

The Shaw-Tarantino Connection: Rolling Thunder Pictures and the Exploitation Aesthetics of Cool

By Kenneth Chan

Introduction

The opening credit sequence of Quentin Tarantino's Kill Bill Vol. 1 features the Shaw Brothers logo—the letters “SB” encased within a crest symbol not unlike the one used by Warner Bros.—emblazoned across a multicolored frosted-glass backdrop, accompanied by the words “Shaw Scope” and a cheesy trumpet fanfare. For many mainstream American moviegoers, this is probably their first encounter with this iconic symbol from Hong Kong’s cinematic history. But for Hong Kong and diasporic Chinese audiences (in countries such as Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore; and in Chinatowns across North America and Europe), this highly familiar branding sequence heralds the movie pleasures ethnic Chinese audiences have come to expect and love from the Shaw films produced during the late-1950s to the mid-1980s in Hong Kong. Tarantino’s culturally and temporally incongruent grafting of the sequence into his own film not only registers his indebtedness to and deployment of Shaw cinema in Kill Bill Vol. 1 and 2, but it also articulates a consciousness of Chinese-language cinemas’ current popularity and cultural cachet in Hollywood, which the recent global retrospective revival of the Shaw Brothers filmic archive also taps into.¹



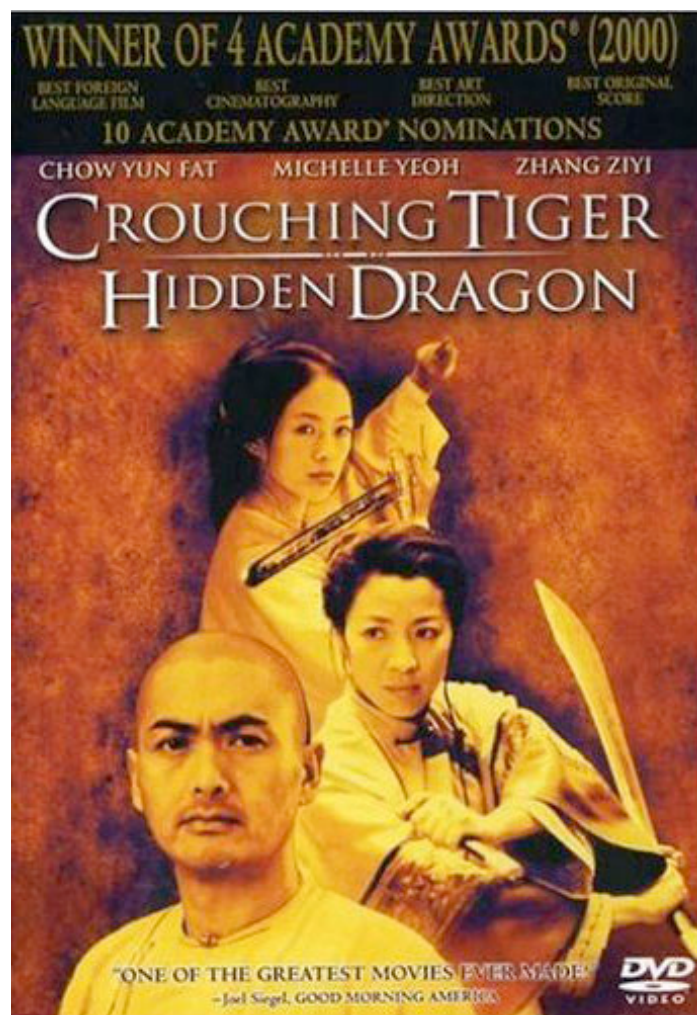
But there is a certain pioneering impact to Tarantino’s relationship to Shaw cinema that one needs to acknowledge, especially in terms of the part Tarantino has played in the recent introduction of Shaw cinema to mainstream American audiences. The media’s rendering of Tarantino’s voracious and indiscriminate consumption of various cinematic traditions from around the world, while working as a lowly clerk at a Manhattan Beach video store, has acquired a mythic quality in the narrative of his 1990s rise as the genius enfant terrible of contemporary American cinema.² Poor quality video copies from the Shaw archive obviously formed a significant part of the cinematic diet of Tarantino’s pre-celebrity, video clerk past, a point that has now become even more evident with the release of the Kill Bill films. While an analysis of Kill Bill Vol. 1 and 2 cannot but constitute a crucial component to theorizing the Shaw-Tarantino connection (critical work that I have taken up elsewhere³), I will focus instead in this essay on an examination of Tarantino’s short-lived attempt in the mid-1990s at a distribution venture called Rolling Thunder Pictures, which released theatrically, and on video and DVD, works of international film and exploitation cinema, including Ho Meng-hua’s The Mighty Peking Man, a 1970s Shaw production. While it did not survive financially, Rolling Thunder Pictures functions as a prescient road marker to Hollywood’s eventual embrace of Chinese cinema in the following decade. One could even argue that Rolling Thunder Pictures, with its Tarantino imprimatur, serves as a precursor to the Weinstein Company’s new DVD label Dragon Dynasty, which has Shaw titles in its current catalogue. But more importantly, from a cultural political standpoint, I want to situate Rolling Thunder Pictures within Tarantino’s love of exploitation cinematic strategies and his aesthetic of coolness, while problematizing its connections to political incorrectness as a form of reactionary white male bravado. In the final segment of this essay, by invoking race, gender, and sexuality, I hope to disturb The Mighty Peking Man’s critical placement within the strictures of Tarantino’s engagement with exploitation cinematic culture by reading and rereading the film both within the ambit of the Rolling Thunder Pictures framework and as a work of Hong Kong cultural

production in the 1970s.

Tarantino, Shaw Cinema, and the Chinese in Hollywood

In order to understand the place that Rolling Thunder Pictures occupies in the story of the Shaw-Tarantino relationship, one must also see this venture in the context of Hollywood's latest infatuation with all things Chinese. Hence, I think it appropriate to begin with the narrative Tarantino style, in medias res, with the Chinese in Hollywood before returning specifically to the discourse involving Rolling Thunder Pictures.

One cannot underestimate the impact of Ang Lee's Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000) in the way it has helped shift mainstream American interest in Chinese-language cinemas into high gear.⁴ Prior to Lee's box-office success, America's fascination with the cinemas from Hong Kong, mainland China, and Taiwan was limited to the film-festival circuits, the art-house film crowd, ethnic Chinese communities, cult kung fu cinema fans, and the rare cinephile. While Lee's work deserves a lot of credit for tipping this interest into mainstream acceptability and box office viability, the pop cultural climate of the 1990s helped enable such a film to find success in the United States. While the production of this climate can be attributed to multiple factors (such as the growing economic importance of China in the global film market, for instance), the emergence of Quentin Tarantino, his love of exploitation films, and his desire to promote Chinese-language cinemas could only have added to, if not strengthened, this desire on Hollywood's part to turn east for inspiration and appropriation. Rolling Thunder Pictures arrived, maybe prematurely, at this particular juncture in the mid-1990s.



The 1997 handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China by the British spurred the migration of the Hong Kong film industry's major players to Hollywood. Directors and stars like John Woo, Tsui Hark, Chow Yun-Fat, Jet Li, Michelle Yeoh, Jackie Chan, Wayne Wang, Ang Lee, Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Gong Li, and Zhang Ziyi added to the growing stable of ethnic Chinese talent who were already making waves at European and American film festivals and saw the potential of a crossover to mainstream Hollywood. In this particular context, Ang Lee's wuxia pian (Chinese sword-fighting film), had accomplished two things. First, it brought attention to the appeal of (trans)national Chinese cinematic culture and the new lease of life it could infuse into tired Hollywood action cinema. Second, and more significantly for this essay, it introduced American mainstream audiences to the pleasures of the kung fu action flick, which has a rich and varied tradition, a dominant part of which is formed by the Shaw Brothers' oeuvre. Ang Lee's cinematic vision of the wuxia world, as he tells it, is based on a "childhood imagination . . . fired by the martial arts movies I grew up with."⁵

The Shaw movie classics had to have been a major part of his movie-going experience, thereby serving as the pop cultural standards of what constituted the genre's conventions and practices. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon basically opened the floodgates to a host of other wuxia and wuxia-inflected films to inundate theaters and the DVD market: Hero (2002), House of Flying Daggers (2004), Kung Fu Hustle (2004), Curse of the Golden Flower (2006), Fearless (2006), The Forbidden Kingdom (2008), and the DreamWorks animated Kung Fu Panda (2008), to name just a few. The now well-known saga of Tarantino's involvement in helping encourage Miramax to "release . . . [Zhang Yimou's Hero] to theaters uncut and undubbed" after two years delay on the studio's part attests to the director's continued influence in the industry.⁶ American audiences finally saw the film in 2004 with Tarantino appending "his name as a presenter credit to gain greater attention for the release."⁷

Riding the timely wave of Hollywood's Chinese fascination, Celestial Pictures announced its Asian DVD release of titles from the Shaw vault beginning in 2002.⁸ After the decline of the Shaw Brothers' film production era in the mid 1980s, the company issued what Richard Corliss of Time magazine described as a "cinematic blackout":

That's what happened with the films produced by Shaw Brothers, once the dominant movie studio in East Asia. The pictures produced by Run Run Shaw and his sibling Runme from 1951 to 1985 set the colony's standard for opulence, vigor and splash in a dozen genres. But because Sir Run Run refused to put his old films on video, or even allow film museums to show them, younger movie fans have had to wonder: What did a martial arts classic like Chang Cheh's The Heroic Ones or Chor Yuen's Killer Clans really look like?⁹

Celestial Pictures, a division of the pan-Asian media conglomerate Astro All Asia Networks,¹⁰ was then headed by American CEO William Pfeiffer. In the hopes of remastering and restoring all the Shaw titles to their original glory and gradually releasing them on DVD, Pfeiffer engineered the purchase of the films to the tune of \$84 million.¹¹ Capitalizing on the global/local strategy of transnational capitalist flows, he believed in "bringing Asian film outside, exporting it to many countries around the world, and having an impact on the quality of entertainment."¹²

While the motivations of Celestial Pictures are in the main profit driven, the cultural significance of the DVD releases is clear. As a student and teacher of these films, I find it difficult not to overstate the value and the pleasure of being able to actually own and study these restored films, without having to resort to inferior archival copies or a failing and often inaccurate memory of these filmic texts. The DVD releases have and will eventually spawn new scholarly work on these films, which were less accessible, if not unavailable, in the past; thus possibly generating a reassessment of the Shaw studios' cultural impact on global cinema.¹³ Even more importantly, these DVDs will also help establish new generations of audiences by giving them the pleasure of experiencing these films in newly remastered forms. The 42nd New York Film Festival (2004) considered the Shaw legacy impressive enough to feature a sidebar tribute by presenting twelve films on the big screen, as they were meant to be seen.¹⁴

The business potential of catering to a new generation of fans had also not gone unnoticed by Miramax Pictures when they inked a deal with Celestial Pictures in 2003 for the North American video distribution rights to fifty titles and video-on-demand to all of the Shaw Brothers' films.¹⁵ When Bob and Harvey Weinstein parted ways with Miramax's parent company Buena Vista, they negotiated a deal to transfer the rights to these fifty Shaw titles to the Weinstein Co.. In 2006, the Weinsteins launched their new Asian cinema DVD label Dragon Dynasty, under which the Shaw titles would finally see the light of day in the US. Tarantino was reported to be "actively work[ing] with the Weinsteins in all aspects of Dragon's brand development."¹⁶ Attaching Tarantino's name to these titles as a "presenter" or an "advisor" found its precedence in the Rolling Thunder Pictures model; so, in a sense, the Shaw-Tarantino connection continued to thread itself through these Dragon Dynasty releases.

Shaw Cinema: Hong Kong Mainstream / American Grind-house

For one to arrive at an even more nuanced understanding of Tarantino's aesthetic in Rolling Thunder Pictures, it is also imperative to briefly map out the critical problem of exploitation elements in Shaw Brothers cinema and their intersection with exploitation cinema in the US. The formation of Shaw Brothers (HK) Ltd. in 1958 by Run Run Shaw launched the Shaw studios, the film production unit responsible for the range of movie classics one associates with the Shaw Brothers label today, in Hong Kong.¹⁷ "With the completion of the Clear Water Bay Film Studio" in 1967, Run Run Shaw "forged out a new management system" involving "vertical integration," where "production, distribution, and exhibition" were controlled by the same company.¹⁸ "Based on the U.S. Fordist-Taylorist model of industrial organization," Poshek Fu observes, Shaw's studio "Movietown was run like an assembly line . . . in pursuit of maximum profit."¹⁹ During the height of its production, the studio's output was around forty titles a year.²⁰ The diversity of filmic genres was also dazzling—the Shaw library on the Celestial Pictures website, for instance, features titles in Chinese opera, musical, comedy, contemporary drama, kung fu, wuxia pian, horror, science fiction, fantasy, historical and period drama, and even soft-core erotica.²¹ As Chuck Stephens observed in his evaluation of Shaw director Li Han-hsiang's legacy of both classic musicals such as Love Eterne (1963) and "plenty of softcore 'duplicity' films," the cornucopia of feverish cinematic production could not possibly yield consistency in quality and resulted in a few filmic gems within a sea of celluloid mediocrity and exploitation.²² Much of Shaw cinema is of B-movie quality, and not unlike the exploitation and blaxploitation cinema one sees in the US, often exploited action, violence, and sex to draw and thrill audiences.

Shaw cinema's link to the exploitation cinematic mode also has its history in the company's unsuccessful attempt to achieve mainstream acceptance in America. Unfortunately, the cinema that was distributed in the US was materially and discursively drawn into the circuits of American grind-house consumption in the 1970s. So eager was Run Run Shaw to tap into the US market that his studio made "different versions of a film for different markets with varying degrees of censorship: three versions were made, the 'hottest' for the US, Europe and Japan, the 'mildest' for Singapore and Malaysia, and the 'moderate' for Hong Kong."²³ It is in this sense that Shaw Brothers was moving towards a transnational cinema in their desire to expand their films' appeal cross-culturally and to extend their distribution network globally. Of course, the kung fu action genre was as popular then as it is now in Hollywood. In what David Desser calls "the kung fu craze" of the early 1970s in America, Shaw director Cheng Chang-ho's King Boxer (1972), re-titled for the U.S. market as the Five Fingers of Death, made its way to the number three spot on the 1973 box office charts, closely following Bruce Lee's Fists of Fury, which occupied the top spot.²⁴ While this kung fu craze period was very short-lived, it demonstrated the potential for the genre to gain mainstream popularity. It was this potential that led Shaw to work on a number of collaborations with American and British film companies, producing, for instance, the blaxploitation Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold (1975) with Warner Bros.; and The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires (1974) and Shatter (1974) with Hammer Film Productions, the former starring Peter Cushing and David Chiang. The films of Shaw Brothers, however, never quite made it into American mainstream circulation and often ended up as double-bill features in grind-house cinemas in mostly minority communities, as poor video copies circulated among cult kung fu movie fans, and in Chinatown. The important point to make here is that the complex capitalist systems of trans-Pacific appeal defined the Shaw studio's aesthetic approach to the making of certain films in its attempt to penetrate the US market. The Shaw cinema that was enmeshed in the exploitation and blaxploitation cinemas of the 1970s soon became the Shaw cinema that drew Tarantino to its exploitative style. Tarantino's later reconfiguration and shifting of his own grind-house aesthetics into mainstream acceptability drew Shaw cinema along with it.

A quick note about American exploitation cinema is in order here, before moving on to a discussion of Rolling Thunder Pictures. Scholars of American exploitation cinema have delineated the exploitative mode as one which historically characterizes a subset of cinema that was in opposition to mainstream Hollywood fare. For instance, the classic American exploitation films of the 1920s to the 1950s, according to Eric Schaefer, cover taboo or "'forbidden' topic[s]" and "were made cheaply, with extremely low production values, by small independent firms."²⁵ Others like Jeffrey Sconce sought to inject into exploitation cinema a political oppositionality, what Sconce terms a "paracinema," which are "in opposition to Hollywood and the mainstream US culture it represents."²⁶ An example of this could be found in particular films of the blaxploitation tradition, such as Melvin Van Peebles's Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song (1971).²⁷

Deconstructing this reductive binary opposition between exploitation and the mainstream is Paul Watson's notion that the very category of exploitation film needs to be reexamined in light of how cinema itself (including mainstream cinema) is exploitative in its very nature:

Exploitation—the embodiment of tastelessness—is now itself, paradoxically, part of dominant taste, and its processes and discourses have become integral even to cinema's most official and mainstream manifestations. This suggests that if the concept of exploitation survives today, it does so neither as a paracinema, a beyond, an outside to cinema, nor as "cultural detritus" or the "cinematic dregs" that [Jeffrey] Sconce describes. Nor is it an intrinsically oppositional discourse, a "bad film" counter-aesthetic capable of filling the void vacated by the historical avant-gardes. On the contrary, the significance of exploitation cinema now lies precisely in its proximity to the present capital-intensive patterns of film production.²⁸

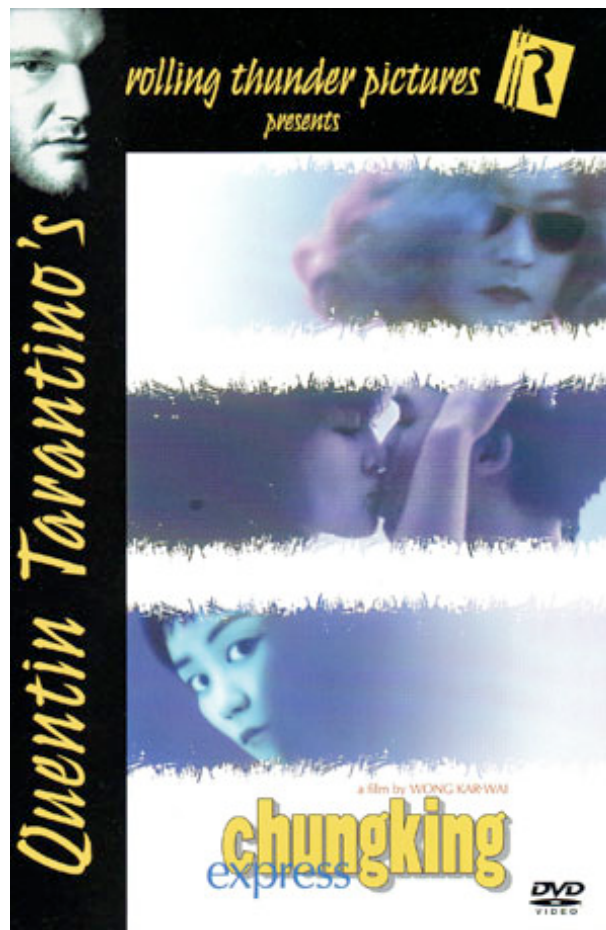
I find Watson's theoretical intervention useful in that by forcing mainstream cinema's own exploitative nature into the open, it begins to create spaces of theoretical accommodation for and critique of other (trans)national cinematic cultures and forms. In addition, it provides a theoretical framework through which one can understand how an aesthetic of trash or exploitative cinema could have entered into the Hollywood mainstream, as now embodied in the work of Quentin Tarantino himself.

This brief detour into the critical dialogue on the subject of American exploitation cinema allows me to make the obvious point (at least to scholars and fans of Shaw) that Shaw cinema was mainstream cinema. Despite the fact that many Shaw films shamelessly deployed sex and violence in their exploitative appeal and were in direct competition with Hollywood products within the Asian markets, they do not fit into either Schaefer's or Sconce's definitions in any tidy way. Shaw cinema instead exemplifies more appropriately what Watson suggests of the interpenetration of the exploitation mode and mainstream appeal. Not only was Shaw one of the major film producers in Hong Kong (with Cathay and later Golden Harvest offering competition), its cinema served in many instances to reify Chinese cultural ideologies and values. In conceptualizing Shaw cinema as a "diasporic cinema," Poshek Fu zeros in on not only the "profit motive" but also the "cultural and national missions," as he cites a Hong Kong film journal published in the 1960s, "to introduce through celluloid images to people of different races and linguistic backgrounds the cultural and artistic traditions of China."²⁹ Films like Li Han-hsiang's Love Eterne offered diasporic Chinese viewers "this imagined changeless China [that] held enormous appeal . . . They found in Shaw Brothers films a China forever in the midst of all the political turmoil and personal

displacements and with which they could continue to identify despite their life in the diaspora.”³⁰ My own experience as a movie-crazy teenager in late 1970s Singapore illustrates how Shaw films and Hollywood movies dominated my cinematic diet in equal proportion, as it did for many ethnic Chinese audiences around the world.³¹ Shaw cinema was mainstream profit-driven cinema, it had a noble cultural mission, and it deployed exploitation aesthetics and strategies to extend its reach globally, all at the same time. My goal here is observe how Shaw cinema, despite its mainstream status and because of the exploitative streaks in its history, has permitted itself to slip into the associative bracketing of Rolling Thunder Pictures and is thus colored by Tarantino’s exploitation aesthetics, producing the Shaw-Tarantino connection as seen by mainstream American audiences today.

Rolling Thunder Pictures

After securing his reputation as a rising directorial star with Reservoir Dogs (1992) and Pulp Fiction (1994), Quentin Tarantino went on to set up Rolling Thunder Pictures with Miramax in 1995, as a way of branding, re-releasing, and distributing cult films that he believed should be given another chance. (The name of the label was derived from a 1977 film, Rolling Thunder, directed by John Flynn, which Tarantino has described as “one of . . . [his] favorite movies of all time.”³²) “It’s a film buff’s dream to give the theatrical experience to films that might never be seen in this country,” Tarantino proclaimed.³³ Despite the laudable ideals of the label, Rolling Thunder Pictures unfortunately did not stay in business long, but it did direct attention to otherwise obscure international and exploitation cinemas. Jack Hill’s Switchblade Sisters (1975), Wong Kar-wai’s Chungking Express (1994), Arthur Marks’s Detroit 9000 (1973), the documentary Hard Core Logo (1996), the American thriller Curdled (1996), the Japanese crime flick Sonatine (1993), the Jet Li vehicle Fist of Legend (1994), Italian Lucio Fulci’s The Beyond (1981), another Fulci film The Psychic (1977), and Ho Meng-hua’s The Mighty Peking Man (1977) were all associated with the label in some way and were screened theatrically, released on video and DVD, or were going to be a part of the Rolling Thunder Pictures catalogue until the label folded in 1998.



For Rolling Thunder Pictures to get off the ground and succeed, Tarantino needed to sell his idea to Miramax as a savvy business venture that relied on his then exploding popularity. This was how he explained his sales pitch to the Weinsteins:

I got tired of going to festivals and seeing what I thought were interesting movies, telling Harvey or Bob Weinstein about them and having one of their acquisition people say, 'Nah, it's not for Miramax.' The straw that broke the camel's back was Wong Kar-wai's Chungking Express when I heard 'It's like watching paint dry.' I said, 'Harvey, I'm the best acquisition guy you've got. You should just let me release four films a year. We'll pay a low amount for them, and it'll be like a specialty label inside Miramax. And it won't cost

you a thing.' I don't get paid. But if the movies make some money, I'll eventually make some. That was the original idea behind Rolling Thunder.³⁴

To Tarantino's credit, his motivations seemed to emerge out of a sincere love for these films, which was once again a reflection of his cinephilic background. There was a certain philanthropic, for the lack of a better term, spirit in the archivist streak that grounded this venture:

Now I don't want to release new films so much as older exploitation movies and give them a new life. Rolling Thunder is really getting kicked off with Switchblade Sisters. This is the personality I want the company to have. We're here to bring back the glory of '70s chopsocky movies, Italian crime films, blaxploitation—we'll get a spaghetti Western in there eventually. Have the fun of watching them in a movie theater, as opposed to going to a whole bunch of different festivals and finding the oddball new movie that no one is going to release. I'll still do that, but I'm going to have to love it . . . What I'd like a year or so from now is to release four movies in theaters and another five on video. Some of the movies will do well and some won't, but they'll all work out because it's not costing us that much. We're treating this like a philanthropic enterprise that we might make some money on. But we ain't going to make much, and the money we make we'll put back into what we're doing. I just want to bring the movies into town. I want other people to see them, to give them a shot.³⁵

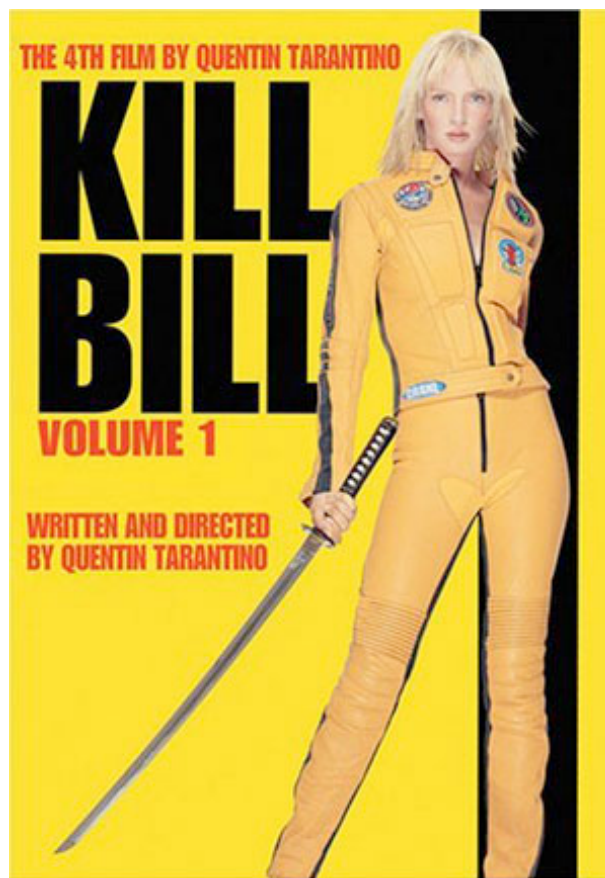
What is unfortunate about Rolling Thunder Pictures' short-lived tenure under Miramax is that its success or failure was premised on economic viability in spite of the good that could have resulted from Tarantino's culturally generous approach. Tarantino displayed foresight in identifying in Wong Kar-wai's Chungking Express a directorial brilliance that has since been proven true, and he confirmed what millions of ethnic Chinese moviegoers from generations past had already known about the pleasures that Shaw cinema offered.

On the other hand, considering the fact that by the late 1990s, critics started to lament of Tarantino's media overexposure, a Tarantino overkill, so to speak, the "Quentin Tarantino Presents" strategy could also be a hindrance when the films in this label were so closely pegged to Tarantino's personal popularity and idiosyncratic taste.³⁶ While this argument is marshaled from a business perspective, I would also like to adopt it for a cultural political viewpoint to engage and critique the problematic discourses surrounding Rolling Thunder Pictures.

In a promotional clip seemingly directed at both movie audiences and copyright owners and released by Miramax for Rolling Thunder Pictures, footage of Tarantino speaking directly to the camera was intercut with footage from some of the films the label sought to release and was accompanied by the stereotypically deep and booming voice of a male narrator who extolled the films' virtues.

With Tarantino brashly proclaiming "I know a good movie when I see one," the narrator chimed in with reminders of what Tarantino had accomplished so far with his own movies and then noting that "the Rolling Thunder video collection is a new line of movies handpicked by Quentin Tarantino, aimed straight at the hottest renting age category, 18 to 34." "If you like my stuff," challenged Tarantino, "you can look at it and like this is where it came from." What is fascinating about this clip is that it captures the discursive logic on which Rolling Thunder Pictures is based. First, it reworks the then growing mythology surrounding Tarantino as a directorial genius by constructing an auteurist history of cinematic influences and origination. Rolling Thunder Pictures, hence, becomes a cultural mapping that provides insight into the Tarantino phenomenon. Yet, the clip's celebration of the linear historical causality of pop cultural origins did not prevent it from embracing the contradictory circularity of Tarantino imprinting his stamp of approval on these films. As the narrator at one point excitedly notes, "Each movie release as part of this collection features an introduction of commentary and facts by Quentin Tarantino himself." The circular reasoning is that while these films constitute a veritable history of Tarantino's beginnings and serve as justification for his cinematic taste and a retrospective sanctioning of the violent and exploitative nature of his own films, Tarantino's commentaries on and reflections about these films imbue them with contemporary relevance and importance. In other words, standing in the middle of this divine circle and holding it all together is Tarantino as both cinematic source and telos.

The idea of having Rolling Thunder Pictures—thus Tarantino himself—framing these disparate works superficially mimics the aesthetic form of Tarantino's films in general, and Kill Bill in particular. This structure is both a creative and critical mode of auteur bracketing. In Kill Bill, Tarantino brings together a mountain of allusions to and references from various cinemas around the world to build a complex edifice of cinematic citationality. What held that edifice together was Tarantino's expert narrative constructions and story-telling ability, which helped to suture tightly the various reconfigured elements of world cinema, and Shaw kung fu cinema was part of that edifice. What was impressive and yet troubling about that critical bracketing was that while Shaw cinema was promoted in Tarantino's film, its presence was only sustained by the Tarantino cinematic structure. Thus, it was not so much Shaw cinema but Shaw cinema as reconfigured by Tarantino that was being feted.



Of course, Rolling Thunder Pictures as movie label and Kill Bill as film is not a perfect comparison, though the critical similarities bear analysis. While the Rolling Thunder Pictures' films must stand on their own, they are still ultimately enveloped in the discursive aura of Tarantino aesthetics, but one positive consequence of the label is that American audiences who are not familiar with Shaw cinema may be compelled by the Tarantino framing to check out films like Ho Meng-hua's The Mighty Peking Man. Yet, it is difficult when viewing Ho's film to distance oneself from the exploitation aesthetic associated with Tarantino without a sense of the cultural and historical contexts of Shaw cinema. As a result, Tarantino is the only context through which the average mainstream American viewer sees exploitation cinema, and the Tarantino connection here further deepens Shaw cinema's link to the grind-house aesthetic paradigm.

An exploration of Tarantino's deployment of exploitation strategies in his films requires an essay of its own, and so my abbreviated approach here is to tease out a relationship between Tarantino's aesthetic of cool and his reliance on the cinematic discourses of exploitation.³⁷ In her excellent book Cool Men and the Second Sex, Susan Fraiman devotes an entire chapter to Tarantino's Pulp Fiction by offering a gendered, sexualized, and racialized understanding of his aesthetic of coolness:

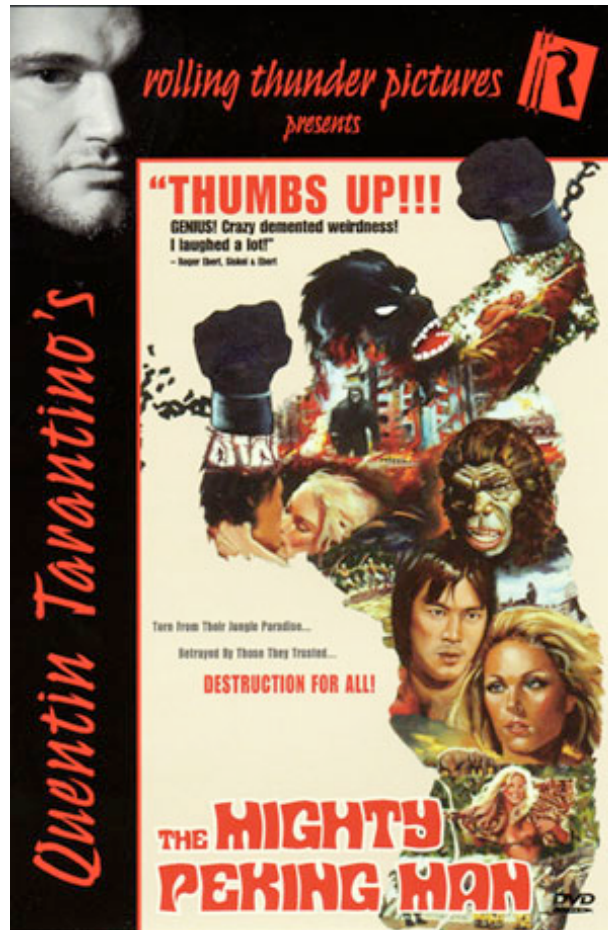
Coolness for Tarantino, and those enraptured with him, thus involves a distinctly masculine desire for mastery, in which domination of the feminine is tied up with white male anxiety about, among other things, black masculinity. One of my primary goals in what follows is to localize Tarantino's allure by exposing its inextricability from white male need. Pulp Fiction's violence, I will argue, is driven by an interest in exploring male vulnerability, along with an only partly self-conscious compulsion to restore men to a state of cool imperviousness.³⁸

This state of masculine coolness is tied to an aesthetic barrier of taste that protects and shields Tarantino against critiques of the oftentimes racist, sexist, and homophobic discourses emanating from characters within his films, which Fraiman's opening anecdote of her encounter with dismissive Tarantino fans illustrates.³⁹ After Reservoir Dogs was released, critics and interviewers bombarded Tarantino with questions about the extreme violence in his films. Though his response has shifted through the years, it still revolves, in essence, around the argument that "it comes down to what some people like and don't like"⁴⁰ and that violence is part of the film's creative integrity.⁴¹ While his argument gestures towards the democratic nature of taste, the implicit assumption is still one of an ironically discriminating hierarchy—you have bad taste if you don't like it or don't get it. The notion that it is "uncool" to dislike a Tarantino film truncates any kind of meaningful critical dialogue.

Fraiman's explication of the racial, sexual, and gendered anxieties in Tarantino's aesthetic of coolness is also significant in the way it squarely places the appeal of this aesthetic in the context of the culture wars. Tarantino's deployment of politically incorrect narrative elements and character types appeals, whether intended or not, to a reactionary politics of white male bravado, where engaging in

racist, sexist, and homophobic language and representation signifies courageous resistance to so-called liberal “Nazi” policing of speech and behavior. The ability to resist this policing is part of being cool in Tarantino’s cinematic world. What then is the relationship between this aesthetic of cool and the exploitation cinema that Tarantino cites in his films and promotes under the Rolling Thunder imprint? I want to argue that the aesthetic structure of exploitation and trash cinema is framed as a kind of B-movie chic. It is now “cool” to relish sexploitation and gratuitous violence as a form of anti-PC resistance, making it respectable to delight in the pleasures of viewing girl-on-girl violence in Switchblade Sisters or the sexploitative imagery in The Mighty Peking Man, all within the confines of Rolling Thunder Pictures’ critical bracketing.

In the final segment of this essay, I turn to reading Ho Meng-hua’s The Mighty Peking Man as an exemplary instance of this anti-PC consumption of B-movie chic, thus illustrating why it occupies an appropriate place in Rolling Thunder Pictures’ slate; while simultaneously rereading it at an angle, against the grain of Tarantino’s critical bracketing, in order to demonstrate how the film, despite its failings, can benefit from a critical distancing from the categorizing strictures of Rolling Thunder Pictures.



The Mighty Peking Man: Rolling Thunder Pictures’ Shaw Entry

During the short tenure of Rolling Thunder Pictures, Tarantino chose, from hundreds of available Shaw titles, Ho Meng-hua’s The Mighty Peking Man to release on DVD. Considering how Ho’s film is a Hong Kong take on the 1970s monster flick, Tarantino’s choice is definitely on the mark for the label. With its over-the-top acting, cheesy special effects, saccharine Barry White-styled soundtrack, and outrageous narrative premise, The Mighty Peking Man epitomizes B-movie sexploitative camp and the pleasures that some have come to expect of the Shaw films of the era. The film is really an Asian retelling of the King Kong story: “In the ‘60s they spotted this monster, and a dozen eyewitnesses saw him in the Himalaya mountains. That monster, gentlemen, was really the prehistoric Peking Man,” proclaims the film’s villainous adventurer Lu Tien (Ku Feng).⁴²

With the different versions of the King Kong story produced by Hollywood, one wonders why Shaw Brothers was willing to jump on the bandwagon, especially when Hollywood studios’ huge budgets and slick production values were hard to surpass. What motivated the Shaw producers to move ahead with this project in the belief that it could offer a sufficiently interesting and unique take on the story, risking the inevitable comparisons? In establishing a culturally distinctive filmic narrative set-up, what kinds of cultural politics did the film have to engage?



Jessica Lange, King Kong (1976)

The Mighty Peking Man emerged out of an era in the 1970s when the disaster epic flick was very big in Hollywood with films like Airport (1970), The Poseidon Adventure (1972), Earthquake (1974), The Towering Inferno (1974), Airport 1975 (1974), Airport '77 (1977), The Swarm (1978), Beyond the Poseidon Adventure (1979), and The Concorde . . . Airport '79 (1979) dominating global box offices. John Guillermin's remake of the 1933 classic King Kong was released in the U.S. during the 1976 Christmas season. The King Kong craze it generated provided sufficient incentive for Shaw Brothers to try cash in. Ho Meng-hua, one of Shaw's key directors, was roped in for the job. Director Ho joined the studio in 1955, during the early days of its inception, and made close to fifty films before retiring in 1980.⁴³ Some of Ho's classic Shaw titles include The Monkey Goes West (1964), Princess Iron Fan (1966), The Cave of Silken Web (1967), Suzanna (1967), and The Flying Guillotine (1974). His versatility in working with various genres, including sexploitative flicks such as Kiss of Death (1973) and The Sinful Adulteress (1974), placed him in the ideal position for the job. Shaw producers clearly had high hopes for The Mighty Peking Man based on the fact that they entrusted one of their premier directors to helm it. One could also draw the same conclusion from the film's use of extensive outdoor location shooting,⁴⁴ considering how financially conservative the company was in terms of their accounting bureaucracy.⁴⁵

With The Mighty Peking Man, Shaw needed to negotiate its appeal carefully, especially since its key Hong Kong and ethnic Chinese audience base had already seen Guillermin's King Kong. The special effects of the Shaw version would pale in comparison to its Hollywood counterpart, so its appeal must stem from other aspects of the film. A study of the film's narrative and discursive strategies used to counteract this inevitable comparison unveils the cultural politics that the film grapples with so that it can put into place its audience appeal.

The first step was to maintain the familiar narrative of the King Kong story that audiences had come to love. So, one finds certain crucial elements intact in The Mighty Peking Man: the giant monster ape and blonde bombshell "love story" (which has such an amazing mythic appeal in spite of, or maybe because of, its bestial undertones), the savagery-to-civilization motif, and humanity's morally ambiguous "triumph" over the monstrous beast. The comforting familiarity of this monster fable has the potential of drawing audiences into theaters. Shaw's strategy was to ensure that its ethnic Chinese audiences would return for a second dose, Shaw style, and should the film make it internationally, it would be a felicitous bonus. But, compensatory measures must be mobilized to displace concerns regarding its inferior production values. One of the key strategies was to Asianize the tale by imbuing it with a Hong Kong/Chinese cultural sensibility while simultaneously sustaining the potential of its global marketability.

One convenient method the film deploys is the relocation of the King Kong geographic placement to Asia, with India and Hong Kong serving as the main locales for the film's diegetic action. The Indian Himalayas displaces the mythic Pacific Skull Island in the 1933 and 1976 Hollywood versions as the mighty Peking Man's "prehistoric" point of origin, and Hong Kong functions as the Asian equivalent to New York City, the ultimate signifier of Western modernity and urban civilization.



The mighty Peking man rampaging Hong Kong

This is an early instance of Chinese-language cinema's semi-successful attempt at configuring a pan-Asian appeal that one now sees in the work of Jackie Chan whose films Who Am I? (1998) and The Myth (2005) come readily to mind. Not only did Ho's film employ ethnic Indians in bit parts and as extras, it also rather unfortunately features Chinese actors in black face makeup playing the indigenous Indians, particularly in the scenes shot within the Shaw studios. While production costs probably had everything to do with this racially questionable practice, it nonetheless offers symptomatically a racist dimension to the Chinese culturalism that permeates much of the Shaw canon.

The notion of monstrosity as located within the geographical polarity of the "savage" Skull Island versus the civilized modernity of New York City is laden with an Orientalist binary division that makes possible the morality tale of a "savage beast" capable of very human love as it is contrasted to "civilized" (Western) humanity's cruel abuse and destructive inclinations towards that which is Other, all in the name of capitalist gain and self-preservation.⁴⁶ The Mighty Peking Man's geographical and cultural relocation does little to diffuse this binary logic, but instead maps it over an Asian hierarchy of racial color consciousness. The then colonial Hong Kong becomes the site of Asian modernity, marking its desire to sustain its place as a global city within the nodal network of transnational capitalism in the Pacific Rim, vis-à-vis India, its developing, "Third World," South Asian counterpart. What I am suggesting here is not that the film is racist in any overtly systemic fashion, but rather that its narrative structuring is indicative of a political unconscious, revealing a racial hierarchy that has its beginnings in the nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific discourses on race that underpinned much of European colonialism. This hierarchy is particularly stark in the context of British colonial Hong Kong out of which the film emerges.⁴⁷

The presence of "whiteness" is also a crucial ingredient in injecting an international flavor to the film, thus extending its global reach beyond Asian shores. As I have noted earlier, Shaw Brothers' collaboration with American studios have resulted in a number of films where American and Hong Kong actors appeared side by side. In some Shaw productions, Caucasian actors appear not only as part of the colonial landscape, but also as main characters in films that tackle historical China's political interactions with European powers, for example, Chang Cheh's Marco Polo (1975), starring American actor Richard Harrison in the titular role. (Harrison's second and final stint with Shaw was in Chang Cheh's 1976 Boxer Rebellion.) The Mighty Peking Man seemed like another apt venue to display this internationalism that Shaw favored. Apart from a number of small roles being played by Caucasian actors, the central character of Samantha went to Evelyne Kraft, an unknown actress from the Soviet Union. Kraft also starred in another film, Deadly Angels (1977), a version of Charlie's Angels, before exiting the Shaw scene.⁴⁸



Evelyne Kraft, The Mighty Peking Man

Though Ho could conceivably have selected one of numerous Hong Kong beauties from the Shaw stable of actors to play the role of Samantha, he stuck to the dark beast-blond beauty combination, which unfortunately does not offer the same kind of radical critique that Jean Cocteau's La Belle et la Bête (Beauty and the Beast; 1946) presents. The racial and sexual dynamic of this beauty and the beast pairing is obvious: Kraft's blonde hair, blue eyes, and voluptuous body provides a sharp contrast to Utam's black furry body, which only deepens the animal eroticism implied in their inter-species relationship. Utam's black monstrosity becomes a racial signifier for the "horrors" of interracial relationships, which the King Kong story evokes. This signifier perpetuates the stereotype of the black male's hyper-sexuality and his "quest for white flesh," which Frantz Fanon has thoroughly critiqued in Black Skin, White Masks.⁴⁹ Ho's persistence in using this filmic stereotype was an exploitation ploy to tap into a particular mode of racialized sexuality. Kraft was

"exploited" on screen at every turn, as Ho resorted to every sexploitation trick in the book.

Kraft was, of course, minimally accoutered in animal skin clothes, reminiscent of blonde bombshell superstars like Raquel Welch in One Million Years B.C. (1966) and Jane Fonda in Barbarella (1968). She was not only made to perform Tarzan-like acrobatics, but was also expected to pose like a super model in a jungle-themed photo shoot, frolicking with elephants, cheetahs, and tigers. The scene where Samantha is bitten by a snake on her inner thigh introduces the implicitly erotic scenario where Johnny has to "go down" on her to suck out the venom from the bite wound.



Arriving in Hong Kong does not save Samantha from the lascivious gaze of the male characters (and Ho's camera): Johnny's idea of new civilized clothes for her is a faux leather version of her skimpy jungle outfit, but this time with zippers conveniently positioned for easy removal. The villain Lu also makes advances on our girl hero by ripping off her top and attempting to rape her, only to be thwarted by Utam's timely rescue.



The urban redesign of Samantha's (Kraft) jungle outfit

Here, Ho's film lapses into the soft core erotica that Shaw is renowned for, where women are often tied up and sexually assaulted. The misogyny and sexism in these films must be criticized, but what is troubling is the fact this mode of sexploitation also fits snugly into the aesthetic framework of Rolling Thunder Pictures' imprimatur. As the Rolling Thunder trailer for the film suggestively proclaims of the scantily clad Kraft: "See the beautiful Jungle Goddess!"⁵⁰

My criticism of the film's problematic sexual politics needs to be tempered by an acknowledgment of its postcolonial and anti-Orientalist interventional possibilities. Throughout its history, Hollywood cinema has portrayed Asian men as feminized, sexually repressed, or asexual figures.⁵¹ Representations of interracial relationships frequently involve white males and Asian females.⁵² Hence, for Hong Kong and ethnic Chinese audiences to see on screen Danny Lee's smoldering hetero-masculinity coming into romantic and sexual contact with Kraft's sensuality is in itself an empowering moment of cultural nationalism. The film offers an alternative representational paradigm which resists white male domination of mainstream cinematic heroism and sexual primacy. Yet, this interventional potential titters on the very borders of a laudable cultural resistance, on the one hand, and a rather problematic identity politics of Chinese patriarchal sexism and racial revenge, on the other. The film's desire to engage these conflicting cultural politics, while attempting to appeal to mainstream audiences, is what gives it its complexity beyond what its B-movie designation signifies. It is also critical to note that in the context of Rolling Thunder Pictures, the remasculinization of the Asian male hero can be tempered under the gaze of its white male viewers, where The Mighty Peking Man is alternatively seen as a laughable and cartoonish mimicry of the Hollywood original, where white male heterosexual standing remains intact and secure. The sexploitative framing further colors the Asian male-Caucasian female coupling as a form of exotic erotica, soft-core porn for "specialized" sexual tastes. White male heterosexuality, thus, retains its normality, dominance, and primacy through this framing gaze.

Conclusion

My strategy in the above cross-hatched reading of The Mighty Peking Man is to not only demonstrate why the film fits so well into the Rolling Thunder Pictures aesthetic, but also why it deserves a much larger interpretive context beyond the label's and Tarantino's critical bracketing. This alternative reading highlights how various cultural, political, economic, and historical circumstances have

engendered such a film, and thereby populated its narrative world with the politics of sexuality, gender, race, and cultural power. This reading, together with my essay's discussion of Rolling Thunder Pictures, could also be seen as a microcosmic attempt to emplace the wonders of Shaw cinema in its greater historical purview of which film scholars and audiences who are familiar with the cinema are already deeply cognizant. While this move puts the Shaw-Tarantino connection into perspective as a minor subplot in the grand narrative of Shaw cinema, it also ultimately aspires to inscribe and even fantasize about the potential cultural place of Shaw Brothers cinema in the multi/trans-cultural universe that we call the future of American popular film.

NOTES

1. Tarantino explains, in an interview with Fred Topel, how Shaw cinema had an impact on his work: "When I was writing this movie, I had the fortunate fun of being able to watch at least one Shaw Brothers movie a day, if not three, and the reason I was doing it is that I wanted to immerse myself so much in that style of filmmaking so that the things that they did would be second nature to me . . . I was like someone who lived in Hong Kong in the Seventies. When you thought of movies, you thought of Kung Fu movies. The Shaw Brothers, the Shaw Scope Logo and then, the Feature Presentation thing which I grew up watching, I always hear that tune before a movie starts. That just lets you know right away where I'm coming from and just sit back and have a good time and know from whence this came." Fred Topel. "Tarantino Talks Kill Bill Vol. 2." Quentin Tarantino: The Film Geek Files. Ed. Paul A. Woods. London: Plexus, 2005. 183.
2. Almost every other published interview following Reservoir Dogs's 1992 success at Cannes identifies Video Archives as the geographical fountainhead of Tarantino's humble beginnings. See, for instance, the interviews in Gerald Peary, Ed. Quentin Tarantino: Interviews. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.
3. I have discussed in greater detail Kill Bill's citations of Chinese cinema in my book Remade in Hollywood: The Global Chinese Presence in Transnational Cinemas. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009.
4. Testifying to the cultural significance of Lee's film is now a growing pool of critical work, including: Felicia Chan. "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Cultural Migrancy and Translatability." Chinese Films in Focus II. Ed. Chris Berry. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.; Kwai-Cheung Lo. Chinese Face/Off: The Transnational Popular Culture of Hong Kong. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005. 177-96; Sheldon H. Lu. "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Bouncing Angels: Hollywood, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Transnational Cinema." Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics. Eds., Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.; Sheng-mei Ma. "Kung Fu Films in Diaspora: Death of the Bamboo Hero." Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema. Eds. Laikwan Pang and Day Wong. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005.; and Stephen Teo. "Wuxia Redux: Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon as a Model of Late Transnational Production." Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema. Eds. Meaghan Morris, Siu Leung Li, and Stephen Chan Ching-kiu. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Cinema Journal devoted a significant part of an issue (Vol. 43, Issue No. 4, 2004) to the film, which includes my essay "The Global Return of the Wu Xia Pian (Chinese Sword-Fighting Movie): Ang Lee's Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," Christina Klein's "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Diasporic Reading," and the film's executive producer and screenplay writer James Schamus's response to the essays.
5. Linda Sunshine, ed. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Portrait of the Ang Lee Film. New York: Newmarket Press, 2000. 7.
6. Mike Snider. "Movies Fill the Bill for Tarantino." USA Today. 30 August 2004. 21 June 2009. http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2004-08-30-tarantino_x.htm.
7. Eugene Hernandez. "Better Late than Never, 'Hero' a Hit in U.S. Release." indieWIRE. 30 August 2004. 21 June 2009. http://www.indiewire.com/article/better_late_than_never_hero_a_hit_in_u.s._release.
8. Celestial Pictures. Press Release. 21 June 2009. http://www.celestialpictures.com/level3_recentnews.cfm?l_news_id=146.
9. Richard Corliss. "Oh, Brothers!" Time. 2 December 2002. 25 August 2007. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,501021209-395411.00.html>.
10. Celestial Pictures website. 10 July 2009. http://www.celestialpictures.com/level2_et.cfm.
11. Corliss, "Oh, Brothers!"
12. Lauren Beck. "CEO Brings Asian Film to U.S." "The Observer". The University of Notre Dame. 4 March 2002. 28 August 2007. <http://www.nd.edu/~observer/03042002/News/2.html>.
13. Poshek Fu, ed. China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008. This volume represents the kind of access that these DVD releases now offer to film scholars.
14. "A Special Sidebar to the 42nd New York Film Festival." New York Film Festival. 28 August 2007. <http://www.filmlinc.com/archive/nyff/nyfffilm2004shaw.htm>. See Chuck Stephens. "The Shaw Brothers' Elephant: Assessing the Monumental Legacy of Hong Kong's Legendary Producers." Film Comment. Sept/Oct 2004: 52-7. Also available at <http://www.filmlinc.com/fcm/9-10-2004/shaw.htm>.
15. David Rooney. "Miramax Deals to Distrib, Remake Shaw Pix." Variety. 3 April 2003. 28 August 2007. <http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=story&articleid=VR1117884091&categoryid=19&cs=1>.
16. Gregg Kilday. "Tarantino to Advise Weinstein Asian Label." The Hollywood Reporter. 24 May 2006. 21 June 2009. http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hr/search/article_display.asp?vnu_content_id=1002540897. On the Dragon Dynasty website <http://dragondynasty.com>, six Shaw titles are now available, including classics like Lau Kar-Leung's The 36th Chamber of Shaolin (1978), King Hu's Come Drink with Me (1966), and Chang Cheh's The One-Armed Swordsman (1967). Chang Cheh's cult film The 5 Deadly Venoms (1978) will be out in August 2009.
17. For a history of Shaw Brothers, see Stephen Teo. Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions. London: BFI, 1997.; Wong Ain-ling, ed. The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003.; and Poshek Fu's introduction to China Forever.

18. Stephanie Chung Po-yin. "The Industrial Evolution of a Fraternal Enterprise: The Shaw Brothers and the Shaw Organisation." Trans. Teri Chan. The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study. Ed. Wong Ain-ling. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003. 8-9. Most of the historical details in this segment of my essay come from this source.
19. Poshek Fu. "Introduction: The Shaw Brothers Diasporic Cinema." China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema. Ed. Poshek Fu. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008. 5-6.
20. Chung. "The Industrial Evolution of a Fraternal Enterprise." 8.
21. "Genres: Kung fu-Martial Arts/Action." Celestial Pictures. 29 August 2007. http://www.celestialpictures.com/level2_genres.cfm.
22. Stephens. "The Shaw Brothers' Elephant." 56.
23. Chung. "The Industrial Evolution." 9.
24. David Desser. "The Kung Fu Craze: Hong Kong Cinema's First American Reception." The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity. Eds. Poshek Fu and David Desser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 20.
25. Eric Schaefer. "**Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!**": A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. 5.
26. Jeffrey Sconce. "Trashing the Academy: Taste, Excess and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style." Screen. 36:4 Winter 1995. 372.; Paul Watson "There's No Accounting for Taste: Exploitation Cinema and the Limits of Film Theory." Trash Aesthetics: Popular Culture and Its Audience. Eds. Deborah Cartmell, I. Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye, and Imelda Whelehan. London: Pluto Press, 1997. 67.
27. Ed Guerrero. Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993. 69-111.
28. Watson. "There's No Accounting for Taste." 80.
29. Fu. "Introduction: The Shaw Brothers Diasporic Cinema." 7.
30. Ibid. 13-14.
31. Singapore served as an important base for Shaw Brothers, with Runme Shaw managing a chain of cinemas in both Singapore and Malaysia, while brother Run Run Shaw controlling the production aspect of their business in Hong Kong. Singapore has an ethnic Chinese majority of about 70 percent in its population make-up, which provided a key market in Southeast Asia for the Shaws.
32. Don Gibalevich. "Out of the Past: Quentin Tarantino—On Ambition, Exploitation, and Playing Psycho." Quentin Tarantino: Interviews. Ed. Gerald Peary. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998. 177.
33. "The Quentin Tarantino Archives." 30 August 2007. http://www.tarantino.info/wiki/index.php/Main_Page.
34. "Rolling Thunder Pictures, A Retrospective." 22 June 2009. <http://www.tarantino.info/wiki/index.php>.
35. Ibid.
36. J. Hoberman. "Interview: Quentin Tarantino." Quentin Tarantino: Interviews. Ed. Gerald Peary. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998. 156.
37. Gerald Peary. "Cool" is "a favorite Tarantino word." Quentin Tarantino: Interviews. Ed. Gerald Peary. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998. ix.
38. Susan Fraiman. Cool Men and the Second Sex. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. 3.
39. Ibid. 1-2.
40. Joshua Mooney. "Interview with Quentin Tarantino." Quentin Tarantino: Interviews. Ed. Gerald Peary. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998. 74.
41. Gerald Peary. "A Talk with Quentin Tarantino." Quentin Tarantino: Interviews. Ed. Gerald Peary. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998. 29.
42. The Mighty Peking Man. Dir. Ho Meng-hua. 91 min. Miramax Home Entertainment. 2000. DVD. Because this film is dubbed in English for the American market, I have also relied on the Asian version for the original Chinese dialogue: The Mighty Peking Man. Dir. Ho Meng-hua. 90 min. Celestial Pictures. 2003. VCD. English translations of the dialogue I reference in my essay are taken from the Miramax version.
43. "Ho Meng-Hua." Celestial Pictures. 31 August 2007. http://www.celestialpictures.com/level3_talent_info.cfm?l_talent_id=128.
44. The fact that the Shaw studios had such an efficient production turnaround can be attributed to its extensive use of studio sound stages instead of outdoor filming in many of its films. Therefore, The Mighty Peking Man was one of its privileged exceptions.
45. Ho Meng-hua himself offers this revelation of the studio's fiscal bureaucratic structuring: "Under the Shaws system, everything needs prior application. And you simply cannot ask for anything on the spot, however trivial. Sometimes it borders on the ridiculous. Once a director was shooting a street scene and he needed a few dozen eggs. Instead of going to the canteen and get them himself, he had to get them through the procurement department. So the whole crew just waited there for the procurement people to get them those eggs. We are talking about a hundred, maybe two hundred people!" Quoted in Chung, "The Industrial Evolution," 9.
46. In his classic essay, Robin Wood argues that "central to . . . [the horror film] is the actual dramatization of the dual concept the repressed/the Other, in the figure of the Monster." Robin Wood. "An Introduction to the American Horror Film." Movies and Methods: Volume II. Ed. Bill Nichols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. 200-1.
47. King Kong as a political trope continues to have its resonance for Hong Kong in different ways. For example, cultural critic Rey Chow has so marvelously and effectively used it in her critique of Western demonization of mainland China when Britain returned Hong Kong to China in 1997. Rey Chow, "King Kong in Hong Kong: Watching the 'Handover' from the U.S.A." Social Text. 55, vol. 16, no. 2 (1998): 93-108.
48. "Evelyn Kraft." Celestial Pictures. 10 July 2009. http://www.celestialpictures.com/level3_talent_info.cfm?l_talent_id=498.
49. Frantz Fanon. Black Skin, White Masks. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967. 81.
50. This trailer is available as an added feature in the Rolling Thunder Pictures DVD release.
51. Jachinson Chan. Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee. New York: Routledge, 2001.; Robert G. Lee. Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999.
52. Gina Marchetti. Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction. Berkeley: University of California



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