Madam (Huang jia shi jie 皇家师姐)*
 - d. Corey Yuen (元奎)

- D&B Film Co. Ltd (德宝)

1986

Hong Kong:

- *A Better Tomorrow (Yingxiong ben se 英雄本色)*
 - John Woo (吴宇森)
 - Film Workshop (电影工作室)
- *Peking Opera Blue (Dao ma dan 刀马旦)*
 - d. Tsui Hark (徐克)
 - s. To Kwok-Wai (杜国威),
 - c. Poon Hung-seng (潘恒生); choreographer: Ching Siu-tung (程小东)
 - Media Asia Group (寰亚) and Film Workshop

Mainland:

- *Hibiscus Town (Furong zhen, 芙蓉镇).*
 - d. Xie Jin (谢晋)
 - Shanghai Film Studio (上海电影制片厂)

1987

Hong Kong

- *Magnificent Warriors (Zhonghua zhanshi 中华战士)*
 - d. David Chung (钟志文)
 - D & B Films Co. Ltd

Mainland

- *Eight Women Die a Martyr (Ba nü tou jiang 八女投江)*
 - d. Yang Guangyuan(杨光远); s.Li Baolin (李宝林)
 - c. Yang Guangyuan, Sang Hua (桑华)
 - August First Film Studio (八一电影制片厂)
- *Red Sorghum (Hong Gaoliang, 红高粱)*
 - d. Zhang Yimou (张艺谋)
 - Xi'an Film Studio (西安电影制片厂)

1989**Taiwan**

- *City of Sadness (Bei qing chengshi 悲情城市)*
 - d. Hou Hsiao-hsien (侯孝贤)
 - Era International Ltd.(年代)

1990**Co-production**

- *Ju Dou (菊豆)*
 - d. Zhang Yimou
 - Tokuma Shoten Publishing Co., Tokuma Communications Co., China Film Co-production (中国电影合作制片公司) and Xi'an Film Studio

1991***Co-productions***

- *Raise the Red Lanterns (Da hong denglong gao gao gua 大红灯笼高高挂)*
 - d. Zhang Yimou
 - Era International (Hong Kong) Ltd and China Film Co-production Corporation

Taiwan

- *Pushing Hands (Tui shou, 推手)*
 - d. Ang Lee (李安)
 - Central Motion Picture (Taiwan)

1992***Hong Kong***

- *92 Legendary La Rose Noire (92 Hei mei gui dui hei mei gui 92 黑玫瑰对黑玫瑰)*
 - dir. Chen Shanzhi (陈善之)
 - Xiangguang Yonggao dianying gongsi(香港永高电影公司)
- *Dragon Inn (Xin long men ke zhan 新龙门客栈)*
 - dir. Raymond Lee (李惠民)
 - s. Tsui Hark, Cheung Tan (张炭) and Xiao He (晓禾)
 - c. Arthur Wong(黄岳泰) and Tom Lau(刘满棠)
 - Seasonal Film Corporation (思远影业公司) and Film Workshop
- *The Heroic Trio (Dong fang san xia 东方三侠)*
 - dir. Johnny To (杜琪峰)

- Media Asia Group, China Entertainment Production Ltd and Paka Hill Film Production Co. (百嘉峰影业公司)

1993

Hong Kong:

- *The Bride with White Hair (Bai fa mo nü zhuan 白发魔女传)*
 - dir. Ronny Yu (于仁泰)
 - Mandarin Films Ltd (东方电影) and Ronny Yu Film Ltd (于仁泰影片有限公司)
- *Executioners (also know as Heroic Trio II, 东方三侠 2)*
 - d. Ching Siu Tung and Jonnie To
 - Paka Hill Film Production Co. and Media Asia

Mainland:

- *Red Firecrackers, Green Firecrackers (Pao da shuang deng 炮打双灯)*
 - d. He Ping (何平)
 - Xi'an Film Studio

Taiwan:

- *The Puppetmaster (Xi meng rensheng 戏梦人生)*
 - d. Hou Hsiao-hsien
 - Era International Ltd, and Hou Xiaoxian dianying she(侯孝贤电影社)
- *The Wedding Banquet (Xi yan, 喜宴) (Co-production)*
 - d. Ang Lee
 - Central Motion Picture, and Good Machine

1994***Taiwan***

- *Vive L'amour (Aiqing wan sui 爱情万岁)*
 - d. Tsai Ming-liang (蔡明亮)
 - Xiongfa Film Co. (雄发电影公司) and San yi gufen youxian gongsi (三一股份有限公司)

- *Eat Drink Man Woman (Yin shi man nü 饮食男女)*
 - d. Ang Lee
 - Central Motion Picture

1995***Mainland***

- *In the Heat of the Sun (Yangguang canlan de rizi 阳光灿烂的日子)*
 - d. Jiang Wen (姜文)
 - China Film Distributions and Production Co. (中国电影发行制作公司) and Hong Kong Ganglong Film Entertainment (香港港龙电影娱乐制作公司)

Taiwan

- *Accidental Legend (Fei tian 飞天)*
 - d. Wang Xiao-di (王小棣)
 - Dao tian dianying gongzuo shi (稻田电影工作室)

- *Good Men, Good Women (Hao nan hao nü 好男好女)*
 - d. Hou Hsiao-hsien
 - Hou Xiaoxian dianying she

1997***Mainland***

- *Red River Valley* (*Hong he gu* 红河谷)
 - d. Feng Xiaomning (冯小宁)
 - Shanghai Film Studio

1998***Taiwan***

- *Flowers in Shanghai* (*Hai shang hua* 海上花)
 - d. Hou Hsiao-hsien
 - Shochiku Co. Ltd, Hou Xiaoxian ying xiang zhizuo youxian gongsi (侯孝贤影像制作有限公司)

1999***Mainland***

- *A Lover's Grief over the Yellow River* (*Huanghe jue lian* 黄河绝恋)
 - d./ s./ c. Feng Xiaoning
 - Shanghai Yong Le Films and Television Corporation (上海永乐股份有限公司)

2000***Hong Kong:***

- *Sexy and Dangerous II* (*guhuo nü II* 古惑女 2)
 - d. Leung Wan Fat (梁荣发)

- Bad Boy Film Culture Limited

➤ *Tokyo Raiders* (*Dongjing gong lue* 东京攻略)

- d. Jingle Ma (马楚成); s. Susan Chan (陈淑贤)
- Golden Harvest Company Ltd.

Co-productions

➤ *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (*Wo hu cang long* 卧虎藏龙)

- d. Ang Lee; choreographer: Yuen Wo Ping (袁和平)
- s. Wang Hui Ling(王蕙玲), James Schamus, and Tsai Kuo Jung (蔡国容)
- c. Peter Pao (鲍德熹)
- Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, Sony Pictures Classics, Good Maschine International, Edko Films, Zoom Hunt International, China Film Co-Production Coop., and Asian Union Film and Entertainment.

2001

Hong Kong

➤ *Wuyan* (钟无艳)

- d. Johnny To and Ka-Fai Wai (韦家辉)
- Milky Way Images Co. Ltd.(银河影像)

Co-productions

➤ *Millennium Manbo* (*Qian xi manbo* 千禧曼波)

- d. Hou Hsiao-hsian
- Orly Films, 3H Production, Paradis Films and Sinomovie

➤ *Hero* (*Ying xiong* 英雄)

- d. Zhang Yimou
- Beijing New Picture Film Co. Ltd (北京新画面影业有限公司), Elite Groop Enterprises Inc.(精英娱乐有限公司), China Film-Co-production Corporation, and Sil-Metropole Organization (银都机构有限公司)

2002

Co-productions

- *So Close (Xiyang tianshi 夕阳天使)*
 - d. Corey Yuen
 - Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia and Eastern Productions

Mainland

- *Gadameilin (嘎达梅林)*
 - d. Feng Xiaoning
 - Beijing Forbidden City Film Co. (北京紫禁城影业) China Film Group Corporation, and CCTV (中央电视台).

2003

Hong Kong:

- *Twins Effect (Qian ji bian 千机变:拯救危城)*
 - d. Dante Lam (林超贤) and Donnie Yen (甄子丹)
 - s. Chan Hing Kai (Chen Qingjia 陈庆嘉) and Jack Ng(Wu Weilun 吴炜伦)
 - c. Cheung Man Po

- Emperor Multimedia Group

2004

Co-productions

- *The White Dragon (Fei xia xiao bai long 飞侠小白龙)*
 - dir. Wilson Yip (叶伟信)
 - One Hundred Years of Film Co. Ltd (一百年电影有限公司), China Film Group Corporation, Singing Horse Productions
- *House of Flying Daggers (Shi mian mai fu 十面埋伏)*
 - d. Zhang Yimou; choreographer: Ching Xiu-Tung
 - s. Zhang Yimou, Li Feng (李冯) and Wang Bin (王斌)
 - c. Zhao Xiaoding (赵小丁)
 - Elite Group (2003) Enterprises Inc., Edko Film 公司(安乐影片有限公司), Zhang Yimou Studio (张艺谋工作室), and Beijing New Picture Film Co. Ltd.

Taiwan

- *West Town Girls (Zhong ji xi men 终极西门)*
 - d. Alice Wang (王毓雅)
 - s. Alice Wang and Xu Yuhua (徐玉桦)
 - c. Yi Hsu Lee (李以须)
 - Core Image Productions Co.

2005**Hong Kong**

- *Mob Sister (A sao 阿嫂)*
 - d. Wong Ching Po (黄精甫)
 - Filmko Entertainment Ltd. (星皓娱乐有限公司), Tianjin Film Studio (天津电影制片厂), and Deepjoy Picture Corporation (海乐影业有限公司)

2006***Co-productions***

- *The Knot (Yun Shui yao 云水谣)*
 - d. Yin Li (尹力)
 - China Film China Film Group Corporation, Emperor Group (Hong Kong) and Long Shong (Taiwan)

Other Films and Television Programmes

NB: d.=director

Aeon Flux (2005)

- d. Karyn Kusama
- Paramount Pictures, MTV Production, Lakeshore Entertainment, Valhalla Motion Pictures, Colossal Pictures,

Aliens (1986)

- d. James Cameron
- Twentieth Century Fox, Brandywine Productions Ltd, and LSM Production Group.

Buffy the vampire slayer (television series 1997-2004)

- d. Neal Batali, et al
- Mutant Enemy Inc., Kuzui Enterprises, Inc., Sandollar Television, Inc. in association with Twentieth Century Fox Television.

Charlie's Angels (television series 1976-1981)

- d. Bill Bixby, et al.
- Spelling-Goldberg Productions.

Charlie's Angels (2000)

- d. McG
- Columbia Pictures, Flower Film, Global Entertainment Productions, and Tall Tress Productions.

Die Another Day (2002)

- d. Lee Tamahori

- Eon Productions, Danjaq, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and United Artists.

G. I. Jane (1997)

- d. Ridley Scott
- Caravan Pictures, First Independence Films, Hollywood Pictures, Largo Entertainment, Moving Pictures, Scott Free Productions and Trap-Two-Zero Productions.

Kill Bill (2003 and 2004)

- d. Quentin Tarantino
- Miramax Films, A Band Apart and Super Cool ManChu.

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001)

- d. Simon West
- Paramount Picture, BBC, Eidos Interactive, KFP Productions, Lawrence Gordon Productions, Marubeni Corporation Mutual Film Company

Matrix, The (1999)

- d. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski
- Warner Bros. Pictures, Groucho II Partnership, Silver Pictures, Village Poadshow Pictures,

Memoirs of a Geisha (2005)

- d. Rob Marshall
- Columbia Pictures Corporations, Dreamworks, Spyglass Entertainment, Amblin Entertain and Red Wagon Productions.

Mulan (1998)

- d. Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook
- Walt Disney Pictures.

Mulan 2 (2004)

- d. Darrell Rooney and Lynne Southerland
- Walt Disney Pictures.

Red Sonja (1985)

- d. Richard Fleischer
- 1985, Dino De Laurentiis Company, and Famous Films N.V.

Resident Evil (2002)

- d. Paul Anderson
- Davis Films, Impact Pictures. Constantin Film, and New Legacy.

Resident Evil: Apocalypse (2004)

- d. Alexander Witt
- Screen Gems, Davis Films, Impact Pictures. Constantin Film.

Rush Hour II (2001)

- d. Brett Ratner
- Hiatt Designs of Las Vegas, New Line Cinema and Roger Birnbaum Productions.

Spice world (1997)

- d. Bob Spiers
- Columbia Pictures Corporation, Fragile Films, Icon Entertainment International, Polygram Filmed Entertainment and Spice Productions.

Terminator (1984)

- d. James Cameron
- Hemdale Film Corporation, Cinema 84, Euro Film Fund and Pacific Western.

Terminator 2: Judgement Day (1991)

- d. James Cameron
- Canal, Carolco Pictures, Lightstorm Entertainment, Pacific Western.

Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines (2003)

- d. Jonathan Mostow
- C-2 Pictures, Intermedia Films, IMF Internationale Medien, Mostow/Lieberman Productions

Tomorrow Never Dies (1997)

- d. Roger Spottiswoode
- Nanjaq, Eon Productions, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and United Artists.

Underworld I and II (2003 and 2006)

- d. Len Wisemen
- Lakeshore Entertainment, Laurinfilm Ltd., Subterranean Productions, Underworld Productions and Screen Gems.

Wonder Women (television series, 1976-1979)

- d. Barry Crane, et al
- Bruce Lansbury Productions, DC Comics, Douglas S. Cramer Company and Warner Bros. Television.

Xena, the Warrior Princess (television series, 1995-2001)

- d. John Schulian, et al.
- MCA Television, Renaissance Pictures, Studios USA Television and Universal TV.

X-men (2000)

- d. Bryan Singer
- 20th Century Fox, Bat Hat Harry Productions, Donners' Company