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“Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon:
A Transnational Reading”¹

Introduction

Ang Lee’s martial arts melodrama Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (henceforth CTHD) was a worldwide cinematic phenomenon in 2000-2001. Made with a relatively modest budget of \$15 million it earned over \$200 million worldwide, outperforming all other Chinese-language films in Asia as an aggregate territory and propelling the jaded critics at the Cannes film festival into a standing ovation. It achieved extraordinary success in the United States: in a market notoriously hostile to subtitled fare it earned \$128 million in the theaters, plus another \$113 million in video and DVD rentals and sales. CTHD made the rare transition out of the art-houses and into the multiplexes, and in doing so it became the most commercially successful foreign-language film in US history and the first Chinese-language film to find a mass American audience. Critically acclaimed as well as popular, it broke records at the Academy Awards, where it was the first foreign-language film to be nominated for ten awards and the first Asian language film to be nominated for best picture. The press heralded it as a breakthrough film that

might succeed in prying open the lucrative American market to the products of Asian film industries.²

Part of the film's significance, apart from its critical and financial success, derives from the way it displays the simultaneously localizing and globalizing tendencies of mass culture in our contemporary moment. In its visual and narrative content, the film comes across as resolutely Chinese local. Based on a pre-World War II Chinese novel by Wang Du Lu that has never been translated into English and set in the *jiang hu* underworld of bandits and heroes during the Qing dynasty (1644 –1911), it tells the story of two renowned martial artists (played by Chow Yun-fat and Michelle Yeoh) who must retrieve a sword stolen by a rebellious young aristocratic woman (played by Zhang Zhiyi). Thematically, the film revolves around the tension between the characters' Taoist aspiration to follow the "way" and their Confucian sense of obligation to others. All of the actors, like director Ang Lee, are ethnic Chinese and several of them are major stars in East Asia. The film offers stunning vistas of mainland China – location shooting was done in the Gobi Desert, the Taklamakan Plateau north of Tibet, the Uigur-speaking city of Urumqi in the far west, the bamboo forests of Anji in the south, and the imperial city of Chengde in the North – and it brings ancient China vividly to life through sumptuously detailed period costumes and decor. The film matches this visual texture aurally by using

Mandarin for all the dialogue. This conspicuous Chineseness at the narrative, thematic, visual, and aural levels locates the film within a cinematic renaissance – exemplified by the work of directors such as Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou in China, John Woo and Wong Kar-wai in Hong Kong, Tsai Ming-liang and Hou Hsiao-hsien in Taiwan – that since the mid-1980s has called the world’s attention to the diverse local film industries of greater China.³

CTHD’s production, in contrast, was astoundingly global. The prominent contributions of American James Schamus, Ang Lee’s long-time creative and business partner, immediately complicate any simple notion of the film’s Chineseness. As executive producer, Schamus put together a complex financing scheme in part by advance selling the international distribution rights. Much of the money came from various divisions of Sony, the Tokyo-based media conglomerate: Sony Pictures Classics in New York bought the US distribution rights; Columbia Pictures in Hollywood picked up rights for Latin America and several Asian territories; Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, a Hong Kong-based entity designed to produce local-language films for the Asian market, provided funds; and Sony Classical music financed the soundtrack. Schamus’ own Good Machine International contributed its portion of financing by selling rights to a bevy of European distributors, including Bim in Italy, Warner Bros. in

France, Kinowelt in Germany, Lauren Films in Spain, and Metronome in Scandinavia. The actual cash for the film came from a bank in Paris, while a completion bond company in Los Angeles insured the production. In addition to executive producing the film (and writing the lyrics for its Academy Award-nominated theme song), the New York-based Schamus also co-wrote the screenplay, working with Taiwan-based writer Wang Hui Ling in a process that entailed translating drafts back and forth between English and Chinese. The actual production of the film involved five different companies in five countries. Ang Lee, who lives in New York, produced the film through United China Vision, a Taiwanese company he created that included his fellow producers Bill Kong of Edko Films in Hong Kong and Hsu Li Kong of Zoom Hunt Productions in Taiwan; Lee's company also created a subsidiary in the British Virgin Islands and a limited-liability corporation in New York. Two mainland companies were also brought in: the privately-owned Asia Union Film and Entertainment and the state-run China Film Co-Production Corporation (Chinese regulations require all foreign films shot and distributed in China to partner-up with a state-owned company). Once the location and Beijing studio shooting was finished, the soundtrack was recorded in Shanghai, post-production looping took place in Hong Kong, and the film was edited in New York.⁴

The simultaneously global and local nature of CTHD has led many viewers to grapple with the film's national-cultural identity. Some tried to wish this complexity away by identifying the film in singular terms as a Chinese, Hong Kong, Taiwanese, or even Hollywood film. The more analytical responses unfolded along a continuum whose poles are marked by two popular models for thinking about cultural globalization. At one end stands Salman Rushdie who, writing on the op-ed page of the New York Times, viewed the film as an act of local resistance against global Hollywood's domination. Rushdie celebrated CTHD as an unambiguously "foreign" "art" film and an exemplar of a revitalized "world cinema" that could potentially break America's stranglehold on the world's movie screens. Affiliating Ang Lee with Akira Kurosawa, Satyajit Ray, Federico Fellini, and Ingmar Bergman – directors who had "pried Hollywood's fingers off the cinema's throat for a few years" – Rushdie praised CTHD as a descendent of the self-consciously national European and Asian cinemas that arose after World War II and that he saw as resisting an earlier stage of US cultural domination. Many of the Western reviewers who gave the film high marks shared Rushdie's views. At the other end of the continuum stands Derek Elley, who reviews Asian films for the Hollywood trade journal Variety and who emphasized CTHD's globalizing tendencies. Reading the film via a model of cultural imperialism, he dismissed it as "cleverly packaged chop suey ...

designed primarily to appeal to a general Western clientele." Elley condemned CTHD as culturally inauthentic, asserting that its Asianness had been fatally corrupted by its absorption of Western cinematic conventions, and he damned Ang Lee as a "cultural chameleon" – an "international filmmaker who just happens to have been born and raised in Taiwan" – who did not belong in the canon of Asian filmmakers. Far from loosening up America's grip on the world's screens, CTHD in Elley's eyes embodied Hollywood's colonization of the martial arts genre and its power to render invisible the genuinely Chinese artistry of earlier directors such as Hong Kong's King Hu. This charge of inauthenticity was echoed by genre purists who complained about the actors' lack of real martial arts skill, academics who questioned the historical accuracy of the costumes and setting, and native-Mandarin speakers who winced at some of the actors' pronunciation and the "Dan Quayle-like spelling misdemeanours" in the subtitles.⁵

Despite the popularity of their views, both Rushdie and Elley offer inadequate models for understanding this film, and by extension contemporary cinema in general. Each one assumes that movies can still be understood in terms of singularity, as more or less culturally pure artifacts that take shape within individual countries and film industries. Rushdie assumes that one can still draw a clear line demarcating Hollywood from "world cinema," while Elley works furiously to shore up a hard-and-fast distinction

between “Asian” and “Western” cinematic styles. Both of them see the local and the global in oppositional terms, as impulses that can be neatly delineated from one another and that exist in a relationship of domination and resistance that necessarily implies the criteria of authenticity. Lee’s film demands, instead, a more transnational critical perspective, one that enables us to see how the local and the global are inextricably bound up with one another and that can illuminate what Aihwa Ong has called “the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space” that characterizes our current moment. CTHD is worth studying precisely because it is embedded within a network of transnational flows – of people, capital, texts, and ideas – that muddy the distinction between the global and the local. The film emerged not out of any neatly-bounded national or cultural space called “China” , “Taiwan,” “Hong Kong,” “Hollywood,” or even “the East” or “the West”, but from the boundary-crossing processes of war, migration, capitalist exchange, aesthetic appropriations, and memory.⁶

We can best see this film from a global perspective if we think about director Ang Lee as a member of the Chinese diaspora and consider CTHD as a work of diasporic filmmaking. A diaspora is a transnational ethnoscape created when a people disperses, willingly or unwillingly, from an original homeland and resettles in a diversity of other locations. Diasporas are fundamentally hybrid entities, shaped by their location in

multiple places and their participation in multiple societies. Out of this historical experience of uprooting and resettlement often emerge works of culture that have a distinctive diasporic shape. CTHD can be profitably read as such a work: it is materially grounded in multiple geographic locations, makes multiple aesthetic affiliations, and fails to map neatly onto a single nation-state or cultural tradition. An awareness of this multiplicity allows us to step beyond the sterile binaries of domination and resistance, corruption and authenticity that structure Rushdie's and Elley's mechanistically predictable moral-aesthetic judgments. In reading CTHD as a diasporic film, I want to focus on how its material production and its aesthetic form have been shaped by Ang Lee's embeddedness within a triangulated set of transnational relationships: to his Chinese homeland, to other members of the Chinese diaspora, and to the culture of his American hostland.⁷

The Axis of Origin and Return

Ang Lee has thought carefully about the cultural dynamics of globalization. In Ride with the Devil (1999), the film he made immediately prior to CTHD, Lee used the genre of the American Western to explore globalization's nineteenth-century origins. Lee felt drawn to this Civil War story, which focuses on three Southerners whose encounter

with the North radically transforms their whole way of life and thinking, because it captured something about his own experience growing up in Taiwan in the 1950s, "where older people always complained that kids are becoming Americanized -- they don't follow tradition and so we are losing our culture." In Ride with the Devil Lee grappled with the historical roots of the contemporary changes he saw taking place throughout Asia and the rest of the world: in making the film, he "realized the American Civil War was, in a way, where it all started. It was where the Yankees won not only territory but, in a sense, a victory for a whole way of life and of thinking." The Civil War marked for Lee the first stage of globalization, the moment when Americans began to export their values of individualism, democracy, and capitalism.⁸

It is tempting to read CTHD as a response to the issues raised in Ride with the Devil, as an authentic expression of a Chinese local which stands in contrast to the Yankee American global. In interviews, Lee has described CTHD as a "Chinese film" and cast it in cultural-nationalist terms. Dipping into the language of cultural essentialism, he describes the film's emotional subtext – the anguish of lovers who cannot express and act on their feelings for each other – as "the great Chinese theme" of literature, painting, and other art forms, something that "is just in our blood." Lee here presents his film as a deeply-rooted Chinese endeavor, one that not only resonates with

other works of Chinese art, but that emanates from the depths of the Chinese soul itself. Lee asserts this Chineseness most insistently through his choice of genre, the martial arts film being the most iconic of Chinese film forms. (Lee had used martial arts as a metaphor for Chineseness in his first feature film, the 1992 immigrant family drama Pushing Hands, which tells the story of an elderly tai chi master who must adjust to a new life in New York.) With CTHD, Lee immersed himself in the martial arts genre, hewing closely to its well-established conventions even as he takes them in new directions. The film pays homage to earlier movies and creatively recycles the familiar narrative tropes of the master whose death must be avenged, the stolen book of martial arts secrets that must be recovered, the skillful student who lacks maturity, and the rogue villain who tries to operate outside the strict conventions of school and lineage.⁹

In keeping with the film's evocation of a mainland Chinese local, Lee has publicly framed his film within the discourse of home, describing it as a personal "homecoming of sorts." His qualifying "of sorts," however, needs to be taken seriously: China is not Lee's "home" in any simple way, and CHTD did not emerge organically out of a mainland Chinese local. Rather, Lee is working with a fundamentally diasporic notion of homecoming.¹⁰

CTHD is perhaps best understood as a diasporic act of symbolic return.

Anthropologist James Clifford describes diasporas, and by implication diasporic cultures, as being oriented along “an axis of origin and return.” The existence of a homeland, perhaps more than any other factor, shapes diasporic culture. Unlike a conventional home, a diasporic homeland is defined by its absence rather than its presence; it is an emotionally resonant home from which one has been separated by time, physical distance, and the experience of loss. Despite this separation, the members of a diaspora remain bound to the homeland through material, symbolic, or psychological ties. A collective memory of the homeland – sometimes invented – suffuses diasporic culture, and fuels a central diasporic desire: the desire for return. The nature of this return can take various forms, from the physical to the millenarian to the symbolic. However that desire manifests itself, it imparts a linear quality to diasporic culture by directing it towards a singular point of reference that is located physically elsewhere and temporally in the past.¹¹

The American press invariably refers to Lee as a “Taiwanese” director, but this identification masks a complex history and identity. Lee is better understood as a member of the Chinese diaspora, a world-spanning ethnoscape that does not map easily onto the political boundaries of any single nation-state or the cultural boundaries of any region or

“civilization.” The Chinese diaspora, which originated in the 15th century and expanded alongside European imperialism and the coolie trade, today encompasses thirty million people living on virtually every continent.¹² Lee's family joined the diaspora relatively late. His parents fled mainland China during the civil war of the late 1940s, the only members of their respective families to escape execution by Mao's forces, and like many anti-communists they settled in Taiwan. These refugees quickly became permanent settlers who dominated the local Taiwanese population, imposing their Nationalist political party and their mainland culture onto a people who, after fifty years of Japanese colonialism, already possessed a complexly hybrid culture of their own. Lee was born in 1954 and grew up in an exclusive society that simultaneously looked back to its mainland origins and outward to the culture of its Cold War patron, the United States. After failing his college entrance exams and studying acting for a few years, Lee left Taiwan for the United States in 1978, thus participating in a second diasporic remove that sent many Taiwanese to the US to pursue higher education. He earned a bachelor's degree in theater at the University of Illinois and a master's in film production from New York University. He married a microbiologist who had been a fellow graduate student at Illinois, had two children, moved to suburban New York, and began making movies. By

the time he made CTHD, Lee had lived in the US for almost as long as he had lived in Taiwan. He has made all his movies since moving to New York.¹³

In some ways Lee seems a typical immigrant who could be considered an ethnic American filmmaker. He has evaded that category, however, by retaining significant legal, financial, and cultural ties to Taiwan. He made his first three movies, Pushing Hands (1992), The Wedding Banquet (1993), and Eat, Drink, Man, Woman (1994) with financing from Taiwan's largest film studio; he shot Eat, Drink, Man, Woman in Taiwan; and all three films feature Taiwanese actors and use Mandarin dialogue either partially or exclusively. In addition, Lee has retained his Taiwanese citizenship.¹⁴

Lee's status as a member of the diaspora complicates both his own sense of Chineseness and any simple cultural-national identification of CTHD as a Chinese movie. More important, it challenges any simple notions of cultural authenticity. Growing up in Taiwan, Lee had no direct experience of mainland China, and as an adult he made only one brief five-day visit there; not until he spent five grueling months filming CTHD there did he have his first sustained encounter. He grew up with a powerful sense of connection to the mainland, but that connection was complicated by the ideological chasm that separated Taiwan from communist China during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Like the rest of his generation, he did not really know China. His sense of connection was always

mediated by distance, time, other people, and mass media. "I ... found out about the old China," Lee said, "from my parents, my education and those kung fu movies." When he finally went to the mainland to film CTHD, Lee said, "I knew nothing about the real China. I had this image in my mind, from movies So I projected these images as my China, the China in my head." This indirect experience of China – a simultaneous intimacy with and alienation from China – infuses the diaspora's cultural nationalism. Speaking of his fellow overseas Chinese, Lee explains that "In some ways, we're all looking for that old cultural, historical, abstract China -- the big dream of China that probably never existed." It is this collectively held and abstracted "dream of China", filtered through second-hand memories and fantasy, that Lee hoped to put on screen.¹⁵

Lee sought to render this "dream" China cinematically by evoking a particular moment in the evolution of the martial arts genre: Hong Kong's Mandarin-language *wuxia* films of the mid-1960s and 1970s. (The Mandarin term *wuxia* means "chivalrous or valorous combat" and is generally applied to martial arts films that feature armed combat, typically swordplay; the Cantonese term *kung fu*, which is more familiar to Americans, did not come into common usage until the Bruce Lee films of the 1970s and generally refers to weaponless fighting.) The *wuxia* film belongs to a long Chinese cultural tradition. The *wuxia* tale, featuring a wandering swordsman hero who rights

injustices, was popular by the ninth century. It was incorporated into the Peking Opera in the nineteenth century, emerged soon after as a staple of mass print culture in the form of serialized novels and pulp romances, and was taken up by the nascent film industry in the 1920s, which infused it with a supernatural aura and developed it as a core genre. In the mid-1960s a “new style” of *wuxia* film took shape when directors such as King Hu and Chang Cheh began making movies that were more realistic, more emotionally intense, and more gracefully choreographed than their predecessors. Immensely popular, these “new style” *wuxia* films dominated Hong Kong’s Mandarin-language cinema through the mid-1970s. Ang Lee grew up reading *wuxia* novels and watching *wuxia* films and he echoes their visual style and emotional tone in CTHD. This aesthetic return to a body of texts beloved from childhood constitutes a major part of Lee’s symbolic return.¹⁶

Significantly, Hong Kong’s Mandarin-language films are themselves best understood in diasporic terms. Filmmaking in Hong Kong has historically been organized into two parallel industries, one making films in the mainland Mandarin language and the other in the local Cantonese dialect. The Mandarin-language industry took root when directors from Shanghai, which was the early home of Chinese filmmaking, fled the mainland in the late 1930s and 1940s, driven out by the war with Japan, the civil war, and Mao’s victory. Carrying their northern culture with them, these

mainlanders settled in Hong Kong and by the 1950s had turned that southern city into the center of Chinese film production. Exiles rather than immigrants, they refused to embrace the local culture and instead made films suffused with a longing for their lost home: they rejected Hong Kong's local Cantonese dialect, clinging to their northern Mandarin instead; they bypassed the social-problem and common-man stories popular with Hong Kong's less educated population in favor of more prestigious stories drawn from Chinese literature and history; and they ignored Hong Kong itself as a specific place, setting their films in locations that suggested Shanghai, Beijing, and the landscapes of the mainland. Hong Kong's Mandarin-language industry was also driven by the demands of its audience, which included many overseas Chinese living in Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and the West. These viewers wanted to see movies that evoked northern culture because they saw that culture as the most representative of the China they had left behind. The Mandarin-language cinema cultivated these viewers' nostalgia, fueled their cultural nationalism, and promoted their sense of connection with each other. (Far from being a purely northern Chinese cultural formation, however, Hong Kong's Mandarin-language industry produced a hybrid cinema shaped by regional and global cultural flows. The executives at Shaw Brothers studio, for example, regularly screened the latest Japanese,

American, and European movies and treated them as a reservoir of cinematic and narrative ideas to be drawn from at will.)¹⁷

Hong Kong's Mandarin film industry declined as the northern-identified directors aged, and in the mid-1970s it was overtaken by a Cantonese-language cinema produced by directors with a defiantly local Hong Kong sensibility. The Cantonese era was symbolically ushered in by Bruce Lee's extremely popular trilogy of weaponless kung fu masterpieces, Fists of Fury (1971), The Chinese Connection (1972), and Return of the Dragon (1972).¹⁸ The decline of the Mandarin cinema and the rise to a position of dominance of the Cantonese cinema was thus marked by a shift both in cinematic sensibility (from exilic to local) and in martial arts subgenre (from *wuxia* to kung fu). For Ang Lee, however, the "real traditional Chinese" cinema remained the Mandarin *wuxia* films and melodramas, and not the Cantonese kung fu and action films of Bruce Lee, Tsui Hark, and John Woo that have become popular in the West in recent decades. Lee's decision to bypass the kung fu film in order to make a Mandarin-language *wuxia* film suggests the centrality of the diasporic sensibility to his artistic vision: CTHD can be seen as an American-based director's homage to a body of Hong Kong films that expressed their makers' nostalgic longing for a lost Chinese homeland.¹⁹

CTHD demands to be seen not as an aesthetic expression of an actually inhabited Chinese local, but instead as a literal and symbolic journey along the diasporic “axis of origin and return.” It is better understood as a willed *claiming* of – rather than a simple *expression* of – Chineseness. With this film Lee sought to re-attach himself to a local he had never directly known and to repair some of the ties ruptured by the psychic and material dislocations of diaspora. The location shooting and Mandarin dialogue enabled Lee to “re-confirm and re-taste [his] mother tongue, to return to [his] cultural roots,” and as such it restored to him a sense of Chinese origins that had become attenuated through his parents’ traumatic flight to Taiwan and his own voluntary emigration to America.²⁰

The fact that Lee uses the martial arts film as the vehicle for his return is fundamental to the film’s diasporic nature. It is Lee’s mastery of this quintessentially Chinese genre – not his choice of mainland locations, Qing dynasty setting, or Mandarin dialogue – that itself constitutes the act of return. Through this work of generic affiliation Lee stitches himself into the cultural fabric of his homeland. As a life-long enthusiast of martial arts movies, Lee hoped that his long-delayed participation in the genre would bestow legitimacy upon him as a distinctly Chinese artist that he felt had been lacking: “There’s a part of me that feels that unless you make a martial-arts film, you are not a real filmmaker.” Lee’s choice of genre also helped restore long-strained family ties. Lee grew

up in a household where there was “no love of art or creativity, not to mention the entertainment business,” and where the pressures of Confucian “family duty” – of being the eldest son to a father who had lost all other family – made it “hard to breath.” Lee had the additional misfortune of attending a high school, one of the best in Taiwan, where his father was principal. When he failed to pass his college entrance exams – an experience that for a member of his generation was “like death” – his relationship with his father became intolerably strained. The success twenty years later of The Wedding Banquet, which took the top award at the Berlin film festival and became the highest-grossing film in Taiwanese history, rescued Lee from being a “disgrace” in his father’s eyes. But it was not until he made a martial arts film that Lee was able to connect with his father through his art. “He never said anything about my other films,” Lee reported, “but he liked this one.”²¹

Lateral Axes of Affiliation

This linear attachment to homeland in diasporic discourse is countered by a more web-like set of attachments to other members of the diaspora. Diaspora, unlike exile or immigration, entails a collective experience, a dispersal of a people rather than simply a number of individuals. The collectivity maintains its sense of peoplehood through

networks of travel, communication, economic exchange, and cultural interaction that criss-cross national borders. Such “lateral axes” of affiliation, as James Clifford calls them, offset and pull against the “axis of origin and return” by grounding a sense of identity in the dispersed community that exists in the present, rather than in the homeland that exists primarily in memory. These lateral axes are eminently visible in CTHD and they make clear the extent to which the film functions not just as an individual act of symbolic return for Lee, but also as a collective endeavor. Beyond simply putting the diasporic “dream of China” on screen, CTHD served as what Lee has called a “bridge” within the diaspora – a creative and economic project that brought together a diverse array of ethnic Chinese talent.²²

The screen credits for CTHD serve as a virtual who’s who of creative talent within the diaspora. Lee drew his actors from across greater China: Zhang Ziyi is from the mainland, Chang Chen from Taiwan, Chow Yun-fat from Hong Kong, and Michelle Yeoh originally from Malaysia. Chow and Yeoh are major stars of the Hong Kong cinema who have also made films in the West: Chow has to date made three Hollywood movies since he left Hong Kong for the US in the mid-1990s -- The Replacement Killers (1998), The Corrupter (1999), and Anna and the King (1999) – while Yeoh starred in the James Bond film Tomorrow Never Dies (1997). Many members of the crew have also

worked in Western culture industries. Martial arts choreographer Yuen Wo-ping is a pillar of the Hong Kong industry who gained international recognition for his work on The Matrix (1999). Academy Award-winning cinematographer Peter Pau was born and raised in Hong Kong, attended high school in the mainland city of Guangzhou, and studied filmmaking in San Francisco; he returned to Hong Kong to start his career, and later went back to California to shoot American films. Production designer Tim Yip, who also took home an Academy Award, has made movies in Hong Kong and the US, and has worked on Hong Kong-Japanese and French-Taiwanese co-productions. Mainland-born Tan Dun, who composed the film's Oscar-winning soundtrack, attended Beijing's Central Conservatory before moving to New York to study with a fellow member of the diaspora at Columbia University. Yo-Yo Ma, who performed the cello solos, was born in Paris and moved to the US at age four. Coco Lee, who sang the theme song, was born in Hong Kong, raised in San Francisco, became a pop star in Asia, and is now trying to break into the American market. Ma Xiao Hui, who played the Chinese erhu, stands out in this list: she was born and still lives on the mainland. Taken together, these artists map a cultural Chineseness that occupies multiple geographical locations, speaks different languages and dialects, represents different degrees of assimilation into non-Chinese

societies, and flows back and forth, with varying ease, across the supposed boundary dividing East and West.²³

Lee's ability to bring together such a collection of talent seems to confirm Robin Cohen's thesis about the economic benefits of diasporas in an era of globalization. He argues that diasporas are "disproportionately advantaged" by globalization because their geographical dispersal and transnational networks enable them to make the most of the changes in technology, economics, production, and communication ushered in by globalization. One can imagine how Lee's diasporic status aided in the film's production. Because he made his first three films with the Central Motion Picture Corporation of Taiwan, he had a pre-existing relationship with his co-producer Hsu Li Kong that he could draw on; his Chinese ethnicity perhaps gave him an edge, despite his Taiwanese citizenship, in persuading the Chinese government to allow him to shoot the film on the mainland; his ability to speak Mandarin no doubt facilitated his working with the mainland cast and crew; and his desire to put the "dream" of China on screen presumably helped enlist the participation of so many prominent ethnic Chinese artists. At a moment when many globally-minded Hollywood producers are looking to hire Asian talent, in the hope of attracting Asian viewers, and to shoot their films in China, where labor is cheap,

Lee's diasporic status provided him with advantages that he was able to exploit profitably.²⁴

Lee's lateral ties of affiliation did much more than guide the film's production, however. They also exerted pressure on the very form and visual style of the film. This can be seen most clearly in the case of martial arts choreographer Yuen Wo-ping. Born in Guangzhan, China in 1945, Yuen has been a major player in the Hong Kong film industry for over twenty years. After studying Peking Opera and martial arts with his father as a child, he began working in the Hong Kong film industry in the 1960s as a bit player and stunt man. He began choreographing martial arts scenes in the early 1970s and directed his first movie, Jackie Chan's breakthrough film, Snake in the Eagle's Shadow, in 1978. By the time he worked on CTHD, Yuen was a widely-acknowledged master of the martial arts genre who had made dozens of movies, including some of the genre's best known and most influential works. The participation of two very different kinds of auteurs – one a world-recognized maker of art films and the other a technical master of a popular action genre – invariably led to tensions on the set. Typically, Ang Lee would approach Yuen Wo-ping with a vision for a fight scene that he had dreamed of since childhood, only to have Yuen reject it out of hand as physically impossible. According to Chow Yun-fat, "Ang would say he didn't want to shoot things Wo-ping's

way because it was an Ang Lee movie. But his ideas couldn't be worked out. Finally, he'd go to Wo-ping and say, 'Master, I'm wrong. Let's do it your way.'" (Lee occasionally succeeded in getting his vision on screen, most notably in the encounter between Chow Yun-fat and Zhang Ziyi atop the bamboo trees, a scene much praised by Western critics.) As an accomplished director as well as fight choreographer, Yuen did much more than simply arrange the actors' dynamic moves and airborne flights. His method entailed choreographing the action *and* the cinematography of each shot, seeing how they worked together, and then composing the next shot so that it flowed seamlessly out of the previous one. This meant that Yuen was essentially editing each fight scene in the camera. According to Lee, who was very impressed with Yuen's technique, "It's all put together in this assembly fashion so if I don't like something it's very hard to take it out. ... If you break these sequences the narrative doesn't work.... You can give it to any editor, it'll come out the same way." This method obviously gave Yuen extraordinary control over what appeared on screen.²⁵

CTHD puts Yuen's distinctive aesthetic sensibilities on display to such an extent that it can be read, in auteurist terms, as a Yuen Wo-ping film almost as much as an Ang Lee film. Yuen's fame derives in part from the creativity and variety of the martial arts moves that he choreographs for his actors. In addition, he is an expert in the use of space:

his films stand out for the diverse ways in which his fighters interact with the physical spaces they inhabit, and for the ways he uses cinematography and editing to shape the viewers' perception of those spaces. In a Yuen Wo-ping film, the fighters define a space through their movements, mapping its vertical and horizontal dimensions and marking its boundaries; sometimes these spaces constrain the fighters' movements in creative ways, and other times the fighters radically redefine the spaces they inhabit.

Yuen often stages a fight within an unobstructed, self-contained space that suggests a kind of performance arena. (He does this masterfully in an early scene in Tai Chi Master [1993], when two young Buddhist monks-in-training take on dozens of their heavily armed colleagues in monastery hall, and also in the dojo and subway scenes in The Matrix [1999].) In CTHD, the culminating encounter between Michelle Yeoh's Shu Lien and Zhang Zhiyi's Jen takes place in a courtyard of Shu Lien's compound – a rectangular open space whose rectilinear shape is reinforced by the worn stone floor and the vertically-placed boards of the unfinished wooden walls enclose it. This simple staging immediately establishes this as a contest between two equally skilled opponents and puts the visual emphasis on the movements of the fighters – and on their weapons. Yuen delights in the creative use of props, a skill honed in his work with Jackie Chan, who never missed an opportunity to turn a prop into a comic device, and ostentatiously

displayed in the famous tofu scene of Wing Chun (1994), in which Michelle Yeoh and her opponent fight each other above, below, and around a large square of tofu that remains unscathed throughout. Much of the dynamic in Shu Lien and Jen's fight revolves around the vast array of weapons— including three swords, a spear, a pair of hooked swords, a heavy cudgel, and a staff — that Shu Lien must call upon in her effort to defeat the younger woman armed only with the stolen Green Destiny.

Most of this fight takes place at the center of the courtyard, thereby enhancing the staged quality, while forays to the edges map the space's boundaries. Yuen shapes the viewer's perception of this space by varying the location of the camera. We see much of the fight in tightly framed shots that draw us into the swirling mass of arms, legs, faces, and weaponry and that create a sense of physical and emotional immediacy. Yuen periodically pulls the camera back to medium and long shots that display the fighters' bodies *in situ* as they pause to strike dramatic poses and as they fill up the courtyard space with elegant leaps, twists, and backflips. He radically alters our spatial perception when he positions the camera directly above the fighters looking down, which has the effect — a la Busby Berkeley — of abstracting their contest into a flat, two-dimensional pattern of light-colored movements against a dark background. Throughout the fight the boundaries of the space remain inviolable: although Yeoh smashes the stone flooring

with a heavy weapon, she cannot break through to anything on the other side. Only at the end of the fight does Yuen open up the space by allowing Jen to jump up and out of the courtyard, revealing an opening that had previously been occupied by the camera.

As the end of this scene suggests, Yuen likes to explore the vertical dimensions of space. Frequently he propels his fighters through the air via unseen trampolines or wirework (as when Jet Li's Huang Feihong takes on the head of the White Lotus sect in Once Upon a Time in China II [1992]), and other times they seem to elevate themselves using props or walls (as in the fight set amidst flaming poles that concludes Iron Monkey [1993]). One can see this fascination with verticality in CTHD when Jen takes on a dozen male combatants in a crowded two-story tavern. Yuen choreographs the fight around a vertical space created by a central atrium, a staircase, and the surrounding open balcony: the men troop up the staircase en masse to confront Jen, they crash down through the balcony railing and out the windows one by one as she defeats them, the patrons rush down the staircase to escape the mayhem, and Jen displays her superior skills by effortlessly backflipping down the staircase and twirling straight up through the atrium.

The tavern scene also displays Yuen's penchant for using a fight to transform a physical space by having the fighters penetrate the boundaries – walls, floors, and ceilings – that define it. (We can see this in Wing Chun when Michelle Yeoh's heroine,

armed with two short swords, maneuvers the spear-armed villain into a small building whose confined space gives her an advantage; this advantage disappears when the bandit bursts out of the building through the thatched roof, thus destroying the physical constraints on his movements.) Unlike the open courtyard space in Shu Lien's compound, the tavern space is complexly obstructed with pillars, tables, chairs, banisters, walls, and people. Over the course of the fight, this space is redefined as tables are smashed, walls are crashed through, and banisters collapse. Virtually all the physical boundaries that demarcate the internal tavern spaces and that separate it from the street outside are penetrated over the course of the fight. This fight does not so much take place *within* a physical space, as the physical space becomes an element that the fighters incorporate into their fight and that they transform in the process.²⁶

One of the ways that scholars and critics evaluate a text is by mapping it in relation to other texts through a network of affiliations and/or ruptures. Salmon Rushdie, for instance, affiliates CTHD with the postwar auteurs of European and Asian art cinema, while Derek Elley disaffiliates it from the martial arts masterpieces made of King Hu. By paying attention to the diasporic aspects of the film, particularly the lateral axes that bind it to other members of the diaspora, we can map a different set of affiliations. Yuen Wo-ping's prominent contributions, for example, ground the film in the traditions of the Hong

Kong action cinema, both materially and stylistically, in spite of the fact that Ang Lee himself has never worked in that industry. The contributions of Tan Dun and Yo-Yo Ma, in turn, invite us to read the film in relation to a body of high-culture texts, such as Tan Dun's "Marco Polo" opera and Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project, that explore earlier eras of cultural globalization from a musical perspective and that also move beyond the domination-resistance model.²⁷

The ethnoscape of the Chinese diaspora is not the only way to explain CTHD's particular collection of talent, however. One must also consider the financescape constituted by the Japanese entertainment conglomerate Sony, various branches of which helped finance and distribute the film. Not coincidentally, a number of the musicians who lent their talents to the film are under contract with Sony. Yo-Yo Ma and Tan Dun record exclusively with Sony Classical, which has also recorded work by erhu player Ma Xiao Hui, while CoCo Lee has released eight of her twelve albums through Sony Music's pop division. As much as the inclusion of these artists makes sense in terms of the lateral axes of diasporic affiliation, it also makes sense in terms of corporate synergy, in which one branch of a media conglomerate promotes the artists from other divisions.

Selective Accommodation

Diasporic culture expresses yet a third relationship: the set of ties that connect a diasporic subject to his or her hostland. In contrast to immigrant discourse, which emphasizes assimilation, and exilic discourse, which emphasizes separatism, diasporic discourse emphasizes what Clifford calls a process of “selective accommodation” through which a member of a diaspora engages with and partially integrates into the economic, political, social, and cultural life of the host country in which he or she actually lives. This complex bond to the hostland pulls against both the ties to the homeland and to the diasporic community, thus orienting diasporic culture along yet a third axis. The “here” matters as much as the “there,” and the ability to understand the “other” is as valued as the sense of attachment to an aboriginal “self”. This process of selective accommodation undermines notions of purity and authenticity, insofar as it always entails cross-cultural dialogue and creolization to one degree or another. This “entanglement” with the hostland, as Clifford calls it, makes clear that works of diasporic culture are shaped not only by the experience of loss, but also by the opening up of new avenues for creativity, exchange, and self-invention.²⁸

Ang Lee’s selective accommodation to the United States has produced a director with a distinctly cosmopolitan sensibility. Lee rejects an ethnic model of filmmaking that would focus primarily on his own experiences and those of his ethnic brethren. “I started

out with three personal films. But what you know about your neighborhood can be very limiting, I think. That's why I wouldn't make ten films like that." After making his "Father Knows Best" trilogy of films about Taiwanese and Taiwanese Americans, Lee moved out of the "neighborhood": Sense and Sensibility (1995) detailed the marriage prospects of young women in 18th century England, The Ice Storm (1997) explored the family dynamics in 1970s suburban Connecticut, and Ride with the Devil (1999) probed the relationship among an unmarried white mother, a German immigrant, and a black slave during the American Civil War. These films suggest Lee's sustained engagement with the narratives, genres, and conventions of American, and more broadly, Western culture. With these films Lee becomes what Clifford might call a traveling filmmaker, whose movies enact an imaginative travel through countries, languages, accents, time periods, and consciousness not his own. In Lee one can see how the experience of diaspora can produce a high level of cultural sensitivity, an ability to read across cultural boundaries and to project oneself compassionately into the experiences of others. That experience of diaspora also expands the notion of what constitutes one's "own" culture: having lived half his life in the United States and studied British theater and American film, Lee's "own" culture is perhaps as legitimately American as it is Chinese.²⁹

In CTHD Lee displays a selective accommodation to, and a creative entanglement with, the conventions of Hollywood cinema. Lee has described this film as an attempt to merge what he saw as Chinese and Western styles of filmmaking – “Sense and Sensibility with martial arts.” Lee saw the Chinese element in terms of the Lego pieces of the martial arts genre – the characters, the narrative, the setting, the action – while the Western element consisted of putting these pieces together in a way that produced a fully developed narrative and psychologically complex characters.³⁰

The martial arts genre, in the eyes of Lee, Schamus, and many others, has traditionally been plagued by a particular flaw: the lack of integration between the narrative and the action. This means that the fight scenes, while highly sophisticated in terms of physical skill and cinematic presentation, function largely as spectacles divorced from the narrative. Rather than growing logically out of the story-line, the fight scenes tend to bring the narrative to a halt and address the viewer in a presentational mode: they invite the viewer to appreciate the virtuoso display of fighting and camerawork for itself, rather than as an expression of theme or character. The martial arts film also privileges this spectacle at the expense of the narrative, a tendency exacerbated by the seat-of-the-pants mode of production in post-studio system Hong Kong. Directors devoted most of their budgets to bankable stars, often shot their films without a complete script, and spent

most of their rehearsal and shooting time on the fight scenes, leaving the narrative scenes to be shot quickly with whatever time and money was left over. The result was visually stunning action films that often had two-dimensional characters and incoherent plots that served mainly to link the fight scenes.³¹

With CTHD, Ang Lee set out to resolve this lack of integration between narrative and spectacle. To do so, he turned to one of the most distinctively American film genres: the Hollywood musical. Many observers of martial arts films, and especially those made by Yuen Wo-ping, have compared them to musicals, most often by noting the performers' physical skill, their graceful movements, and the careful choreography. And indeed the fundamentally rhythmic quality of most martial arts scenes – the balance between action and repose, the dialogic quality of the fight, the careful use of sound, the dynamic camera work and editing – does make the typical Hong Kong action scene look less like a Hollywood brawl and more like a ballroom dance. Although the fight scenes in CTHD certainly partake of these dance-like qualities, Lee looked to the musical genre for something more: he saw it as offering a solution to the structural problems of the martial arts film.³²

The Hollywood musical long ago confronted the problem of how to integrate the spectacle of song and dance into a compelling narrative. As the musical took shape on

Broadway in the 19th century and as a film genre in the late 1920s, individual musicals tended to be non-integrated: the numbers were more or less free-standing moments of spectacular song and dance that had only a loose relevance to the lives of the characters. The integrated musical first appeared on Broadway in 1927, when Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II intertwined narrative and numbers in Show Boat, and it took shape in Hollywood in the 1930s with the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers cycle of films at RKO. The musical numbers still served as the highpoints and emotional centers of the film, but instead of interrupting the narrative flow they worked to progress the story, develop the characters, and express the themes. With CTHD, Ang Lee wanted to do for the martial arts film what Show Boat had done for the musical: he wanted to transform the genre by creating a truly integrated martial arts film.

To do so, Lee rebalances the typical martial arts film's equation of narrative and spectacle. Taking his cue from the integrated musical, he subordinates the martial arts scenes to the demands of the story, rather than allowing them to overwhelm it. In most Hong Kong films, the first fight scene comes right away and the others follow in rapid succession. In CTHD, in contrast, the first fight scene does not come until about fifteen minutes into the film. By delaying it so long, Lee gives himself time to establish the diegetic world of Qing dynasty China, set up the violent backstory of the Green Destiny

sword, and introduce the long-simmering emotional tensions between his main characters. This generically innovative withholding of action signals to the viewer that narrative and character are important and worth paying attention to. Lee also slows down the pace of the film overall. He spaces the fight scenes widely apart, allows the plot to emerge in a leisurely cinematic fashion instead of through hurried dialogue scenes, and develops themes that invite the viewer's sustained contemplation.

As part of this rebalancing, CTHD establishes a clear distinction between the narrative scenes and the fight scenes. The fights exist as clearly bounded moments nestled within, yet set apart from, the larger narrative. Because of this distinction, the movie must ease the viewer out of the narrative and into the fight – it has to give the viewer some cues that this shift is about to take place. This transitions can be marked in various ways. Sometimes it is marked spatially, by presenting the viewer with a kind of stage space in which one might expect a performance to occur, as in the scene where Shu Lien and Jen face off against each other in the courtyard; other times it is marked by a change in costume and setting, as in the tavern scene where Jen appears dressed like a man in a locale that the genre has established as a privileged one for a fight. The first fight scene, in which Shu Lien chases Jen across the nighttime rooftops of Beijing after she steals the sword, offers several cues to the transition. One is the visual introduction

of something that does not fit comfortably in the narrative world as we have seen it so far and that warns the viewer that something unusual is about to happen. The scene begins with a long shot of the city in which we can see a tiny figure skimming across the rooftops, and continues a moment later with Jen climbing in through a window by hanging upside down from the roof. These are the film's first ruptures with the conventions of cinematic realism. These visual cues are paired with pacing cues, as when the night guard pauses as he detects Jen's presence on the roof behind him, and also rhythmic cues: the non-diegetic music on the soundtrack heightens in intensity and Jen's body movements become more stylized as she creeps through the room. These cues are restrained, but they set up the fight and carry us into it as it erupts: the music gets louder and more dramatic, the physical movements become more forceful and rhythmic, the sense of the extraordinary increases as the characters defy gravity. These transitional cues serve a dual function: they mark the border between narrative and spectacle, and ease the viewer across it.³³

Why, one might ask, does the viewer need to be eased through this transition? Because, like a musical number, the fight scenes create a fundamentally different world from that of the narrative: when the fight begins, the characters enter a different kind of reality. In the world of an integrated musical number, people spontaneously break out

into song and dance. In CTHD's world of martial arts fights, physical laws don't apply: people can climb up walls, fly through the air, and move from place to place instantaneously. Nor do the social rules of the narrative world fully apply: in a fight scene Jen can enact the personal freedom she desires, escape the strictures of her sex by disguising herself as a man, and proclaim her refusal to be bound by the rules of her family and class. In this sense, the fight scenes, like musical numbers, represent a kind of fantasy or utopian world – a purified world that exists beneath polite society and beyond the reach of its regulation. The co-existence of these two worlds, with their distinct social and physical laws, creates a conflict that animates the film as a whole and that gives an added depth to the main characters who cross between them.

As much as the narrative and the fight scenes are distinguished from each other, however, they are also tightly integrated with one another. This is where the film is most innovative, and where Ang Lee builds on Yuen Wo-ping's contributions. Like a romantic waltz in a musical, the fights communicate visually what is difficult for characters to say verbally. They express characters' feelings and desires, externalize their inner lives, and give physical shape to their relationships. "In other movies," Lee told an interviewer, "flying is an effect. But here it is part of the storytelling." Jen and Lo's vigorous fight in the desert communicates their mutual sexual attraction as well as their shared social

defiance; Li Mu Bai's dreamy encounter with Jen atop the bamboo trees, with its languid camera movements and the deep color saturation, suggests an erotic dimension that extends beyond what a master should feel for a disciple; the tavern scene enacts Jen's self-liberation from the confines of her class and gender roles. This expressive quality ultimately trumps the violence in the fight scenes, most of which do not involve the serious injury of the participants.³⁴

The opening fight scene is among the most beautifully integrated in the whole film, as Shu Lien and Jen perform what will emerge as the film's central theme: the conflict between the desire to pursue of one's self-interest and the sense of obligation to others and to the rules which define one's social role. The two women represent the poles of this tension, which finds expression in the very form of their fight. It is here that we can see how Ang Lee subsumes Yuen Wo-ping's penchant for vertical choreography to the demands of the narratives; far from working as pure spectacle as it might in a Hong Kong film, Yuen's choreography does important narrative work. Jen's fighting style expresses her desire to be free of social constraints and obligations to others, to liberate herself from the requirements of her age and sex. Her strength lies in her ability to fly, to escape, and to jump up walls and across rooftops effortlessly. Shu Lien's fighting style expresses the extent to which she has allowed herself to be disciplined by her sense of

duty and by the repression of her own desires. Just as she is more responsible than Jen, her fighting style is literally more grounded. She is more earthbound and must struggle to keep up with Jen on the rooftops. Her goal is to literally bring Jen back to earth: she throws a heavy object in an effort to knock Jen out of the air, she stomps on Jen's feet to keep her from leaping away, and she yanks on Jen's clothes when she starts to levitate. Shu Lien wants to ground Jen, as she is grounded, both literally and metaphorically – she wants her to recognize that her fantasies of freedom, and the way she enacts them, are untenable and ultimately destructive.

Ang Lee was not the first director of a martial arts film to feel the pull of the Hollywood musical. Inspired both by Hollywood and the Shanghai nightclub scene of the 1930s, Hong Kong's Mandarin-language studios began producing their own musicals in the 1940s. The musical quickly became the industry's most popular genre, until it was displaced in the mid-1960s by the "new style" *wuxia* film and then the kung fu film of the 1970s. The shift from musicals to martial arts was gradual rather than sharp, however, with the musical serving as an ancestor to the martial arts film rather than its antithesis; the rhythmic quality of the modern martial arts film derives in part from the influence of the musical genre that preceded it in the Hong Kong film industry's evolution, as well as from its roots in the Peking Opera. The two genres even came together in the occasional

martial arts musical such as The Singing Thief of 1969. Lee gestures towards this history of generic evolution and hybridity with the casting of Cheng Peipei as the villainous Jade Fox. Born in Shanghai in 1946, Cheng studied ballet for six years before moving in 1960 to Hong Kong, where she made over twenty films, both martial arts and musicals. She straddled the transition from one genre to the other, starring in Come Drink With Me, King Hu's 1965 *wuxia* film that ushered in the "new style," and in 1967's Hong Kong Nocturne, one of the industry's last major musicals. Selected "Queen of the *wu xia pian*" by the Hong Kong press in 1969, she was admired for her skill in dancing as well as in martial arts. In 1970 Cheng moved to the US, where she pursued a career as dance instructor and performer, only to return to Hong Kong and acting in 1973. Like so many of the people who worked on CTHD, Cheng is a diasporic character who has migrated both within greater China and across the Pacific. Her presence in CTHD serves as part of Lee's evocation of the swordplay films that he loved as a child, and also an acknowledgement of those films' historical bond with the musical.³⁵

Conclusion

Ang Lee assumed that CTHD would find its primary audience in the Chinese diaspora. While he had aimed his earlier films at the Taiwanese middle class and

Western art house viewers, Lee expected his martial arts film to be embraced most enthusiastically by East Asian viewers who had a passionate engagement with the genre. He was thus surprised when the film turned out to be a bigger hit in the West than in the East. While the film did quite well in Asia as a whole, it performed unevenly: it broke box office records in Singapore, Malaysia, and Taiwan, performed respectably but behind local and Hollywood productions in Hong Kong and Korea, and produced dismal box office receipts in China. Western commentators on the film's Asian reception have, like Derek Elley, often blamed the poor showing in some markets on the film's supposed cultural inauthenticity. And indeed, some viewers familiar with the *wuxia* film were unimpressed by the technical quality of the martial arts, while others were alienated by Lee's tinkering with the generic conventions. Law Kar, for instance, historian at the Hong Kong Film Archive, characterizes CTHD as a Hollywood film on the basis of its privileging of narrative over spectacle: "In Chinese martial arts films you don't let the action slow down; you just feed [the audience] more fights. ... Ang Lee knows how to weave inner drama with outer drama. That may be the Hollywood way." I think more substantive explanations for the film's uneven Asian reception, however, can be found in the processes of globalization and in the dynamics of diasporic cinema itself.³⁶

The film's disastrous earnings in mainland China, for instance, are perhaps best explained not by anything intrinsic to the film itself, but rather by the country's awkward transition from a state-run to a market economy. In a crude effort to maximize the profits going to the government, Chinese authorities pulled CTHD out of theaters a week after it opened and kept it off the market for three and half months as they tried to pressure the privately owned Asia Union Film and Entertainment, which held 80% of the distribution rights, into giving up some of those rights to the state-run China Film Co-Production Corp., which had short-sightedly signed on for only 20%. By the time the conflict was resolved and the film reopened in theaters, millions of pirated DVDs and VCD had flooded the streets, where they sold for \$2.50 or less, and everyone who wanted to see the movie already had. According to Schamus, CTHD was even shown on national and provincial television stations, making it "probably the most watched movie of the year" in China. CTHD did not really bomb in China so much as its profits were earned outside the theaters and went to free-lance Chinese entrepreneurs rather than the film's producers and official distributors.³⁷

CTHD's use of the Mandarin language, so essential to capturing the "dream" of old China, created its own set of difficulties for Asian viewers. For Lee, only Mandarin could reach across the diversity of the Chinese diaspora and evoke the collectively-held

memories of the mainland. But the linguistic divisions within the diaspora proved more difficult to bridge than he had imagined. Of the four main actors, only Zhang Ziyi spoke fluent Mandarin; Chang Chen spoke with a Taiwanese accent, while Chow Yun-fat and Michelle Yeoh, having been raised in Cantonese- and English-speaking households respectively, delivered their lines phonetically. While all these actors are ethnically Chinese, as diasporic subjects they are not all Chinese in the same way. This linguistic unevenness hampered the film's reception among Mandarin speakers worldwide, who sometimes found the actors' accents laughable, and contributed to the perception that it was not a "real" Chinese movie. In focusing on the collective "dream" of China and bringing together a pan-Asian cast, Lee underestimated the depth of the cultural divisions within the diaspora. While globalization may have made it easier for media texts to cross the supposed East-West divide, it has not erased the divisions within the Chinese diaspora itself.

Finally, Lee's version of the "dream" of China had a certain time-bound specificity that put off some younger Asian viewers. Like the idea of home carried by many diasporic people, Lee's notion of China had in some ways it ceased to evolve after he left Taiwan. I am reminded of a scene from Gurinder Chadha's 1993 film Bhaji on the Beach in which an Indian woman who left home in the 1970s to live in England

reconnects with an old friend who stayed. The Bombay friend, dressed in a hot pink mini-skirted suit, chastises the sari-wearing Birmingham dweller for clinging to a vision of India that had long ago ceased to exist at home. There is an element of this dynamic at work in CTHD: in some ways, it is a martial arts film dressed in sari when other Chinese movies have long ago started to wear mini-skirts. Younger diasporic viewers, raised on the fast-paced Cantonese-language films of the 1980s and 1990s, did not necessarily share Lee's view that the Mandarin films of the 1960s and early 1970s represented the "real" Chinese cinema. Rather than reading CTHD as evoking tradition, they sometimes read it as simply old fashioned: one young Hong Kong viewer, complaining about the film's slow pace, described the experience of watching it as "a bit like listening to grandma telling stories." This comment points to an evolution in the definition of Chineseness within the diaspora. For Lee's immediately postwar generation, only recently separated from the mainland by the communist revolution, the cultural ties to the mainland were of primary importance; for the younger generation, born and raised on the other side of what used to be called the bamboo curtain, their ties to the local culture – in this case, Hong Kong – carry greater weight as part of a more broadly defined sense of Chineseness. In bypassing the cinematic conventions of Hong Kong's recent Cantonese

cinema, Lee eschewed a set of cultural markers that would have identified the film as a work of contemporary Chinese filmmaking in the eyes of some younger viewers.³⁸

CTHD stands as exemplary instance of an emerging “global cinema”. In contrast to the “world cinema” that Salman Rushdie invokes and the “authentic” Asian cinema that Derek Elley pines for, works of global cinema tend to muddy the distinction between Hollywood and “foreign” films. The production and consumption of these films takes place on a global, rather than a national scale, and the aesthetic affiliations they make cross multiple cultural boundaries. The national-cultural identity of such films is surprisingly fluid: one will arrive at radically different answers depending on whether one looks at studio ownership, sources of financing, primary location of box-office receipts, production locale, ethnic or legal identity of cast and crew, narrative and cinematic style, or thematic concerns. The emergence of such a global cinema makes it vitally important to develop critical tools that allow us to read films from a transnational perspective. The idea of diasporic cinema oriented along multiple axes of affiliation offers one possible approach.

¹ This essay is currently under submission at a print journal and will be published as part of a book-length cultural history of martial arts in America.

² Box office figures from Variety.com, Weekly Box Office, July 27 – August 2, 2001; video and DVD figures from VideoBusiness.com, “2001 Year-End Report, Market Research”; performance in Asia from James Schamus in Stephen Teo, “‘We Kicked Jackie Chan’s Ass!’ An Interview with James Schamus,” [Senses of Cinema](http://SensesofCinema.com), www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/13/schamus.html. *CTHD* took home Oscars for best foreign language film, cinematography, art direction, and original musical score. It was also nominated for best picture, director, costume, editing, song, and screenplay based on previously published material. On *CTHD*’s effect on the American film market, see Ramin Zahed, “Foreign Lingo Pix: When it Rains, it Pours,” Variety.com December 16, 2001.

³ On the simultaneity of globalization and localization, see Stuart Hall, “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities,” in Anthony D. King, ed., [Culture, Globalization, and the World System](#) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 41-68. Shooting locations from “A Conversation with Ang Lee and James Schamus,” Magic Lantern Inc., www.magiclanternpr.com/films/crouching.html.

⁴ James Schamus, "The Polyglot Task of Writing the Global Film," New York Times, November 5, 2000, Sec. 2A, pp. 25, 32; Claudia Eller, "Company Town; The Biz; Funding for 'Crouching Tiger' a Work of Art," Los Angeles Times, December 12, 2000, p. C9 (from Lexis-Nexis); Reed Martin, "Studios Bank on Overseas Box Office," USA Today, December 13, 2000, p. D6 (via Lexis-Nexis). Henry Chu, "'Crouching Tiger' Can't Hide from Bad Reviews in China," Los Angeles Times January 29, 2001, Part A, Part 1, p. 1 (via Nexis-Lexis). "A Conversation with Ang Lee and James Schamus," Magic Lantern , Inc. Philip Kemp, "Stealth and Duty," Sight and Sound, December 2000 (http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/2000_12/stealth_duty.html).

⁵ Salman Rushdie, "Can Hollywood See the Tiger?," New York Times, March 9, 2001, p. A19. Derek Elley, "Asia to 'Tiger': Kung-Fooey," Variety.com, February 7, 2001. Henry Chu, "'Crouching Tiger' Can't Hide from Bad Reviews in China." Historians debated the historical accuracy of the film on the H-world electronic discussion list during February 2001 ("I shudder to think of it used as historical teaching material," Ralph Crozier, University of Victoria, February 23, 2001. "It's great fun to watch, even if it isn't 'authentic'", Peter Perdue, MIT, February 15, 2001). Jaime Ee, "Good on You, Ang Lee," Business Times of Singapore, February 16, 2001, page EL 2 (via Lexis-Nexis). Pauline Chen, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon", Cineaste vol. XXVI, no. 4, p. 71.

Stephen Teo, "Love and Swords: The Dialectics of Martial Arts Romance," Sense of Cinema, www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/11/crouching.html, p. 2.

⁶ Aihwa Ong, Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999) p. 4. For an example of the domination-resistance model, see Benjamin Barber, Jihad vs. McWorld (New York: Times Books, 1995); for a rebuttal of the cultural imperialism thesis, see John Tomlinson, Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). On globalization as a series of transnational flows, see Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference," in Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) pp. 27-47.

⁷ On theories of diaspora and diasporic culture, see: Kachig Tololyan, "The Nation-State and its Others," Diaspora Spring 1991, pp. 3-7; William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," Diaspora Spring 1991, pp. 83-99; Kachig Tololyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," Diaspora 5:1, 1996. pp. 3-36; William Safran, "Comparing Diasporas: A Review Essay," Diaspora 8:3, 1999, pp. 255-291; James Clifford, "Diasporas," in Routes: Travel and Transculturation in the Late Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Harvard, 1997), pp. 244-277; Robin Cohen, Global Diasporas: An Introduction(Seattle: University of Washington,

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⁸ Ang Lee, "Foreword," in James Schamus, Ride With the Devil (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999) p. ix.

⁹ Lee quoted in "A Director's China Dream," Newsweek Pacific Edition, July 17, 2000, p. 60 (via Lexis-Nexis), and Rick Lyman, "Crouching Memory, Hidden Heart," New York Times, March 9, 2001, p. B27

¹⁰ Lee quoted in Winnie Chung, "A Roots Trip with a Kick," Asiaweek, July 21, 2000, p. 36 (via Lexis-Nexis).

¹¹ Clifford, "Diasporas," p. 269; Tololyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s)," p. 15.

¹² On the Chinese diaspora, see Lynn Pan, Sons of the Yellow Emperor: A History of the Chinese Diaspora (New York: Kodansha International, 1990); Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nohmi, eds., Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism (NY: Routledge, 1997); Ong, Flexible Citizenship; Stuart Cunningham and John Sinclair, eds., Floating Lives: The Media and Asian Diasporas (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Wang Gungwu, China and the Chinese Overseas (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1991). Ien Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm,” in Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory, ed. Rey Chow (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) pp.281-300. As transnational ethnoscaples, diasporas undermine Samuel Huntington’s model of a world divided into neatly-bounded “civilizations”; see, “The Clash of Civilizations?” Foreign Affairs vol. 72, no. 3, summer 1993.

¹³ Oren Moverman, “The Angle on Ang Lee,” Interview September 1997, pp. 64-68; Chris Berry, “Taiwanese Melodrama Returns with a Twist in The Wedding Banquet,” Cinemaya no. 21, Autumn 1993, pp. 52-54. “Dreaming Up an Ever-Changing Destiny,” CNN.com, May 21, 2002. Jennifer Chiu, “Ang Lee,” Free China Journal, published February 26, 1993, www.gio.gov.tw. Richard Natale, “Helmer Adds Eastern Touch to Western World,” Variety.com, August 26, 1999. Joan Dupont, “Ang Lee in China:

Seeking the Hidden Dragon,” International Herald Tribune, November 13, 1999 (www.ihf.com/IHT/JD/99/jd111399.html); Ann Hornaday, “A Director’s Trip from Salad Days to Banquet,” New York Times August 1, 1993, Sec 2, p. 25 (via Lexis-Nexis). On Taiwan’s history, see Murray A. Rubinstein, ed., Taiwan: A New History (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999).

¹⁴ Jim Henry, “Ang Lee,” Notable Asian Americans, pp. 180-181; Chiu, “Ang Lee”; “President Chen meets with Ang Lee and Lee’s father,” news release, Office of the president of the Republic of China, April 24, 2001, www.president.gov.tw.

¹⁵ Lee quoted in “A Director’s China Dream,” and Rick Lyman, “Crouching Memory, Hidden Heart,” New York Times, March 9, 2001, p. B 27.

¹⁶ On Lee’s evocation of Mandarin-language literature and cinema, see James Schamus, interview with the author, November 16, 2001. Definitions of *wuxia* and *kung fu* are from Lau Shing-Hon, “Introduction,” The 4th Hong Kong International Film Festival: A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1980) p. 3. This capsule history of the martial arts film is drawn from David Bordwell, “Hong Kong Martial Arts Cinema,” in Ang Lee, Richard Corliss, David Bordwell, James Schamus, Linda Sunshine, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Portrait of the Ang Lee Film (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000) 14-17. More complete histories can be found in: The 4th

Hong Kong International Film Festival: A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film, The 5th Hong Kong International Film Festival: A Study of the Hong Kong Swordplay Film (1945-1980) (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1981), Stephen Teo, Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimension (London: BFI, 1997), David Bordwell, Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Teo, Hong Kong Cinema, pp. 14-15, 23, 26-27, 29, 49, 74, 88, 98. Chang Cheh's One-Armed Swordsman (1967), which is one of the landmark “new style” *wuxia* films, appropriated elements from the British James Bond films, the Zatoichi series of Japanese samurai movies, Chuck Connors’ American TV series Broken Sabre (1965), and perhaps even Bad Day at Black Rock, the 1955 Hollywood Western featuring Spenser Tracey as a one-armed World War II veteran who is implausibly adept at judo. "Interview with Qiu Gangjian," in The 5th Hong Kong International Film Festival: A Study of the Hong Kong Swordplay Film (1945-1980) pp. 207-210.

¹⁸ These are the American titles; outside the US, the films were released in English as The Big Boss, Fist of Fury, The Way of the Dragon.

¹⁹ Teo, Hong Kong Cinema, pp. 98-99, 59. Lee quoted in Lyman, "Crouching Memory, Hidden Heart," p. B27.

²⁰ Lee quoted in Chung, "A Roots Trip with a Kick."

²¹ Lee quoted in "Getting a Tiger to Pounce," Asiaweek, June 2, 2000, p. 43 (via Lexis-Nexis). Lee quoted in Moverman, "The Angle on Ang Lee," p. 68. Lee quoted in Henry, "Ang Lee," p. 180. Lee quoted in Dave McNary, "Lee's 'Hidden' Talents," Variety.com, December 7, 2000.

²² Clifford, "Diasporas," p. 269. Lee quoted in "A Director's China Dream."

²³ "Peter Pau, HKSC," International Cinematographer's Guild, www.cameraguild.com/awards/pau/htm; Tim Yip, Internet Movie Database, <http://us.imdb.com/>; James R. Oestreich, "The Sound of New Music is Often Chinese: A New Contingent of American Composers," New York Times, April 1, 2001, p. 30; Yo-Yo Ma, www.sonyclassical.com/artists; Coco Lee, www.cocolee.org/; Ma Xiao Hui, www.culture.sh.cn/scibchtm/whrs/music_dancing/EMXH.HTM.

²⁴ Cohen, Global Diasporas, p. 175. Wade Major, "Hollywood's Asian Strategy," Transpacific March 1997, pp. 24-35. Rana Foroohar, "Hurray for Globowood," Newsweek Atlantic edition, May 27, 2002, p. 51 (via Lexis-Nexis). Reed Martin, "Asian Audience is Hollywood's Hidden Dragon," USA Today, December 13, 2000, page 6D (via Lexis-Nexis). Reed Martin, "The Casting Accent is on Foreign Appeal," USA Today, December 13, 2000, page 6D (via Lexis-Nexis).

²⁵ Chow quoted in Richard Corliss, “Yuen Wo-ping, Martial Master,” Time Asia.com, February 19, 2001. Lee quoted in Kemp, “Stealth and Duty.”

²⁶ The discussion of these two scenes is meant to suggest rather than exhaust Yuen’s repertoire and the ways that CTHD draws on it; there are many other types of fights scenes that are typical of Yuen Wo-ping’s style.

²⁷ Ma’s Silk Road Project – a program of concerts, exhibitions, festivals, and educational initiatives -- explores the traffic in ideas and music that took place along the ancient trade route that connected East Asia and Europe across the deserts of Central Asia and the Middle East. See Michael Church, “From Africa to the Steppes of Asia,” London Independent January 19, 2002, p. 16 (via Lexis-Nexis); James Oestreich, “A Multicultural Project Takes a High Road, the Silk Road,” New York Times, October 25, 2000, Sec. E, p. 1, and David Wright, “Next Stop Along the Old Silk Road: Persia,” New York Times, March 11, 2001, Sec. 2, p. 29. Tan Dun’s “Marco Polo” fuses elements of Peking opera, European classical music, Gregorian chants, Tibetan harmonies, and Italian opera in an evocation of the Silk Road’s most legendary traveler. See www.schirmer.com/composers/tan_marco_polo.html.

²⁸ Clifford, “Diasporas,” pp. 251, 255. Cohen emphasizes the positive and creative aspects of diaspora, Global Diasporas, p. 4.

²⁹ Lee quoted in Moverman, p. 68. James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in Cultural Studies, Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1992) pp. 96-112. Cohen makes this point about diasporas and cultural sensitivity, Global Diasporas, p. 170.

³⁰ "A Conversation with Ang Lee and James Schamus," Magic Lantern, Inc. Lee quoted in Devin Gordon, "It's the Year of the Dragon," Newsweek December 4, 2000, p. 60 (via Lexis-Nexis).

³¹ Stephen Teo, "'We Kicked Jackie Chan's Ass!'" Bordwell, Planet Hong Kong, pp. 115-129.

³² Lee and Schamus thought quite consciously about the musical as a model for what they wanted to do. Lee, in describing the generic combination of the film, said: "It seems to me that martial arts didn't want to get along with drama very well.... It's more like a musical", quoted in K.D. Shirkani, "'Tiger' Burns Bright," Variety.com, October 12, 2000; Schamus also said that they had the musical in mind as they were making the film, Schamus interview with the author. Their interest in the musical extends to future projects, as well. They are developing a romantic musical comedy based loosely on Alan Resnais's Same Old Story (1997) and inspired by Li Hanxiang's The Love Eterne (1963); Teo, "'We Kicked Jackie Chan's Ass!'"

CTHD is a generic hybrid in other ways, as well. Lee drew his inspiration for many aspects of the film -- such as the emphasis on feelings, the importance of human relationships, and the centrality of women characters and their lives -- from Mandarin-language melodramas and opera films; see Lyman, "Crouching Memory, Hidden Heart."

³³ The structural model of the musical that I am using is derived from Rick Altman, The American Film Musical (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987).

³⁴ Lee quoted in Gordon, "It's the Year of the Dragon."

³⁵ "Zheng Peipei," in The 5th Hong Kong International Film Festival: A Study of the Hong Kong Swordplay Film (1945-1980) p. 238.

³⁶ Chu, "'Crouching Tiger' Can't Hide from Bad Reviews in China." Law Kar quoted in Landler, "Lee's 'Tiger' Celebrated Everywhere But Home," New York Times February 27, 2000, E1.

³⁷ Schamus quoted in Teo, "'We Kicked Jackie Chan's Ass!'"

³⁸ Steve Rose, "'The Film is So Slow -- It's Like Grandma Telling Stories,'" The Guardian, February 13, 2001, p. 14 (via Lexis-Nexis).