

The Circulation of Chinese Cinemas in the UK: Studies in Taste, Tastemaking and Film Cultures

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Abstract

This thesis has two interrelated research objectives. First, to understand the circulation of Chinese cinema in Britain through the cultural authorities and gatekeepers responsible for the canonisation of international film. Second, to use Chinese-language films as case studies through which to deconstruct and better understand the mechanisms that make up British film cultures and their tastemaking practices. English-language Chinese film studies has long been preoccupied with the semantic issue of how to define such a loaded and diverse concept as “Chinese cinema”, with investigations generally focusing on film form and production contexts. This thesis extends these studies to include considerations of the role played by film circulation, to observe how the parameters of these analyses and the films of their focus are defined in the first instance.

This thesis traces the lineage of Chinese cinema as it has appeared in Britain's film cultures from 1954 through to 2014 when this project began. Taking emblematic moments of this history as case studies to anchor the investigation, each chapter contextualises the cultures into which Chinese-language films arrived. Using the sociological theories of Pierre Bourdieu and others, these investigations note how, in addition to their negotiation of international trends, domestic skirmishes for cultural authority within Britain have had significant effects on the perceived value of Chinese cinema.

This thesis considers the various social, cultural, and class contexts that support Britain's key tastemakers in the circulation of Chinese cinema. It shows not only the ways modes of evaluation and film availability are cultivated through these contexts, but that the activities therein result also from, and curate, assumptions toward *Chinese* as a cultural, political and ethnic signifier. Those commanding the discourse around Chinese cinema in Britain have done so with conceptions about Chineseness that result from and contribute to domestic conflicts of taste, class and social standing. The inevitable intersections between film tastes and cultural assumptions have worked to curate a parochial definition of Chinese cinema that prioritises certain kinds of films at the expense of others, dependent more on the idiosyncrasies of British film cultures than the activities of Chinese film industries.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any university or other institute of learning.

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Introduction

The current moment is a particularly dynamic one for Chinese cinemas in Britain. Since 2015, audiences across the United Kingdom have been able to see the latest blockbuster releases from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan at regional multiplex cinemas. New distributors, including China Lion Film, release contemporary Chinese productions at venues in London, Manchester, Birmingham, and numerous others, on the same day as their domestic releases. In 2016, 21 films saw a general theatrical release this way (see Appendix One): a figure that my research suggests is the highest of all time. For those who cannot make it to these regional venues, online distribution services and streaming platforms currently offer a similar variety of choice. Amazon Instant Video hosts a number of martial arts films produced by the Hong Kong-based Shaw Brothers studio during the 1960s and 1970s, and Netflix offers a similar amount of contemporary Chinese-language films and television programmes. Furthermore, in 2014, when research for this thesis began, the British Film Institute (BFI) hosted the season “A Century of Chinese Cinema” which contained 84 films from across the history of Chinese filmmaking. These were shown to audiences in cinemas, through DVD releases, and their BFI Player streaming service for over four months.

This is an impressive circulation of Chinese cinema in the UK whose presence is significantly more complex than a simple boom in availability. Indeed, outside of the BFI's season, in 2014 only one Chinese-language film appeared on general release in Britain, *The Grandmaster* (2013, Wong Kar-wai). One production is an alarmingly low statistic considering that at the time Mainland China's film industry was witnessing its “golden age” (Yueh, 2014) with a market “going gangbusters” (Kuo, 2014). Equally, none of these films occupy the same cultural spaces, nor do they necessarily represent the same kind of “Chinese cinema”. Some have been particularly successful in the marketplace. In the years between 2000 and 2010, three of the ten highest grossing foreign-language films at the UK box office were in Mandarin Chinese (BFI, 2011: 43). These were all martial arts narratives that screened at both multiplex chain cinemas and what are colloquially known as “arthouse” venues: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000, Ang Lee), *Hero* (2002, Zhang Yimou) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004, Zhang

Yimou)¹. Others have been prosperous with critics but only hosted by arthouse cinemas. Three of the films listed in influential film magazine *Sight and Sound*'s "films of the decade" were Chinese-language productions of this nature: *In the Mood for Love* (2000, Wong Kar-wai), *Yi Yi* (2000, Edward Yang) and *Platform* (2000, Jia Zhangke).

These films offer different kinds of Chinese cinemas, in terms of their cultural character (regions of production, languages, ethnicities, politics, art histories) and their generic aesthetic strategies. They also occupy a variety of spaces that contest the notion of a singular British film culture as even solely in a theatrical sense these films are supported by a diverse collection of venues each with their own social, cultural, and institutional positioning. It is the complexity and dynamism of this moment that inspired this thesis and its three central goals. These are: first, to map the circulation of Chinese-language film in British film cultures to understand how "Chinese cinema" is discursively formulated for audiences across the UK; second, to investigate the impact of this circulation on the processes of film programming and selection; and third, to foreground and analyse the extent to which perceptions of "Chineseness" intersect these otherwise film-specific processes. The diversity of the current moment is ultimately fascinating for a contemporary researcher, but film studies lacks an existing methodological framework through which to analyse it. This thesis offers a new methodology in this regard.

Studies of film circulation

Contemporary film studies is a diverse discipline, yet textual analysis remains its prominent form of investigation. It is only relatively recently that scholars have turned their attention to the cultures and contexts in which films are created, consumed, and established as valuable through processes of canonisation. This is observed in Graeme Turner's edited collection, *The Film Studies Reader*, published shortly after the millennium and containing 32 essays that showcase the growing interdisciplinarity of the discipline. The collection seeks to showcase "the benefit of some relatively new disciplinary influences from cultural studies, television studies, audience studies or

¹ Films are referenced in this thesis in the following way: *Film Title* (Year, Director). There is no dedicated filmography as information is included in in text citations.

ethnography, and social history”(Turner, 2002: 1). However, while the collection is introduced in this way as indicative of the move away from formal analysis in film studies, almost all of the essays within it prioritise textual characteristics. Of the five essays within this 32 that foreground “audiences and consumption” none can be said to focus on topics that are not, in turn, used to inform the writer's understanding of their case studies' textual characteristics.

The reluctance to break away from discussions of film form is in part because in the relatively recent turn toward studies of industry practice, a majority of investigations focus on cultures of production. Particularly where ideas of national cinemas are concerned, scholars lean toward film *industries* and shifting trends within them as they intersect with changes in the funding and technologies of production as well as the influence of external factors including social change and government intervention. This has been true for recent studies of discrete international industries in, for example, Italy (Nicoli, 2016), India (Ganti, 2012), and Britain: from Geoffrey Macnab's (1993) study of *J.Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* to Sian Barber's (2013) diverse investigation of the British film industry of the 1970s. The findings of these publications are valuable and do a great deal of good in contextualising the development of trends in cinematic production. They are, however, ancillary to the study of the circulation of films in international contexts and within these adoptions of “new interdisciplinary influences” it remains rarer still to see a focus on distribution, exhibition or circulation.

The only unified academic intervention in this regard has centred on the role played by the international film festival network in the global circulation of various national cinemas. A collection of academics working across European and English-speaking territories have produced a vital and significant body of literature on the extent to which the economics and politics of the festival are responsible for how international audiences understand, and are encouraged to consume, global productions. Marijke de Valck's (2007) seminal *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephelia* has spearheaded this recent academic movement, but her observations have been corroborated by Skadi Loist (2008, 2013), Dudley Andrew (2010), Thomas Elsaesser (2005), Felicia Chan (2011), and Mark Peranson (2009) to name a few. From a base at the University of St Andrews, Dina Iordanova has co-edited

an annual *Film Festival Yearbook Series* which, since 2009, has acted as a useful repository of this diverse literature. This work has deconstructed the Euro-American understanding of global cinema and its importance should not be understated. However, few, if any, of these studies continue their line of investigation into national reception contexts: into what happens *after* the festival. Those that have tend to focus on discrete, individual processes within film circulation: whether distribution, exhibition, or reception. Again, these prove illuminating, but all are held back by their singular focus.

Studies of distribution in this regard are rare, but they recontextualise understandings of cinema that have previously been assumed to result entirely from formal experimentation. Ramon Lobato and Mark Ryan (2011: 188) note that distribution is a topic “commonly assumed to be outside the remit of film studies, as though distributors merely facilitate (rather than fundamentally shape) audience-text relations”. However, through the case study of horror films, these scholars show that definitions of genre, commonly discussed in film studies through shared aesthetic characteristics, are dependent on processes of distribution in the first instance: distribution practices “set the terms of the interplay between texts and across genres, as the availability and cultural prominence of generic 'ingredients' is contingent upon effective distribution” (Lobato and Ryan, 2011: 192). These landmark observations should have encouraged a paradigm shift in contemporary scholarship but this is yet to take place. In the British context, most studies of distribution eschew formal qualities entirely to compliment these considerations of genre with considerations of film canons. Charlotte Crofts (2011) and Stuart Hanson (2007), for example, have both discussed the digitisation of projection equipment in Britain's independent cinema network to note the impact this change has had on the distribution of “specialist” films and the programming possibilities of smaller venues. The same has been done on the impact of high “market concentration” in Britain's distribution industry (Pardo and Sanchez-Tabernero, 2012). These observations have been corroborated by industry practitioners through interviews printed in academic journals (Henderson, 2009) that show how the canon of cinema depends more on avenues of access and distribution than it does formal achievement.

A more common focus in studies of British film cultures has been on exhibition

and the changes beckoned by the proliferation of multiplex cinemas following the late 1970s. Studies by Paul McDonald (2010) and Stuart Hanson (2000) have taken the case study of multiplexes to promote the utility of using programming as its own “text” to study. Elsewhere, Geoff Brown (2000), Justin Smith (2005), and Hanson (2013) have integrated analyses of consumer habits, economic structures, geographies, and architectural design to note the ways the proliferation of the multiplex has indelibly changed British film cultures following the move away from regional, urban venues. These British examples compliment a growing international study of exhibition cultures and their wide-reaching effects on social and economic practice in various national contexts. The *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* journal has proven a particularly fertile place for this kind of work (Roy, 2013; Chua, 2012), occasionally with specific regard to Chinese-language film, as shown by S. Srinivas (2000) and their observations of how the exhibition of Hong Kong action films informed not just Indian film production, but also the development of regional exhibition venues and audience practices.

An encouraging development in these studies of cultural contexts is observed by Hayley Trowbridge in a literature review of contemporary analyses of distribution and exhibition, published in the *New Review of Film and Television Studies*. The very fact of its publication indicating the increasing importance of this kind of work, Trowbridge (2013: 228) observes that “the concept of circulation as opposed to distribution is gaining momentum within the cultural studies and media studies circles”. The “circulation” of Trowbridge’s discussion, as observed through the work of Lobato (2010) and Jenkins et al (2013), refers to audience-led distribution thanks to technological developments and the newly opened potential of the internet and “bottom-up” cultural practice. Technological developments problematise the “top-down” understanding of institutionally-supported distribution and exhibition practices which has, in turn, warranted the use of this new terminology in the study of a film’s movement. Such work has been criticised for its “Youtopian” rhetoric and its overemphasis of the democratising potential of contemporary media devices (Trowbridge, 2013: 229) and in this thesis I posit another definition of “circulation” that curtails these problems.

“Circulation”, as it is used in this project, accommodates both distribution and exhibition but positions them within their wider cultural contexts by integrating

considerations of surrounding determinants that dictate a film's positioning. In other words, circulation is used to refer to the movement of film as it depends not just on discrete practices of distribution and exhibition, but how these process are in dialogue with a variety tastemakers and institutional conventions, social and economic trends independent of cinema, and regional divisions, to name just a few examples. Studies of circulation in this regard are few but ongoing. Under this umbrella I would include Valentina Vitali's (2008) investigation of the functional relationship between the activities of film critics and the availability of films, noting through a case study of Taiwan-based director Hou Hsiao-hsien the role played by cultural expectations on the circulation of international film; and Mark Glancy's (2011) analysis of *Picturegoer*, a British film magazine during World War II, that reveals the surprising heterogeneity of British film cultures and the possibilities for consumption therein. Developing the observations of the film festival network noted above, Julian Stringer (2011), Melanie Selfe (2010, 2013) and Mazdon and Wheatley (2010) have produced particularly revelatory pieces on the role played by tastemakers and cultural institutions in the circulation of foreign-language films in Britain. Through case studies of Japanese and French cinema respectively, these studies reveal the extent to which Britain's domestic understanding of discrete national cinemas owes more to the structures and processes of film circulation in Britain than it does the production industries of these nations.

These studies compliment those of distribution and exhibition because they observe the importance of the cultures that set the parameters within which these industry practices take place. Of all the sections of film circulation discussed above, none are isolated, despite their study often being so. All take place within a wider cultural system whose values need to be investigated because they are themselves loaded with preconceptions and guided motives that are not impartial or without contention. We can see these processes in effect through recent studies of British film cultures which have observed the specific biases and inferences that have been consciously built by institutions eager to *create* a homogeneous cultural space. An important recent edited collection on the BFI by Christopher Dupin and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (2014) compiles a number of essays that detail attempts by the institute to, through government support, extend a centripetal command of British film cultures. Since the 1950s, at least, when the British government proposed that the BFI “extend

its influence outside London” (Selfe, 2014: 117), the institute has worked across cultural and regional divisions to promote specific ideas of reading their perceived ideas of cinematic appreciation and the international film canon. Dupin and Nowell-Smith (2014: 1) observe that “anybody in Britain whose interest in the cinema extends beyond what’s on at the local multiplex will at some point in their lives have taken advantage of some service or activity performed or supported by the British Film Institute” through its involvement in, at least: film societies, museums, exhibition, distribution, production, preservation, journalism, education, or television programming.

This valuable edited collection outlines the various internal and external conflicts that have helped shape the contemporary form of the BFI, showing that cultures can be manufactured by those in powerful, institutionally supported positions, but that these are rarely uncontested. Therefore, when the term “British film culture” is used in this thesis it is so knowingly as a loaded and contentious term. I show in this thesis that despite the BFI's aspirations as “official” gatekeepers of Britain's cultural practice, British film culture is a heterogeneous concept that is in constant conflict and competition: it is fluid and dependent on a variety of changing and intersecting regional, social and economic cultural factors. The complexity of these competing cultural spaces has been avoided by scholars because of its unwieldy nature. All the studies listed above of film festivals, distribution, exhibition, and circulation are worthwhile and vital but they predominantly limit their methodological focus to these individual and discrete industrial cases. Nobody has thus far achieved the objectives of this thesis to study all of this heterogeneity and its messy, intersectional composition. In this regard I anchor my analysis not in a singular case study of industrial and cultural processes, but in the individual focus on Chinese-language films: not in an area of industry or culture, but in the discursive idea of a “Chinese cinema”. These films act as the unifying thread pulled through the thesis that brings together all of the methodological approaches of those listed above, into a new, encompassing framework.

“Chinese cinema” and “British film cultures” represent complex and heterogeneous concepts, but the localised case studies of this thesis help to elucidate our understandings of both and point toward the phenomenon whereby each informs

the other discursively through various cultural activities. This is important not just for what it tells us about film cultures and their roles in the curation of national cinemas, but also for how it informs us of the cultural processes that have guided the academic of study of Chinese-language films. In particular, English-language Chinese film studies has, since its inception, wrestled with the desire to propose a single term that unifies “Chinese” productions without problematic inferences that all attempts inevitably promote. Chinese is a loaded adjective used to refer to ethnicities, cultures, languages, politics and various geographical territories that is complicated further when extended to a “Chinese cinema” and introduced to the territorial diversities of production, distribution, and exhibition in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China, at least. Since some of the earliest organised efforts to study Chinese-language film in academia, international scholars have attempted to counter this complexity through the “process of mapping” (Berry, 1991: 2). In 2011, Song Hwee Lim offered a history of the discourse on Chinese cinema by observing six of the most prominent definitions, all of which have had studies dedicated to them. These include: Chinese cinema(s) (Berry, 1991; Browne et al, 1994), Taiwan Cinema, Hong Kong cinema (Teo, 1996), transnational Chinese cinemas (Lu, 1997), Chinese-language cinema (Lu and Yeh, 2005), diasporic Chinese cinema, and Sinophone cinema (Yue and Khoo, 2014), all of which bear unwanted inferences and meanings².

Of these various attempts to craft a unified and appropriate single term for “Chinese cinema”, none foreground the role played by film circulation, choosing instead to focus on textual qualities and production industries. Circulation, however, plays an absolutely commanding role in dictating both the selection of films and how they are posited to academics in international. I have first-hand experience of this phenomenon, when I was prohibited from writing about films from Taiwan at British universities because, as they were unreleased in this territory, I could not legally source them. This is one informal example of processes alluded to by James Udden (2011) who, through statistical analysis, notes that Chinese-speaking film directors receive

² It is for these reasons that, in this thesis, Chinese names are written out in their most commonly used English-language version. As this is a thesis on the circulation of Chinese cinema in British film cultures, I opt to use the names most commonly seen in British film cultures. I believe this to be the most responsible method (rather than prioritising either Mandarin or Cantonese pronunciations, as each have political inferences I am keen to avoid) and the clearest option for my methodological approach.

more attention in academia when they are well represented at international film festivals compared to those whose international circulation bypasses the festival network. While academia has its own cultures which define fashions and general practices, the objects of its study are often those that are made available (and situated) by the gatekeepers of film circulation.

In considering how Chinese cinema is discursively formulated for audiences in Britain through the processes of film circulation, my methodology contextualises the kinds of semantic ambitions we see in Chinese film studies within the cultures that dictate them. The term “Chinese cinema” is used in this thesis knowingly as a discursive construct and it is employed only when I am consciously referring to the idea of a national cinema, presented as so by key players in British film cultures. Otherwise the term “Chinese-language film” is used because, of the number of attempts to unify this diverse collection of films, this is the least problematic due to its lack of regional prioritisation or suggestion of unifying cultural traits. This term is not without its problems – it does infer a collection of films whose productions and narratives are geographically situated in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan – and these loaded meanings are kept in mind in my use of the term here.

A new methodological approach

There is currently no available framework that could be used to satisfy the requirements of my diverse research goals. They require a methodology that envelopes the study of film festivals, distribution, exhibition, and circulation, that can inform us of the reasons dictating availability and notions of value in film cultures, all while grounding the semantic skirmishes of Chinese film studies within an example of their hitherto understudied contexts. In light of this absence, I have worked to develop a new methodological approach which incorporates strategies from all of these previously disparate studies of film cultures with a guiding influence from Reception Studies and Cultural Studies schools of thought. As noted above, Chinese-language films are used to anchor these diverse discussions and offer continuity throughout the following chapters.

Reception studies is a theoretical approach to the study of film that first

appeared in a significant form in the late 1980s, defined not as a “way of interpreting works but an attempt to understand their changing intelligibility by identifying the codes and interpretive assumptions that give them meaning for different audiences in different periods” (Culler, qtd in Staiger, 2005: 2). As partial grounding for studies of film cultures, reception studies directs focus away from aesthetic characteristics toward the analysis of contexts of reception in order to highlight the role played by “discursive and social situations” on the construction of cinematic meaning (Klinger, 1997: 108). This research is predominantly historical in focus and investigates industrial, social or political areas – such as cultural policy, film reviews, or distribution and exhibition histories – to reconstruct a sense of the past in order to situate films within their individual reception contexts. Direct methodological inspiration for my research comes from Barbara Klinger who in her 1997 article “Film history terminable and interminable: recovering the past in reception studies” lays out potential research strategies for a scholar interested in such a project. Klinger writes of a research method that is a variation of the Marxist “historical materialist” approach which works on the assumption that social and cultural codes in any historical moment result from economic factors determining the production and exchange of goods.

For Klinger (1997: 112), the prime objective of materialist approaches is not simply to secure new, contextualized meanings for texts, but to attempt a “historical *explanation* of the event of interpreting a text” by tracing the “range of [interpretative] strategies available in particular social formations” (emphasis in original). Once this meta-interpretive move is made, questions of value, continuously at the heart of interpretive enterprise, become themselves contextualized. That is, the aesthetic or political value of a film is no longer a matter of its intrinsic characteristics, but of the way those characteristics are deployed by various intertextual and historical forces. Klinger’s meta-interpretive move foregrounds the “questions of value” that support the cultural consumption of films at any given historical moment. A “totalized history” will never be entirely achievable for a researcher, as such, one must decide which social formations are most important and which “intertextual and historical forces” best reveal the questions of value that have defined the reception of certain films. The goal of such an approach is thus to provide “a sense of what the historical prospects were for viewing at a given time by illuminating the meanings made available within that

moment”: to understand “how social forces invite viewers to assume positions, giving us a range of possible influences over spectatorship, without securing an embodied viewer” (Klinger, 1997: 14).

The utility of Klinger's methodological statement for the study of film cultures increases when it is used in conjunction with observations of cultural studies and the influence therein of sociology and the work of Pierre Bourdieu. While rejecting the idea of a totalised history, it can be difficult in the study of film cultures to identify those “historical forces” most influential over spectatorship and the circulation of films. Indeed, in her seminal study of *Film Cultures*, Janet Harbord (2002: 2) observed that “film culture” represents everything “between production and consumption”, between “the text and the bus stop”. Echoing Raymond Williams' (1961: 48) proclamation of culture to be “most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity”, Harbord instead grounds her study in “sites where the value of film is produced”. Notions of value, in this sense, develop a number of theories posited by Bourdieu (1984, 1990) on questions of taste and identifying the processes that cultivate certain objects as valuable within any cultural system. In particular, this work follows Bourdieu's observation of the indispensable role played by “cultural intermediaries”: those institutional practices, “taste makers” and “need merchants” who occupy the middle ground between production and consumption, and whose primary function is to maintain a culture in which each end of the operation works as efficiently as possible.

In this thesis I equally reject ambitions for a totalised history, taking as my focus instead discrete historical moments and the most powerful cultural intermediaries within each. Acknowledging the ubiquity and institutional support of the institution observed by Dupin and Nowell-Smith (2014), I posit the BFI, those associated with it, and those that share a similar cultural and intellectual space, as the default cultural gatekeepers of foreign-language film in the Britain. Including “quality” critics at national newspapers and other film magazines, Britain's independent cinema network, and smaller institutions similar to the BFI – like the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London – these bodies are all discussed in this thesis under the umbrella of a “middlebrow” culture. Working with characteristics of the middlebrow detailed by Laurence Napper (2009) in his study of middlebrow production in the British film industry, I use the term in this thesis to also refer to a culture of reception and

distinction as observed by Pierre Bourdieu and others. This is a middlebrow culture of film circulation as alluded to by Melanie Selfe's (2014: 86) observation of the BFI's regional film societies as a collection of invested curators who "criticised both the highbrows who disdainfully rejected the cinema and the habitual filmgoing of the masses".

The details of this middlebrow are developed throughout the thesis, introduced in detail in Chapter Two, which pulls the authority of this space through a collection of emblematic case studies and time periods in the history of Chinese-language films in the UK. These focal points have been determined through research of peaks and troughs in the availability of Chinese-language films and their appearances in British discourse, alongside important moments in the developments of British film cultures. While framing the middlebrow as the gatekeepers of foreign-language film in Britain, I explore the various moments of conflict whereby their authority and hegemony has been challenged by new voices. The focus on conflict highlights disparities in understandings of value and situates each variation within its social, economic and cultural contexts, ultimately revealing and detailing the heterogeneity of British film cultures and Chinese cinema over the last 60 years.

Using Chinese-language films as my case study, in this thesis I offer moments of cultural conflict to deconstruct in Britain's cultures those concealed systems that curate what Paul du Gay et al (1997: 8) have called the "shared, taken-for-granted knowledge" that supports how all objects are understood. These are the politically and socially motivated processes which create "conventions and institutions, through which the meanings that are valued by the community are shared and made active" (Hall, 1980a: 55). I unpack these processes through the analysis of the systems that dictate the value of Chinese-language films in Britain: from critical discussions to marketing materials, home media and theatrical release strategies and designs, television programmes and newspaper articles, down to the activities of snack manufacturers. The "value" of this methodology does not lie in what it tells us about audience preference or practice – that is not of explicit concern here – but of how these institutional conventions feed back into themselves and the circulation of Chinese cinema in Britain in terms of programming, selection, availability and presence in British film culture.

There has recently been an example, offered by a handful of scholars, of what

this work might look like, though it is limited by its focus on one cultural intermediary. This is the recent and short-lived burst of academic activity on UK-based distributor Tartan and their “Asia Extreme” sub-label. Operating between 2001 and 2003, Tartan Asia Extreme was an operation that specialised in distributing films from across East Asia which contained purportedly “extreme” elements: generally sex, violence, and supernatural narratives. The distributor picked and chose films from separate regions across East Asia, most notably from the “J-horror” boom in Japan and its films including *Ringu* (1998, Hideo Nakata) and *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2002, Takashi Shimizu) and the revenge narratives of South Korea led by *Oldboy* (2003, Park Chan-wook) and *A Bittersweet Life* (2005, Kim Jee-woon). The distributor acquired a handful of Hong Kong productions which were themselves influenced by these international trends, including horror films *The Eye* (2002, Danny and Oxide Pang) and *Dumplings* (2004, Fruit Chan), but these were in the minority.

Focusing on Tartan Asia Extreme as a cultural intermediary between East Asia's film industries and the British consumer, studies of the sub-label all share a methodological approach: analysing curation choices, marketing materials and exhibition strategies, paying particularly close attention to the portrayal of East Asian cultures in these practices. Their conclusions are a consensus. The label achieved its popularity through an aggressive marketing campaign that channelled cultural expectations in Britain which saw East Asia as a place that was scary, exotic, and Other (Martin, 2015; Dew, 2007; Shin, 2008). In presenting their selection as a representation of “Asian cinema as a whole”, Tartan suggested to the British audience a homogeneous East Asia and a singular film industry that was seeing a unified boom in extreme titles of similar aesthetic and thematic content. In actuality, many of these films were “rather marginal” in their own national film cultures and it was only through Tartan’s productive practice of “genre-fication” that these disparate films came to form a singular canon of the continent’s multiple film histories (Shin, 2008: 2).

Valuable audience research has shown that a majority of Tartan's consumers did not unquestioningly digest the cultural representation offered by the distributor (Pett, 2017) and it has been argued that understanding East Asian cinema to be at risk of misrepresentation in this way actually perpetuates the “myth of...Asian victimhood” that these studies seek to criticise (Frey, 2016). These are certainly valid criticisms of

the work, yet they do not affect the conclusions gleaned by this research regarding the impact of Tartan Asia Extreme on film circulation and characteristics deemed valuable in East Asian cinema by Britain's cultural authorities of the time. For example, the sub-label proved so popular during its short-lived run that chain stores including HMV created dedicated "Asian Extreme" shelf spaces which housed films from a number of distributors in addition to Tartan (Dew, 2007, p. 56). Retail spaces were physically changed by this distributor, which worked to further their curation philosophy beyond both their own acquisitions and their lifespan. The same was true for Britain's distribution and exhibition networks. In 2007, a report from the UK Film Council (2007: 51) designed to increase engagement between young audiences and foreign-language film suggested that distributors should "foreground themes of sex, violence and horror" as "hooks" and ways to garner interest in subtitled films. These suggestions materialised in the UK Film Council and the BFI's funding for the distribution and marketing of the violent Japanese-language samurai film, *13 Assassins* (2010, Takashi Miike).

The Tartan example shows the cultural systems that develop through film circulation which go on to have long-term effects on the shape of international cinemas presented to audiences in Britain. The scholarship on Tartan Asia Extreme also concludes that a number of these circulation characteristics are inherently related to, and intersect with, domestic assumptions about international cultures, societies, ethnicities, politics and art histories. Where the distribution of foreign-language film in the UK is concerned, the process is not just about curating a canon of worthwhile cinema, but also enabling cross-cultural exchange and the presentation of, in my case, Chinese cultures and communities to British audiences. As Lobato and Ryan (2011: 198) state in their study of film distribution, this is not simply the curation of "Asian cinema", but the selective representation of "Asian cultures". The circulation of foreign-language films in Britain ensures that productions go through what David Morley has called a "process of indigenization" in which productions are bent and shaped to align with assumptions that tastemakers and cultural gatekeepers either hold within themselves, or believe to be held in their prospective audience (Morley, 2006, p. 330).

This thesis extends the observations of these studies of Tartan by broadening its research scope across a broad coverage of numerous historical moments and diverse

institutional and cultural case studies. Focusing on the time period between 1954 and 2014, I explore in greater detail how notions of value as they are understood by Bourdieu, Harbord, and Klinger, are invariably inflected with *cultural* assumptions that go beyond abstract notions of cinematic taste. The depth of analysis offered by this broad methodological remit allows me to observe the complexity of developing intersections between evaluative preferences and perceptions of Chineseness as a multifaceted descriptor. Through this new approach, I show that the history of Chinese cinema in Britain has been dictated not just by the general processes through which all foreign-language films reach audiences in Britain, but equally (and often more prominently) by these commanding and conflicting attitudes toward Chinese cultures, politics, and societies. It is impossible to discuss the reception of a Chinese cinema without lending significant attention to the way that adjudicative preferences or distribution practices intersect with contemporaneous understandings of what it means for something to be Chinese.

In this thesis I pull these considerations to the foreground to reveal the extent to which these assumptions have shaped Britain's film cultures. In doing so, I contest that it is most important for English-speaking scholars of Chinese-language film based in international locations to deconstruct and investigate the systems that curate Chinese cinema as an object of study. As Rey Chow (2000: 7) notes of the work of international scholars in the field of China Studies:

to fully confront the issue of Chineseness as a theoretical problem, therefore, it is not sufficient only to point to the lack of attempts to theorize Chineseness as such. It is equally important for us to question the sustained, conspicuous silence in the field of China studies on what it means for certain white scholars to expound so freely on the Chinese tradition, culture, language, history, women and so forth in the postcolonial age; it is also important for us to ask why and how one group of people can continue to pose as the scientific investigators and moral custodians of another culture while the ethnic and racial premises of their own operations remain, as ever, exempt from interrogation.

Through my methodological approach, this thesis foregrounds those cultural, ethnic, and institutional premises of British operations responsible for curating Chinese cinema for regional audiences. I argue that Britain's cultural authorities and tastemakers within its film cultures are equivalent to the scholars Chow discusses in this short extract.

What does it mean, for example, when Rita Barisse (1955a), writing for British publication *Films and Filming* in the 1950s, proclaimed *The White Haired Girl* (1950, Wang Bin) to be the “best” Chinese-language film because it was “the most Chinese” production she had seen? Likewise, what informed BFI critic Tony Rayns’ (1988: 70) lambasting of writers in China for liking *Yellow Earth* (1984, Chen Kaige) less than *Tribulations of a Chinese Gentleman* because he understood the former to be “a far more committedly ‘Chinese’ film”? This thesis unpacks what conceptions of Chineseness these critics are referring to in such writing and notes the implications of these proclamations on our contemporary understanding of Chinese cinema in Britain.

A note on structure

These processes and preferences depend on a complex network of institutional and cultural practices, conceptions of value in disparate social and vocational spaces, and attitudes toward Chineseness therein. Due to this intersectional complexity, it would not make sense to include in this thesis a general and isolated Literature Review beyond that which has been covered in this introduction and methodological statement. Instead, each chapter contains its own review of academic and industry literature most relevant to its theoretical framework or historical moment. For example, Chapter One addresses the lack of Chinese-language films in the contemporary turn to film festival studies and their accompanying investigations of national film cultures and thus includes a review of the key issues and contributors in this field. This approach is useful because I use the discoveries of my new methodological approach to rethink and problematise a number of academic schools of thought in ways that would not be productive in a general literature review. The overall structure of the thesis has been dictated by my methodology and its need to discuss those most powerful in shaping the circulation of Chinese-language films across the UK. As such, there are a number of key moments that this thesis has to centre on. These moments are as follows: Chinese cinema and the consecration of “national cinemas” through the festival network, 1954 – 1982; the *kung fu* craze (Hunt, 2003) of the 1970s and its challenge to the authority of the middlebrow; the emergence of film studies, followed by the arrival of China's Fifth Generation filmmakers in the early

1980s; the home media proliferation of Hong Kong action cinema, led by entrepreneurial enthusiasts, in the 1990s and early 2000s; and the ubiquity of Chinese “auteurs” in 21st century middlebrow discourse. These have been chosen as focal points because they are times in which Chinese-language films have been particularly plentiful and contributed to moments of key cultural conflict and change in British film cultures. In terms of availability, Chapter One is an exception because it focuses on Chinese cinema's relative absence in Britain. However, this chapter is necessary because it observes the ways the international circulation of Chinese-language film is unique and introduces Chinese cinema into the academic inquiries of film festivals and circulation of which it has previously been largely absent.

While the thesis is laid out chronologically, its structure is dictated first and foremost by the developing conceptions of Chineseness as they intersect with the curation processes of Chinese cinema in the UK. A serendipitous benefit to this linear structure is that it lends a clarity to my discussions of British film cultures. These have developed over time so that, for example, the same film critic working in 1960 and 1990 can hold notably different investments in Chinese cinema, which would become confusing if detailed out of sequence. I show in this thesis that despite the intimidating complexity of film cultures and the necessity in their study to engage with numerous heterogeneous conflicting processes and institutional practices, such research can glean insights into the foundations on which contemporary studies are based. Studies like this one deconstruct taken-for-granted assumptions that dictate what is considered valuable – and what is available – in international cinemas, thus providing a new toolset with which to analyse understandings of national cinemas and film cultures. This new methodological approach provides the framework needed to comprehend a moment as exciting and dynamic as the current one for Chinese cinema in the UK, thanks to its necessary historical survey.

1. Curiosity is Awakened: Incompatibility and Contrasting Chinas in the Early Middlebrow Response

Film festival studies and national cinemas

Within the recent turn to studies of film circulation and those cultural intermediaries responsible for the curation of national cinemas, discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the most substantial body of literature has centred on the activities of international film festivals. These studies investigate what Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (2010: 4) understand as “art cinema”: a collection of films that, though they could be said to share aesthetic strategies, are unified primarily by the ways they are circulated internationally. The global circulation of art cinema has relied predominantly on the international film festival circuit as the first point of contact between films and international audiences. Productions shown at annual events in Cannes, Berlin and Venice, to name only three, enter the vernacular of critics and the rosters of distributors around the world, ensuring that these events are the most effective necessary intermediary step in the presentation and circulation of films into various national contexts. The festival is a crucial centre of knowledge production in global film cultures, responsible historically for shaping which films audiences and scholars see, which films are respected or neglected, and what the parameters for film appreciation have been (Wong, 2011: 1).

While integral gate-keepers in the transnational flows of international film production, the selective processes of the film festival are not arbitrary: they are bound with sets of values and modes of appreciation of a specific kind of “art” (Andrew, 2010). Historically, this has been a categorisation focused on national distinction, shaping films from shared geographic regions into collections unified by style, political sentiment, production characteristics, and directors. Though, as a medium, cinema has never been inherently bound to national distinctions, the film festival is one of numerous sites through which film industries have been mobilised to symbolically represent (or support) discreet national formations. These practices were at their clearest in the early post-war period, whereby the films provided to festivals by individual nations were selected by government agencies keen to promote geopolitical

agendas through the network (Chan, 2011). Part of a strategy of national distinction, the film festival began to act as a site where “films were exhibited as an expression of national identity and culture”, where “issues of nationality or political relations are negotiated, economic sustainability or profitability is realized, and new practices of cinephilia are initiated” (de Valck, 2007: 92, 16)³.

The “conception of what constitutes the international” on the film festival network is, however, “a fairly limited one” that reveals more about the mechanics of festival curation than it does the state of global film production (Galt and Schoonover, 2010: 4). Contemporary scholarship has shown that the processes of prestigious film festivals have historically been Eurocentric and limiting for international – particularly East Asian – productions (Evans, 2007: 28). Steeped in imperialist traditions of European discovery, the selection processes of historical European film festivals once worked to deny agency in, and failed to accommodate, a great deal of East Asian and other non-European productions. These events proffered a history of film “from Italian neorealism’s “discovery” in the United States to a model of international flows that centred on the West Europe-North American axis, including only a few exemplary filmmakers from cinematic cultures beyond that axis” (Galt and Schoonover, 2010: 4). As evidence for these claims, Galt and Schoonover consulted early additions of *The International Film Guide* – a document that “powerfully indexes the changing discursive terrain of art cinema” – for discussions of Asian filmmakers. Satyajit Ray and Akira Kurosawa were the only two names mentioned.

As crucial but contentious sites in the global circulation of Asian and Chinese cinemas, it is important to acknowledge film festivals and their academic observers in this thesis. Some work has begun to deconstruct the mechanisms that lay behind the loaded curation of Chinese cinema on this circuit. One such project is currently being undertaken by the Chinese Film Festival Studies Research Network, an international collection of scholars funded by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council who are focusing their attention on film festivals *within* China to better understand how these events are configured in the Chinese context (Berry, 2013). If their investigation is

³ At the time of writing, nations are becoming less prominent as categories at international film festivals. The London Film Festival has, for example, begun to categorise films by “mood” rather than production base. For the purposes of this chapter and its focus on the middle of the 20th century, the national focus remains pertinent.

moving attention away from the European film festival as an intermediary step in the international life of films toward an initial stage within a domestic Chinese context, my own research relocates attention to the other end: toward what happens to those films when they make it to regional audiences in foreign nations. My methodology continues the parallel scholarship amassing on the dissemination of film festival culture into national and regional contexts which considers primarily how “national cinemas” are maintained through the idiosyncratic film cultures of individual nations. Leading scholars like Julian Stringer (2011), Melani Selfe (2013) and Lucy Mazdon and Catherine Wheatley (2010) have produced compelling studies of the mutually constitutive roles of film festivals, critics and distribution/exhibition networks in the consecration of “Japanese cinema” and “French cinema” in the UK respectively.

Stringer’s discussion of Japanese cinema is a particularly important piece in its clarification of the role of the film critic in disseminating specific and narrow ideas about national cinemas both discursively and through their involvement with film exhibition. Historically, within Britain the critic has extended a kind of centripetal command of specialised film culture across the country; seeking an imagined community formed as a combined reflection of their own aesthetic judgements and the films that are available to them at festivals abroad. Stringer focuses on an individual case study of BFI’s influential film magazine *Sight & Sound*, refusing a “totalising perspective” to glean insights from the “local and specific”. He observes that, as the “premier highbrow UK cinema magazine” which self-consciously “aspired to detect and pass on knowledge about aesthetic quality in contemporary world cinema”, *Sight and Sound* and the critics writing for it largely determined for the British reader what was valuable (and what was available to see) in the contemporary Japanese-language cinema (Stringer, 2011: 64). These were entirely films seen at European film festivals, whose positive assessments by the magazine’s writers informed acquisition choices of distributors, film societies, and curators of dedicated seasons at London’s National Film Theatre (NFT).

Focusing his investigation on the canonisation process within Britain after the film festival, Stringer’s writing reveals as much about the constitution of British film cultures as it does the shaping of “Japanese cinema”. He goes as far to suggest that these films were used “to aid in the formation of British national film culture” in the

late 1950s, by which point their characteristics had been appropriated and given specific meaning within the British context. “On the back of this appropriation” Stringer (2011: 74) observes, “complex relations among the print media, cultural institutions, government bodies, regional cinema clubs and a new metropolitan film festival have been forged”. Japanese-language films became a “cultural currency”, traded with by players in British film cultures to define their own practice and the small number of films discussed in these spaces were liked because they “served the interests of the cultural institutions extremely well” (Stringer, 2011: 76). In this case, the activities of *Sight and Sound* worked to establish a specific kind of Japanese cinema as valuable – what Stringer calls a “boutique cinema” – and ensured that readers depended on the knowledge of their critic to understand what was “good” about this kind of filmmaking. Critics worked to ensure the necessity and preservation of their own role in enlightening audiences about these films, ultimately cultivating their own “boutique identity as a form of currency”, accruing capital that raised their status and profile above that of other cultural commentators (Stringer, 2011: 65).

This research convincingly suggests that the British canon of “Japanese cinema” (and therefore, to some extent, the Euro-American understanding) has been shaped largely as a side product of domestic power struggles as these have intersected with critical preferences and the prestigious European film festival. Following from Stringer, this chapter explores how these acts of identity formation, these pursuits of cultural currency, and the personal practices of influential tastemakers worked to discursively formulate Chinese cinema in Britain in the mid-20th century. While Stringer's case study focused only on the one magazine, *Sight and Sound*, I introduce a number of other cultural intermediaries and tastemaking voices that existed in the same cultural space. I refer to this space as the “middlebrow”. Colloquially this term has a pejorative tone, but I do not use it disparagingly in this thesis. Rather, it is used to refer to a specific form of film intellectualism and education driven by institutions like the BFI and its competitors who wrote and circulated films to a similar audience. Laurence Napper (2009: 116) suggests that middlebrow culture was nurtured by both the Britain's government institutions and educated audiences to “protect British culture generally from the vulgarities of the unfettered commodity and leisure capitalism originating from America”. It retained its status in the “middle” of the cultural spectrum through

its negative co-option by the “high intelligentsia” who distanced themselves from this culture to protect their activities from “the vulgarities of the general educated audience”. This tangible cultural positioning is clear across the magazines, institutions, and tastemaking activities discussed in this chapter, and the definition of the middlebrow as it shaped in opposition to the commercial marketplace is developed throughout later chapters.

Through this analysis we can see that Chinese cinema had a very different history of international circulation to the majority of those “national cinemas” that have informed the contemporary boom in film festival scholarship. As such, Chinese cinema is employed in this chapter to further “art cinema” scholarship with an anomalous example and to better understand the contexts into which Chinese cinema, as a discursive construct, first appeared in British film cultures. I show that an air of expectancy began in the 1950s for a worthwhile Chinese cinema to arrive in Europe, but that this optimism was continually eroded by an incompatibility between the aesthetics of available Chinese-language films and the expectations of Britain's cultural intermediaries. Thanks to this incompatibility, Chinese productions were relegated outside the discourse of valuable art cinema and contained as artefacts whose use was only in documenting China's contemporary society and politics. Across this process, assumptions of European superiority moderated the possibilities for Chinese cinema's adoption and circulation in British film cultures. Productions from Mainland China form the majority of this chapter's investigation, as these films were by far the most commonly discussed and circulated by Britain's tastemakers and cultural intermediaries in the art cinema network.

Mainland China on the film festival circuit

Chinese-language productions were generally absent from the European film festivals of the 1950s and 1960s that were vital in the international canonisation of films from Japan, India, and other global production sites. This lack was not initially caused by inactivity in Chinese production industries, resulting instead from political tensions between international powers and the developing governments in Mainland China and Taiwan. In the 1960s, at least, films from Mainland China were not eligible to

be accepted and screened at the Berlin Film Festival because their country had no “embassy or consulate” in West Berlin (Baker, 1960). Similar anxieties ran well into the 1980s in the UK, where questions were raised in the British parliament regarding the ethics of showing Mainland China's films at the NFT when the country was not officially “recognised by the West” (Whitaker, 1986; 19). These were film specific examples of the international community's desire as it developed in the post-war period to cut China off from United Nations activity amid fears that China was “the West's most deadly enemy” (Our Own Correspondent, 1954: 1; Clark, 1954: 6).

In addition to international grievances, within China the government of the People's Republic centred on anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist measures to detach the country from the influence of Western powers (Chen, 2010: 4 – 6). This was drastically different to the policies of the Japan of Stringer's focus, which took on a socio-political strategy to redefine itself as a “nation of culture” and to reintegrate into the international community following wartime tensions (Saikawa, 2016). Films played a key role in this strategy: with over 500 produced annually in Japan (the most for any nation in the world (Nagib, 2006: 31)), there were plenty of options to choose from to support this government strategy at the international film festival. The opposite was true in Mainland China at this time where, in addition to growing political seclusion, the campaigns of the Cultural Revolution almost completely halted film production. No fiction films were made here between 1966 and 1970 and very few were produced in the remaining six years of the campaign (Clark, 1987: 124 – 126). As a result of these domestic and international policies, Mainland China and its productions were not part of the same dominant discourse as other films of this era. This raises interesting questions for those trying to delineate Chinese cinema's reception in the UK through the same methodological and theoretical frameworks that have proved so fruitful for analysing the productions of other countries.

First and foremost is the slight number of Chinese-language films making it to European film festivals and, therefore, British film cultures. I have not found any references to a Chinese-language film playing at the Cannes Film Festival before 1959 and between this year and 1974 there are only accessible records of 4 productions: *Tang Fu Yu Sheng Nu* (1958, Tien Shen), *The Enchanting Shadow* (1960, Li Han-hsiang),

*The Magnificent Concubine*⁴ (1962, Li Han-hsiang), and *Empress Wu Tse-Tien* (1963, Li Han-hsiang), three of which came from the same director. A minority of films benefited from the Edinburgh International Film Festival's (EIFF) incentive to screen productions that had not been shown previously on the festival circuit – one such production was *Letter with the Feathers* (1954, Shi Hui), a film from Mainland China that was awarded the festival's Best Film accolade during the 1955 event – but these appearances were rare. According to Peter Graham (1965: 44), the first “official” visit from Mainland China to a European film festival was in 1965’ where the most notable production was a “delightful encomium of the fifty species of frog that inhabit the republic”. The film was not taken particularly seriously by the writer for the popular magazine *Films and Filming* who covered the event, however. Nowhere to be found are the adorations of artistic vision and talent that Stringer has found the British critics threw at Japanese cinema. Instead, the most notable part of this film screening for Graham (1965: 44) was that the Chinese delegates he spoke to at the event “were most chagrined to hear that Britain has only two or three kinds of frog to help in pest control”.

This leads to a second obstacle presented to Chinese-language films when they first arrived in Britain: the majority of critics and tastemakers were uninterested in taking them seriously and many did not mention any of these films at all. *Sight and Sound* and their partner publication *Monthly Film Bulletin* published annual reports of major film festivals like the one in Cannes. These were features that ensured the tastes which were “tentatively formed of the immediacy of festival going” were consecrated for the expectant British readership and curators of film societies therein (Lovell, 1972: 7) and vital for the Japanese cinema of Stringer's analysis. Yet, of the four Chinese-language films that played at Cannes, only one earned a passing mention in either publication. In Richard Roud's write-up of the 1962 festival, “Hong Kong(/China)” is considered one of the “countries with previously undistinguished festival records [which] managed to come up with surprises” for the European audience. The “surprise” was simply in its appearance at the festival however as, for Roud, *The Magnificent Concubine* paled in comparison to the films of its neighbouring Japan. The film took “the same story” as one of Kenji Mizoguchi's famous films, “omitted the

⁴ *The Magnificent Concubine* did not just appear at the festival, it won the 1962 Grand Prix for Best Interior Photography and Colour.

poetry, and turned it into a prettified Chinese calendar” (Roud, 1962: 130).

This represents the totality of Chinese-language films in the festival write-ups of *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin* during a period when these editorials were vital to the development of the contemporary Japanese-language cinema within British film cultures. If Chinese cinema did not occupy a meaningful position within these important parts of the festival ecosystem until the late 1980s then we cannot discuss its international canonisation in the same way that other national cinemas have been analysed in relation to these international flows of film. This requires further investigations into the specific ways Chinese-language films entered British film cultures. Despite rarely appearing at these festivals and their write-ups, it would be incorrect to say that Chinese-language films had no presence in the UK. As I will go on to show: numerous features and reviews *were* published in British magazines during this period from writers who went to China and its neighbouring regions personally; at least four feature-length Chinese-language films were released in the country between 1952 and 1970⁵; and in this time, in 1960, there was at least one dedicated programme of Chinese-language films at the NFT. The difference here is that these films did not generally travel to Britain through the more common film festival ecosystem.

The Mainland Chinese example foregrounds the formative role of taste-makers within Britain's national contexts who relied on their own assumptions and practices to define and promote Chinese cinema. For these reasons, the need to analyse Britain's domestic circulation of Chinese-language films and the specific characteristics of those taste-makers responsible for framing their consumption is paramount. In his discussion of cultural currency, Stringer (2011: 76) observes that “Japanese cinema became appropriated...in a battle between the bastions of metropolitan film culture and the various regional, at times even counter-cultural peripheries”. While Chinese-language films may have had a very different history at the film festival to their Japanese counterparts, their coverage in British publications and their associated exhibition in the mid-20th century show how they were equally used as ammunition between divergent organisations as part of a strategy for cultural authority. We can look to these

⁵ These films are shown in Appendix Two, a list of all Chinese-language films reviewed by *Monthly Film Bulletin*. While inclusion in this publication does not serve as an indication of the breadth of a film's distribution and exhibition, it does indicate a presence, however small, in Britain's cinemas.

conflicts between Britain's tastemakers and cultural intermediaries to garner a more holistic understanding of the characteristics of Chinese Cinema's discursive formulation in Britain.

While Chinese-language films were absent from the film festival network, it was still those middlebrow authorities that usually dealt with the festival that were responsible for the majority of the discourse on Chinese cinema in Britain at the time. This chapter includes analysis of those magazines and publications, emblematic of different stakeholders within British film cultures, who are understood to have been vital in the consumption of foreign-language art cinema. Every mention of films from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong has been noted across a number of publications within this specialised ecosystem, with the most emblematic examples appearing here. The BFI's *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin* are referenced as representing an attempted hegemony of taste as discussed by Stringer, Selfe and others; *Films and Filming* is offered as an oppositional voice within this space that circulated to a (larger) audience of similar intellectual standing; and academic counterparts, notably those whose contributors assisted in festival programming, such as *Framework*, are included as a third voice in the discourse.

The BFI response to Chinese cinema

Between 1953 and 1970, four Chinese-language language feature films were released in Britain in a significant enough way to warrant press screenings for critics in London: *The Forbidden City* (1947, Chu Shih-Ling), *Liang Shan-Po and Chu Ying-Tai* (1953, Sang Hu and Huang Sha), *The Letter with the Feathers* and *New Year Sacrifice* (1956, Hu Sang). Little information remains about the extent of their exhibition, however⁶. It is more likely that the majority of the nationwide British public would have access to Chinese-language films only at regional societies whose activities have not been well documented by, or integrated into, Britain's cultural authorities. Most information circulating about Chinese cinema came as editorial content in British

⁶ The magazine *Film Review 1953-4* – which documented “commercial” releases in Britain – states that *Forbidden City* was released in 1953 which suggests this film may have had a larger reach than just central London. This is, however, impossible to confirm at this stage. The reviewer for this publication believed *Forbidden City* to be “the first Chinese feature film to have a commercial showing” in the country (Speed, 1954: 96)

magazines which could not be corroborated by the British reader as the films were simply unavailable. The unique relationship, or lack thereof, between Chinese-language films and the film festival ecosystem presented Britain's film critics with an unusually productive role in their selection and evaluation of Chinese cinema. Most of those who wrote about films from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan had to either travel to these regions personally or individually liaise with contacts positioned there.

As with Stringer's investigation, BFI publications *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin* were particularly prominent gate-keepers in the presentation of Chinese cinema through their self-ascribed responsibility as Britain's "premier" voice in film coverage and also through their active involvement in what Alan Lovell (1972: 7) called the "apparatus of exhibition". BFI critics assisted in the programming of the NFT, the London Film Festival, and the EIFF; and the reach of the BFI's operation granted leverage with the British Council and regional film societies. Critics stationed at these BFI publications had privileged positions in British film cultures with access to films, festivals and programming opportunities that few others had. Through these

practices of programming and informal pedagogy, ultimately consolidated through the establishment of a network of Regional Film Theatres, [*Sight and Sound*] disseminated enduring interpretative habits and helped to shape the terms on which 'quality' and cinephile film taste would be defined in Britain for many years to come (Selfe, 2013; 458)

As a result of the reach of this informal pedagogy, an investigation of the critical appetites espoused on the pages of *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin* offers useful insights into the wider circulation of Chinese cinema in Britain at this time, even if those direct records of distribution, exhibition, and reception are unavailable. Reviews in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, while primarily circulated to BFI members, were also handed out at NFT screenings as programme notes and their text was often printed in *Film News*, "the film society movement's reviewing publication", ensuring reach to audiences and readers nationwide. In addition to its evaluative activities *Monthly Film Bulletin* also positioned itself as "a comprehensive survey of films in distribution, including the catalogues of independent distributors primarily serving non-commercial and non-theatrical exhibitors like film societies" (MacDonald, 2016: 101). This self-professed survey function suggested comprehensiveness to their operation that was

often lacking and its calls to objectivity helped mask the personal investments of these privileged writers who were salaried staff at the BFI's London headquarters. *Monthly Film Bulletin's* practice, in fact, promoted a specific kind of analytical framework through which a limited selection of works were presented as valuable.

Within these publications, the value of international productions was judged on their technical competence and visual qualities, and how these were realised through the strength of a director's singular vision. For East Asian productions, visual qualities were particularly commanding because many of the films seen at festivals were without English subtitles, leaving only the visuals for the critic to discuss (Stringer, 2011: 66/67). Those few available Chinese-language films at festivals did not suit the rigid evaluative frameworks of these BFI publications, whose adjudicative preferences were mobilised in the mid-20th century into a series of dismissals of Chinese cinema through unfavourable comparisons with cinematic counterparts in Western Europe and, most persistently, Japan.

A common criticism levied against Chinese-language films here was that they were technically uneven and without a distinct authorial voice. While trying to extol the virtues of the cinema of Hong Kong in a piece entitled "Oriental Notebook", Raymond Durgnat (1954: 84) was keen to note that the Hong Kong productions he had seen did contain "individual scenes" that were "outstanding", but conceded that "in the long run boredom sets in". He was frustrated most by Hong Kong cinema's customary non-sequitors – its habit of "suddenly breaking off into song" - which seemed to make it harder to pin-point any singular artists in the industry⁷. This was less of an issue for contemporary reviews of American musicals where whole productions could be saved by single routines – like Gene Kelly's eponymous performance in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952: Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen) – or single performers like Judy Garland in *A Star is Born* (1954: George Cukor) (Morgan, 1952: 29; Houston, 1955: 194).

Of the few complimentary words Durgnat did have about Hong Kong productions, his most superlative were given to the adept acting ability of the region's

⁷ Raymond Durgnat only wrote two pieces for the BFI publications. After these features were published in the 1950s, Durgnat became a vocal detractor of *Sight and Sound* and its pedagogy, discussed in Chapter Three. Despite his future disagreements with the editorial policies, Durgnat's "Oriental Notebook" offered the most detailed analysis of Chinese-language films in this critical space at the time.

main stars which he found to resemble “that of Japanese films”. The critic was impressed by actors' abilities in rendering subtle emotions while adorned in the masks and opulent clothing of Chinese opera. However, as was often the case, these were brief glimpses of value in an otherwise irksome cinema:

Unfortunately, unlike the Japanese, the Chinese film-makers have not yet found a compromise between this form of mime and the necessity in the cinema for expressive physical action; their films concentrate almost exclusively on the actor, their scenarios on dialogue scenes, unvarying in tempo. Camerawork, composition, lighting, cutting, in the more expensive films are efficient but academic; in the cheaper films, drab and flat (Durnat, 1954: 84)

Competent acting was the great strength of Chinese cinema for this critic yet it was never enough to elevate the “efficient” and “drab” character of the films' direction. Only one film of this era could boast compelling direction as well as praiseworthy acting in the publication, *Letter with the Feathers*, and even though this production was given the Best Film award at the 1955 EIFF, the BFI's critics remained apprehensive in their praise. While John Gillet was particularly fond of the film's “remarkably real” presentation of a young child, he found it to otherwise be a “naive and crude” production (J.G, 1955: 98).

Chinese-language films suffered most under the BFI's critics when this general apathy was mobilised in the “battle between the bastions of metropolitan film culture” (Stringer, 2011: 76) as a dismissal of the films through an attack on critics who found them valuable. This was a common occurrence in these magazines whose writers supported their evaluations with considerations of Britain's exhibition and distribution cultures. Durnat (1954: 84), for example, concluded in his *Oriental Notebook* that “hardly any” of the Hong Kong productions he saw were “suitable for export”. More tellingly is a short piece from the same year detailing the contemporary state of film availability, in which the anonymous editorial voice of *Sight and Sound* suggested to its readers that

films from Communist China have their place in some Film Society programmes, if not in the cinemas. Again, curiosity is awakened rather than satisfied, and again we can scarcely criticise distributors for a reluctance to take risks with films whose main interest, except in a few rare cases, lies in their remoteness from our own idiom. Someone, however, might

take a chance with the Indian *Two Acres of Land*, modelled on *Bicycle Thieves* and able to stand up to the comparison (Anon, 1954; 57)

Thanks to this writer's specific critical tool set, little satisfactory value was to be found in films from "Communist China" beyond a shallow awakening of curiosity and thus the critic took no issue with their unavailability in the UK. The rhetoric tone of this piece attaches the issue of availability to one's status as a critic, suggesting that anyone who lamented the unavailability of Chinese cinema was a poor judge of film. There were better films that had been modelled on established European cinema that warranted attention.

Many of these personal criticisms are raised through a familiar comparison: "to the Japanese films, we are bound to return. There can be few serious critics in the West who do not regret their inability to see more, for instance, of the work of Kurosawa" (ibid). The persistence of the comparison to Japan is striking because it was almost always raised on the basis that Chinese cinema and Japanese cinema had next to nothing in common artistically: a comparison that one might expect would lose its usefulness over time. It is implied that this relationship was based primarily on perceived cultural similarities and the extent to which perceptions of East Asia as a homogeneous cultural base were embedded in Britain's cultural networks. These trends are not confined to history and Valentina Vitali (2008: 283) has noticed similar comparisons to Japan in appraisals "based on little more than racial assumptions" in reviews of films by Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien more recently. That this reductionist lens seems to only ever work to the detriment of Chinese cinema during the post-war period represented a significant obstacle for its contemporary circulation. With an apparent lack of artistic visionaries skilled enough to bind productions into unified narratives suitable for European audiences and talented enough to overcome the poor technical quality of Chinese film production – two characteristics these critics had found in Japanese cinema – the pervasive discourse for the BFI was that Chinese-language films were "not for us". When they were for any of "us", it was only those specialists in film societies who were willing to put their educated film appreciation on hold to acknowledge the novelty of these "naive and crude" cultural artefacts from a foreign culture.

As a direct result of Chinese-language films' incompatibility with the BFI critics' evaluative criteria, regular features in the magazine inscribed Chinese cinema with an exclusively niche value, made ever narrower through constant explicit and negative comparisons to more favourable cinema from elsewhere. When attached to considerations of availability, the magazine revealed its assumption that the modes of appreciation it circulated were the natural way to read cinema, ostracising Chinese-language films to the status of cultural oddities that should only be valued at the extremes of film culture. Despite their influential role in criticism and exhibition, critics at the BFI, however, were not the only voices in British film cultures at this time and, despite their attempts to suppress dissonant voices, their critical approach was not the only authoritative voice on foreign-language cinema. During the early 1950s publications were created with the specific goal of dismantling *Sight and Sound's* hegemony over the circulation of art cinema in Britain and the critical approach of these new magazines was, as one might expect, notably different.

Challenge to hegemony: *Films and Filming*

An emblematic example of such a magazine was *Films and Filming*. First published out of London in 1954, the magazine existed in its first thirty years for those that found *Sight and Sound* "unintelligible" but who were still interested in the intellectual study of film (qtd in Morgan, 1955: 161). This intentionally oppositional stance meant that *Films and Filming* was more diverse in its editorial activity than the BFI's publications, taking on itself a responsibility to cover "diverse areas of the film industry" and disrupt the hegemony of the critical establishment by introducing a "plurality of voices" (Giori, 2009: 4). To this end the magazine had a wider remit, detailing films from their early production through to analyses of their final textual qualities. *Films and Filming* simultaneously served as a publication for Britain's then-illegal male, gay community, offering a repository of images of scantily-clad male actors and contact information for like-minded individuals and organisations. While still part of the middlebrow through its intellectualism and publication contexts, *Films and Filming* was the closest thing to an anti-establishment voice in this cultural space. Its disruptive practices were so successful that by the 1960s *Films and Filming* reached a

significantly larger readership than *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin* (Bengry, 2011: 34).

There were notably more China-related features in the early issues of *Films and Filming* than would grace the pages of *Sight and Sound* or *Monthly Film Bulletin* for around 20 years and, as might be expected thanks to its more varied interests, the editorial opinion of Chinese cinema was visibly more optimistic. Its coverage of *Letter with the Feathers* – the film that failed to find enthusiastic support in *Sight and Sound* – was so positive that the magazine's reviewer ended his evaluation with the lamentation that Britain could “not find stories and directors to make films like China's *Letter with the Feathers*” (Brinson, 1955: 8). This reviewer's sentiment was not uncommon in the magazine which was holistically interested in international film production. The preoccupation with “diverse areas of the film industry” accommodated regular features like “Films and Filming Abroad” which offered between two and three pages of information on global film production and reception. The very first issue of the magazine in October 1954 included a section on China in this feature which detailed the country's “young” film industry and its audiences' preference for films about the “immediate past and current events” (Li, 1954; 27).

In 1955, the magazine expanded on regular appearances in this section with two large features on Mainland China's contemporary industry. These two articles, written by Rita Barisse, a French writer stationed in China for a short period of time, reveal a decidedly different critical investment to the BFI's publications and an interest that lay first and foremost in the role played by cinema in China's communist societies. Most notable in comparison to *Monthly Film Bulletin* are the concessions Barisse (1955b: 9) granted technical/visual competency in favour of an almost phenomenological merit:

[China's films] all have the drawback of poor sound, uneven lighting, often scrappy continuity and excessive simplicity of plot and characterisation. But almost all of them are alive with such vibrant enthusiasm, such deep-felt emotion that you are carried away quite irrespective of the fact that you cannot understand a word of the language and have no subtitles to help you.

Barisse's language is one of emotional resonance which echoes early observations of Japanese cinema in *Sight and Sound* encouraged by linguistic barriers (Stringer, 2011:

66). Though concessions are made about technical quality they are not mentioned through direct comparison with a superior European or Japanese cinema and there is no suggestion that these films are less worthwhile for their lack of visual polish.

Barisse's anchor for appreciation in *Films and Filming* was the extent to which a film's representation of contemporary Chinese culture was accurate. During her travels, she saw a screening of *The White Haired Girl* which she decided was "the most Chinese film of all those [she had] seen" (Barisse, 1955a: 5). She felt this way because its "blend of realism and stylisation, of melodrama and poetry, of visual beauty and strident but haunting music that happily [combined] Eastern and Western harmonies, could only have been made in China". Barisse found few problems with *The White Haired Girl*'s visual strategies because she believed the film was "not meant to be 'artistic', it was meant to be useful". It is the film she found to be most representative of China as a social, national and cultural construct that in this instance seems bound to vaguest of aesthetic and social qualities. Her admiration for the film led Barisse to promise that China would soon offer a "major contribution to the art of cinema" on the world stage.

There are numerous elements to Barisse's writing that support Stringer's understanding of the critic's aim to increase their cultural currency through critical practice. Her writing reinforces her status as a knowledgeable critic thanks specifically to privileged time spent in China itself and the predictions she makes grant her the power to make revelatory statements to her readership. She shares the exploitation of knowing about what was unknown to the general British population and of acting as the agent of discovery just as BFI critics were doing concurrently with Japanese-language productions. The key difference between this example and the Japanese productions of Stringer's focus is that Barisse was not writing from a prestigious European festival, but from China. The result of her pursuit of cultural currency was that it suggested a framework for consumption unique to Chinese-language productions that differed from those films offered on the festival network. This idiosyncratic evaluative framework was one based on her own experience in China itself: Barisse's stance toward a film like *The White Haired Girl* was complimentary because it offered a representation of Chineseness that chimed with her own perceptions of China. She saw the film as "useful" to the Chinese population and thus as relevant and accurate to the experience of Mainland Chinese communities of the day.

In the early 1950s, this positivity could be found in other descriptions of China's new communist governance including those in British newspapers where praise was given to the People's Republic of China whose "power rested on the freely given support of the Chinese people" (Lindsay, 1951: 4). *The White Haired Girl* might have offered little aesthetically that appealed to those at the BFI, but the film was relevant to those with an interest in China and in lieu of wider support the film was able to be hired by societies from an independent Chinese bookshop in London; advertised in *Films and Filming* to accompany Barisse's feature (Anon, 1955). While not as visible nationwide as the "apparatus of exhibition" of which *Sight and Sound* critics were a part, this was a valuable parallel network for those in the know.

Setting the terms of Chineseness

The appreciation of films that best portrayed an authentic China represents a specific permutation of the critical lust for realist international cinema that was pervasively invoked in post-war Europe in a reaction against Hollywood. In the European context, Selfe (2013: 472) understands this trend to be indicative of the increasing move against the Americanisation of global culture in which "any 'authentic' and 'cultural' national cinema was to be framed as a subset of a 'natural' international impulse towards the real, which in turn could be collectively defined in opposition to Hollywood's commercial fantasy". Within the case of Chinese cinema and *Films and Filming*, the "new expression of realism" (Mead, 1957: 29) offered by these films specifically served the general perception of Mainland China as an isolated community free from international influence. Numerous writers for the magazine supported these concerns by suggesting that films were the most popular in China when they "served the people" with "stories that [described] their own life" (Mead, 1957: 29). In the increasingly insular Communist China we are told by *Films and Filming* that audiences disliked films which failed "to grapple with their subject from the socialist viewpoint of today" (Chi, 1959: 31).

The commanding difference between the approaches of *Films and Filming* and *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin* lies in the points at which cultural assumptions intersect with notions of cinematic value and the extent to which the

former could justify praising a film as worthwhile. For *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin*, value was judged by how well a Chinese-language film conformed to the loaded expectations of the British critic as they pertained to opinions of art cinema that came from being embedded in the European film festival context during the post-war years. This means that these publications were not particularly sympathetic to Chinese cinema in the middle of the 20th century because of their perceptions of technical inferiority and a lack of singular artists. Value according to *Films and Filming* was based on how well a film served the Chinese populace or by how representative a Chinese-language film was of “normal” Chinese industrial operations. While we might readily criticise *Sight and Sound*’s approach as parochial in its disinterest in the majority of Chinese-language films, *Films and Filming* foregrounds an equally problematic rubric in Britain’s reception culture. What did it mean that films were valued for being *Chinese*, but that the parameters of what was considered Chinese were generally dictated by white, European film critics?

The reviews and festival reports offered by writers in Britain show that a particularly opaque set of criteria was employed when it came to the cultural character of Chinese-language films, raising the question as to what kind of China these tastemakers were conceptualising. The reception of animated films from Mainland China across both *Sight and Sound* and *Films and Filming* shows this phenomenon most clearly. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, these animations were available in Britain through regional film societies, including the short films *Why the Crow is Black* (1956, Chien Chia-chun) and *The Magic Paintbrush* (1954/55, Jin Xi). Seen as “largely for children” by British commentators (Orna, 1956: 33), both *Sight and Sound* and *Films and Filming* found little of interest in Chinese animation because it was thought to “slavishly [copy] Soviet styles” (Martin, 1959: 80). The fact that animation was seen as remarkably technically accomplished – unlike many non-animated features as I have discussed – had little bearing on the films’ reception because this accomplishment was not seen as the result of Chinese labour: “Foreign methods are so entrenched [in China] that one is forced to look elsewhere...for animation methods drawn from Chinese traditions” (Leyda, 1960: 35).

“Foreign methods” here referred to practices learnt from Russian production industries. However, by 1959 and 1960, when these comments were made, China had

been under the governance of the Communist Party for over a decade and the Sino-Soviet alliance had worked to inform much of the contemporaneous Chinese culture and industry. Indeed, newspaper reports from as early as 1951 had begun detailing the “Russianisation” of China since the late 1940s (Guillian, 1951: 4). To read that film critics saw Soviet influence as a dilution of a film's Chinese character rather than an affirmation of China's 20th century constitution suggests that the Chineseness envisioned by the British writer was one of a more timeless and ethereal character. Responses were similar for the film industry of Hong Kong. As a city that was known for its post-war industrialisation and emergent economy one might expect commercial films, produced at a rapid pace for mass audiences, to be valued by the British critic as representative of this unique aspect of the wider Chinese identity. Yet as early as 1960 British critics were ready to dismiss Hong Kong productions as “nothing more” than superficial entertainment which warranted only a brief mention (Leyda, 1960: 35).

Through the repeated processes of these critical appraisals, writers across these institutions and publications consecrated a certain type of Chineseness against which their readings of Chinese cinema were held. This rendering of China was surprisingly powerful and persistent thanks to these discursive practices. Writing on Chineseness, Allen Chun (1996: 114 – 5) notes that cultures are “not just imagined but authorized and institutionalized as well”. “Acts of writing” are one of the “prime vehicles for conveying the imaginative nature of cultural constructions” for this writer, who suggests that cultural discourse, like the many editorials published across the middlebrow, serves “to rationalize a particular utopian vision of the polity”. The utopian version of the Chinese polity envisioned by these film critics and writers was clearly one that its films were rarely able to represent. Chinese-language films were placed in an elusive bind whereby they needed to be seen to best serve Chinese culture and society but those critics who defined this “culture and society” were particularly opaque in their criteria.

These film critics were writing amid a wider social context of interest in Chinese politics, cultures, societies and histories. In British newspapers, optimism was shown that “The Communist Government in China may do much good” and it was understood to be “a great fact of contemporary history that a political machine [had] been created for the reconstruction of Chinese society” (Wing, 1950: 4). Across the 1960s and 1970s, numerous European intellectuals turned their attention to China:

from a tour of the country by *Tel Quel*'s editorial staff, including Roland Barthes; to Julia Kristeva's (1981) writing on China and Chinese women (see Féral et al, 1976); and films by European directors such as Michaelangelo Antonioni's documentary *Chung Kuo, China* (1972). These trips and publications reveal a decided fascination in contemporary China (although recent scholarship has problematised how sympathetic these tastemakers were to the Chinese situation (O'Meara, 2016)) but this was always an interest in Chinese cultures, politics, and societies and not an interest in Chinese aesthetics. This is evidenced in Jean Luc Godard's 1967 film, *La Chinoise*, a film displaying the influence of Chairman Mao's politics on French students in the run up to May 1968 that for all its political interest borrows nothing formally from the textual and formal strategies of Maoist works of art, literature, or film (Williams, 2010: 207). Godard's film instead leans heavily on the traditions of European art cinema and Soviet influence within the Dziga Vertov group.

This was an interest that worked to reinforce the superiority of European artistry and aesthetics. As Rey Chow (2010a: 24) notes of the fetishisation of Chinese politics during this time: "In hindsight, even those whose political idealism had led them to defend the merits of Chinese culture were...partaking of a kind of knowledge production the benefits of which accrued to themselves rather than to their objects of study". In containing the value of Chinese-language films to that of imagined politics and cultural representation instead of artistic value, Chinese cinema was denied the possibility of being judged by the same standards of formal accomplishment as European and Japanese films of the era. Positive assessments of Chinese cinema ultimately rested on a films' ability to best represent Chinese culture and society, cultivating a framework based on a malleable definition of Chineseness to which films stood little chance of conforming.

Chinese cinema as a political cinema

While opaque, the criteria through which a film was considered "Chinese" appeared generally to rest on Mainland Chinese politics. Chinese cinema was categorised as a wholly political cinema thanks to those preferences detailed above, and this appears to have shaped the physical availability of Chinese-language films in

Britain at the time. On particularly useful case study through which to understand the wide-reaching command of these influential tastemakers is the emergence of political film festivals in Europe which hosted Chinese-language films and ultimately framed their arrival in Britain. After Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the films of Mainland China began to open to the world and European audiences suddenly had the possibility of access to an overwhelming number of films from "Communist China". Earlier absence at prestigious festivals was counteracted by political events elsewhere, with northern Italy hosting two particularly important examples. In 1978, the Pesaro International Festival of New Cinema held a retrospective of 25 films from Mainland China produced between 1952 and 1975. Organised by Marco Mueller⁸, who in 1975 became the "first Italian student sent to China", this event formed the basis for a much larger showcasing of Chinese-language cinema – between 135 and 150 films⁹ – at an event in Turin in 1982. These events were not covered in *Sight and Sound*, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, or *Films and Filming*.

Instead, nascent academic journals and publications that would become part of the educational space during the 1980s offered coverage. One such journal, *Framework*, provided detailed reports of each event. *Framework* was a semi-academic publication which sought to destabilise the primacy of Euro-American ways of reading and appreciating cinema as circulated in magazines like *Sight and Sound* and academic journal *Screen*. Their publishing history and cultural context is considered in detail in Chapter Three but their coverage of these film festivals is beneficial for the current discussion. In the first instance, these reports reveal the extent to which both Italian festivals were curated along political lines. These were events which intended to use Chinese-language films to promote and educate local audiences and European critics in the benefits of Mainland China's communist ethos. They were "less the thinly disguised market for the film industry of Cannes or Venice, and more a cultural celebration,...a symbol for Chinese-Italian relations" (Allen, 1982: 53). The Turin event was "hosted and partially funded by the communist council of the Piedmont region" and used the communist cinema of China as an intended expression of political solidarity – "to the

⁸ Mueller returned to China in 2015 where at the time of writing he is the special advisor to the Beijing International Film Festival (Makinen, 2015).

⁹ Different festival reports disagree on the total number of films that played at this event. Stanbrook (1989: 30) suggests 135 films while Allen (1982: 53), writing closer to the time, suggests 150.

possibility of reconciliation with the Chinese” – that sent a message to the intended audience of local workers. *Framework* contributor Donald Ranvaud (1979a: 40) found, for example, numerous films across the festival that foregrounded acts of “Maoist self-analysis “rather than...individual acts of heroism”. As was the way with critical reception, the artistry of the films was secondary to their political curation and those visiting film academics and cinephiles from the UK were forced to constantly work with, or against, the overtly political framing of the event in their summaries for British readers.

This is not to say that films were presented without consideration of their aesthetics. Ranvaud (ibid) noted that when films were not chosen entirely for the strength of their contribution to China's national ideologies they were selected for how well they represented filmmaking practice in China at that time. In this example of programming we can see how the representative qualities of films which had pleased Rita Barisse in her travels around China were not singular to *Films and Filming* but informed the curation of festivals and thus the visibility of Chinese-language films for European audiences more generally. This was a curation strategy that resulted in “culture shock” for those in attendance primarily because it was one of the first European opportunities to see so many films from Mainland China at one event: purportedly “‘open minded’ cinephiles [were] bewildered by the new cinematic grammar” showcased by these films (Ranvaud, 1979: 40). In lieu of a collection of Chinese-language film specialists, these festivals were curated by historians who were responsible for their historical and political focus. It appears from *Framework*'s reports that the loudest voices speaking from a films-first perspective were Jay Leyda, *Films and Filming* contributor and an enthusiast who would go on to write one of the earliest English-language books on Chinese cinema (Leyda, 1972) and his French counterpart Régis Bergeron¹⁰. According to Ranvaud, Leyda and Bergeron's understanding of Chinese cinema played a prominent role in framing the films *cinematically* for the attendant cinephile audience: “time after time in the course of the lengthy and fruitful symposium held with the eight members of the delegation, Jay Leyda and especially Régis Bergeron had to intervene to rectify the perspectives being generated and inform

¹⁰ Bergeron's three-volume *Le Cinéma Chinois 1949 – 1983* was the French-language equivalent of Leyda's *Dianying* (1973)

the audience” (Ranvaud, 1979a: 40).

Ranvaud's language indicates agreement with Leyda's interjections and rectifications which themselves appear to suggest Mainland Chinese filmmaking as an entirely political cinema:

Leyda...was careful to explain the complete subservience to which the cinematic mean must be subjected within a framework of political awareness and ideological 'growth'. Films that do not play the required historical role in the development of the nation simply do not exist. (Ranvaud, 1979a: 40) (emphasis in original)

Although Leyda's history of Chinese cinema began with a discussion of its “origins to 1940” the details of this were left out of Ranvaud's summary who again turned to define Chinese cinema through contemporary perceptions as socially useful films made during the communist regime. He was certainly not alone in his opinion¹¹. Writing three years earlier for *Screen*, Rosalind Delmar and Mark Nash (1976: 67) also suggested that “National Chinese cinema properly speaking began in the Communist base area of Yan'an...established after the Long March”¹². And, although their specific invocation of a “National Chinese cinema” might suggest an interrogation of what a “national” cinema is, their following generalisation that 1938 was “the beginning of the Chinese cinema” when the revolutionaries received “their first camera” suggests the opposite. Contemporary scholarship (see Lim and Ward: 2011) has uncovered the cinema cultures of Mainland China that existed in the years before the communist party's governance so it is noticeable that, thanks to issues of availability, for *Framework* and *Screen* Chinese cinema began and ended with communist productions.

These political festivals represent sites of exhibition which clearly show how the evaluative tensions found in magazines and critical appetites in Britain during this era were shared in spaces across Europe that explicitly framed the circulation of these films. Turin, Pesaro, and their summaries in *Framework* further honed the understanding of Chinese cinema as a national product that was unified by a shared

¹¹ Ranvaud's piece is only half of the coverage of Pesaro in this issue of *Framework*; there there is a complementary article by Leyda and Bergeron (1979).

¹² “The Long March” refers to the period between 1934 and 1935 during the Chinese Civil War in which the Red Army, of the Communist Party of China, moved to the North and West of Mainland China in order to evade the Kuomintang. It was quickly mobilised by Mao Zedong as the “founding myth” of communist China (Sun, 2009: 1).

thread of aesthetic and ideological alignment with the ruling communist party. The film industry was an extension of, and reliant on, the political system whose productions were valuable almost exclusively as artefacts and evidence therein. This meant that perceptions of Chinese cinema developed in tandem with perceptions toward China and Chinese cultures. The similarities are clear here in numerous examples. For instance, Richard Allen (1982: 53/54) concluded from Turin's retrospective that in light of Mao's death, "both aesthetically and logically the Chinese cinema seems to have lost direction, a reflection...of the uncertainties of the future path on which the Chinese Communist Party is embarking". Allen's comments echoed contemporary newspaper reports in *The Guardian* that saw China facing a "deeply uncertain" future akin to "a blank sheet of paper" in light of the Chairman's death (Anon, 1976: 10). Allen and his colleagues all served to reinforce a political reading of Chinese-language film, not an aesthetic one, that furthered Chinese cinema's relegation outside the dominant discourse of international art cinema.

Effects on exhibition

Remembering the impact of these critical practices on the physical distribution and exhibition of Chinese-language films of the time, we can see that these are the themes and assumptions that framed Chinese art cinema's presence in the UK between the 1950s and the early 1980s. In lieu of general theatrical releases, the clearest evidence a contemporary researcher has to this end are two seasons programmed in London. The first, "China Discovery", took place at the NFT in 1960: understood to be "the first considerable display of the Chinese cinema, of any regime, to be seen in Western Europe" (Figure 1)¹³. Little information remains about this event but its promotional material promised "an unrivalled opportunity for a further knowledge of what life is like in this, the newest of the great world powers". This short extract shows the extent to which Chinese cinema was deemed valuable predominantly for its representative display of contemporary Chinese life. This was a collection of interesting

¹³ We must remember that due to their absence from Cannes et al. this would likely have been the first opportunity for many British critics and audiences to see Chinese-language films: even the most oppositional voices received these productions in the first instance through the selective processes of the BFI and the NFT.

artefacts of a foreign culture, rather than a collection of art cinema productions to be co-opted into the middlebrow canon of international film. It is telling that, despite the season's BFI programming, neither *Sight and Sound* nor *Monthly Film Bulletin* covered the season in any capacity.

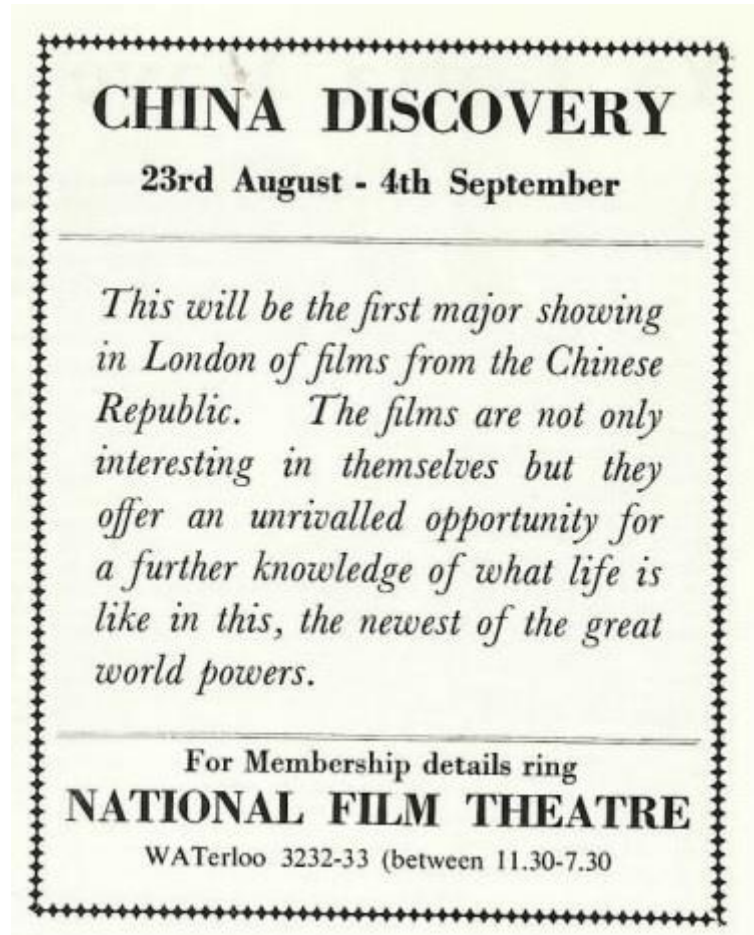


Figure 1: *China Discovery* (1960), *Films and Filming*, September

It was left to Leyda in *Films and Filming* to let the nation know about the films screened at this event but even his tone was subdued and laced with assumptions of European superiority. Leyda (1960: 11), invested in the region's filmmaking, explicitly displayed a desire for creating an alternative mode of appreciation to read these films:

As there is no doubt that all Chinese films are made for China and its needs, what can we outside China find in them beyond information? Though it is unfair to compare the normal Chinese film with the exceptional films in our world, we should make sure we are seeing their best...If the Chinese cinema has not found its Kurosawa, or Bergmann or Truffaut, it is doing something as necessary and as important.

Leyda offered little by way of expanding on what he meant by this “something” and the comparative rhetoric that permeates the article positions Chinese-language films as lesser to those from “our world”, making it difficult to understand just how important they might be. Indeed, despite his assertion of an important filmmaking activity that existed parallel to the dominant narrative, Leyda saved his highest praise (and projection of international success) specifically to those “film artists” who best blended the personal and political: who employed a “new polished technique to express their personal attitudes to their nation’s problems and history”. These are evaluative preferences remarkably aligned with the appetites of *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin*.

Leyda was optimistic and he concluded his summary with the proclamation that film artists were “a beginning, or a new stage, of the greatest encouragement and hope. It isn't often that we have the privilege of watching something exciting *about* to happen in the international film world” (emphasis in original). As will be detailed across the next two chapters, however, this preferred kind of filmmaking did not become available to Britain until the mid-1980s. Instead, this overtly political curation continued for another 20 years, at least. This was the context that informed the second major season on Chinese-language film in Britain, taking place in 1980, again at the NFT. “Electric Shadows: Chinese Cinema” contained over 50 Chinese-language productions, mostly from Mainland China, curated by BFI film critics and reviewers Tony Rayns and Scott Meek. Funded by the Great Britain-China Centre as part of their aim to “encourage mutual knowledge and understanding”, the season showcased films from across China's history of filmmaking, but took as its “deliberate” focus the “development of left-wing production” in Mainland China (Meek, 1980: Authors' 1). Despite a brief acknowledgement in the season's brochure that these were not China's only films, the focus remained on productions that best represented China's politics. For those interested in other kinds of films, of which a few were screened, Meek suggested they read Jay Leyda's book or otherwise Cheng Jihua's *History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, though the latter had not been translated from Mandarin Chinese.

This impressive retrospective of Mainland Chinese production clarifies many of the observations of this first chapter. The focus on overtly political, left-wing film

production points toward an alignment with the curation philosophy of the Pesaro festival in 1978 and the Turin event in 1982. Just as “China Discovery” had done in 1960, this film season continued to contain Mainland Chinese productions as interesting primarily for their political function as artefacts from a foreign culture. The evaluative preferences clear in the critical writing of those across Britain's cinema journals and publications, but also at political film festivals across Europe, here filtered down to frame the films that were available to the public in England's capital city. Organised by staff at *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin*, funded a political body, the season shows the linear process by which evaluative preferences in influential tastemakers, as they combined with international availability, indelibly shaped the circulation of Chinese cinema in the UK. For those unable to make the season in person, they could consult literature written by these cultural authorities instead.

Conclusion

Chinese cinema may have formed a minor part of the international art cinema network as it developed through film festivals and British film cultures but as I have shown in this chapter it nevertheless played a role. The circulation of Chinese-language films through these seasons represents the final stage of a curation process that struggled repeatedly to accommodate Chinese cinema. These films represented a particularly difficult challenge for those interested in foreign-language films for a number of reasons detailed in this introductory chapter. In particular were the intersection of attitudes toward value judgements of cinematic accomplishment (related to foreign-language films more generally) and assumptions of *Chinese* as a cultural, national, political and ethnic signifier. The films had to act as objective artefacts that best served and best represented the collective consciousness of the contemporaneous Chinese populace but those that did this best were deemed “crude and naïve” in aesthetic terms. Those who showed a welcoming tone to Chinese-language films did so when productions offered a representation that matched the critic's socio-political understanding of China. These are the nascent stages of preferences in British film cultures that are shown to develop throughout this thesis.

Together Tony Rayns, Scott Meek, Jay Leyda, Marco Mueller, and numerous

others were the gatekeepers responsible for framing Mainland Chinese productions for the British audience at this time. Developing Stringer's (2011) discussion of "cultural currency", I have shown in this chapter how domestic disputes in editorial practice at divergent publications like *Sight and Sound* and *Films and Filming* inform nuanced differences in the appreciation and circulation of international film. This cross-section of Britain's middlebrow film cultures offers evidence as to why, for example, *Films and Filming* were receptive to films that *Sight and Sound* were not, and to what the repercussions are therein for the cultivation of Chinese cinema for the British readership. Importantly, this process is shown to take part within an international system, rather than a detached and isolated one in the UK. The curation of Chinese cinema in the British film cultures through editorial practices and the programming of film festivals and specialist seasons may have depended in the final instance on the tastes of domestic cultural intermediaries, but these are inextricably connected to developments in both China's own industries and European distribution networks.

I argue, as a result of these findings, that when Jay Leyda predicted a Chinese cinema that was "about" to arrive on the international marketplace, what he meant was that China was about to start making films that could satisfy the European and British expectations of what Chinese cinema should be. In other words, Mainland China was to begin creating films with clear authorial characteristics as realised by talented directors that did not betray the Chineseness and cultural character preferred in Britain's key tastemakers. Unfortunately for the middlebrow, this did not happen until 1986 and the arrival of films from China's "Fifth Generation" directors, discussed in Chapter Three. Instead, the arrival wished for by invested tastemakers took the form of the "kung fu craze" (Hunt, 2003) and the large number of Hong Kong martial arts films which populated Britain's regional commercial cinemas in the 1970s but were largely absent from the cultural spaces discussed in this chapter. I show in the following chapter that these films possessed none of the qualities deemed valuable in the middlebrow space, nor did they offer the specifically Chinese character preferred therein. Noting that the commercial success of these martial arts films entirely bypassed the otherwise important cultural intermediaries discussed in this chapter, Chapter Two leads on from Julian Stringer's discussion of cultural currency with a return to Pierre Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital. The chapter continues to trace

tastemaking processes through domestic fissures and relationships between powerful cultural gatekeepers, introducing considerations of class and exhibition more prominently into the debate.

2. From Golden Harvest to Golden Wonder: Cultural Capital and General East Asianness in the Kung Fu Craze

In the previous chapter I detailed the presence of Chinese-language films in those middlebrow publications and cultural institutions that extended the tastemaking practices of the film festival circuit into British film cultures. There I explored the cultural expectations that contradicted the evaluative preferences of the day for singular “film artists” and accomplished aesthetic strategies. The slight number of films being made in, and released from, Mainland China extended these incompatible expectations to curate an understanding of Chinese cinema in Britain’s middlebrow spaces that was parochial, niche and centred on politics. Despite this, a few optimistic tastemakers including Jay Leyda (1960) were vocal of their faith that “something exciting” was about to happen for Chinese-language films and the international marketplace. I show in this thesis that this air of expectancy was not satisfied in Britain until 1986 and the release of *Yellow Earth*, a Mainland Chinese film directed by Chen Kaige, that arrived in the UK as “the most acclaimed Chinese film ever made” (Display Ad, 1986). The “arrival” of Chinese cinema spearheaded by *Yellow Earth* is explored in detail in Chapter Three of this thesis, yet this occurrence in the mid-1980s left 26 years between Leyda’s prediction and its realisation.

It similarly took until the late 1980s for Chinese-language films to form a significant part of Euro-American film studies. Though not the first English-language study, the Chris Berry edited *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (1991), published in the wake of the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, has canonically been thought of as instigating contemporary English-language, Chinese film studies as a loosely unified subset of the film studies discipline (Chan and Willis, 2016). This collection of essays followed the emergence of *Yellow Earth* on the international stage, alongside Chen Kaige’s colleagues in China’s “Fifth Generation” of directors, and represented the wealth of English-language academic studies it inspired in the late 1980s. Though Berry (1991: 1) noted in his introduction to the collection that *Yellow Earth* “drew the attention of the international film world eastwards to encompass not only mainland China, but also the young film-makers of Taiwan and the thriving popular cinema of Hong Kong”, this edition, and indeed a majority of the literature that has followed, was

primarily concerned with cinema from Mainland China, and with the art cinema space defined by Galt and Schoonover (2010). Within academic literature, it took until Stephen Teo's *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions* in 1997 for Hong Kong cinema to receive the same kind of in-depth attention and, at the time of writing, Taiwan's popular cinema is still sorely under-represented in academic investigations¹⁴.

Curiously, though it took the Fifth Generation at the end of the 1980s to bring Chinese-language films into prominence in academia and the middlebrow, popular Chinese-language cinema through martial arts films from Hong Kong had by that point colloquially represented Chinese cinema for most international audiences for close to two decades. Martial arts films, especially fist-fighting *kung fu* productions, were hugely popular internationally in the 1970s, and these were referred to under the umbrella of Chinese cinema by the contemporaneous press. These action films were more numerous than anything Britain's cinemas had seen before. *Monthly Film Bulletin*, for example, contains evidence that at least 60 martial arts films from Hong Kong received press screenings in London between 1972 and 1980 (and even this was not comprehensive, as shown below) which was significant considering that between 1942 and 1971 the same publication suggests only 6 feature-length, Chinese-language films of any genre earned press screenings¹⁵. With this presence in mind, we might ask why Chinese cinema seemed to arrive on the international scene at the end of the 1980s when these films had been circulating across cinemas and living rooms for two decades prior. In this chapter I take this discursive split as inspiration for a study of Hong Kong's martial arts cinema in Britain as it appeared in the 1970s, furthering the efforts of Chapter One to historicise the competing arenas of British film cultures during a particular time period.

Continuing from Julian Stringer's discussion of cultural currency, I turn to Pierre Bourdieu's theories of "cultural capital" and his exploration of the middlebrow to detail the competing discursive arenas of cinema critics and a burgeoning new space of magazines for enthusiasts, introducing concerns of class into the evaluative preferences and suggested modes of consumption in these cultural spaces. A partial aim of this

¹⁴ While a first in academic study, as I will go on to show throughout this thesis, Teo's seminal study of Hong Kong cinema was preceded by numerous non-academic studies and discussions of Hong Kong's popular cinema.

¹⁵ See Appendix Two.

investigation is to document an historical moment in Britain that is yet to be appropriately recorded to this extent because, as I will go on to show, very little of the circulation of these films suggested anything of importance to the cultural authorities in British film cultures. Additionally, my central argument in this chapter is that the apathy, and occasional dismissal, of popular Hong Kong cinema as it appeared in Britain in the 1970s was the result of the complexity with which cultural perceptions of Chineseness (and how one displays those perceptions) intersected with the way film was circulated in Britain. This was a collection of films kept separate to those discussed in Chapter One.

In particular, I argue that cultural assumptions about China, Hong Kong, and any associated Chineseness therein, as displayed in the available films, were bound with domestic conflicts regarding taste and cultural capital which in turn informed how the films were curated in Britain. This argument continues to nuance the observations of Chapter One regarding the role of perceptions of Mainland China in the assessments of Chinese-language films and further elucidates characteristics of British film cultures and Chinese cinema's life therein. The chapter begins by outlining the characteristics of the *kung fu* craze, the middlebrow response, and the market forces that propelled and sought to define it as a working class pursuit. With this context established, I turn my attention to the specific brand of Chineseness offered by the films which arrived in Britain as one mediating factor in a culture-wide dissemination of East Asian culture, noting that this was not specifically *Chinese* at all. Instead, it was a general "East-Asianness" steeped in an Orientalist mystery that helped fuel a market craze and further deter middlebrow institutions in their gatekeeping role.

The "*kung fu* craze", as Leon Hunt (2003) defines it, began in full force in Britain in 1973 and lasted in various smaller forms until into the 1980s. Primary research for this chapter was conducted on film-related materials from between 1972 and 1976, particularly 1973 – 1974, when the craze was at its peak of cross-cultural appeal and ubiquity. This continues my methodological focus on those moments when Chinese-language films have intersected most widely with the general machinations of British film cultures in order to compare and contrast coverage across otherwise disparate spaces. Exhibition and distribution records for the films are situated alongside contemporaneous reports in newspapers, magazines and academic publications, and

contextualised through observations of social developments, marketing strategies and television programming from the decade. Reference is made to a number of films in this era with *Hap Ki Do* (197, Huang Feng) and *Enter the Dragon* (1974, Robert Clouse) used as case studies. “Popular cinema” is used in this thesis as it is invoked by scholars including Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendau (2013), and Antonio Lázaro Rebol and Andrew Willis (2004: 6), as a cinema that exists within a market economy, intended to be “enjoyed or consumed by large numbers of people”. Discussed here as a fluid counterpoint to Galt and Schoonover’s “art cinema”, the films discussed under the umbrella of “popular cinema” in my thesis are genre productions – mostly martial arts and action films – produced by large studios in Hong Kong and Taiwan for local and international audiences.

An exhibition boom

It is important to acknowledge that the circulation of popular Chinese-language films in the UK did not start in 1973. In Chinatowns, across both Britain and America at least, programming initiatives and events served the local diasporic Chinese populations with the latest commercial Chinese-language films as early as the 1950s (Curry, 2008; Fan, 2010). In Britain this was largely entertainment products from Hong Kong, as the majority of Britain’s Chinese population had emigrated from Hong Kong’s New Territories region. Communities could access the latest films, television programmes, and music releases at events hosted in restaurants and rented cinemas, nationwide (Parker, 1995; Benton and Gomez, 2008: 197/347). There was a brief moment in the 1960s when these events were politically mobilised by pro-Beijing supporters wanting to spread Mao Zedong’s “revolutionary message” through film screenings but, for the most part, these events were entertainment first (Benton, 2005: 334). This was a phenomenon invisible to the eyes of *Monthly Film Bulletin* and its purportedly exhaustive review remit, as well as those magazines discussed in the previous chapter, but it would be incorrect to assume these screenings were confined exclusively to local British Chinese communities. Due to geographical serendipity and outsider interest, it was not long before these films were seen by a wider audience.

This was particularly true in London where the city’s Chinatown on Gerrard

Street intersects with Wardour Street which for much of the second half of the 20th Century was the British film industry's hub for distributors and producers. This proximity ushered in a number of clubs in the area dedicated to exhibiting popular Hong Kong and Taiwan films at, for example, the Golden Harvest Cinema Club¹⁶ and the Chinese Cinema Club. These organisations would play new "Hong Kong movies usually subtitled or dubbed" on a nearly weekly basis, soon attracting the attention of more general organisations like the ICA-affiliated New Cinema Club whose interest was high enough to warrant a screening of an "astonishing programme of 26 Chinese Film Trailers" in May of 1973 (*Time Out*, 1973a: 43). It was not just nearby exhibitors who showed an interest in Hong Kong's popular cinema, and by the middle of the decade distribution and production studios including Tigon – also based on Wardour Street – became involved. Tigon, once producer of what would now be considered "cult films", mainly horror and some "sexploitation" productions, shifted entirely into distribution during the 1970s and released a number of Hong Kong films¹⁷ in the country (Harper and Smith, 2012: 209/210).

These were cultural spaces and events that for the most part went beyond, or sat outside, the remit and resources of the middlebrow. Retaining a focus on London for a moment, it is clear to see how many films were available to audiences that far exceeded the number suggested by *Monthly Film Bulletin*. As seen in Appendix Two, the magazine reviewed 23 martial arts films in 1973 and 1974: 13 and 10 respectively. In itself this represents a significant increase from the one reviewed in 1972 but even this impressive number is incomplete. *Time Out*, the local London magazine containing information on cultural events, concerts, and film listings, shows the many playing at clubs and other venues in this one city alone that went under the radar of the middlebrow press. In Table 1 we can see that even the incomplete records in *Time Out* show named films opening on an almost weekly basis at the Golden Harvest Cinema Club and another venue, the Harlesden Coliseum, in the capital city during 1973 and

¹⁶ While this club shared the same name with Golden Harvest, one of the largest production studios in Hong Kong of the 1970s and 1980s, there is no evidence to suggest whether this London club was officially affiliated with the studio.

¹⁷ There are records of Tigon releasing *Snake in the Monkey's Shadow* (Pym, 1980), *Master of the Flying Guillotine* (Combs, 1978) and *Yu T'ang – Ch'un* (Pulleine, 1980) in Britain, where they were reviewed by *Monthly Film Bulletin*. Records of the other martial arts films released by Tigon, of which there were likely more, are harder to find.

1974¹⁸. The majority of these are poorly remembered by the contemporary film canon. Alongside vague listings in *Time Out* of “Hong Kong movies, usually subtitled or dubbed”, it is suggested here that genre and location were more important than individual films for these invested fans.

Golden Harvest Cinema Club Screenings May, 1973 – January, 1974 (<i>Time Out</i>)	Harlesden Coliseum Screenings: January – April, 1974 (<i>Time Out</i>)
<i>Last Spring</i> <i>Blues in the Dream</i> <i>The Rivals</i> <i>Operation Bangkok</i> <i>Peeper, Model, Hypnotist</i> <i>None but the Brave</i> <i>Hapkido</i> <i>Seaman No. 7</i> <i>Unscrupulous General</i> <i>The Bandits from Shan-Gung</i> <i>Hurricane</i> <i>Devil's Treasure</i> <i>Fate of Lee Khan</i> <i>Queen Bee</i> <i>Angry Tiger</i> <i>Evil Slaughter</i> <i>When Taekwondo Strikes</i> <i>Sky Hawk</i>	<i>Ma Su Chen</i> <i>The Avenger</i> <i>The Crush</i> <i>Gold Snatchers</i> <i>The Smugglers</i> <i>Chinese Dragon</i> <i>Love is a Four-Letter Word</i> <i>Roaring Lion</i> <i>Excelsior</i> <i>The Hero of Chiu Chow</i> <i>Swift Fist</i> <i>The Mandarin</i> <i>The Good and the Bad</i> <i>Queen of Fist</i> <i>The Brave and the Evil</i> <i>The Big Risk</i>

Table 1: Records of Hong Kong films listed in *Time Out*

As will be explored throughout this chapter, these were working class spaces which served predominantly diasporic audiences. In addition to the British-Chinese audiences targeted in Chinatown, the Harlesden Coliseum audience was primarily composed of London's West Indian community (Coon, 1977). Scholars (see Kaminsky, 1982; Ongiri, 2002) of the *kung fu* craze in America have discussed the importance of Hong Kong's martial arts cinema with black audiences in cities like New York but there is yet to be an equivalent study of the UK's minority audiences at the time. Toby Russell, self-styled Hong Kong cinema expert discussed in Chapter Four, anecdotally

¹⁸ *Time Out* had no obligation to be comprehensive and often the magazine's “Hong Kong movies usually subtitled or dubbed” would stand in for any specific titles, so these lists too are incomplete. They are included because even in their incomplete form they hint at the high number of titles available in these venues.

suggests that black audiences made up “80%” of the viewers for *kung fu* films at the Astra cinema in Stoke Newington as late as 1993 when the venue closed (Johnson, 2016). Despite certain differences between the US and UK examples, studies of both have observed the intersections between geography, class and demographics within fan communities of *kung fu* films. Kaminsky (1982: 139 – 140) notes that the popularity of martial arts cinema with black American audiences went beyond identification based on race or ethnicity and the watching of action films with non-white protagonists, suggesting equally the importance of playing films in urban, downtown cinemas to predominantly working class audiences.

In this case, screenings in rented Chinatown cinemas or at the Harlesden Coliseum suggest equivalence with their American counterparts. Harlesden is an urban area in northwest London with a predominantly Afro-Caribbean demographic (UK Census Data, n.d.). When not screening films, the Harlesden Coliseum was a venue which hosted gigs for punk bands like The Clash and Buzzcocks. It was one of many working class spaces which in the 1970s intentionally positioned itself as disruptive to middle class (and middlebrow) hegemony and sterility. Russell remembers the Astra cinema as a “ghetto fleapit” which screened *kung fu* films because they were “the only thing they could afford to show”, rented cheaply from venues in London's Chinatown (Johnson, 2016). While not as outwardly confrontational as the punk scene of the day, screenings of *kung fu* films at these venues were loud, “rowdy” affairs. Their shared urban, spacial politics with events like punk shows meant that Hong Kong cinema's exhibition at this time sat both outside and in opposition to the cultural authorities in the art cinema network discussed in the previous chapter. While these working class spaces and multi-purpose venues continued as places to see *kung fu* films into the 1990s, news of their curation rarely reached audiences not already in the know. They were replaced in this decade by cheaper home media options (Fan, 2010), ignored by the theatrical focus of leading film publications.

Considerations of martial arts productions and their popularity became unavoidable in the middlebrow press, however, when the *kung fu* craze hit Britain's cinema chains in the early 1970s. The pivotal moment was the 1973 UK release of *King Boxer* (1972, Cheng Chang Ho) which was brought to the country by Warner Bros. following the success it had seen under the name *5 Fingers of Death* in the USA

(Desser, 2000: 24). *King Boxer* was “the first of the Chinese art of self defense epics to get a full-scale release” in the UK according to *Time Out* (1973b: 37) and it was an unprecedented success. It began as an exclusive presentation at London’s Warner West End cinema in March where it played for close to three months before moving out to other venues across London and the rest of the country in May, screening nationwide intermittently for a long time¹⁹. This was to be a common strategy with Hong Kong films during the era: later releases including *The Killer* (1972, Chor Yuen) and the Bruce Lee films *Fist of Fury* (1972, Lo Wei), *Way of the Dragon* (1972, Bruce Lee), and *The Big Boss* (1971, Lo Wei) all began runs with close to three months of exclusive screenings in one of London’s West End venues.

This strategy speaks principally to the financial returns to be gained from these increasingly popular films. As Alexander Stuart (1973: 27) noted in *Films and Filming*:

What’s really attracted all the interest is the financial side of the kicks... After the tremendous success enjoyed by *King Boxer* at the Warner, Leicester Square (where it took £42,000 in eight weeks), along came *Fist of Fury* which went into the Rialto to break all box-office records at that cinema, for normal performances, for first day, for first week and for two weeks run. With a seating capacity of 580, 21,200 people crowded in during the first fortnight to sample the camp fun, handing over £12,898 at the door... Meanwhile, *The Killer* prepared to draw £8,550 at the Warner in its first week, and *New One Armed Swordsman*, billed with *Cold Sweat* at ABC Edgeware Road, netted £2,624 the first seven days.

The attendance for *Fist of Fury* in the Rialto, noted here, is the equivalent of 36 sold out screenings in 14 days at a capacity of 580 seats. This was a significant commercial intervention in Britain that bypassed conventional release patterns for non-Hollywood, international productions discussed in the previous chapter. By the middle of the decade, distributors began releasing *kung fu* films straight to cities outside of London, skipping the capital (and its critics) and heading straight to Birmingham, Plymouth, Bristol, Nottingham and other cities (*Kung Fu Monthly*, Issue 23), screening in chain cinemas like Warner Bros, ABC and Odeon venues rather than the ICA or NFT in London.

¹⁹ Records of Manchester cinemas, for example, show *King Boxer* screening during the spring of 1974 (Anon, 1974: 14)

These record breaking figures were particularly impressive because they came at a time when cinema attendance in Britain was falling drastically under the threat of television and other recreational distractions. British exhibition cultures bifurcated in the 1970s, as noted by Screen Digest at the time, into: on the one hand “aggressively commercial material, be it disaster movies or porn” which did well commercially but was shunned by critics, and on the other “introspective and national” cinemas, which pleased the film critic but floundered financially (quoted in Harper and Smith, 2012: 210). The martial arts film led the former category and the success of films like *Fist of Fury* was instrumental in supporting the stumbling film market in Britain (Gordon, 1974: 71). It did so as part of a distributor strategy to capitalise on the compatibility of Hong Kong’s martial arts cinema with the concurrent trend of international B-movie productions. Known mainly for their “aggressively commercial” characteristics, this was a group productions from exploitation films to Blaxploitation, Spaghetti Westerns and war films, of which the *kung fu* film was the latest addition.

On their first arrival, it was actually the martial arts films’ similarity to these other B-movie standards that dictated the majority of their critical reception and commercial distribution in Britain. For a variety of people from *Time Out* critic Verina Glaessner, to an anonymous writer in Manchester for *The Guardian* (Anon, 1973a: 6), to Run Run Shaw (qtd in Glaessner, 1974a: 32), co-founder of the Shaw Brothers studio responsible for producing most of the martial arts films that made it to the UK at the time, Hong Kong’s action cinema was not “new”. It was, instead, a continuation of the “swashbuckling fantasies” of old film serials whose legacy continued in Euro-American film production through Westerns and James Bond films (Glaessner, 1974a: 132). Hong Kong’s contributions were screened in double bills with other films from this global action genre, by distributors keen to capitalise on an already established audience. EMI, for example, paired the racy *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (1972, Chor Yuen) with British sci-fi-thriller *The Final Programme* (1973, Robert Fuest), while elsewhere: *New One Armed Swordsman* (1971, Chang Cheh) toured with French-Italian action film *Cold Sweat* (1970, Terence Young); *King Boxer* with US Blaxploitation film *Superfly* (1972, Gordon Parks Jr); and *Enter the Dragon* with *Cleopatra Jones* (1973, Jack Starrett), also a Blaxploitation title. Like Spaghetti Westerns before them, the majority of martial arts films to see this wide a release were dubbed with English-language

audio tracks, reducing a significant barrier to entry and increasing their compatibility with the Euro-American films they were paired with²⁰. As the decade went on and *kung fu* became more associated with this B-movie circuit, prestigious openings in London's West End transformed into more ordinary nationwide releases alongside softcore pornography and other, less-reputable X-rated films. By 1975 films like *The One Armed Boxer* (1971, Wang Yu) showed around the country with pornographic productions including *Emmanuelle* (1974, Just Jaeckin) and *Confessions of a Window Cleaner* (1974, Val Guest) at regional urban cinemas (Anon, 1975: 7).

Pairing less well known films with others in double bills may have worked to increase their earnings but these films have a history of absence in the UK from critical writing in newspapers and the middlebrow press. In Britain, since the 1940s, these tastemakers have “virtually never reviewed – possibly never [seen]” the secondary films in double bills so their chances of being “critically noticed” historically were slim (McFarlane, 2003: 182). Combined with regional distribution in chain cinemas and working class venues, these distribution trends firmly positioned Hong Kong's martial arts cinema within the “aggressively commercial” film culture in Britain that critics had little interest in, despite its wide-reaching representation across the country. The middlebrow was undermined at this time by a commercial movement propelled by a parallel group of tastemakers at distribution operations and in a new publication space for martial arts enthusiasts. If we consider the theories of Stringer and Bourdieu, with their implications of class, social, economic and cultural positioning, we shed light on the discursive split between the *kung fu* brand of Chinese cinema and that which had been otherwise preferred since the 1950s.

²⁰ The widespread practice of dubbing at this time complicates the utility of the term “Chinese-language cinema” which I have chosen to use throughout this thesis. As such, this term is used sparingly in this chapter but kept for consistency and for its inference of film's whose primary language was Cantonese or Mandarin in its first domestic showings.

The middlebrow response

As with their readings of previous Chinese-language films, the middlebrow response to the *kung fu* craze varied across publications depending on individual editorial conventions. Despite differences, most were unified by a cautious affection constrained by the evaluative preferences of their respective institutions, as seen by returning to the magazines of my earlier focus. *Films and Filming*, for instance, were initially receptive to *kung fu* films, particularly because the appeal of their action choreography was high enough to bypass the less desirable elements of their “aggressively commercial” formal characteristics. Early reviews of action star Bruce Lee's films, for example, were keen to note that the performer was “extremely impressive” in his physical ability (Braun, 1973: 53) and Alexander Stuart's (1973: 27) assertion that it was the “action and nothing else that makes the Chinese movies popular” was not laced with the pejorative undertones it would be later on. The specific nature of Bruce Lee's physical performance also chimed well with *Films and Filming*'s associated incentive as a clandestine publication for gay men in London. As an action hero topless for most of his Hong Kong career, Lee was given a cover image for the magazine in October 1973, and in the same issue a general introduction to the martial arts genre, Stuart's (1973) “Chinese Chequers”, was weighted toward pictures of Lee over the written word. Excellence in choreography and Lee's attractiveness notwithstanding, however, by as early as November 1973 some writers for *Films and Filming* began to tire of the genre. Tudor Gates (1973: 56), a critic who became screenwriter for a number of exploitation films in Britain, found that “monotony [became] intense” in *The Killer* and by March 1974 was confident to dismissively assert that, with *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan*, “as in all Chinese films, you always know where you are so far as story is concerned” (Gates, 1974: 44). Suffice to say this was already less complimentary than Stuart's earlier assessment.

Elsewhere, positive evaluations at *Monthly Film Bulletin* were tempered by the magazine's stricter editorial policy and its purportedly objective critical practice. Comparisons to Japanese-language productions persisted in reviews by John Gillet (1972, 1973) of films like *King Boxer* which, as the first of Hong Kong's martial arts films to be released in the UK, was used as a platform to showcase knowledge of the Shaw

Brothers studio as an introduction for readers. Elsewhere, assessments in the magazine continued to focus on the standardised collection of technical characteristics, from the quality of direction and photography (Rayns, 1973a), to lighting (Rayns, 1973b) and editing (Milne, 1973). This is not to say there were no positive value judgements hidden within these strict guidelines, as seen in Gillet's (1973: 146) welcoming summary of *One Armed Boxer* where: "the photography and cutting of the fights is, as usual, highly expert, with a splendid sense of movement". As with *Films and Filming*, though, most positive words were offered to the action choreography as one part of a whole package whose other formal characteristics proved incompatible with the strict expectations of *Monthly Film Bulletin*, especially as time went on and Hong Kong's exports were increasingly seen as "tired" and monotonous by reviewers (Milne, 1973: 192).

Before it became a general dismissal, the cautious affection in these publications shows a receptive collection of critics whose affinity with *kung fu* was held back by prohibitive editorial environments. In this way, we can see how Stringer's (2011) observations of cultural currency were not contained to individual calls to legitimacy by critics and reviewers, but existed on an institutional level whereby the highly codified preferences of individual magazines' editorial conventions limited positive responses. The institution and the individual are interrelated in this process: while the individual trades with films as a cultural currency partly from a perspective of personal survival, the institution does so on a grander scale to promote the legitimacy of film as an art form. This phenomenon is discussed by Bourdieu in his explicit considerations of photography as a "middlebrow art". For the sociologist, cinema is a cultural form whose circulation has been particularly useful for cultural commentators and institutions keen to present themselves as authorities within a certain cultural space. Importantly, these practices are not contained to notions of artistic achievement within art industries, but they are inherently bound to wider social and class structures.

Bourdieu (1990: 97) writes that in the cinema:

there are coteries of professional critics with erudite journals and radio and television discussion platforms at their disposal which, as a sign of their pretension to cultural legitimacy, assume the learned and tedious tone of university criticism, taking on its cult of erudition for erudition's sake, as if, haunted by the issue of their legitimacy, the

only thing they could do was to adopt and exaggerate the external signs of statutory authority of the guardians of the monopoly of cultural legitimacy, the professors.

A particularly dismissive view of such writers this may be, Bourdieu's analysis foregrounds the aspirational and defensive impetus behind editorial activities and the functions of a tight evaluative rule set to this end. His comparison to academia refers back to earlier writing on "cultural capital": the wealth accrued by a person or an institution in forms that are separate to (but interrelated with) economic capital. The academic institution, for Bourdieu (2008: 285) best represents the "objectification of cultural capital" as a process which establishes the codes and conventions of how artefacts, achievements, and abilities are deemed culturally and socially valuable in a systematic and purportedly objective way. Universities show this process in a crystallised form, whereby qualifications help to standardise accomplishments that are otherwise hard to define immediately: they become a certificate "of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture".

In film cultures, Bourdieu (1990: 97) understands the objectification of cultural capital, by taking on the "learned and tedious tone of university criticism", as an attempt to raise the art-form to a higher "noble cultural practice" in a process which equally serves to legitimise the critics and the cultural space they occupy. Thus the rigidity of rules laid out in the editorial practice of magazines in this middlebrow space, particularly those like *Monthly Film Bulletin*, is a pointed example of this objectification whereby the subjective taste of editorial teams is presented as objective truth to increase the cultural capital held by their staff writers and promote a specific kind of cinema as the "best" kind. Not only does this aspiration to "noble cultural practice" offer further reasons for an incompatibility with lowbrow, market-led martial arts films, but the stringency of critical rule sets it requires means that even the most evangelical of voices at these publications was restrained by a minority status within this culture of objectivism. This is important to acknowledge because there were, at each publication mentioned in this chapter, advocates of martial arts films: Tony Rayns at BFI publications, Verina Glaessner at *Time Out*, and Derek Elley at *Films and Filming*, in

particular. These writers were effusive about their interest in the genre, if not always wholly complimentary, and were responsible for the majority of martial arts coverage at their respective institutions. In their writing these individuals often openly positioned themselves within a minority role in an otherwise hostile environment punching against their own editorial cultures (see: Rayns, 1974a: 139).

Elley (1974a: 38), for example, was frequent in his praise of martial arts films and mentioned actively tracking down obscure titles so he could raise their profile through *Films and Filming*. Yet, his treatment of these films, with the same degree of analytical depth that others lent the productions of “film artists” from European countries, was not met well by members of the magazine’s readership. He was seen to have veered away from the expected practice of the magazine to indulge his personal preference. One reader, Stephen Snell (1974: 4), was particularly vocal in his disdain that such a respected periodical would treat martial arts films with this depth:

one can only wonder at the ingenuity of your reviewer Derek Elley who succeeds, month after month, in using different words to describe almost identical films. But not only; he takes them seriously. He uses words such as ‘motif’, ‘ethos’, ‘mythical’ in respect of films that are no more than commercial exercises in violence, and in which the ethics of good or bad... are treated in a childishly simplistic manner... I should add that, as a genre, I find the ‘Kung-Fu’ pictures very enjoyable. So, I assume does Mr Elley. But to treat them on any level other than entertainment, is, if I might say so, pretentious to the point of absurdity.

Snell’s criticism is presumably not simply that Elley uses words such as “motif”, “ethos” and “mythical”, as others used these words plenty in their assessments of different productions. Rather, it is that these “commercial exercises” would be included in the magazine’s activities in the same way that such “better” and more worthwhile films would be: it is almost their inclusion at all that is offensive to this reader. Snell suggests a parallel way of positively receiving the films – for enjoyment, rather than appreciation – that disconnects and contains martial arts, not unlike China’s political films of the 1950 and 1960s, in a cultural and evaluative space that is separate to the activities and preferences of *Films and Filming* and their middlebrow contemporaries.

Snell’s letter is symptomatic of the defensive position taken on by general

contributors to the middlebrow press whose cultural capital was jeopardised by martial arts cinema and the intimidating success of this genre which threatened the legitimacy of film as an art form as they had defined it. Just as these publications had worked to contain films from communist China as interesting artefacts of a foreign country and not as worthwhile cinematic productions, these tastemakers continued to moderate Chinese-language film in middlebrow spaces in their assessments. It is unsurprising that a ubiquitous trend across all middlebrow publications during this time was to refer to the martial arts boom explicitly as an “invasion” (Rayns, 1974a: 138; Anon, 1973b: 8; Stuart, 1973: 27), threatening British film cultures in one way or another. The sheer number of Hong Kong films playing successfully in Britain was certainly partially responsible for this semantic trend, but so was the fact that the *kung fu* craze was intentioned by the studios in Hong Kong themselves, who had set their sights on exports and dominating global film exhibition (Rayns, 1974a). This meant that the film critic – usually vital in the success of international films in Britain through their privileged access at film festivals – was close to entirely redundant in any evangelical role and no longer an integral part in this system. The Hong Kong studios and their films were active agents which had disrupted the hegemony of Britain's middlebrow press.

In his breakdown of cultural capital Bourdieu (2008) suggests the importance of “social capital”: an extension of his previous analysis which includes a consideration of how accrued cultural wealth can be bolstered through the creation of social networks with other persons and institutions. The *kung fu* craze, in its aesthetic characteristics, British circulation, and financial success, represented an unwelcome new member in Britain's film culture which problematised middlebrow hegemony and threatened its legitimacy. It needs to be acknowledged that this proliferation was also happening at a time when China was becoming a more visible nation in international politics and Britain's Chinese communities were increasing across the country. There was a concurrent trend in the decade of changing attitudes toward East Asia and developments in the British understanding of China whereby anxieties of invasion also commanded the social discourse. The 1970s were a time when Britain's Chinese population became more visible due to changing government policies (Benton and Gomez, 2008: 328), and also when attitudes toward Mainland China began to sour in

light of Cold War tensions and fears that Britain's colonial Hong Kong was being used as a port through which communist ideas and supporters could “invade” the UK. These trends combined into an anxious moment for Britain’s conservative communities and sensationalist newspaper reports became rife with conspiracy theories about triads peddling drugs (Andrews, 1976: 5) and “red China” gaining a footing in Britain through Chinatowns, where apparently “at least 15 percent of the Chinese restaurants” were used “as listening posts by the Chinese intelligence service” (Niesewand, 1974: 20). Due to Britain’s colonial history with Hong Kong, part of this sensationalism has been credited as an “imperial reflection” and a collective expression of colonial guilt whereby the increasing community in visible spaces like Chinatowns came to represent a kind of reverse colonisation of Britain’s domestic culture (Benton and Gomez, 2008: 298-300). The violence of this perceived invasion resonates with the nods in the middlebrow press to the invasion of “oriental tough guys” (Stuart, 1973: 27) on British audiences, and both this and the anxiety expressed by film critics and reviewers originate from the same fear of one’s power and collective hegemony being threatened and supplanted by a new group.

When this kind of event happens, for Bourdieu (2008: 287), the original group, “its fines, its boundaries, and its identity, is put at stake, exposed to redefinition, alteration, adulteration”. If the *kung fu* film’s aesthetic characteristics and circulation trends represented as significant a threat to the middlebrow press as some of their assessments, and particularly Snell’s letter to *Films and Filming*, suggest they did, it is unsurprising that the critic reinforced the existing tastes of the middlebrow press to counter the *kung fu* cinema and to support other films which confirmed their “objective” critical eye in order to bolster their privileged position in Britain's cultural eco-system. Through similarities shared with conservative social commentators in Britain's reactionary press we can see how commanding the disruption to social capital and a cohesive, hegemonic unit was in affecting tastes and attitudes toward *kung fu* cinema in middlebrow contexts. This combined threat of a foreign product that led an “aggressively commercial” market trend which castrated middlebrow commentators also reintroduces issues of class into the reception of these films, particularly because the objectification of cultural capital encouraged by these middlebrow processes in

Britain has long been associated with class difference.

Britain's middlebrow space has particular associations with the middle class, more so than it might in other geographical contexts. Lawrence Napper (2009), in his book length study of *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years*, helpfully delineates the origins of British middlebrow culture as it emerged in the 1920s as a particularly middle class affair situated alongside the growing disdain for free market forces. The middlebrow taste developed from the "feeling that, as far as the cultural life of the nation was concerned, market forces alone could not be trusted to deliver anything but the lowest, most vulgar, not to mention, *foreign* product" (Napper, 2009: 25). The "foreign product" in this case being Hollywood's studio cinema that was popular in the British market, this anxiety led to the creation of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as a nationalised service. While there were similar legislative interventions for film distribution and exhibition, a more commanding change here was the crystallisation of the importance of "cultural taste" in defining one's class position while fending off Hollywood's influence:

Part of this investment involved an acute awareness of the social implications of cultural taste. For such audiences, allegiance to British texts (both literary and filmic) with their ambivalent, fraught negotiation of the tension between culture and the market, was an activity which crucially distinguished them from the industrial working classes who tended towards Hollywood's more consumerist mode of culture (Napper, 2009: 29/30)

The veracity of the *kung fu* film's success across Britain's urban cinemas returned the "tension between culture and the market" to the fore and remapped the cautious dismissal of Hollywood productions onto this East Asian brand of cinema. In this case, though, the foreignness of *kung fu* cinema was heightened by its visible signifiers of East Asian culture, discussed in detail later, which coincided with a social anxiety toward China and Chineseness in conservative commentators during the time. A coalescence of concerns of aesthetics, identities and cultural taste, there was a plethora of reasons for the middlebrow authorities responsible for canonising international film production to reject, or be at least ambivalent toward, martial arts cinema.

Exploiting a cultural moment

This analysis helps us understand reasons why the films of the *kung fu* craze held little value to middlebrow voices, but framing a discussion around this “legitimate” space runs the risk of under serving the publications and spaces in which martial arts films *were* seen as highly valuable and it continues to assert middlebrow institutions as default gatekeepers of film culture. It ignores what the characteristics actually were for those authorities responsible for propelling Hong Kong's martial arts cinema to the heights it reached. Going forward, I turn my attention to the films themselves as well as their complimentary receivers in Britain, particularly through a focus on the working class contexts that are alluded to above and throughout the literature on martial arts cinema. Looking at these spaces, I suggest that fans of *kung fu* film in working class communities were encouraged to trade with a kind of cultural capital that was different and threatening to that of the middlebrow/class critic: this was a capital based on the uncritical acquisition of knowledge, the consumption of merchandise, and the development of practical martial arts skills. I argue that many of these characteristics developed out of the strategies of publishers and cultural bodies financially invested in promoting the kung fu craze. This process is well seen in a new publishing space targeted at *kung fu* enthusiasts: a collection of publications aimed at young, fan audiences, the best example being *Kung Fu Monthly*, a poster magazine which began in 1974, months after Bruce Lee's death.

Kung Fu Monthly was, as the name suggests, a monthly magazine which included information on Hong Kong stars (mainly Lee) and films, as well as contextual information about the history of China and its neighbouring regions²¹. The magazine was read by a predominantly young readership, diverse in their gender and appreciation of martial arts films and it was instrumental in the establishment of British fan clubs for stars including Bruce Lee and later Jackie Chan. *Kung Fu Monthly* was

²¹ *Kung Fu Monthly* has since become a collector's item and is poorly archived in libraries. The British Film Institute, where research for this chapter was conducted, does have a number of issues of the magazine but this is less than half of the total publication run. Compared to magazines with institutional support like *Sight and Sound*, *Kung Fu Monthly* is not well remembered in accessible locations. The magazines were only about 10 pages long, their pages were not numbered, and issues not dated. As such, to reference the individual magazines I include their issue number in in-text citations.

particularly successful. It branded the promise of “the world’s best-selling martial arts mag” on its cover, lasted for 81 issues, and was published in 11 languages across 14 countries (Crowther, 2014). A common format for fan magazines in the 1970s, *Kung Fu Monthly* was slight, often only around 10 pages which were unfolded in their entirety into a poster, usually an image from a Bruce Lee film, to grace the bedroom walls of their young readership.



Figure 2: *Kung Fu Monthly* (1974 – 1984) and *Dragon* (1975)

Not unusual for the time, *Kung Fu Monthly* was launched in an entrepreneurial move to make some quick cash for its founder Felix Dennis, a now notorious mogul in the publishing world. *Kung Fu Monthly* was one of many magazines created by Dennis to exploit a popular cultural moment for the promise of significant financial return. In addition to *kung fu*, Dennis dedicated magazines to other fads ranging from *Star Trek* to *Star Wars*, skateboards to bicycles, to even The Fonz from US-sitcom *Happy Days* (1974 – 1984) (*Where Have All the Flowers Gone*, 1978). In later life, Dennis (2007: 111) was open about the purely financial inspiration for starting the magazines. Regarding *Kung Fu Monthly*, Dennis noted that following Lee's early death (“a great career move for any

movie star”) he became “impossible to libel” and thus ripe for sensationalist articles and his popularity in “virtually every country in the world” ensured a large captive audience.

Appropriately for these ambitions, the magazine centred on encouraging the veracity of consumption in its young readers who needed to be convinced to buy, effectively, a very expensive poster on a monthly basis for over 10 years. As such, *Kung Fu Monthly* was entirely uncritical of the films it covered: choosing to encourage fandom rather than criticality. The magazine had a wholly complimentary tone and editorial practice centred on plot summaries, star profiles, production histories, and articles which revealed truths about the mythical China the films represented formally. Instead of serving a pedagogical function in teaching its readers how to “read” films critically, *Kung Fu Monthly* encouraged the acquisition of knowledge about martial arts films as a way of gaining cultural capital. This knowledge could become objectified capital, to use Bourdieu's term, through the collecting of memorabilia. Magazines would goad readers with articles like one published in *Dragon* (1975), a publication similar to *Kung Fu Monthly*, titled “Bruce Lee's Superfan” whose subheading teased readers with the following questions: “So you think you’re pretty keen on the Little Dragon? In fact you reckon you’re one of Bruce Lee’s greatest fans? Keen fan that you may be, you’ll have to go a long way to beat eleven-year-old Bruce Mackenzie from Glasgow” (Figure 3). Those readers who wanted to beat their young Glaswegian competitor could have done so by buying more posters than him, handily supplied by these magazines, alongside everything from “authentic Bruce Lee type Kung-Fu slippers” (*Kung Fu Monthly*, Issue 23), to key rings, pillowcases, costumes, and even package holidays (“pilgrimages”) to Hong Kong (see Appendix Three for examples).



Figure 3: Bruce Lee's Super Fan! in Dragon (1975)

This was a much more veraciously capitalist enterprise than the subsidised activities of the middlebrow and these *kung fu* magazines were one part of an entrepreneurial strategy of the 1970s that sought to exploit working class consumers. The publishing space in which *Kung Fu Monthly* circulated was one whose general rule was to “find a youth cult and write about them – and, crucially, to them – including every gritty detail necessary” (Sword, 2014) as it was understood that young working class readers were enthusiastic in their purchasing habits. The sensationalist base of these capitalist enterprises meant that they generally traded with “cults” that, like martial arts, were seen as unwholesome by the conservative establishment but likely to bring in the most money. New English Library was the most prolific publisher in this space, selling books on skinheads, punks, girl gangs, and other unsavoury groups, to an eager readership in their “millions” during the 1970s (Sword, 2014). *Kung fu* was included here: in 1975 Richard Allen released *Dragon Skins* through New English Library, a short novel about a “Skinhead Squad” who tackled “a crooked Kung Fu master”, and there were numerous others that capitalised on the popularity of the martial arts boom including *Jason Striker Master of Martial Arts: KIA!* (Anthony and Fuentes, 1974), *Black Samurai* (Olden, 1974), and a novelisation of the film *Super Man Chu: Master of Kung Fu* (Sullivan, 1974). Providing literary versions of cinematic genre hybrids these three books offered readers elements not just of martial arts but the associated spy narratives and Blaxploitation films.

The popularity of *kung fu* within these marketplace spaces helped to posit Hong

Kong's martial arts cinema as a product for young, working class audiences. These connections were heightened by the take up of martial arts practice in those targeted by these publishers. In lieu of financial wealth, martial arts offered teenagers a shortcut to cultural capital through displays of physical ability (Bowman, 2013: 55). Complete with cautionary "don't try this at home" messaging, *Kung Fu Monthly* regularly included a regular feature titled "The Martial Arts" which broke down the specific moves on show in popular film scenes (Figure 4). At the same time, a number of publications dedicated to martial arts practice, such as *Karate & Oriental Arts*, extended their sports coverage to include discussions of film. The violence of Bruce Lee's masculinity which afforded *Films and Filming* opportunities for a new cover star, in this context supported the personal aspirations of young men to be physically tough and commanding in their social networks²². *Kung Fu Monthly* encouraged readers to take up martial arts practice as a physical signifier of their dedication to *kung fu* cinema. It promoted martial arts as "an essential part of *western* life" (emphasis in original) thanks to "every town" opening a martial arts school and "every cinema showing a Kung-Fu spectacular" and thus offered the magazine as a place for "true" fans of Hong Kong cinema to get the advantage over their friends (*Kung Fu Monthly*, Issue 9).

²² Writing for Birmingham's Centre for Cultural Studies in the 1970s, John Clarke (1975) offers a detailed analysis of the role of violence in skinhead culture and its connections to gender and identity formation in this section of Britain's working class.



Figure 4: Kung Fu in Action, Dragon (1975)

For those without the financial means to adorn their bedrooms with memorabilia, showcasing martial arts talent offered a faster objectification of their cultural capital as *kung fu* fans. For Paul Bowman (2009: 162) the items that epitomized this process were nunchucks/nunchaku: metal chains with cylinders of wood on either end, popularised by Bruce Lee. Nunchaku were popular with teenagers and children because those who wielded them, even without any trained skill, could “gain some teenage ‘cultural capital’ or kudos” in the school playground in an instant. Nunchaku were banned by the then British Board of Film Censorship²³ for their perceived danger and, although this ban was largely due to concerns that children were hurting *themselves* with the weapons, it helped mobilise a narrative of fear that developed in the 1970s around martial arts and class conflict. *Kung fu* became enveloped in the decade in a trend of vilifying working class communities by conservative commentators, promoting certain practices as unwholesome and unworthy of appreciation by those seeking to maintain a privileged cultural position.

At the centre of this debate were “kung fu stars”, small metal throwing weapons that could be created with a basic knowledge of DIY, which garnered a number of

²³ Now the British Board of Film Classification

scaremongering newspaper articles about the corruption of the British youth and the militarisation of football fans during the decade²⁴. Articles circulated fears of children being stirred up by *kung fu* practices through numerous reports of schoolchildren using time in metal work classes to fashion *kung fu* stars out of spare material (Greig, 1975). These fears were exacerbated when it appeared that crowds were using the stars as weapons at football matches in an ongoing conflict between “football hooligans” and police officers. Individual reports (Mirror Reporters, 1975: 11) that police were “on the lookout for the sharp pointed metal missiles” at matches in Manchester, for example, built up into a cumulative narrative of “soccer savagery”, “battles” and fears of an increasingly organised army of hooligans (Stott, 1975: 1). Football fans were seen, by a reporter in *The Guardian*,

skimming sharpened, spiked discs known as Kung Fu stars, a product of films ritualising violence, at police and provoking from Tommy Docherty, the Manchester United manager, the comment that he was frightened at the prospect “of what these louts are going to do next” (Lacey, 1975: 18)

Cinema is kept, even in this short excerpt, as the original mediator of these violent practices and their introduction to the UK, but by this point *kung fu* had reached well outside of specifically cinematic spaces and had become folded into a narrative of class conflict, truant children and violent football fans.

The cultural capital traded with by enthusiasts and fans of martial arts cinema, therefore, was quite different to that of the middlebrow press in its focus on the objectification of knowledge through practice and purchases. The main differences between *Kung Fu Monthly* and the middlebrow centred around editorial strategy with the former promoting a lack of criticality and a rabid support of the commercial marketplace and the latter refusing these due to a self-imposed evaluative rigour and “cultural taste”. It is impossible to dislocate these contradictory evaluative approaches from their social, economic and class contexts as we are reminded by Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital. The circulation of Hong Kong cinema during this era was commanded by the relationships between these diverse structures. During this period *kung fu* cinema became associated with working class consumers due to a variety of

²⁴ See Appendix Three for a scanned image from *Dragon* (1975) detailing these “throwing” stars alongside a warning, through Bruce Lee, to “be careful” with *kung fu* practice.

factors including, not least, the uptake of martial arts practice and its demonisation in contemporary, conservative press outlets. Thanks to the proliferation of martial arts film, fandom and practice in the UK at this time we can see that there were many factors mediating the life of Chinese cinema for a variety of heterogeneous audiences. I do not intend to conclusively designate in this chapter elements of consumption that were explicitly working class as this would be a dangerous oversimplification of class breakdowns in the UK and there were undoubtedly many fans of *kung fu* cinema in other class demographics.

Instead, I suggest that perceptions of class as they informed displays of cultural taste were vital in commanding the circulation of Chinese cinema at this time. For the rest of this chapter, I tease out this complexity by returning to the role played by Chineseness – at the intersections of this variety of mutually constitutive factors – to clarify these tangled processes of film circulation. This methodological approach shows us how commanding perceptions of China and Hong Kong exist in this space as they did with Mainland China's communist cinema, but that these are shaped domestically by disputes of class, taste, and distinction. Martial arts films functioned at this time as particularly visible intermediaries between the UK and Chinese regions yet, while they offered a cultural character compatible with the market forces exploiting this phenomenon, they did not signify the specific kinds of Chineseness preferred by the middlebrow.

Hap Ki Do and a general East Asianness

Despite their abundance and financial success, the *kung fu* films that travelled from Hong Kong to the UK at this time actually represented a narrow selection of Chinese regions' varied output, lacking a diversity that was present even within the martial arts genre alone. The 1960s and 1970s were a particularly prolific time for the film industries of Hong Kong and Taiwan. A centre for Mandarin-language films, Hong Kong's industry in the 1960s also became a production hub where over 300 Cantonese-language films were produced annually by a number of competing studios. Each of these organisations worked with a plethora of genres, settings, and languages to satisfy

the tastes of expanding local and regional audiences²⁵. The Shaw Brothers studio was the most prolific in an era of plenty for South East Asian filmgoers: starting production on a new film on an almost weekly basis, boasting high production values and widescreen technology. Less well known internationally is the commercial film industry of Taiwan which also flourished at this time as one of the top ten film producing areas in the world (Lee, 2012: xiii). Readers will remember that the film industries of Mainland China staggered during the collectivist campaigns of Chairman Mao's communist government for which fiction filmmaking was "stopped completely" between 1966 and 1970 and remained slight and highly controlled for much of the following decade (Clark, 1987: 127).

The absence of Mainland Chinese productions on the international market and the high number of Hong Kong martial arts films making their way to Britain help us understand why this specific niche of Chinese-language filmmaking came to represent Chinese cinema in its entirety in the UK outside of the middlebrow during the 1970s. Most of the other regional trends in Chinese industries would have been invisible to general audiences in Britain. International festivals at Cannes and San Francisco were two of some that did play films with festival appeal like the period drama *The Magnificent Concubine* and operatic musical *Love Eterne* (1963, Li Han Hsiang) in the 1960s (Fu, 2008: 9) but these failed to have much of an impact on Britain's exhibitors and press. Even these films made famous internationally through the avenues of art cinema on the festival circuit appear to have missed Britain, with *Monthly Film Bulletin* reviewing no films from Hong Kong or Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the range of filmmaking going on in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the selection of films that made it to Britain was surprisingly homogeneous and representatively small. Observations of this reality frustrated British critics who had the good fortune to have travelled to Hong Kong and seen the region's other offerings, like Tony Rayns (1974a: 138), who was quick and able to discuss the region's otherwise diverse productions. This would change after the Hong Kong International Film Festival was established as a global platform for Chinese-language film in 1976.

For the most part, though, the sheer number of martial arts productions

²⁵ See Fu (2000) for a particularly in depth study of Hong Kong's 1960s cinema for a range of examples that show the diversity of production at this time.

arriving in the UK in this short time gave the opposite impression of a bountiful and representative collection of films. These films were rarely seen to constitute a “Hong Kong cinema” despite the acknowledged awareness that this was their production base, and it was much more common to find “Chinese cinema” used in contemporaneous publications and adverts. Within the collection of films that made it to the UK, however, there was often very little that was specifically “Chinese” in both their aesthetics and their presentation to audiences. Hong Kong too was almost invisible in these films which instead offered a generalised East Asian cultural identity, defined more by its genre than local identity, which circulated perceptions of a mysterious and homogeneous East. A useful case study through which to see these characteristics is *Hap Ki Do*, a martial arts film released in Britain at the early stages of the *kung fu* craze in February of 1974, which is relevant both for its formal qualities and the breadth of its circulation in Britain.

Hap Ki Do was one of a handful of productions that were quickly canonised as “classics” by the British press in the middle of the decade. Between 1973 and 1976, amid the regular releases of new martial arts films arriving in Britain on a weekly basis, these films – including, mainly, *King Boxer*, *The Killer*, *Hap Ki Do* and *Fist of Fury* – dipped in and out of screenings at regional cinemas for a number of years following their initial successes in London and in large regional venues. Starring three rising stars of the Hong Kong industry – Angela Mao, Carter Wong, and Sammo Hung – *Hap Ki Do* was an early film produced by Golden Harvest, the biggest competitor to the Shaw Brothers in the early 1970s. The eponymous *hapkido* is the name of a specific form of martial arts practice, originating in Korea, which begins the central narrative thread of the film that follows three students of the discipline tasked with spreading the form to Mainland China, where they are to set up their own school. These aspirations are disrupted by a group of Japanese thugs, the “Black Bear Gang”, who misuse their own martial arts to terrorise the townsfolk and threaten the institution ran by the three protagonists. In a morality tale whose simplicity was criticised at the time (Rayns, 1974b), the film concludes with the surviving members of the *hapkido* school overthrowing their Japanese competitors and returning peace to the town. This conflict is also the central conceit of *King Boxer* and *Fist of Fury*, whereby the restraint of martial arts students at an academy is tested by (also Japanese) aggressors until a final

explosion of violence is justified to close the film. There are numerous elements to *Hap Ki Do*'s narrative and aesthetic strategies that are emblematic of the most visible films of the *kung fu* craze in Britain: these were films that did not “belong” to Hong Kong due to a number of textual and extra-textual factors (Hunt, 2003: 15).

First, set in the 1930s, the film is removed from the contemporary Hong Kong of its production. *Hap Ki Do* sits at the more contemporary end of the spectrum, but almost all of those films which toured Britain at this time were set either in the early 20th or late 19th centuries. Though this in itself is a broad amount of time, and a particularly complex and contentious one for regional Chinese politics and histories, the specificity of these settings is unimportant: it is relevant simply that these stories do not take place in the present day. Characters in *Hap Ki Do* wear clothing that is appropriate enough to the setting but any dedication to accurate historicity is confounded by the use of generic sets and costumes by the production studios. Although the film is also removed from Hong Kong by its geographic setting – between Korea and Mainland China – again, the specificity of these locations is hard to distinguish because *Hap Ki Do* was shot on sets that would have appeared in many other productions of the day. Studio sets were used across the Golden Harvest and Shaw Brothers *kung fu* films released in the UK, so audiences would doubtlessly have been familiar with their appearance, meaning that connections between films were more likely to be made than connections to specific locations and historical moments.

Accuracy is unimportant here and what is relevant is that this is simply not Hong Kong, nor really China: it is a general East Asian location. The result of these two separations is that the film deals with a cultural memory whose histories and ideological passions did not belong to contemporary Hong Kong and its population: they belonged to “another place and to an older generation” (Abbas, 1997: 30) that may or may not have ever existed²⁶. Another distraction from the specificity of setting is that, despite the Korean/Mainland Chinese locations and characters of *Hap Ki Do*,

²⁶ It has been argued (Shu, 2010) that, in fact, this dislocation from contemporary Hong Kong to a historical, mythical China is actually a visual representation of the cultural imagination of a Hong Kong population who do not associate with their British colonial government. Shu (2010: 52) suggests that the “rendition of China” in Bruce Lee’s films highlights “the problem of cultural dislocation among the inhabitants of Hong Kong, who do not identify themselves with either mainland China or the British empire, but who live in a space of anxiety, ambiguity, and contradiction in between”. A valid reading this certainly is, this was not an interpretation that appeared in the contemporaneous press.

the film played in Britain with a dubbed English audio track. Again symptomatic of the genre for its further abstraction of the Chineseness presented visually, dubbing was one of many aesthetic elements that disagreed with Britain's middlebrow press, as noted by Tony Rayns (1974b: 41) in his *Monthly Film Bulletin* review of the film²⁷.

These aesthetic tendencies have been covered in a recent wave of studies on martial arts films centred on textual analyses (see Hunt, 2003; Farquhar, 2008; Bowman, 2009, for examples), some of which have noted that the aesthetic strategies of these films circulated an “Orientalist imaginary” more severely than productions from Hong Kong have done since (Hunt, 2003: 13). These films presented an historical East Asia of “romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences”, as Edward Said (1979: 1, 5) has written of Europe’s view of “The Orient”, which offered to fans an encounter with a representation of East Asia which existed “despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a “real” Orient” itself. Importantly, the character of this cultural presentation was extended unquestioningly in the UK by those most influential in sympathetic circles, where cultural intermediaries such as *Kung Fu Monthly* continued the “Orientalist imaginary” of the films through their own coverage.

Pages of the magazines were regularly laced with a language of discovery detailing the mysterious Asia of these films' settings: from a piece on the “maze of strange sounding names and rituals” in “Chinese Secret Societies” (Issue 10) to ruminations on the death of Bruce Lee as “Victim of Ninja Death Squad” (Issue 23) and an exposé “on a thousand years of secrecy” in the Shaolin Temple (Issue 26). This language extended to the magazine’s star profiles, including one on *Hap Ki Do*’s Angela Mao who received similar treatment. In a long feature on *Hap Ki Do* and its female lead, readers were told by writer Tong Inch’iek²⁸ that, just like her diegetic character, Mao studied at a school where “ancient Chinese martial arts [were] taught”, that she

²⁷ A minority of *Monthly Film Bulletin* reviews show that a few films played in their original language with English subtitles, as may have been the case in club screenings not recorded by the magazine, however this appears to be much rarer than the films playing dubbed for nationwide releases. Furthermore, until the mid-1970s following the influence of Bruce Lee and other local films associated with the Hong Kong New Wave, most of these martial arts productions would have been originally filmed in Mandarin, the official language of Mainland China, which would similarly have abstracted the Hong Kong character of the films.

²⁸ The editors of *Kung Fu Monthly* all used pseudonyms for their activities at the magazine, almost all of which casually mocked Chinese names: Don Won Ton and Tong Inch’iek were perhaps the worst offenders.

was the “ideal of classic Chinese culture” as a modest women, and most bizarrely, with *Hap Ki Do* arriving in the UK not long after Bruce Lee's death, that she had “the spirit of Bruce to guide” her through her troubles.

These editorials and star profiles circulated the same exotic and Orientalist tone promoted by the selection of films making it to the UK from Hong Kong and they also sought to foreground the importance of historical, traditional Chinese customs in contemporary life. Part of the function of these star profiles was certainly to curate a fandom with a rabid appetite for Hong Kong's star system in the way Hollywood's media machine had done for years prior, and focusing on the “authenticity” of these actors in their Chinese context would have helped set them apart from their American contemporaries, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. Yet, the magazines commitment to the mysteries of everything from temples to “ninja death squads” reveals their primary interest in stoking the flames of intrigue with this “Orientalist imaginary” more than it does any ambition to nurture a holistic understanding of the contemporary Hong Kong or Chinese experience. They suggest that the cultural character of these films was met in the UK with little resistance from those who were curating the films for invested communities. Though the ubiquity of Hong Kong films in UK cinemas could have offered a chance for audiences to “examine certain notions of linguistic, racial and cultural difference” (Fore, quoted in Hunt, 2003: 13), the modes of consumption encouraged by these intermediaries instead suggest the opposite: that they offered simply, “a flirtation with the exotic rather than an attempt at any genuine intercultural understanding” (Marchetti, quoted in Hunt, 2003: 13).

Enter the Dragon and the authenticity debate

I am cautious of betraying the heterogeneity of Britain's audiences by suggesting that no genuine intercultural understanding was attempted, but *Kung Fu Monthly's* “dominant” reading of the films – in Stuart Hall's (1980b) words – as an extension of their own ideological presentation was symptomatic of a British culture in the 1970s and early 1980s that was generally invested in a vague and homogeneous understanding of East Asia. Across television, music, books, leisure activities and even food, this was a wide-reaching cultural moment where spurious, generalised and exotic

portrayals of East Asia were ubiquitous across Britain's commercial spaces. On television, for example, BBC One broadcast the American series *Kung Fu* (1972 – 1975) which told the story of a Shaolin monk, played by David Carradine, travelling through the old American West as guided by his proverb-keen elderly master. The programme was immensely popular in Britain as it was in the US, becoming “flavour of the decade” (*I Love Kung Fu*, 2001) and enjoying high ratings as one of the most viewed and well known programmes of the 1970s (Iwamura, 2011: 154). *Kung Fu* was a particularly vague and “inauthentic” presentation, set in America with a white actor in the lead role, but it occupied the same spaces as Hong Kong's martial arts films in Britain: the poster included in the first issue of *Dragon*, for example, was of David Carradine in character from *Kung Fu*, not of a Hong Kong star.

Later in the decade, the BBC broadcast two Japanese series, *Water Margin* (1973) and *Monkey* (1978 – 1980), which retold historical Chinese epics and screened on prime time slots for a young audience²⁹. Again hugely popular, both series were dubbed in English with scripts written by the British David Weir, based only on plot synopses rather than direct translations of the original scripts. Faithfulness to the source material was not important here. Like *Kung Fu*, these programmes offered “pearl-of-wisdom aphorisms” in their spiritual and mysterious presentations of Chinese cultures. Viewers are told immediately in the opening credits of *Monkey* that “in the worlds before Monkey, primal chaos reigned. Heaven sought order, but the phoenix can fly only when its feathers are grown”. These lines are delivered with an affected accent by Burt Kwouk, one of a collection of British actors who provided the English dub of *Monkey* for the BBC with equally spurious international accents (Tasker, 2013: 124). The propensity in the scripts of *Monkey* and *Water Margin* for these aphorisms extended to their framing in marketing material and television listings where each episode of the former was introduced with the knowing “Old Chinese proverb says...” in suitably broken English (Radio Times, 1979). Elsewhere on television, the American Hanna-Barbera production *Hong Kong Phooey* (1974) offered a similarly clichéd and light-hearted take on *kung fu* culture.

²⁹ *The Water Margin* initially screened on BBC Two on Tuesday nights after 9pm in 1976, but the series moved to a prime time evening slot on BBC One, Friday evenings, in May of 1977 (Radio Times, 1976; Radio Times, 1977)

These television programmes were not anomalies in their circulation of stereotypical and often historical presentations of East-Asianness. They were matched in various forms from the music charts and Carl Douglas' (1974) "Kung Fu Fighting" disco track, right through to food suppliers eager to exploit the cultural phenomenon. Golden Wonder, supplier of savoury snacks, created the short-lived "Kung Fuey" crisps which they promoted with a television advert that promised the "taste of a new way of life" from "out of the East". As elsewhere, there was nothing particularly *Chinese* about this product: this advertisement was presented by Keinosuke Enoda, a practitioner of *karate*, the Japanese martial art (Kallenderumezu, 2010). Elsewhere, Vesta, a company which helped popularise "ready meals" in the 1960s and 1970s produced a range of Chinese inspired products: most notably their Vesta Chow Mein. Promoted across advertisements with a variety of stereotypes and "Fu Man Chew" puns, Vesta promised consumers a meal that was "Oriental, mysterious, exciting [and] imaginative" in their television advertising, sold against a collection of images of traditional customs from across China's regions (Vesta Chow Mein, 1985). In a practice shared by Chinese takeaway and restaurant establishments across the country (see Anderson, 1987: 583; Luk, 2005: 1), authenticity and accuracy was unimportant and irrelevant to these developments in the food industry. These were not calls to a specific Chineseness located in the contemporary cuisine of Hong Kong, Taiwan or Mainland China, but they were exotic aesthetic signifiers utilised to exploit a cultural phenomenon for financial gain.

Parallels in the food industry are useful indicators of the intersections between domestic definitions of taste distinction and perceptions of East Asia in the curation of Chinese cinema by key tastemakers in British film cultures. It is worth considering these contemporaneous trends in detail because they provide insight into the pursuits of cultural capital that exist beyond the confines of film cultures and in turn help contextualise those otherwise film-specific processes. In other words, the way one discussed Chinese or East Asian cultures during this time whether in film, food, or other contexts, was interconnected with domestic trends. Remaining on the food industry is helpful here. While "food choice is a complex phenomenon" with numerous factors dictating consumer choice, various meanings have historically been ascribed to the consumption of certain types of food (Mahon et al, 2006: 474). Ready meals of the kind

provided by Vesta as well as takeaway establishments in contemporary British society tend to be associated with working class families thanks to assumptions made about the time needed to cook meals from scratch being a luxury only afforded to the wealthy (Parsons, 2015: 52). While these perceptions have not always been true and during the 1970s there were equally pervasive assumptions of upwardly mobile class aspiration to the consumption of ready meals, the fast food phenomenon has long been understood as a visible signifier of the commercialisation of food cultures in Britain and across the world.

Much of this kind of food has long been disregarded by middle class newspaper journalists and middlebrow critics, dismissive of the marketplace, through patronising dismissals of food understood to be “inauthentic”. Knowledge of authenticity, like those in *Films and Filming* who praised films that showed the “real” China, becomes a shortcut in these spaces to authority and cultural capital. For example, since the proliferation of Chinese food in the UK in the 1970s there has been hesitancy in middle- and highbrow circles to consume it in its commercial form, which is assumed to be a “Westernised, bastardised version” of the cuisine (Malone, 1968). The assumption is that popular Chinese dishes in the UK, like the iconic sweet and sour chicken and chow mein, are creations developed to hoodwink ignorant non-Chinese Brits that should be avoided by informed, cosmopolitan restaurant goers³⁰. The disregard for such food can be found across materials from the 1960s to the present day, but was perhaps best shown by a tirade offered by John Lancaster (1995) near the millennium on the emblematic sweet and sour pork. In the piece, Lancaster suggests that the sauce of this dish “achieves the colour of an air-sea rescue beacon, the viscosity of superglue and the flavour of concentrated Hermesetas [and] its pork accomplishes the texture of pre-chewed gristle and the flavour of ashtrays”. The critic, who makes it known in this piece for *The Observer* that he grew up in Hong Kong, is keen to note additionally that “in the area of Chinese cooking...increased authenticity has been nothing but a good thing”. Here is one example whereby appreciation of authenticity becomes a marker of cultural distinction because only those with the good fortune to have experienced

³⁰ There have been times when this consideration has had a hostile inflection through the suggestion that Chinese communities are exploiting or excluding non-Chinese patrons from their restaurants for sinister reasons (see: Smith, 1987: 20) but mostly this is instead viewed as a challenge for those wanting to find the “real thing”

“authentic” cuisine are able to distinguish it from its “bastardised version”.

Complexities remain, however, and food that is perceived as inauthentic is granted its own space to exist thanks to its status as a cultural oddity. Like Stephen Snell's comment in *Films and Filming* that *kung fu* films were to be enjoyed but not analysed with the complexity of other productions, many journalists of the 1960s and 1970s would showcase knowledge that the food they consumed was inauthentic but were happy to enjoy it anyway for its “exotic” character. Acknowledgement seems to be enough to raise one's cultural capital because the appeal of the “Orientalist imaginary” even within a “Westernised bastardised” version is too strong to dismiss. For instance, in the *Daily Mirror* newspaper in the 1960s, from a time just before the explosion of East Asian culture in the UK, Mary Malone (1968: 18) wrote a particularly open-minded review of a television programme which went to great lengths to deconstruct and disprove problematic stereotypes affecting British-Chinese communities. Malone's piece is progressive, including the admonishment that all these stereotypes were “comic-book hogwash”, yet her review ends with a strangely oxymoronic plea: “It's all very well ripping away the myths like this, but now what are we going to do for an exotic night out?”. Though she accepts these stereotypes as “hogwash”, she is keen to retain the Orientalist mystique of their character for the pleasure to be gained from them. It is enough for Malone to showcase her awareness of inauthenticity while retaining an investment in it because this both reveals her enviable knowledge and also maintains exotic spaces she can visit for an evening out. Despite complicating calls to authenticity, the seductive lure of an Orientalist reading of East Asian culture remains strong throughout this discourse.

It is worth discussing food in such detail because these approaches were symptomatic of the ways perceptions of Chineseness and East-Asianness intersected with Britain's cultural and class geographies to inform the circulation of Hong Kong's martial arts cinema. Questions of authenticity and inauthenticity have been ubiquitous in assessments of *kung fu* films since the arrival of *King Boxer* in the UK, both in terms of authenticity in practice (whether the fighting is ‘real’) and in cultural representation (whether the places and cultures depicted are ‘real’). Authenticity in practice has been a particularly commanding aspect of the reception of Bruce Lee's Hong Kong films,

both in critical and scholarly circles, since their arrival on the international circuit³¹. Authenticity in cultural representation, however, is yet to receive the same amount of attention despite being equally influential. To tease out the motivations for, and repercussions of, this preoccupation with in/authenticity it is useful to look at Lee's 1973 film *Enter the Dragon* which arrived in the UK in January, 1974, as a case study. The purpose of this closing investigation is not to delineate what was or was not authentic in *Enter the Dragon* – Stuart Hall (1990: 222) and those after him have long reminded us that authenticity in cultural identities is an impossible notion that is “always constituted within, not outside, representation” – but rather, to understand the repercussions of the culture-wide investment in authenticity in British film cultures. As noted in Chapter One, authenticity as a prerequisite for positive appraisals is a dangerous condition for numerous reasons, not least because in British film cultures, those who dictate the standards of authenticity are film critics, publications and distributors who themselves have ulterior investments in their activities.

Released only months after his death, *Enter the Dragon* came out at a time when the mythos of Lee's authenticity was at the height of its codification by magazines and fans around the world³². *Enter the Dragon* was a co-production between the US-based Warner Bros. and Hong Kong's Golden Harvest. As noted above, Warner Bros. were vital in the early stages of the *kung fu* craze in America and Britain through their distribution strategies and *Enter the Dragon* represented an attempt to capitalise on this popularity at ground level. There are numerous elements to the film's narrative, *mise-en-scène*, and characters that point toward its transnational production status. In the film, Lee plays a martial artist who is enlisted by the British secret service to enter a tournament hosted by a crime lord with stakes in prostitution and drug

³¹ Leon Hunt (2003) goes into rigorous detail in a discussion of the differences between “archival”, “cinematic”, and “corporeal” authenticity in the films. Elsewhere there is a focus on Lee's real martial arts ability. We can find *Kung Fu Monthly's* posthumous assurance that Lee was only interested in promoting *kung fu* to the world and not in the glamour of show business (Issue 5), for example, which is echoed in Hsuing-Ping Chiao's (1981) academic investigation of the star which unquestioningly circulates Lee's primacy as a “martial artist” instead of an “actor”. This assumption similarly informed middlebrow appraisals by those like Derek Elley (1974b: 44/45) who praised Lee's physical ability and the development of his own martial art form, *jeet kune do*.

³² There is no need to rehearse the controversy and mystery surrounding Lee's death here. It is interesting to note, though, that the reasons for his apparent death have moved from the ridiculous and extravagant (as “Victim of a Ninja Death Squad”) to ones dependent on the “authenticity” of his physical ability (he was so physically fit that a pain-killer tablet killed him).

trafficking. While the action is choreographed martial arts, this overarching narrative intentionally shares much with the popular James Bond films of the era, though it has been noted that the imperial connotations of Bond's character are remapped into an anti-corruption morality tale through Lee's star persona and expectations of the *kung fu* genre (Prashad, 2003: 54). During the mission, Lee meets a number of characters of diverse ethnic and national backgrounds who either help or hinder his progress. These characters have been read by Paul Bowman (2013: 175) as formal representations of *kung fu* cinema's diverse international fan base: Lee carries associations with a Chinese identity and he is joined in his fellow tournament competitors by white American actor John Saxon playing the "white ersatz Bond" figure, and the African-American Jim Kelly as the "black inner city karateka". Bowman's reading is a more amenable interpretation of that from the time which saw these characters as part of an "all embracing plotline that could only be brought on by the need to sell in as many 'territories' as possible" (Glaessner, 1974b: 29).

In the middlebrow press, few reviews and discussions passed without pejorative reference to these transnational characteristics. These perspectives were shared both by general staff writers at publications like *Films and Filming*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Sight and Sound* as well as those enthusiasts within them, from Tony Rayns to Verina Glaessner, who otherwise often sat as outliers from their dominant editorial preferences. Both Glaessner (1974b: 29) at *Time Out* and Margaret Tarratt (1974: 44) at *Films and Filming*, for example, chose the phrase "loss of innocence" to refer to *Enter the Dragon*'s intentional targeting of international audiences. It was understood, in words similar to dismissals of British-Chinese food, that the fan community in Britain were dismayed by the film's corruption of pure martial arts thanks to Warner Bros.'s bastardised interpretation for a global audience (Tarrat, 1974: 44). Appropriately, in the issue of *Films and Filming* that followed the review, one reader was keen to note that the *karate* practised in the background of much of *Enter the Dragon* was inaccurate (Anthony, 1974: 4). Elsewhere, Tony Rayns (1974c: 6) was displeased that this co-produced "mutant" looked "like nothing more than a low-budget re-make of the island fortress scenes from *You Only Live Twice*" whose "basic tactical errors" made the film "inferior even to the most modest Hong Kong production". Behind these criticisms lay accusations of inauthenticity that resulted specifically from America's involvement.

These assessments forgot that Hong Kong's martial arts cinema had been transnational from the start through its South-East Asia wide production context and intentional international outlook. These “mutant” characteristics did not matter when the studios involved were also located in East and South-East Asia because their involvement did not break any identifiable call to an authentic Asianness in their productions.

Bruce Lee managed to navigate some of these observations and avoid their transformation into severe criticisms thanks to his own personal history which shared the same transnational trajectory as *Enter the Dragon*'s production. Lee was born in America in 1940 but spent his childhood in Hong Kong. He rose to fame in the late 1960s as a sidekick in the American television series *The Green Hornet* (1966 – 1967), yet despite immense popularity, his career possibilities were held back by institutional anxieties about his ethnicity (Bowman, 2013: 3). Lee returned to Hong Kong at the end of the decade to pursue a film career there, which quickly led to his international success. Sympathetic writers have turned the dual identity of the film's star into a way of reading the “inauthenticity” of films like *Enter the Dragon* to support positive appraisals. Chiao (1981: 33), for example, credits Lee's success to his presentation of authentic martial arts through aesthetic strategies which both Eastern and Western audiences could read, thanks to his knowledge of both cultures' industries. In particular, Chiao notes that in Lee's productions there are aesthetic strategies more common with “western realism” than with the “Oriental fantasies” of earlier martial arts films. We see in Lee's films, and those like *Enter the Dragon* which was directed by an American with experience in Hollywood's film and TV industry, “fewer camera tricks”, more long shots, and reduced edits: “so audiences could tell they were watching genuine kung fu instead of camera deceptions” (ibid). Although *Enter the Dragon* may have been “inauthentic” in terms of it being a “Chinese film” thanks to American involvement, it serendipitously retained an authenticity for critics that paralleled the life of its lead which, in turn, enhanced the physical authenticity of his martial arts practice through a more “realistic” aesthetic strategy. This would have been a difficult line to toe for most Hong Kong stars and films of the era.

Outside of *Enter the Dragon*, other aspects of the Bruce Lee mythology offer acute examples of the desire for, but ultimate acknowledgement of the impossibility of, authenticity. Toward the end of the 1970s, the British market saw a number of

“Bruceploitation” films released across the country. These were films that starred any number of Bruce Lee stand-ins – all with names similar enough to the star to cause confusion in unwitting spectators – which were produced by a number of Hong Kong studios desperate to continue cashing in on the international fame and mythology of the star following his early death. *The Dragon on Fire* (1978, Joseph Kong), reviewed by Tom Milne (1982: 41), was one of the more egregious of these films – starring a Bruce Lei, a Bruce Lea, and a Bruce Le – and one of the least liked of “Hong Kong’s tiresome parasites”. At *Monthly Film Bulletin*, reviews of these films fell almost entirely to Tony Rayns who, by this point, was dismissive and tired of these inauthentic productions. For these critics, there was nothing of the authentic in these films, particularly those like *Dragon Dies Hard* (1975, Kuan-Chang Li), released in 1979, which Rayns (1979: 225) thought was “evidently shot in Taiwan...and may, in fact, be a Taiwanese production” and ultimately a “thinly plotted and staggering dull” film. Half of Rayns’ review of this film was dedicated to cautious advice that the English name on the British release had already been used by a “1976 Taiwanese movie”, and that the staff of *Monthly Film Bulletin* had been unable to source accurate cast and crew credits. Authenticity and accuracy, though evidently still sought after by evangelists at these publications, was seemingly obscured at every level.

This frustration in its various forms was common across all those who received martial arts films because the obscuring of authenticity and accuracy played such a prominent part in the films’ international distribution. All publications mentioned in this chapter were agreed in their continued annoyance at the British Board of Film Censorship and its enthusiastic censoring of violence in martial arts films. Dubbed the “Scissor Kings of Soho Square” (*Kung Fu Monthly*, Issue 56), the censors were the cause of constant annoyance for *Kung Fu Monthly* and its readers, but also for those like Tudor Gates (1974: 44) at *Films and Filming* who bemoaned the edits forced on the soft-core *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan*, and an anonymous *Time Out* (1973c: 34) critic who lamented *The Big Boss*’ protracted journey to the UK due to censorship controversies. These were understandable frustrations considering that writers and fans found value in martial arts films to lay predominantly in the spectacle of the fight scenes which were being hastily cut out of most films (Kaminsky, 1982: 138). These valid concerns united disparate cultural commentators and cultivated a

shared faith of unknowable and potentially unattainable originals in Hong Kong. Censorship was only one contributor to this trend, as summed up comprehensively by Rayns (1974a: 138) in his *Sight and Sound* report on “Hong Kong Movies” in which, after complaining about the British censor and the practice of “insultingly” poor dubbing, he noted that

like the popular culture of any country, they are regarded as fair targets for ‘adjustment’ to the tastes of another: Lo Wei’s *The Big Boss*, for example, plays here with a music track reportedly added in West Germany. Or even as targets for political hijacking: Do Kwang Chee’s *Crush* first appeared in Paris in a version with situationist subtitles (prepared by the ‘Association for the Development of Class Struggles and the Propagation of Dialectical Materialism’) as *La Dialectique peut-elle casser des briques?*.

Whether the BBFC, Hong Kong studio’s dubbing staff, German editors, or even French situationists, the processes by which *kung fu* films travelled to the UK made it impossible for any claims to authenticity to be validated.

In their “adjustment to the tastes of another” country, the films of the *kung fu* craze are discussed by these key tastemakers with similar language to that used of food and culture, with critics forever frustrated by the inauthenticity of the available product. Through the framework of authenticity, these films take on a loaded meaning in tandem with a Vesta chow mein or a takeaway’s sweet and sour pork whose assessments are bound with assumptions about taste, class and cultural capital on the part of those discussing them. The large number of martial arts films from Hong Kong represented a uniquely visible collection of non-Euro-American films in the British marketplace but possibilities of “genuine intercultural understanding” were counterbalanced by the parochial films making it through and the means through which they travelled to Britain. These actualities continued to enforce a separation between Britain and the East Asian production centre of the films extended by those responsible for their circulation and discursive framing. In those new magazines for enthusiasts, it allowed for the weaving of tales of exotic and mysterious histories and locations from which these films came; stoking the flames of fan intrigue and compelling readers to find edits of films that were truest to their original form before the butchery of distributors and censors. In middlebrow and middle class circles it had the opposite effect: contributing to a hesitancy to commit to engaged discussions of

films through their perceived inauthenticity. The desire for authenticity shown across the middlebrow response to Bruce Lee and his clones suggests that the completely “inauthentic” presentation of Chineseness across the majority Hong Kong films playing in the UK across this era would have constrained their promotion by those eager to retain their capital as informed authorities familiar with authentic portrayals.

Conclusion

This focused study on exhibition, distribution, critical assessments, and contextual social trends during a short period of time in the mid-1970s when the *kung fu* craze was at its peak thus reveals a series of parallel competing narratives in the circulation of Hong Kong's martial arts productions. This was a commercially successful collection of films which aided the buoyancy of a film market in Britain which was generally floundering in the early 1970s. A cultural phenomenon that began initially in cinemas, the boom was carried and extended by a number of sympathetic cultural institutions and publications from a prolific publishing culture down to suppliers of new crisp flavours, almost all of which continued the generalised East-Asianness presented within the films themselves. The sheer number of films arriving in the UK during this time statistically offered audiences in Britain exposure to Chinese-language films and cultures in ways not previously available, yet their suggested consumption by sympathetic cultural intermediaries presented East Asia as distant and homogeneous, instead of encouraging the potential of genuine intercultural understanding. It was partially for these reasons as well as those of aesthetic accomplishment and genre filmmaking that the middlebrow establishment was unenthusiastic in their response to Hong Kong's martial arts cinema following the standout early releases of the *kung fu* craze.

The *kung fu* craze serves as a useful reminder of the negotiation process between producers of culture (in Hong Kong in this case) and its consumers (in Britain) whereby both possess an agency in the way represented cultures therein are perceived and consumed. Whether through dismissals of inauthenticity or the extension of “Orientalist” perceptions present in the niche collection of films making it to the UK, British receivers of *kung fu* films continued to define Chinese culture as something “to

be explored and investigated” (Chow, 2010b: 25) in ways that were prescribed by those dictating the exploration. Vitrally, these contrasting modes of consuming Hong Kong’s cinema during this era show that not only do assumptions of the cultural character of “Chinese films” intersect with aesthetic considerations, but that these attitudes and appetites for specific kinds of Chineseness are shaped by intersections of class, cultural capital, and taste which are significantly informed by domestic conflicts and characteristics, rather than international politics. The *kung fu* craze was a cinematic moment defined in the UK largely by its associations with working class spaces and investments, where displays of interest in the specific brand of Chineseness, or East-Asianness, promoted by the films themselves had repercussions on a person’s cultural capital and their own personal character within respective contexts.

Without wanting to imply causality too strongly in this process, these characteristics of the reception of Hong Kong’s martial arts films in Britain suggest a number of answers to the problem that began this chapter, regarding the ability for Chinese cinema to arrive in the UK in the late 1980s despite the prominent history I have detailed here. The *kung fu* craze, in terms of the spaces it was consumed, its class associations, its lack of the wished-for authentic Mainland Chinese character, and its aesthetic characteristics, suggested to the middlebrow tastemaker a type of cinema of little importance. Not only this, but it was an anomaly as a type of non-English-language, non-Hollywood filmmaking that did not require the middlebrow critic at all for its passage to a British public. The arrival of the Fifth Generation, discussed in the next chapter as a collection of filmmakers – dependent on the international film festival circuit – who were making compatible films about Mainland China and its political situation, finally afforded Britain’s conservative critics, middlebrow commentators, and film studies scholars, a chance to regain their agency in dictating the cultural value of Chinese-language film productions. It was the Fifth Generation that shifted Chinese cinema back into the predominantly middle class space of arthouse cinemas and middlebrow publishing cultures where these cultural intermediaries retained relevance and necessity in the processes of consuming international film production.

3. “The most acclaimed Chinese film ever made”: *Yellow Earth* and the Primacy of Mainland China in Britain's Debate Culture

Yellow Earth, the directorial debut of Chen Kaige, was first shown to an international audience at the 1985 Hong Kong International Film Festival. Immediately lauded by some as an “outstanding breakthrough” (Yau, 1988: 22) the film received praise at worldwide events, including its acceptance of the 1985 British Film Institute award in London (Lent and Zhengxing, 2000: 32/33). Chen's film was the first of China's Fifth Generation, a collection of filmmakers who attended the Beijing Film Academy at roughly the same time, to receive substantial attention from international art cinema tastemakers without the anxiety that had been forever attached to Hong Kong's martial arts films. This was an “auteurist and ostensibly internationalist Chinese cinema” led by directors instead of stars and genre, acclaimed on the global film festival circuit and its colleagues in the British middlebrow (Chan and Willis, 2016: 2). Films by the Fifth Generation were so in vogue at this time that (then festival director) Derek Malcolm (1985) conceded “if the London Film Festival was not an outstanding festival for films from the East [they] would have failed abysmally to choose justly. This section is enormously strong, both in numbers and quality”. Referring to the films of Chen Kaige and his colleagues Zhang Yimou, and Tian Zhuangzhaung, the “East” here finally included Chinese regions that had previously been ostracised in favour of Japanese productions.

The critical popularity of the Fifth Generation did not just open up Chinese-language films to those cultural authorities with privileged access to film festivals, but also to members of the general public. Following an exclusive six-week presentation at the ICA in London in 1986, *Yellow Earth* toured Britain's regional cinemas well into 1987. The critical praise of “the most acclaimed Chinese film ever made” (Display Ad, 1986) was matched with robust nationwide exhibition and Chen's debut feature was not an anomaly in this regard. Although the early films that benefited from this exhibition boom did so exclusively at the ICA in London, by the early 1990s a significant number of productions from Mainland China and its neighbouring Taiwan played to regional British audiences. These were not bound to the “arthouse” network. Chen Kaige's epic *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), for example, did play at independent

repertory cinemas including the Watershed in Bristol and the Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle, but it also found supporters in the multiplex at the ODEON cinema in Hull and the Warner cinema in Bury, to name only a few venues. This exhibition support was matched by concurrent trends in British television. During the late 1980s, other films of the Fifth Generation including *Hibiscus Town* (1986, Xie Jin), *The Big Parade* (1986, Chen Kaige) and *King of Children* (1987, Chen Kaige) were screened on BBC2.

This was a circulation of Chinese cinema not seen since the early days of the *kung fu* craze. As noted in Chapter Two, however, unlike Hong Kong's martial arts cinema, Mainland China's Fifth Generation has remained well-liked in the middlebrow and oft discussed in academia since its appearance to the time of writing. As recently as July 2017, *Farewell My Concubine* was named by *Time Out* as the "best" Mainland Chinese film of all time in a list compiled by Tony Rayns and others (Time Out, 2017). In the 1980s, these films were taken up as a fruitful object of academic study in a collection of published papers and edited collections, explored by Felicia Chan and Andy Willis (2016: 2) which had as their unifying trait the reading of "Chinese cinemas from the inside out and the outside in". This reading manifested in a proliferation of academic analyses of the Fifth Generation focused on the situatedness of these films within a global context and the extent to which, thanks to Mainland China's regulation and strict censorship practices, directors like Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige made films to specifically appeal to international tastemakers.

Different manifestations of these interpretations are discussed later in this chapter, but it is worth noting in this introductory section that these concerns perpetuated the preoccupation with "authenticity" that had affected both Mainland China's political cinema discussed in Chapter One and Hong Kong's *kung fu* cinema discussed in Chapter Two. Concerns of inauthenticity, "self-Orientalism" and the fetishisation of historical Chineseness alluded to earlier in this thesis continued for the Fifth Generation (see Yau, 1988, 1993; Dai, 1993). Considering its ubiquity in the discourse, I do not aim in this chapter to revisit well-worn ground in the English-language study of the Fifth Generation. Instead, this chapter uses my ongoing methodology to recontextualise their initial popularity in Britain, delineating the cultural contexts into which these films arrived in the 1980s. Observing the characteristics of the anomalous compatibility between a film like *Yellow Earth* and

almost all of Britain's heterogeneous cultural intermediaries allows us to think more productively about those incompatibilities discussed elsewhere in this thesis, informing the studies of other chapters.

Despite these continuities running back to the 1950s, the British film cultures that accommodated foreign-language, art cinema productions changed dramatically in the twenty years before *Yellow Earth's* release and these developments need to be addressed and detailed in an investigation such as my own. This is particularly true in terms of the rise of "Film Education" and the increasingly disruptive and institutionalised practice of film academics as an alternative to the critical and programming efforts of Britain's leading middlebrow authorities. Building on the findings of previous chapters, I continue to note the intersections between tastes in British film discourse and cultural assumptions toward Chinese regions and the continued preference for Mainland China, in order to more holistically situate these ongoing debates. To this end, I begin the discussion focusing on the middlebrow's reading of the Hong Kong New Wave: a collection of films that, at the time, represented Hong Kong's only foray into Galt and Schoonover's understanding of "art cinema". Trends are seen to crystallise through this case study which reveal the origins of anxieties and discursive skirmishes in this era regarding cultural capital and authority across the middlebrow press, film studies as an academic discipline, quality newspapers, and curators and festival programmers. These are concerns which I develop through Rey Chow's (2010b: 150) discussions of the "deadlock of the anthropological situation" and the perceived inability to write about Chinese-language films without "anthropologizing" them.

Academic discourse of the 1980s brought to light the contentious intersections between critical taste and cultural assumptions as they enforced problematic power dynamics between Euro-American tastemakers and international communities. These explicit concerns framed *Yellow Earth's* first exhibition in the UK, where it screened at the Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF) as part of an associated conference organised by *Framework*. This event and the journal articles that accompanied it have not been well remembered in terms of what they tell a contemporary researcher about this initial circulation of China's Fifth Generation films in Britain. This chapter, therefore, concludes with the case study of *Yellow Earth's* arrival, paying attention to

the Edinburgh event, the observations learned from it, and how this disrupted (or failed to disrupt) the tastemaking authority of the middlebrow. Films after Chen's debut received wider release in Britain, but by focusing on the initial and pivotal moment of *Yellow Earth's* release, this chapter provides readers an opportunity to view opinions, tastes, and characteristics of circulation that were in flux: in combat with one another before a consensus was reached.

The Hong Kong New Wave

As noted in Chapter Two, Jay Leyda's anticipation of "something exciting" about to happen for Chinese cinema in Britain had been counterbalanced by the numerous releases of the *kung fu* craze: the predictions of the 1960s for Chinese cinema to become a major player on the international stage were proved correct not by a handful of behind-the-camera "film artists" but by an overwhelming number of on-screen Bruce Lees who offered a brand of general East Asianness that clashed with the cultural expectations of Britain's tastemakers. In that chapter I argued that these films were incompatible with the evaluative preferences of the middlebrow but that this discord was heightened by the lack of any "authentic" Chineseness and Hong Kong therein. However, if we relocate focus to highlight Hong Kong's film artists that *did* satisfy calls to authenticity and singular authorship, we can see that a film's positioning in Hong Kong or Taiwan encouraged still a restricted circulation in Britain. There were films released at this time that did offer readings understood by the middlebrow to be authentic, but these were authentic to Hong Kong culture that did not contain any signifiers of a preferred Chineseness that would have been offered by Mainland China. This is an issue of filmmakers and "film artists" being rooted in local cultures which are themselves unable to satisfy the appetites of Britain's tastemakers. This brief consideration of Hong Kong cinema provides an illuminating counterpoint to the later discussion of *Yellow Earth*.

It is important first to emphasise that if a "film artist" was able to be defined for a particular feature, this film's standing increased in the eyes of the middlebrow tastemaker. We can see this phenomenon at its clearest in the cautious attempts to identify evidence of authorship in the films of the *kung fu* craze. Of the plethora of

films available, only two directors of martial arts cinema, Chang Cheh and King Hu, were afforded the rare privilege of acceptance into the middlebrow's canon of global film production. Both directors made it into *Monthly Film Bulletin's* "Checklist" feature, a list of worthwhile directors from around the world (Cheah and Rayns, 1976: 17; MFB, 1975: 250), and they were held up in the class of Michael Curtiz, Raoul Walsh, Francis Ford Coppola and Michael Cimino by reviewers (Rayns, 1973c: 17; Elley, 1980: 34). In order for these comparisons to hold their weight, repeated efforts were made by critics to extract the directors' films out of their undesirable generic and commercial contexts. Derek Elley (1980), Chinese cinema expert at *Films and Filming*, showed this well in promising readers that, despite its copious action sequences, Hu's *Legend of the Mountain* (1979), it was "not primarily a martial arts film".

These extractive tendencies were more easily applied to Hu than other directors because his own personal trajectory lent itself to such appraisals. Although Hu had worked within the Fordist production environment of the Shaw Brothers studio for a number of years in Hong Kong, he was known to express frustration at the restrictions placed on his artistic sensibilities by studio bosses. His films were often edited to meet external demands and Hu disowned projects that he felt did not contain enough of his authorial voice (Lee, 2012; 204 - 208). He moved to Taiwan and to a new production company in a move designed to afford more creative control over his film-making and the results were immediately lucrative: his second film made in Taiwan, *A Touch of Zen* (1971, King Hu), won the Technical Grand Prize award at Cannes (Teo, 2006; 1). Hu performed as an "auteur" in a way that will be covered in detail in Chapter Five and curated a perception of himself through his films and his mythology that chimed with the preference for individual film artists in Britain's middlebrow. Hu and Chang were, however, two names in a sea of films defined by nameless performers and visual spectacle and by the 1980s even the most ardent of supporters in Britain's specialised publications came to bemoan "the Bruce Lee boom and its tattier off-shoots" because it "failed to reveal the works of many major directors" (Elley, 1980: 46)³³. These frustrations should have been appeased in the late 1970s when the films of the Hong

³³ As a critic invested in Chinese-language cinema in general, Derek Elley (1980: 46) was also disappointed by the *kung fu* craze because it "also left uncovered most of the vast framework of actors and actresses upon whom the industries are resolutely based".

Kong New Wave arrived in Britain.

The Hong Kong New Wave was a loosely defined (and retroactively named) cinematic movement carried by a number of directors – those known in the UK at the time were Allen Fong, Ann Hui and Tsui Hark – who had been educated internationally and made their way into the Hong Kong film industry through years of working for local television companies (Teo, 1997: 137 – 183). It appears that only two films from this group made it to UK audiences, though even this small selection speaks to the diversity of the New Wave: *Father and Son* (1981, Allen Fong) a social-realist drama about inter-generational relationships and *The Butterfly Murders* (1979, Tsui Hark), a special effects laden, supernatural, martial arts genre piece. This incidental distribution of the Hong Kong New Wave speaks to its value as a case that reveals to a contemporary researcher the extent to which preferences for film artists in the middlebrow conceal a host of implicit cultural preferences. The Hong Kong New Wave offered Britain's cultural authorities a collection of films created by film artists. However, unlike most "national" cinema movements that found fame internationally, the Hong Kong New Wave existed *within* its local commercial industry and many of the films they created were genre narratives intended for mass, local audiences. The minor exhibition presence hints at the extent to which this rootedness and the brand of Chineseness promoted therein were of the kind that Britain's cultural intermediaries were generally uninterested in.

Distributed by the BFI, *Father and Son* enjoyed a run at the ICA in London and some regional cinemas (Malcolm, 1983b: 11), and it formed a part of the NFT's 1984 film season "Hong Kong, Hong Kong". *The Butterfly Murders*, with its footing in martial arts, screened at the Scala cinema in London (discussed in Chapter Four for its role in cult cinema consumption). Their availability was slight, but still a possibility for British audiences, and *The Butterfly Murders* found a keen supporter in Tony Rayns who penned a large review in *Sight and Sound*. Rayns praised the film, but did so by contending it was of relevance only to those with a specialist interest in Hong Kong productions. He concluded by noting that *The Butterfly Murders* was "one of the most striking initiatives in the Hong Kong film industry in recent years [and]...a key movie in any analysis of the aesthetic and political choices that confront the present generation of Hong Kong filmmakers" (Rayns, 1984: 114). Segments of Rayns' review do allude to the authorial hand of Tsui Hark, who the reader is told has a clear "delight in his

medium”, but otherwise much of Rayns' evaluation centred on the brand of Chineseness offered by Tsui's direction.

Rayns' praise of *The Butterfly Murders* was constrained by the technical quality of the film's print through its “grisly” Cantonese soundtrack. The critic found this to be “inferior” to the “elegant” Mandarin version he first saw at the London Film Festival prior. Within this assertion is a familiar pursuit of cultural capital in telling readers of his privileged access to films in the capital, but also his preference for a specific type of Chineseness associated with Mainland China rather than Hong Kong. Similarly in the review, Rayns expounds on the “specifically Chinese tradition of *wuxia*”, that he believed *The Butterfly Murders* to be “deeply rooted in”. *Wuxia* is a Mandarin term referring to a specific genre and practice of martial arts more commonly associated at his time of writing with Mainland China and Taiwan's genre productions than Hong Kong. Through these evaluative preferences, Rayns and other critics who found value in the Hong Kong New Wave had their promotion of the films tempered by anxieties caused by the films' groundedness in Hong Kong's cultural and industrial contexts. Persistent across the framing of *Father and Son* and *The Butterfly Murders* for British readers and audiences was the dislike of Hong Kong's commercial film industry.

Derek Malcolm's (1983a) extreme dismissal of the “commercial system” which “absorbs its better talent...then eats it alive” was at the more voracious end of a critical discourse that remained obsessed with Hong Kong's commercial industry well into the 1980s. Writing about Ann Hui, Malcolm (1980) was less polemic when he ceded that her obligation to work within this setting both “strengthened and weakened” her films. Elsewhere, in a review of *Father and Son*, Martin Auty (1983: 189) saw in the film a clear desire on the part of its director Allen Fong to “mark his card as an individualist filmmaker in an industry that is somewhat exceptionally genre-based (to which he nevertheless acknowledges his debt)”. While these critics were not always dismissive in their writing, the need for Hong Kong's directors to invariably engage with the commercial constraints of their local industry softened any endorsements given to these productions. The reception remained cautious and continued to suggest that, outside of the specialist sect of Hong Kong researchers, if a singular author could be completely dislocated from this local, industrial *Hong Kong* context, their films would be more worthwhile.

It is unlikely that the effects of this trepidation would be restricted to critical discourse. Though I have focused on their reviews and editorials, those discussed in this chapter including Rayns, Elley, and Malcolm, had spheres of influence that went, and still go, far beyond the specialist readership at their publications. These writers all shared in common working in a general editorial role at their respective publications with a special interest in East Asian cinema, but in addition to this, they were involved with the physical circulation of films and their presentation to audiences across Britain and the world. Outside of his contributions to *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Tony Rayns has acted as a programmer of film seasons both in the UK (noted in Chapter One) and abroad. He has aided festival programming in Vancouver and Hong Kong, and he played a “key role” in establishing the Busan International Film Festival in South Korea (Ahn, 2011: 175). During the 1980s he produced numerous programmes on Chinese-language films for British television³⁴ discussed later in this chapter and has provided commentary, interviews and features for countless DVD releases of Chinese-language films since.

Similarly invested is Derek Elley, writer at *Films and Filming* in the 1970s and 1980s and now Chief Film Critic at the reputable “Film Business Asia” website. Elley extended his critical interest in East Asian cinema by co-founding the Far East Film Festival in Udine: an annual event that screens popular East Asian films to European fans. Even Derek Malcolm, prolific resident film critic for *The Guardian* and the BBC, has made “no bones about his own preferences” for East Asian cinema. During the 1980s when the new waves of Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan hit the international stage, Malcolm was the programmer of the London Film Festival (Elley, 1985: 24). Duncan Campbell (2001) went so far as to state that “Europe was the first territory” to welcome New Taiwan Cinema, Taiwan's contemporary equivalent of the Hong Kong New Wave, noting that the “London Film Festival in 1983 was the first moment that Taiwan's new cinema got a chance to be exposed to the world”. This selection of films happened under Malcolm's initiative following a trip he had made to Taiwan to source productions for the festival. While I am focusing on their critical writing, then, it is important to bear in mind the extent to which these tastemakers were involved in every stage of film circulation and discourse from sourcing the films

³⁴ See *Visions: Cinema in China* (1983) and *Visions: New Chinese Cinema* (1989).

direct from Chinese regions to their eventual presentation at British cinemas, film festivals and nationwide television channels.

The visibility of, and yet the scant enthusiasm for, the Hong Kong New Wave did not translate into accessibility and the films of this movement continuously struggled to gain traction during this time. Although certainly more accommodating, critical assessments remained cautious of the territory's commercial influence over its directors and, unlike their treatment of other national cinemas, none of the magazines mentioned in this chapter published dedicated features or editorials on the movement. The films remained relatively unattainable and invisible to the majority of Britain's regional audiences. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, outside of film festivals, I have not found mention of any film other than *Father and Son* playing outside London and *The Butterfly Murders* appears to have played only at the Scala cinema in the capital (Malcolm, 1983b). These films *were* playing at Cannes and elsewhere on the festival circuit so their unavailability to general UK audiences usefully highlights the specific character of British film cultures' incompatibilities with these regional productions.

One possibility is that this lack of theatrical support resulted from the absence of accommodating cinema venues nationwide. The BFI had set up its Regional Film Theatre network to support the exhibition of their preferred kind of films nationwide in 1966, yet by the late 1970s many of these cinemas had fallen into disrepair. Most had only one or two screens and could not necessarily accommodate a diversity of content that would allow for films from the Hong Kong New Wave. This would change between the mid-1980s and early-1990s during the arrival of the Fifth Generation, when the BFI supported a number of renovation projects at venues including the Glasgow Film Theatre, Bristol's Watershed cinema and Manchester's Cornerhouse. Another possibility is that middlebrow critics no longer had the taste-making power over exhibition cultures that Julian Stringer (2011) and I have suggested they did have in the 1950s and 1960s. I would contest, however, building on the findings of Chapters One and Two, that a reason the Hong Kong New Wave appeared to tick most of the boxes for foreign-language productions in the UK yet failed to find fundamental support in the territory was because it did not satisfy Britain's wider cultural expectations of Chinese cinema at this time.

The Hong Kong Chineseness espoused by these films was not interesting to

those tastemakers otherwise preoccupied with Mainland China: a comparison to which they were always held hostage. Thanks to cultural proximity and their shared footing in an overarching Chinese cinema, Hong Kong's productions were always circulated through generally implicit comparisons to Mainland China. These were occasionally explicit when the formal characteristics of a film allowed them to be so, as seen with Tony Rayns' preference of the Mandarin version of *The Butterfly Murders* over its Cantonese equivalent. Unrestrained capitalism had defined the social structures of Hong Kong during the 1960s and 1970s thanks to Britain's colonial strategies (Chun, 1996: 121) and this nurtured a commercial film industry that was devoid of both isolated "film artists" and a cultural characteristic of the type preferred by Britain's tastemakers. In this way, the insubstantial circulation of the Hong Kong New Wave as it pertained to their rootedness in an undesirable cultural context serves as a useful control against which to deconstruct the rapturous reception of the Fifth Generation. This movement is also worth revisiting and keeping in mind because, as with the *kung fu* craze, the Hong Kong New Wave remains relatively understudied in contemporary scholarship.

While the various directors in the new wave have seen dedicated attention by recent scholars and distributors (see Morton, 2009; Yue, 2010), there is only one monograph on the collection of films as a "movement" (Cheuk and Zhuo, 2008). In comparison to the numerous individual publications on the Fifth Generation³⁵ this collection is slight and speaks to an ambivalence shared between academics and Britain's tastemakers in the middlebrow. This parity should be considered as resulting from the same processes and structures of circulation that dictate the discursive presentation and formation of Chinese cinema in other cultural contexts across Britain. It is worth bearing this character in mind when I turn to *Yellow Earth* later in the chapter to observe how this circulation differed drastically from that of the Fifth Generation. Remaining on academia, however, it is first important to note the development of film education – specifically film studies as an institutionalised

³⁵ Dedicated monographs to the Fifth Generation are plentiful: including investigations by Ni Zhen (2002), Paul Clark (2005), Jeffrey Faubel (1990), Sheila Cornelius and Ian Haydn Smith (2002) and Kwok-kan Tam and Wimal Dissanayake (1998). These do not include those publications like Chris Berry's (1991) seminal edited collection, *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, which were inspired by, and take as much of their focus, the Fifth Generation, without explicitly doing so from the outset.

discipline – because the collective voice of this new “debate culture” was drastically disruptive to the hegemony of the middlebrow.

Debate Culture

From the mid-1960s onward, film cultures in the UK fragmented further into a number of institutionally and ideologically opposed spaces following structural changes at the BFI and the influence of film theory from abroad. During this decade and into the 1970s, new publications, journals and exhibition strategies developed with the specific intention of disrupting the hegemony of British film culture as it had been shaped by the BFI and its middlebrow colleagues. Part of this disruption materialised through the promotion of new ways of reading cinema that countered the evaluative preferences espoused by the cultural establishment of the kind that I have been analysing throughout this thesis. Since the millennium, there has been a coterie of scholars that have documented these changes in more detail than is needed for me to engage with in this chapter. Dupin and Nowell-Smith’s (2014) history of the BFI is useful here for a broad history, but equally informative is Matthew Lloyd’s (2011) documentation of the EIFF in the 1970s as a nexus through which many of these critical and discursive changes were realised. It is necessary, however, to address these changes for the specific implications they had on the curation of Chinese cinema in Britain as some of these voices were directly responsible for framing the Fifth Generation’s British exhibition.

The first notable disruption to the evaluative practices of *Sight and Sound* and other middlebrow magazines came from France, through an American translation, with the arrival of *la politique des auteurs* from *Cahiers du Cinema*, translated by Andrew Sarris in 1962 as “auteur theory”. The leading proponents for auteur theory in Britain gathered around *Movie*, a publication helmed by Ian Cameron and his colleagues from the university-based *Oxford Opinion*, whose writers used analyses of *mise-en-scène* to promote the theory. Through a diverse collection of essays, *Movie* took as its case studies films from Hollywood and other sites of production deemed of little value by the critical establishment. It did so as an intentional affront to the BFI’s publications and the hegemony of the Institute over British film culture of the day. Taking film *critics*

in their sights specifically, *Movie*'s editorial policy was shaped in rejection of film criticism's "predictable" evaluations of films based on "judgement" instead of "appreciation". The magazine was not coy in its activities, calling out *Sight and Sound* explicitly in its writing. Its rebellious views were distributed widely, raising the ire of the BFI's resident critics, and a particularly polemic dismissal of *Sight and Sound*'s evaluative processes in *Movie* cut deeply enough to earn a published rebuttal from the publication in 1960 (Perkins, 2010: 2).

While perhaps the clearest example of successful disruptive practice against the middlebrow by these new scholarly voices, *Movie* was only one of numerous magazines launched with provocation and revolution at the centre of its discursive activities. It was itself preceded by almost a year by *Motion*, a publication that, while similar to *Movie* in its rejection of *Sight and Sound* and its practices, was vehemently against auteur theory. *Motion* adopted a structuralist approach that disregarded directors and genres as connective categories, focusing instead on recurrent themes and motifs across the whole of cinema, however disparate production staffs and genres may have been. Led by Raymond Durgnat (whose brief stint at *Monthly Film Bulletin* was discussed in Chapter One), *Motion* specifically utilised these new methodological approaches to sing the praises of productions that film critics considered "low culture" and unworthy of attention (Naremore, 2008: 30). Durgnat and Cameron are two examples of enthusiasts who emerged at this time, using grassroots publishing to supplant the homogeneous consumer practices of the middlebrow. There are many more examples here which speak to the fragmentation and heterogeneity of the day. Noted academic Thomas Elsaesser, for example, began his career editing *Monogram* from Brighton in the early 1970s, extending auteur considerations to include historically informed criticisms and Freudian psychoanalysis to serve the legitimacy of the often ignored Hollywood family melodrama (Buckland, 2008; 32).

In this time before film studies had become an institutionalised discipline, alternative discourse in British film cultures was led by these passionate, enthusiast voices. Though most were unified by their disdain for *Sight and Sound*, well represented in Durgnat's "Standing up for Jesus" – a piece aimed squarely at the critical establishment and recently called the "British (and left-wing) equivalent of Truffaut's 'A Certain Tendency in French Cinema'" (Miller, 2015) – it would be wrong to assume they

were unified in their rebellion. The heterogeneity of this culture is easy to see even at a brief glance³⁶. Passionate and polemic arguments on the validity of the different ways of reading film existed across this cultural space. The early careers of Durnat and his contemporary Robin Wood were so marked by vocal disagreements that Durnat's obituary in *The Independent* makes reference to them (Barr, 2002). Many of these debates lacked the academic neutrality of today and the passion is visible in the various letters sections of publications that condemned the “uselessness” of others' critical approaches or their “utterly inadequate understanding and assessment of American cinemas”, to name just one example (Russell, 1961).

Film journals were not the only places where new writers could indulge their enthusiasm and get their voices heard and they were accompanied by an influx of individual monographs, or “little books” (Betz, 2008), published in the UK by the BFI and other publishers. These covered numerous aspects of cinema but the most famous are likely Robin Wood's books on individual directors including Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks and Claude Chabrol. These books, published between 1965 and the 1970s, were some of the first of their kind and they helped to spread film “appreciation” across Britain (Barr, 2010). Over 200 little books were released in these years and the BFI continued to publish extensive monographs – often on single auteurs – into the 1980s. The very high levels of consumption of these publications across Britain and North America helped the process of formalising this growing body of work into an academic discipline. Around the same time that Durnat began teaching at British universities, in 1976 the BFI funded five experimental lectureships in film studies at nationwide universities, including posts for Robin Wood at the University of Warwick and Charles Barr at the University of East Anglia.

This short period saw the transformation of enthusiast voices into an institutionalised discipline that represented a significant intervention into, or alternative to, the dominant intellectual film cultures of the UK that had been previously dictated by the BFI's support of *Sight and Sound* et al. However, the complexity of this moment is seen in the fact that, while many of these new operations

³⁶ Even their antagonism of the establishment can be problematised. Tony Rayns himself edited the short-lived *Cinema Rising* journal that was not unlike *Movie* or *Motion*, indicating a degree of crossover between the middlebrow and this new enthusiast space.

sought to destabilise the middlebrow critic, a majority were funded by the BFI themselves: from Wood's "little books" to the early university lectureships. What is clear, is that while *Sight and Sound* and middlebrow critics still retained powerful sway over a large readership, their singular approach to the evaluation of film had been problematised and diluted by these new tastemakers. It is vital to note that these new voices remained fragmented and combative in their practice, despite their new establishment homes, and the development was not as linear or as smooth as a written historical summary like this may suggest. The heterogeneity is acknowledged in the term recently given to the era by Mark Betz (2008) – "debate culture" – which suggests a more fluid and disjointed environment than the binary set up of "Film Education" and "Film Criticism" which was used at the time (Simpson, 1981). As this binary suggests, if there was any kind of consensus within "debate culture" it was merely in the rejection of *Sight and Sound's* critical pedagogy.

Despite these competing and contradictory discourses about the appreciation or evaluation of film and the democratising possibilities of these heterogeneous spaces, it was rare for Chinese-language cinema to play any role in this new culture. Contemporary archives of the many publications from this time are incomplete, but I have found that *Movie* never discussed a Chinese-language film throughout its lengthy (but intermittent) publication history and amid the scattered collection of the other journals and magazines from this time, Chinese productions are almost never mentioned³⁷. Additionally, outside of magazines, it appears that none of the little books that boomed in the 1960s and 1970s were dedicated to Chinese-language films, or had these films form a meaningful portion. This was a culture carried by enthusiasts and few were interested in Chinese cinema. It would be easy to suggest that this was a reflection of the absence of Chinese-language films at sites where British and Anglophone writers could see them but this would ignore both the many martial arts films on general release in the UK and the efforts of those like the Hong Kong New Wave. The apathy shown by key voices in Britain's debate culture echoed that of the middlebrow press and key tastemakers within "Film Criticism" to suggest that whatever

³⁷ It is worth noting that the hierarchy of taste curated through *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin* exists also in the archive where these two journals (as BFI publications) are well documented and easily accessible, while those contentious publications without institutional support, as with *Kung Fu Monthly*, are now hard to find.

their differences were analytically, they, for the most part, shared in their practice a disinterest in Chinese cinema. This absence is notable as it means that Chinese-language films formed no part in the vital institutional changes through which many contemporary practices of reading cinema in Euro-American contexts were consecrated.

This is not just a problem of discourse and this indifference displayed by scholars filtered through to exhibition practices of the time. A key strategy of the debate culture in its goals to dismantle the hegemony of *Sight and Sound* was to involve themselves in Britain's "apparatus of exhibition" so that their preferences would affect cinema tangibly for nationwide audiences. As alluded to above, the EIFF is a particularly clear and important example in this regard. At the time of writing, the EIFF is the longest continuously running film festival in the world, beginning in 1947 as an event for documentaries. By the 1960s, the festival's organiser Murray Gregor was looking to revitalise the event following the above developments in British film cultures and inspired by political movements across Europe in 1968. To achieve these ambitions, Gregor co-opted two Edinburgh-based students, Linda Myles and David Will – two "self declared cinephiles in the French tradition" – into the organisational team after they had published damning critiques of the event in their university press (Lloyd, 2011: 36/37). Like many within the "debate culture" of the day, the two explicitly rejected the "liberal arts orthodoxy" of *Sight and Sound* et al. and bypassed the gate-keeping of these cultural authorities by going straight to Paris and the Cinémathèque Française to immerse themselves in auteur theory and international cinema under the "personal guidance" of Henri Langlois. The two young cinephiles revitalised EIFF with popular films, often American, instead of the European fare that the festival had come to be known for and their intentions were clear: "We were making a cultural intervention" (Will, qtd in Lloyd, 2011; 38).

In his extensive report of "how the movie brats took over Edinburgh", Matthew Lloyd (2011) notes the extent to which, through Myles and Will, the programming of the EIFF was influenced by developing modes of reading cinema in film academia and, likewise, how contemporary film studies was affected by the festival. Their main influence was *Screen*, an academic journal that developed out of the ashes of an instructional publication from the Society for Education in Film and Television that

remains one of the most prominent tastemaking voices at education institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. At the time, *Screen* was a journal concerned with establishing a rigorous theory for the study of cinema, borrowing from Marxist and psychoanalytic thought (Willemen and Pines, 1998: 3). It was supported by the BFI's Education Department but, in light of its theoretical practice, the Institute cut its funding to 1/12th of what it had been prior to focus expenditure on little books and regional educational courses (Brock et al., 1971: 2; Screen, 1971: 9/10). Though highly academic and incomprehensible to those without grounding in theoretical language, *Screen* was influential for those in the know. In their pivotal role at EIFF, Myles and Will brought in numerous scholars and enthusiasts from *Screen* and other publications including Peter Wollen and Paul Willemen, ensuring that the pedagogical imperatives of the debate culture filtered through to the apparatus of exhibition and the practices of film curation and programming (Lloyd, 2010: 38 – 45).

The results ensured visibility for these tastes and practices across the nation, representing a worthy counterpoint to the BFI's activities at the NFT in London. Their effects were not just contained to local and specialist circles. Each successive EIFF was accompanied by a published book to promote the curation philosophy of the event; many focused on individual auteurs, for example, and were written by new scholars. The dense, “elitist” language of these publications became so notorious that in 1974 Barry Norman, BBC Two's film critic and presenter of stalwart of the BBC's schedule, *Film...* (1972 -), physically destroyed an EIFF monograph on Raoul Walsh to prove his disdain on live television. While the voices of debate culture may have been heterogeneous and fragmented, their activities were disruptive enough to be acknowledged on one of the three television channels of the day. This reach presents EIFF as an emblematic point at which the various discursive changes occurring in Britain's academic, critical, and educational spaces intersected with practices of film curation and exhibition, all in front of the eyes of the general public and invested audiences.

The 1986 EIFF contained one of the first international screenings of *Yellow Earth* following its appearance at the Hong Kong International Film Festival. The same festival also hosted the Taiwan production *Taipei Story* (1985, Edward Yang) in its programme. The event was a major platform for Chinese-language film and an early stop in *Yellow*

Earth's British, and global, life. After screening at the EIFF, both *Yellow Earth* and *Taipei Story* showed at that year's London Film Festival before the former toured Britain's newly refurbished regional cinemas well into the following year (The Guardian, 1987: 23; Malcolm, 1987: 21). As part of the EIFF's ongoing collaboration with scholars and enthusiasts from the contemporary debate culture, the festival showed *Yellow Earth* (and *Taipei Story*) as part of a major academic conference on Third Cinema. Centred on contemporaneous debates around the study of international film, this conference was organised in collaboration with *Framework*, noted in Chapter One for its coverage of Italy's political film festivals. Sharing with others in this space the rejection of *Sight and Sound* and the critical establishment, *Framework* was established with the help of Paul Willemen, a writer who moved into academia in 1995, and initially published out of a base in English and American Studies at the University of East Anglia where the BFI-funded film studies professor Charles Barr was based (Willemen and Pines, 1998).

Of the many currents that dictated the content of the journal, the most prominent according to its editors were: the increased engagement with film festivals and the apparatus of exhibition, attention to independent cinemas from around the world that had not seen mainstream attention, and a greater eye for historical retrospectives of film theories and histories that had either not been read widely or not seen publication in English (Willemen and Pines, 1998: 6 – 7). On the surface, *Framework* occupied a new space that might offer a home to those Chinese-language films that had been hesitantly kept at arm's length. The journal's multiple intentions coalesced into a governing strategy to support an

increasingly anti-universalist argument stressing that films are and must be understood as thoroughly grounded in particular histories which reverberate in their very texture. The implied polemic was and still is against the by now discredited but still overwhelmingly dominant 'touristic' approach to films at, for instance, festivals or in film magazines: an approach which regards the prevailing industrial, Euro-American way of seeing and assessing as the only permissible or practical frame of reference (Willemen and Pines, 1998: 10)

Reading the systematic, theoretical and methodological approaches and evaluative criteria of the BFI's critical establishment as "universalist" in its activity, *Framework* attempted to position various cinemas within their individual localities and contexts to

destabilise the ubiquity of the Euro-American “way of seeing and assessing”. Many of these strategies materialised in editorials on diverse subjects, whether on West African cinema (Martin, 1979), Chilean and Cuban cinema (Ronvaud, 1979; Chanan, 1979), or the overlooked independent filmmaking scene in Japan (Whitaker 1977: 24) and through their staff's involvement with exhibition through events like the EIFF.

Although it appears to have been unknowing, these intentions explicitly and (surprisingly) specifically countered the evaluative frameworks in the middlebrow that had hindered the wider circulation of the Hong Kong New Wave. *Framework's* interest in championing cinemas as they were positioned within individual local contexts and their plans to destabilise Euro-American assessments suggested an editorial culture that would have found value in this movement. These were the intentions brought to their discussion of *Yellow Earth* and its screening at the 1986 EIFF. This moment thus represents a culmination of the changes to British film cultures brought on by the rise in film studies academia and serves as a useful focal point around which to observe the characteristics of *Yellow Earth's* circulation across a variety of different tastemakers, critics, distributors and exhibitors. Revisiting this moment in light of the findings in previous chapters of this thesis, we can re-contextualise the success of the Fifth Generation in Britain. It affords a good opportunity to learn how perceptions of Chinese cinema and Chineseness, as they had been developing in the years prior, materialised in 1985/1986 in a way that British audiences could corroborate with a film they could actually see.

A satisfied middlebrow

Yellow Earth tells the story of a soldier Gu Qing, member of the Chinese Communist Party's army, sent to the Shaanxi province of central Mainland China to learn and collect the region's folk songs so that they can be updated with political lyrics. Set in 1939, during the Chinese Civil War and ten years before the Communist Liberation of 1949, the narrative is only tangentially focused on a grand historical narrative and the role played by the military within it. Instead, much of the film focuses on the relationship between Gu and a young girl, Cuiqiao, struggling with a commitment to marry a much older man. Tensions between Gu's communist ideologies

and the life of the villagers are developed over the course of the narrative: Gu learns that the morale-boosting songs he sought to collect do not exist as he needed them to, while Cuiqiao eagerly learns of the freedom of women within the communist system. The film concludes with an ambiguous scene: following her forced marriage to the older man, Cuiqiao crosses the treacherous Yellow River, but the success or failure of her attempt is not told to the viewer. *Yellow Earth's* political motivations are ambiguous: across its depiction of the military, of rural life, and of communist politics are elements of both “celebration” and “critique”, though “of who or what is difficult to discern” (Edwards, 2015).

Yellow Earth's complex ambiguity offered a lot to digest for Britain’s tastemakers and through its indeterminate formal and narrative strategies it was easily read to serve a variety of editorial and promotional agendas. Initially striking is how well *Yellow Earth* satisfied the variety of expectations held by the middlebrow, discussed in previous chapters. The film offered influential middlebrow tastemakers formal strategies that pleased their rigid evaluative frameworks *and* circulated a kind of Chineseness that supported, rather than detracted from, these film-specific preferences. These achievements were generally interrelated: *Yellow Earth's* aesthetics alluded to something that Rey Chow (2010b: 149) has called an “original essence” of Chinese culture that overcame the vague East-Asianness propagated by the *kung fu* craze, but whose obscurity dodged the specificity of contemporary Chinese experience that critics in the 1950s and 1960s were conflicted over. Specifically, the initial middlebrow response to *Yellow Earth* found merit in the film for its departure from the aesthetics and ideologies of China's communist cinema, which was understood to take place through the return to an essential, “traditional” Chinese form.

As elsewhere, Tony Rayns' discussions of the film in *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Sight and Sound* prove useful as widely circulated assessments. In his review, Rayns explicitly references a Chinese essence, in this case geographical, from which all the accomplishments of the film originate: “the strength – and beauty – of *Yellow Earth* is that everything in it springs from its setting on the Loess Plateau” (Rayns, 1986a: 295). The reader is told that the location has “a personal association for the cinematographer Zhang Yimou (he was born and raised there)” as well as “an immense symbolic weight in the minds of all Chinese” as the site of the Long March and the birthplace of

“prehistoric” Chinese civilisation (Rayns, 1986a: 296). In the continued practice of reinforcing one's cultural capital by curating modes of appreciation that depend on the knowledge of the critic, these observations supported Rayns as necessary in the art cinema ecosystem as they made the reader rely on his knowledge of China to know what made *Yellow Earth* “good”. Around one third of the review is dedicated to discussions of Chinese cultures and histories which become required set up for the textual analysis that follows.

The film's aesthetic strategies are read here as direct descendants of Chinese folk cultures, peasant paintings and songs. Chen Kaige's “aesthetic innovations”, Rayns (ibid) continues, opposed

the 'theatrical' plotting and dialogue and the visual banality of most recent Chinese cinema by taking inspiration – and structural models – from the songs and peasant paintings of Shaanxi....The fact that these images have palpable roots in folk culture evidences the film-makers' determination to forge a distinctively Chinese film language, with no obvious debt to either Western or previous Chinese cinema

This analysis presents Chen's direction less as an innovation in global film-making and more a renovation of historical Chinese artistic cultures. *Yellow Earth*'s formal strategies depart from the Maoist aesthetic of the communist cinema (unenthusiastically received as discussed in Chapter One) to forge “distinctively Chinese film language” that is isolated globally from the rest of the world and temporally from China's recent past. In one paragraph, *Yellow Earth* is presented as both refreshingly modern – in its departure from, and critique of, the recent communist cinema – *and* grounded in an historical tradition. This is a cinematic version of a “paradoxical conceptual structure” observed by Rey Chow (2010c: 94) in China studies that she deems ethnocentric in its problematic rendering of Chinese cultures.

Specifically, China is made in this instance to represent multiple temporalities at once, continuing the process of “the casting of the other in another time” which separates Chinese cultures from “our” own. Chow (2010c: 120) calls this “allochronism” which is enforced by a concurrent process of “cultural relativism” whereby “other cultures are territorialized in the name of their central values and vital characteristics” in order to support the separation of them from “our” time. Such acts of territorialisation have been clear in the evaluative practices I have discussed in

previous chapters – from the dislike of Soviet influence on animation in Mainland China to the rejection of Hong Kong's Hollywood-inspired industrial models – but *Yellow Earth* represents the first time the process has worked to the benefit of the films and their reputation in Britain. The “distinctively Chinese film language” *Yellow Earth* is said to possess by Rayns thus separates it from other international artistic practices and contains the film within an historical tradition from a time passed.

Yellow Earth is used here to territorialise the lineage of Chinese cinema not as a medium specific process, but a cultural one in which Chen's film is a continuation of the standards of traditional artistic practice that go back centuries, rather than one of trends in contemporary filmmaking. Again, we see that this is a discourse commanded by cultural assumptions and perceptions of Chineseness rather than a holistic interest in China's film industries. The clearest example here is that *Yellow Earth* becomes used as a tool in this cultural relativism to retroactively oust the years of communist filmmaking from the canon of Chinese cinema. British writers had long preferred a kind of cinema that was more traditionally *Chinese*, as they understood it, than that offered by communist films and this was a tendency not contained to the middlebrow. In a piece on the cinema of Hong Kong and China written in 1981, two academic writers for *Screen* had worried that a Chinese cinema “without adequate realisation of the importance of China's own traditions of acting and representation” would be a failure (Coward and Ellis, 1981: 100). Across the discourse, communist cinema was presented as a kind of detour in the grand narrative of Chinese art that was finally steered back in line by *Yellow Earth*. David Robinson (1986) of *The Times*, was one who praised the film for supplanting “the old cardboard heroes and villains of official communist mythology with flesh and blood people” and for doing so by recognising “ancient cultures as sources of Chinese thought and character”.

While some scholars did note that China's communist cinema was actually also “heavily influenced by indigenous operatic conventions” (Clark, 1981: 305), these opinions were in the minority and mostly absent from public discourse. After *Yellow Earth*'s release, the communist films of Mainland China that had earned Chinese cinema a “battered profile” (Elley, 1986: 44) and defined the national output to global audiences for decades prior were commonly seen as a departure from “real” Chinese cinema to which the Fifth Generation finally returned. These perceptions continued to

command the discourse with each sequential Mainland China production released in Britain after *Yellow Earth*. The next film released, *The Black Cannon Incident* (1985, Huang Jianxin), for example, was found by Rayns to have a satirical edge that called back to “China's greatest modern satirist, the 1930s writer Lu Xun” (1987: 367) in its ability to fondly characterise China's national character. *The Horse Thief* (1986, Tian Zhuangzhaung), the next in the release schedule, managed to straddle the paradox of being both a “sign of a new cinematic life in China” and “an acknowledgement of the country's very diverse ethnic, cultural and religious traditions which couldn't be wished away by the all levelling policies of the Cultural Revolution” (Combs, 1987: 271). The next, *Sacrificed Youth* (1986, Zhang Nuanxin), like many of its contemporaries was seen to raise questions about the contemporary legacy of the Cultural Revolution. Yet, although it raised novel and “frank questions about the relationship between sexuality, aesthetics and ideology”, Verina Glaessner (1988), was keen to remind readers that “*Sacrificed Youth* remained a 'Han' film” at the end of the day³⁸. The allochronism that prized tradition and modernity – but not communist cinema – continued with each release.

A phenomenon based on cultural assumptions, this cultural relativism was ubiquitous in the discourse and persisted entirely independently from the evaluative conclusions drawn by those writing about the films; from whether or not the films were deemed “good” or “bad”. In other words, even those that criticised *Yellow Earth*, whether they did so for aesthetic reasons or cultural ones, were equally invested in the notion of an “original essence” of Chinese culture. Derek Elley (1986: 44) in *Films and Filming*, for example, noted that *Yellow Earth's* departure from “engrained narrative traditions of Chinese filmmaking” was not necessarily a return to Chinese traditions of old, but was an innovation indebted to “western film-makers like Bresson or Janco”; an evocation he assumed to be “unwitting” though it is now known that the education at the Beijing Film Academy included productions from the West. Thanks to this dilution, Elley was keen to repeatedly temper *Yellow Earth's* rapturous reception with reminders that at the time within Mainland China itself, the film was only considered a “specialist curio”: “given the distorted effect that the festival circuit can have on countries' profiles, it is essential to see *Yellow Earth* in perspective” as “bread and butter to

³⁸ Han Chinese is the prevalent ethnic group in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

western art-house audiences” (Elley, 1986: 44).

Roger Garcia (1985: 122), current executive director of the Hong Kong International Film Festival, reminded readers of *Framework* that “Chinese film production [was] still of a variable quality” in 1985 and in their “attempt to make new discoveries” Western critics tended “to loose [sic] their critical distance when confronted with such works”. Garcia asserted that *Yellow Earth*’s “visual style owes more to the West than the East and although markedly different from the bulk of contemporary Chinese film production, its style is similar to an average European art film”. Because of this, Garcia found it “difficult to agree with the “masterpiece” tag that some critics have loosely hung on it”. While it is important to acknowledge these dissident voices and show that praise for *Yellow Earth* was not unanimous, though they disagree with the consensus that the film was an artistic achievement, these critics reveal an equal faith in the possibility of an essential and authentic Chineseness. When Garcia dismisses *Yellow Earth* for its stylistic similarities to an “average European art film” the implicit inference is that this international influence has diluted the “original essence” of Chinese culture that the film could possibly have realised.

The presence of *Yellow Earth* in these spaces serves as a clear reminder of the extent to which perceptions of China and Chineseness inform evaluations of Chinese-language films in the British context, and that while divergent critically, many tastemakers in British film cultures are unified in their cultural perceptions. Additionally, *Yellow Earth*’s circulation and reception in Britain shows us explicitly what *form* this Chinese essence is believed to take which, in turn, suggests reasons why films that do not offer this form have failed to gain traction. In her discussion of allochronism and cultural relativism in the study of China and Chinese languages in Euro-American institutions, Rey Chow (2010c: 118) notes that the binary between “modern” and “tradition” is not free of socio-political associations. Chow states that

much of China studies prefers, methodologically, taxonomic divisions of China into “premodern” and “modern,” “traditional” and “Westernized” periods, and so forth, even as the fragmented, dispersed, ironic developments of Chinese modernity make the clarity of these conceptual divisions useless. Thus, as is often felt though never directly stated, Chinese from the mainland are more “authentic” than those who are from, say, Taiwan or Hong Kong, because the latter have been “Westernized.”

A lot of ground is covered in this short statement which notes generally the ways this process forgets the complicated contemporary history of China and its interactions with colonial European powers. Importantly, Chow's observations note that this cultural relativism reinstates the centrality of Mainland China in the international community's understanding of Chineseness. In particular, this is a type of Mainland Chineseness devoid of international influence.

The similarities between Chow's observation and the implicit references to Chinese culture in British film discourse suggest that, in addition to formal incompatibilities, these investments in Mainland Chineseness have held back approval of the martial arts film and the potential success of the Hong Kong New Wave through their commercial (/ "Westernized") industrial context while supporting Mainland China's Fifth Generation. Similar conclusions could be drawn about the perennial focus on Mainland China in Chinese film studies. Vitally, Chow (2010c: 94) reminds us that these limiting effects are propagated not just in negative appraisals of films that are deemed to be "Westernized" or otherwise, but also in complimentary assessments as I suggest above: that "positive, respectful, and admiring feels for the "other" can themselves be rooted in un-self-reflexive, culturally coded perspectives". These processes are significant because the specific kind of Chineseness cultivated in these discursive spaces not only essentialises the representation of contemporary Chinese life, but also reinforces a subject-object relationship between Euro-American spaces and Chinese regions respectively which supports the agency of the former in discursively curating the experiences, cultures, and characteristics of the latter.

This is an "orientalist tradition, in which the fraught realities of Chinese modernity are characteristically understood as the continuations of or aberrations from a pure native tradition" (Chow, 2010a: 26). It downplays China's role in contemporary international society and does so by forgetting "the coercive role played by the West" in the contemporary make up of Chinese regional politics and social structures. The hazards of such an approach go beyond their historical revisionism and amnesia, even in the context of cinema, and have structural implications over who, in the Britain of my focus, is given the power to curate and define what it means to be Chinese. There are "racial implications" of this "imperialistic gaze" that are concealed

by the promotion of the essentialist practices encouraged across the discourse, seen clearly in critics' suggestion of ownership of the Chinese experience in their writing. In 1988, for example, Tony Rayns wrote an editorial for *Monthly Film Bulletin* in response to a critic stationed in China. This critic, Wu Yigong, discussed the “national” character of Chinese films and suggested that accolades at international film festivals should be less of a priority for China's film directors than commercial success on the global marketplace. In response, Rayns (1988: 70) summarised that:

To Western readers, the contradictions at the heart of Wu Yigong's speech seem obvious. He undervalues the success of 'fifth generation' films in Western art cinemas, and his dream of rivalling Hollywood in world markets seems, to say the least, under-informed about the realities of world film distribution. There is also a serious problem about his equation of national characteristics with popular success in China; *Yellow Earth* is, in fact, a far more committedly 'Chinese' film than *Tribulations of a Chinese Gentleman*, and the commercial failure of Chen's film at home has much more to do with the inflexibility of the Chinese distribution and promotion systems than with any notional imitation of Western styles. However, none of these confusions was apparent to most Chinese readers

Rayns' tone here is quite remarkable and shows the extent to which he is comfortable asserting both authority and knowledge over what makes a film *Chinese* as well as the importance of success on the global art cinema circuit for the value of a Chinese-language film. The air of superiority explicit in this piece extends out of just the films and onto “most Chinese readers” who we are told were unable to understand the films and their criticism as well as Rayns.

Remembering the role played by Rayns in global film circulation discussed above, it is necessary to acknowledge that the impacts of the “orientalist tradition” he continues extend far beyond critical writing. These were the specific ideological biases that informed his framing of the circulation of China's Fifth Generation films to audiences around Britain. Thanks to a combination of limitations on the export of film prints from China (Berry, 1991: 117/117) and the centrality of London in Britain's film cultures, at the time that Rayns made these comments, the British exhibition of Fifth Generation films was confined to the ICA in London³⁹. For those outside of the capital,

³⁹ Cinema listings in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* show that, in theatrical terms (excluding festivals), out of the early films of the Fifth Generation only *Yellow Earth* was viewable outside London. This

Rayns was (and continues to be) an invaluable resource. It was him who curated and introduced BBC2's screenings of *Hibiscus Town*, *The Big Parade* and *King of Children* and also who wrote and presented three episodes of Channel 4's *Visions* (1982 – 1985) programmes centred on China's production industries and contemporary directors.

Visions was helmed by John Ellis, contributor to *Screen* and university academic who had written of the need for Chinese cinema to pay attention to its “traditions”. The programme was popular with both fans and media academics around the country, and those without access to theatrical screenings in the capital city would have relied on the show as an invaluable resource for information on Chinese-language film⁴⁰. Much like Rayns' inclusion in Chris Berry's *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, Ellis' choice of Rayns to create and present the *Visions* episodes on Chinese film speaks to the extent that Rayns was seen as an authority on the subject and his movement across BFI magazines, mainstream media and academic publications reminds us of his influence across British film cultures. Rayns had seemingly unique access to the inner workings of the Beijing Film Academy and the film-makers and students therein were apt at using him as a conduit through which to broadcast their projects to an international audience in a mutually beneficial exchange whose effects would go a long way to aid international perspectives on Chinese cinema.

The “orientalist tradition” continued by Rayns and other tastemakers across middlebrow, critical, and academic circles observed above was thus consecrated in the marketplace circulation of China's Fifth Generation films through these various cultural activities. These evaluative preferences were legitimated by (and helped to frame) screenings on television, nationwide theatrical distribution and exhibition, and regular appearances at regional film festivals. The malleable desire for authenticity in the middlebrow observed in Chapter Two reappeared in the circulation of *Yellow Earth* and later films but by this point with a tangible set of “authentic” cultural characteristics and qualities. The ethereal Chinese “original essence” hinted at during the *kung fu*

documentation suggests that *The Black Cannon Incident*, *The Horse Thief*, *Sacrificed Youth* and later films *Hibiscus Town*, *King of the Children*, *Swan Song* and *The Big Parade* all only screened at the ICA. It was not until Zhang Yimou's films *Ju Dou* and *Raise The Red Lantern* were released in the 1990s that these films made it to nationwide audiences, spurred on by the zeitgeist around their American Academy Award nominations (Lent and Zhengxing, 2000: 33)

⁴⁰ The final broadcast of *Visions* prompted a 12-page obituary piece on *Framework* in which Willemen lamented its “loss” (Willemen, 1986)

craze materialises here as one based in Mainland Chinese geographies, folk traditions and historical artistic practices, detached from the Westernised “modernity” of Hong Kong's industry and colonial influence. All of these events and practices helped frame the significant increase in the availability and presence of Chinese-language film in the UK following the move out of the mainstream by martial arts cinema. However, for all of the problematic systems the British tastemakers’ promotion of Chinese cinema worked to engender, there comes a point where criticising these practices leads a researcher to a dead-end.

Yellow Earth at the Edinburgh International Film Festival

Through this somewhat accusatory approach we begin to engage with what Rey Chow (2010b: 150) has termed the “deadlock of the anthropological situation”. This phrase refers to her contention that, internationally, “we cannot write/think/talk about the non-West in the academy without in some sense anthropologizing it” and constructing this problematic subject-object binary that runs the risk of perpetuating the processes of cultural relativism discussed above. While it remains valuable to analyse the surprising degree to which this anthropologizing continued an “orientalist tradition”, it is more productive for this thesis to ask what the results are of this anthropological situation for the presentation, circulation, and canonisation of Chinese cinema in British film cultures. To do this it is useful to turn to those minority voices in academia who specifically co-opted Chinese-language films to criticise and deconstruct these anthropological practices. This was the case for *Framework* and their involvement with the 1986 EIFF and to close this chapter I suggest that, while discussions within this event and publication do not solve the deadlock of the anthropological situation, observations therein can nuance our contemporary understanding of Chinese cinema at this historical (and current) moment.

As alluded to above, *Yellow Earth* played a prominent role at this film festival through an associated conference. This was an event organised by Paul Willemsen and his colleagues at *Framework*, held as part of the festival, on the theme of Third Cinema which included *Yellow Earth* and *Taipei Story* as emblematic productions. These films were chosen as definitive cases of “Third Cinema”: defined as an “Avant Garde for the

'80s" in which films built on "experiential and historical knowledges" of their localities of production and employed formal devices and narrative structures to yield "greater insight into the dynamics of the social, of history" (Willemen, 1986a, 170). Contending that the approaches of film critics and earlier academics were part of a "universalist" aesthetic focus – mentioned in their statement of intent (Willemen, 1998: 10) – Willemen and his colleagues used the event to promote new holistic investigations grounded in the socio-cultural, historical positioning of each individual production.

Through this evaluative framework, *Taipei Story*, a film about the difficulties faced by a young couple in Taiwan's capital, is read by Willemen (1986a: 171) as a film whose narrative structure and formal devices serve an allegorical function for Taipei's cultural history in addition to their surface level portrayal of young people in love: the aesthetic "not only recounts the relationship of a couple in contemporary Taipei, it also and simultaneously recounts the history of Taipei since the Chinese revolution". Applying this toolset to *Yellow Earth*, Willemen lent no time to the film's aesthetic character as being indebted to "traditional" Chinese art and practice as the critical press had done. Thus avoiding the problematic preference for an "original essence" of Chinese culture, Willemen (1986a: 171) posited that the film's Chinese character resulted simply from the director's "need to elaborate a cinematic way of representing social processes in all their intricate complexities". What *Taipei Story* and *Yellow Earth* shared was that they emerged from individual aspirations to represent the unique identity of their cultural contexts and any similar conceptions of Chineseness therein were the result of analogous economic and industrial conditions in their respective local sites of production. Perceptions of a film's Chinese character were reached as the conclusion to these holistic new approaches, they did not *determine* the conclusions as they did in the middlebrow.

There are two ways of reading this intervention at the EIFF. The first is that Willemen and his colleagues democratised the criteria by which a foreign-language film might be judged: bypassing the codes of appreciation embedded by the dominant British critics and international processes of the previous thirty years and opening up space for a more diverse, heterogeneous collection of films to find sympathetic eyes, not based in vague and problematic notions of a timeless Chineseness. The second is that despite the de-constructionist goals of Willemen and *Framework*, these writers

were simply moving the goalposts and reinstating a new kind of Western authority in the assessment of cinema, appropriating international productions into a discourse governed by their engagement with Euro-American aesthetic and economic theory. This suggestion is not merely conjecture as Willemen (1986: 170) noted that all the films discussed here “appear to have absorbed many of the anti-realist arguments debated since 1968 in Euro-American cultural theory”.

This second suggestion was taken up during the EIFF by Clyde Taylor (1987) who accused Willemen and his colleagues of being “elitist” and kidnapping cinema in the “Third world” through a thinly veiled Eurocentric process. In their rootedness in Euro-American theory, Taylor saw these tastemakers as first world chauvinists who utilised a liberal political perspective to continue Western imperialism through artistic appropriation: they castrated the “real” issues facing international communities by replacing them with theoretical ones that rested on a knowledge of Western theory (Taylor, 1987: 140-141). Despite Willemen's insistence on the importance of social and economic contexts, Taylor argued that Western scholars of Third Cinema still exerted a strong preference for “Western esthetics” and in doing so, manipulated the “culturally specific origin” of each film. Taylor's criticism of *Framework's* event reads similarly to Garcia's of those international critics seduced by *Yellow Earth* for deflecting the discourse back toward “First World” ways of reading film that asserted a European priority over artistic achievement and cultural character.

It is hard to wholly reject the positions of both Willemen and Taylor and their tense back-and-forth at the EIFF shows the discursive “deadlock of the anthropological situation” in ways clearly related to *Yellow Earth* and its early British exhibition. Willemen's methodology, while more holistic and less bound in stereotypes and cultural assumptions was read to continue to assert a Euro-American dominance, “kidnapping” agency from the film cultures it covered. Yet, Taylor's analysis implicitly maintained ideas of an original cultural essence that existed separate to Euro-American developments, thus perpetuating the cultural relativism that led to problematic portrayals of Chinese cultures in the middlebrow. Both lines of enquiry affirm Rey Chow's (2010c: 118) observations of the problems that arise when those writing about China and Chinese arts “attempt to articulate issues in their field using the tools of “Western” concepts and theory”. Furthermore, and of significant importance, both

moderate the agency of China's Fifth Generation directors in this regard and their own role in this ethnographic process.

Developing the "deadlock of the anthropological situation", Rey Chow (2010b : 152) reminds us that we must also "turn our attention to the subjective origins of ethnography as it is practiced by those who were previously ethnographized and who have, in the postcolonial age, taken up the active task of ethnographizing their own cultures". Chow's attention throughout *Primitive Passions* (1995), the book in which these observations were first published, is on Fifth Generation filmmakers: Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige in particular. Across this book, Chow develops understandings of "self-writing" and "autoethnography" by Chinese filmmakers in ways that reveal a parity between the (re)presentation of Chineseness in the Fifth Generation's films with its theorisation in Euro-American appraisals. In other words, the aesthetic characteristics of a film like *Yellow Earth* were inscribed in the first instance with an ethnographic gaze that aligned with that of an international spectator. Furthermore, these formal strategies are extended by the savvy negotiation of the international marketplace by Zhang, Chen and their colleagues (a characteristic discussed at length in Chapter Five). Whether through involvement with the European film festival circuit, or with Tony Rayns on his *Visions* programmes, these directors retain their agency in the global circulation of their films: these films are "self-projections of a so-called Third World" which both feed and subvert "the narcissistic assumptions of power and potency in the "advanced" Western countries" (Dissanayake and Guneratne, 2004: 81)⁴¹. This "kidnapping" is thus far more complex than Taylor's dismissal initially suggests. Where my project is concerned, the question here is not "how can we

⁴¹ It is on this subversion of "assumptions of power" within Britain that the importance of the EIFF event and of later work spearheaded by Paul Willemen ought to be stressed. As is apparent in the summary of Taylor and Willemen's disagreement above, there was more at stake here than the stability of suggested modes of appreciation of international film: the ambition was to deconstruct and redefine British film cultures. As shown by Willemen's (1989: 29) suggestion that "what is at stake... in the re-actualisation of the Third Cinema debates in the UK in the 80s, is the conviction that outsideness/otherness is the only vantage point from which a viable cultural politics may be conducted in the UK", Third Cinema became a lens through which the elements of British film cultures this thesis has shown to be problematic could potentially be deconstructed. The EIFF event was an important early part of a sustained effort (see Willemen, 1994; Willemen and Pines, 1989) to adopt an "outsideness" approach and redress ethnocentric cultural practice in the UK that had, through the middlebrow of my focus, aided the formation of a British film culture that was mostly homogenous, white, middle class, and self-serving to the detriment of international filmmakers and locations (see also Trinh, 1989: 133/134).

resolve the deadlock of the anthropological situation?”, but: what does an acknowledgement of this situation tell us about the discursive formation and circulation of Chinese cinema in Britain? Acknowledgement of this situation informs the contemporary researcher that the tool-sets that writers, curators, and programmers in Britain were equipped with to approach Chinese-language films, and their personal investments, only worked to benefit a small selection of films. These tastemakers across disparate spaces disagreed on questions of value in cinema but they worked with similarly small parameters to prioritise a certain kind of Chinese-language film. Taylor (1987: 143) argued that those “elitists” who led the Third Cinema event pushed an agenda through their appraisal of international productions whose main adjudicative criterion was the extent to which films engage with “the issue of acceptance/rejection of westernisms, of the colonizer's culture” that continued to redirect accomplishment to conformance to, or engagement with, a Euro-American way of producing and reading art. This is not a concern of historical colonisation in a geopolitical sense: if that were the case then Hong Kong's commercial industry, as a direct acceptance of “westernisms” would have been favoured by British tastemakers. Instead, it is a space of cinematic colonialism in which we can understand Mainland China's cinema to exist within an “art cinema” network that has been colonised and dictated by Euro-American practice.

The European film festivals at Cannes, Venice and Berlin as well as the assessment preferences of Euro-American critics can be read here as colonising the international standards by which films must be judged as worthwhile. Acknowledging this situation, Taylor (1987: 144) suggested that he offered a way of reading films that was a “vigorous defence of third world communities and their legitimacy” while those who subscribed to Western concepts of value and “esthetics” took an approach that was “synonymous with [the] rejection of those communities by third world people from them”. Taylor equates this phenomenon with the “familiar taxonomy of the “good” and the “bad” native” and the historical support in Western literature and literary criticism to guide readers' sympathies to identify with subjects who collaborate with the colonial process and distance themselves from those “natives” who resist colonialism. Mapping this onto Third Cinema, Taylor suggests that films chimed with the British academic if any aspect of their narrative, form, or *mis-en-scène* suggested a

severance from local contexts and an active engagement with Euro-American theory; specifically film theory or a “liberated” desire for political thought.

Taylor's contentions reveal vital characteristics in the presentation of Chinese cinema beyond academia and across the UK during this time and the circulation of the Fifth Generation in particular goes a long way to confirm his suggestions as correct. Within this framework we can attribute the success of *Yellow Earth* to its perceived utilisation of Western cinematic aesthetics to shine a light on the contemporary problems of communist China: to use formal devices of the “coloniser” to circulate political ideas that sat better in Western Europe than perhaps contemporary China. If we were to have understood “Chinese cinema” in the years immediately preceding *Yellow Earth*'s arrival as an entirely communist cinema, then *Yellow Earth* represented a significant rejection of the local cinema and culture by a native film-maker. There are numerous other examples here that extend our understanding of the repercussions to the rendering of Chinese cinema as a communist cinema observed in Chapter One. One such example is the release of *The Black Cannon Incident* which personifies European attitudes toward China in a criticism of China's communist cinema and state.

The Black Cannon Incident was the first Fifth Generation film after *Yellow Earth* to get a general release in the UK, where it played at the ICA in 1988 before its BBC2 screenings. The film tells the story of an engineer and German interpreter, Zhao Shuxi who loses a black cannon chess piece during a business trip. Through attempts to recover the piece, Zhao is mistaken to be involved in suspicious activity and removed from his post at the mining company. He is replaced with a young man with no knowledge of the industry and poor German ability, who through a series of comedic scenes makes repeated translation errors in front of a visiting German specialist, Hans Schmidt. It was in these moments of comedy that Tony Rayns found the value of *The Black Cannon Incident* to lie. Rayns (1987: 367) praised this comedic send up of China's contemporary contrivances as revealed to the watchful eyes of the German visitor within the narrative stating that “one of the mainsprings of the humour is embarrassment, and Chinese embarrassment” for Rayns “is always most acute in the presence of a foreigner, since that is when questions of 'face' are uppermost in Chinese minds”. For Rayns, *The Black Cannon Incident* removed itself from the Chinese context through the narrative device of the European visitor and shone a light on the passivity

of the Chinese populace. The bureaucratic problems plaguing the government were highlighted through the satirical narrative by a director whose own political stance chimed with the liberal values of the British tastemaker suggested in their writing. Indeed, the political zest of *The Black Cannon Incident* was so successful in its alignment with Rayns' political and aesthetic values that his review concluded with a lamentation that the “whizz-kids” of the British film industry had nothing similar to offer.

The Black Cannon Incident is one example which uses this rejection of local culture as an explicit narrative device, while Taylor referred more generally to the adoption of Euro-American formal strategies and replacing local aesthetic devices in his critique. More representative are those films outlined by Browne et al. (1994: 9) in their early study of *New Chinese Cinemas* which was presented as a collection of films united by their “distinctive stylistic and ideological antinomy that serves as an emblem of the deeper dispute over the terms of reproduction, reform, or rejection of traditional culture”. Half of this book is dedicated to the cinema of Mainland China – those of Taiwan and Hong Kong are given a quarter each – and the four essays here focus on director Xie Jin's Fourth Generation films, the “political economy of the Chinese melodrama”, postsocialism, and China's cinema of the 1980s. These are all concerned with films that offer, in Browne's words a “rejection of traditional culture”, yet this is not a rejection of “traditional” culture *per se*, but a rejection of the communist cinema of the previous decades. This is a trend built on the discursive phenomenon observed in Chapter One of this thesis whereby Mainland Chinese cinema – as an aesthetic, political, and ideological national cinema – was curated entirely as a communist one. The complimentary perception of these new films of the 1980s and their ubiquity in the discourse were intimately bound up with their rejection of communist aesthetics and politics.

Thanks to this totalising and intersectional definition of Mainland Chinese film as a cinema of intertwined political and aesthetic character any filmmaker who criticised the Communist Party in their filmmaking practice did so by also criticising the *aesthetic* strategies of China's local cinema. In Taylor's words, formal strategies of the coloniser were employed to reject the contemporary politics and filmmaking histories of Mainland China. While this had defined the early circulation of the Fifth Generation,

it was visible in its nascent stages in the early 1980s in readings of films that showed at Italy's political festivals. Writing in *Screen*, film academic and *Visions* creator John Ellis (1982: 83) praised *Legend of Mount Tainyuan* (1980, Xie Jin) as “a new level of sophistication in Chinese cinema” because it reworked “the central melodramatic tendency of Chinese cinema so that the sufferings of the central characters are caused by tendencies within the Party itself”. In other words, *The Legend of Mount Tianyuan* offered a new critical voice that critiqued the Communist Party doctrine through a departure from the communist cinema's pervasive aesthetic: Xie Jin is given an authorial voice based on his rejection of the Chinese cinema that came before him.

It is in this departure from communist cinema that the directors of Fifth Generation films could be detached from their contexts enough to become “film artists” as the middlebrow had preferred them. These were films deemed by Rayns (1985: 27) to be made by “outsiders and misfits”, or in Taylor's words “good natives”, who were dismissive of their local communities and cultural contexts. Local communities and contexts, in the case of Chinese art cinema at this time, implicitly referred to Mainland China's communist cinema and governance, and thus one could reject these while still retaining footing in the historical and ethereal Chineseness enjoyed by the middlebrow. Taylor certainly sits at the more polemic end of this debate, concluding in his *Framework* piece that English-language film studies and criticism was “culture-bound, self serving...racist, sexist, classist and hegemonic” (Taylor, 1987: 131). This aspect of his argument is worth revisiting, though, for how it took to task the elitism of British discourse and provides the contemporary researcher a new lens through which to understand context that *Yellow Earth* and the Fifth Generation arrived in. His arguments align with observations noted in Chapters One and Two of this thesis regarding the conflation of political, cultural, and social ideologies with aesthetic strategies and perceived cinematic movements and national categorisations.

Conclusion

That is not to say that Taylor's contribution to the discourse is without flaws and his conclusions are problematised by earlier observations in this chapter. I outlined

here that the productions of the Hong Kong New Wave failed to satisfy Britain's cultural intermediaries because they were rooted in a socio-cultural context that these tastemakers were not amicable to. The films of the Hong Kong New Wave did not satisfy political and social expectations, as firmly rooted in a colonial Hong Kong context and not the perceived “authentic” Mainland China, or those of filmmaking practice, as made within the confines of a commercial film industry and its reliance on genre productions. This existed alongside lacklustre distribution and exhibition trends so that the Hong Kong New Wave made little impact in Britain. The Mainland Chinese productions of the Fifth Generation, however, *were* read to be rooted in an historical Chinese culture and their aesthetic form was malleable in the interpretations it induced: whether part of a “traditional” Chineseness in the middlebrow, or a rejection of it as understood by academia. Both readings supported positive appraisals. Considering the apathetic take up of the Hong Kong New Wave after its festival run compared to the success of the Fifth Generation, the circulation of these films appears intimately bound up with these perceptions.

Both of these examples complicate Taylor's understanding that films succeeded in international and British contexts when they utilised the “language of the colonisers” - in this instance, a cinematic language propagated by international art cinema practice – and rejected local cultures. This is distinctly untrue for the Hong Kong context where engagement with Western modes of production forsook any claims to an “authentic” Chineseness. The Fordist modes of production at studios like Golden Harvest and the Shaw Brothers were understood to be distinctly “Western” as shown by Derek Malcolm's (1980: 10) relief that he could still find films that were “quintessentially Chinese” despite “all the Western influences and the cheapening process of mass production by big studios”. Similarly, the Fifth Generation's rejection of local cinematic cultures was only true in that it built on years of discursive equivalence in Britain between Mainland Chinese cinema and its political, communist cinema. This was not necessarily a rejection of local cultures, as those like Rayns readily adored the historical Chineseness on display in *Yellow Earth*, but a combined aesthetic and political rejection of communist aesthetics and social theories.

Ultimately, these arguments remain in the “deadlock of the anthropological situation”. From this debate, however, we can learn again that notions of cinematic

value which appear to be shaped independently of cultural concerns – whether the prioritisation of films that support modes of reading based in Euro-American theory in the new “debate culture”, or the distrust of commercialism in favour of “film artists” continued by the middlebrow – are developed through, and not separately to, these complex cultural assumptions. These developments are more intersectional than has been previously thought and thus it is vital to revisit this moment of the Fifth Generation's arrival within Britain's new heterogeneous cultures to recontextualise the contemporary taken-for-grantedness of the movement's popularity.

While the attitudes toward cinema had changed and fragmented significantly after the early 1960s, the unifying investment in cultural products that offered a brand of Chineseness indelibly associated with Mainland China persisted across these new spaces. Moments of intersection between these preferences, filmmaking practice, industrial contexts, formal strategies, distribution characteristics, and a host of other processes, remained largely unchanged since the 1950s and the *kung fu* craze of the 1970s. The primacy of cultural investments persisted. While the voices of film education democratised the means by which Chinese-language films could be appreciated, during the 1970s and 1980s this rarely, if ever, materialised in a way that helped the circulation and availability of films from Hong Kong, and to a lesser extent Taiwan, which remained slight in middlebrow and art cinema spaces throughout this period.

In the following chapter I note the drastic changes in the circulation of Hong Kong cinema in Britain brought on by technological developments and the new possibilities of home media distribution. Focusing on a collection of tastemakers and cultural authorities in a new “subcultural” space, Chapter Four observes how the preferences for Mainland Chineseness, alongside those for films that rejected local cultures and engaged in Euro-American cultural theory, did not inform this new group at all. Instead, a collection of men across distribution and journalistic operations cultivated new modes of accommodating Hong Kong's popular cinema based on universal generic expectations that shared with debate culture their shaping through an explicit rejection of middlebrow practice. Chapter Four introduces a concern of the final two chapters of this thesis: the phenomenon by which new modes of access through technological developments and a more robust British exhibition network

reframed understandings of value in Chinese cinema. While certainly informing circulation practices implicitly, these were appetites for Chinese-language films that ostensibly moved away from the pervasive influence of cultural perceptions that had limited and restricted the majority of Chinese cinemas in Britain before them.

4. Underground Tastemakers and Grassroots Entrepreneurs: Subcultural Capital and the Circulation of Hong Kong's Genre Cinema after the *Kung Fu* Craze

Historically the fact is that the way North America began to consume East Asian films, initially Hong Kong films, was via video stores rather than mainstream distribution, and via...cult-y audiences. Nerds who became specialists ...There is a kind of geek mentality towards this material. As far as I can see it's largely uncritical. It almost never defines any kind of aesthetic criteria or moral criteria; it has no sense of why something might be better than something else – it's just it works better or it doesn't work better. There are no other judgements that ever seem to be made. I look on this with some amusement and bemusement, actually. A mixture of the two.

- Tony Rayns (Archibald, 2007)

The high number of martial arts films that screened at commercial cinemas in the 1970s came to an abrupt halt around 1982 when the abundance of genre films on general release turned into one or two a year, overshadowed by the critical darlings of the Fifth Generation discussed in the previous chapter (see Appendix Two). The lineage of Bruceploitation films that lingered at Odeons and ABC cinemas nationwide transformed into a handful of films at cinemas in newly renovated regional “arthouse” network: Bruce Lee replaced with Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, and their mainland contemporaries. However, this did not mean that the kind of popular Hong Kong filmmaking discussed in Chapter Two vanished from British film cultures, nor did the scattered theatrical appearances by Hong Kong genre films like Jackie Chan's *Police Story* (1985), released in UK cinemas in 1987, and the John Woo-directed *The Killer* (1989), released in 1990, represent the total availability of Chinese-language genre features at this time. In this period, the theatrical nature of the *kung fu* craze shifted into the home media space thanks to the dissemination of VHS technology, a technological change which facilitated the circulation of Chinese-language genre cinema (almost exclusively productions from Hong Kong) in Britain into the new millennium.

It is on this new home media scene and Hong Kong productions that this chapter focuses, detailing the characteristics of distribution and the communities that enabled it from 1989 through to 2007. I introduce a number of cultural gatekeepers responsible for framing the discourse around which popular Hong Kong cinema has circulated in Britain over the last three decades, arguing that much of the discursive construction of a “Hong Kong cinema” has resulted from (and informed) a subcultural ideology.

Following scholars that have adapted Pierre Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital into the analysis of *subcultural* capital (Thornton, 1995), this chapter continues to note how the personal investments of key tastemakers have had repercussions on the framing of Chinese-language films in Britain. Almost unique in this space, these tastemakers were also directly responsible for the availability of the films they discussed as they simultaneously acted as the films' main distributors.

The central case studies of this chapter are the organisations responsible for the idiosyncratic collapsing of journalistic coverage and film distribution: Eastern Heroes, Made in Hong Kong, Hong Kong Legends. Retaining the focus of this thesis on tastemaking individuals in various cultural spaces, I also discuss key personnel who moved across these operations, mainly Rick Baker, Bey Logan, and to a lesser extent, Toby Russell. These men practised a similar mode of self-styled expertise as Tony Rayns has done in the middlebrow space and, indeed, share footing with the "nerds who became specialists" of Rayns' reckoning, quoted above. While it is important to acknowledge the individual quirks and pursuits of these men, as I do in this chapter, for the most part I treat them here as contributors to a culture with clear homogeneous traits and shared investments. I refer to these evangelical tastemakers as grassroots entrepreneurs because, in a mutated continuation of the *kung fu* craze discussed in Chapter Two, the pursuit of financial capital has been central to their activities.

Since the 1980s, these have been the cultural intermediaries that have shaped Hong Kong cinema in Britain both for those in the know but also for general audiences whose access to Hong Kong productions has passed through the curatorial vision of these gatekeepers and their involvement across Britain's cultural spaces. Overshadowed by fascination in the middlebrow and film academia with the Fifth Generation and Mainland China, these men took Hong Kong's popular cinema seriously before many of their contemporary colleagues. Stephen Teo's (1997) *Hong Kong Cinema: Extra Dimensions* has been a seminal text for scholars researching Hong Kong film since its release in 1997. The self-proclaimed "first full-length English-language study of one of the world's most exciting and innovative cinemas" has been vital for the representation of Hong Kong films in the academic space. Before this book was released, however, Bey Logan (1996) wrote and published *Hong Kong Action Cinema* – similarly a full-length repository of information on stars, directors, genres and

production contexts – that was, and to some extent still is, a valuable resource for those in English-speaking territories eager to learn about Hong Kong film.

This chapter notes the central evaluative preferences in these cultural intermediaries – namely, the anchor of action performance in their appreciation of film and the gendered bias of the space – that have shaped their circulation of Hong Kong cinema, and offers cultural and structural reasons for these. I argue that this presentation of Hong Kong productions departs significantly from the cultural relativism of the middlebrow and its curation of cinematic value based inherently on perceptions of Chineseness therein, discussed in the previous chapter. Historically, this space has been thought of as part of a “cult” cinema lineage but, while this serves an initially useful mapping function, I begin this chapter noting the inadequacies of this approach. These men occupied a subcultural space more generally, and the specific character of Hong Kong cinema's circulation therein resulted significantly from their pursuit of subcultural capital. This materialised in promotional and critical practices that diverted attention away from cultural difference, “authenticity”, and the importance of Chineseness toward universal frameworks based on action performance and star quality.

Through case studies of the distribution and promotion of the films of Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan, I show in this chapter how the evaluative preferences toward Hong Kong cinema nurtured in editorial activities shaped the UK distribution of these films. Some practices of these grassroots entrepreneurs could be rightly criticised as problematic in their social and cultural politics and these purportedly universalist modes of appreciation were embedded with implicit cultural assumptions. However, I show in this chapter that their evangelical practice has played a vital and understudied role in the British, and international, circulation of Hong Kong cinema since the late 1980s.

Divergence from cult cinema

Together, Eastern Heroes, Made in Hong Kong, and Hong Kong Legends distributed hundreds of Hong Kong films into Britain during the 1990s and 2000s on VHS cassette tapes and later DVD. The films themselves were one part of a larger retail operation,

detailed throughout this chapter, that included mainly: books and magazines containing reviews, editorials, and interviews with stars; and an assorted collection of posters and memorabilia. These operations were not the same as those that had received or distributed Chinese-language films in Britain before them: not equal to the institutionally supported authorities responsible for framing art cinema in middlebrow contexts, nor direct descendants of the business men and women of *Kung Fu Monthly* in the 1970s who cared little for Hong Kong cinema beyond the financial returns it could garner. Their activities were understood, first and foremost, as evangelical pursuits hoping to reclaim a kind of cinema that in the 20 years since the *kung fu* craze had been curated as a niche and misguided pursuit by Britain's cultural authorities. Well summarised in an introductory editorial to *Impact* – a magazine founded by Bey Logan – this practice was interventional: aiming to give “publicity to the sort of films that sometimes [were] over-looked by other mainstream magazines” and shine a light on what they saw as “the most neglected of cinematic genres: the action film” (Mosby, 2000: 4). They were operations led by entrepreneurial fans, enthusiastic about Hong Kong's genre cinema and invested in widening its availability in Britain as equally as they were in creating careers for themselves.

As a starting point, it is useful to consider the activities of these men and their operations as part of the lineage of cult cinema. Indeed, *Impact's* interventional ambition was remarkably similar to the sentiment of V. Vale (qtd in Sanjek, 1990: 150) – author of *Incredibly Strange Films*, a seminal book in cult cinema appreciation – who suggested that the cult film was, generally, a “territory largely neglected by the film-criticism establishment”. This broad definition fits the cultural positioning of Hong Kong action cinema Britain as shown in Chapter Two's discussion of middlebrow apathy during the *kung fu* craze. But more specifically, Hong Kong films have, since the 1980s, regularly appeared in books and magazines deemed essential literature on cult cinema. One of the earliest attempts at curating a canon of cult films, Danny Peary's (1981) *Cult Movies*, includes *Enter the Dragon* in between French erotic film *Emmanuelle* and David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977). Likewise, Pete Tomb's (1998) *Mondo Macabro*, an influential work in cult cinema appreciation, uses an image of Lo Lieh in his *King Boxer* role as its cover design. Indeed, the early activities of Baker, Logan, and Russell were part of a global trend in the late 1980s that positioned Hong Kong's commercial

filmmaking as part of Europe and America's canon of cult film. The first collaboration between these men took the form of monthly screenings of Hong Kong action films at the Scala Cinema in London, which ran between 1989 and 1994⁴². The Scala was a venue known at the time for specialising in "underground classics" of cult cinema from directors including John Waters and Russ Meyer (Paley, 2011).

A key part of cult film circulation is that, in their absence from an imagined "mainstream", productions depend on an "active fandom" to find audiences, distribution, and recognition (Mathijs and Sexton, 2012: 7). A rhetoric of discovery was often used to frame the circulation of Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s in ways that helped specifically position its films within this cult space. The clearest example here is Thomas Weisser's influential journal *Asian Cult Cinema* (formerly *Asian Trash Cinema*), a publication that hosted the writing of many including prolific academic Tony Williams, which was said to have specifically "discovered" Hong Kong's "cult" cinema for the North American market (Collins, 1997: 2). The activities of Baker, Logan and Russell at the Scala Cinema served the same revelatory function and the critical writing of these men revealed an explicit understanding of their role as cultural gatekeepers. Logan (2000: 5) claimed to be "way ahead of the game in terms of Hong Kong action cinema" during the late 1980s as apparently part of the only team that paid it any attention. Long before Hong Kong's stars "became household names in the West", Logan suggested, he was "covering their exploits...in detail".

In addition to their explorer's credentials and work at the Scala Cinema, the forays of these tastemakers into VHS distribution equally suggests a positioning within a cult cinema context, in which videocassettes were of vital importance (Mathijs and Sexton, 2012: 4). Eastern Heroes released a number of films on VHS in Britain during the 1990s which were acquired directly from Hong Kong by Baker and Russell themselves⁴³. These films invariably traded with themes of excessive sex and violence through genres

⁴² Their first screening harked back to the days of the *kung fu* craze with a triple bill of films starring Hong Kong action icon Sammo Hung. These were *Eastern Condors* (1987, Sammo Hung), *Dragons Forever* (1988, Sammo Hung) and *Project A Part 2* (1987, Jackie Chan).

⁴³ Baker and Russell travelled regularly to Hong Kong, buying the rights to films from the local television company TVB for 500HKD. Adjusting for inflation, this is around £140 at the time of writing. It should be noted however that this information comes from Toby Russell in a recent podcast on his work in the industry so its reliability may be questioned (Johnson, 2016). It is unlikely that TVB would have held many of the British distribution rights to Hong Kong productions which were produced by other film studios.

generally associated with the “bad taste” of cult cinema (Jancovich et al, 2003: 90): from action films in their “Hong Kong Cinema on the Edge” collection, to exploitation and soft-core pornography in their “Category III” collection⁴⁴. This operation was decidedly amateur and fannish in appearance, with the more voracious characteristics of their film choices promoted through garish and awkwardly designed VHS tapes. Their cover for thriller *Man Wanted* (1995) shows the busy collage style from many of their releases clearly designed to foreground the explosive violence from the film (Figure 5). The garish borders, inconsistent capitalisation and multitude of logos repeated across the design represents well their amateur operation.



Figure 5: *Man Wanted* (1995) VHS. Eastern Heroes Ltd

Crossover with cult cinema circulation and appreciation is useful to help to initially conceptualise the positioning of Hong Kong genre cinema in Britain following the *kung fu* craze, particularly for outlining the separation of this space from the practices of the

⁴⁴ ‘Category III’ refers to the Hong Kong ratings system whereby Category III denotes an adults-only film. This rating became associated with excess (whether violent or sexual) as the 1990s progressed.

middlebrow. Outside of the grassroots nature of their operation, remarks of being “way ahead of the game” by Logan reveal the extent to which he understood himself to be operating in spite of an otherwise apathetic film culture in Britain. However, this critical framework only sustains a productive investigation when thinking in these broad sweeps. Analysis of the specific modes of consumption circulated by these underground tastemakers shows the utility of a cult cinema framework to be lacking. For example, a key component in the reception of cult films is the ubiquity of ironic and “camp” readings, often discussed through the notion of “paracinema” (Mathijs and Sexton, 2012: 86 – 96), that support the enjoyment of films that are implicitly understood as “bad” through conventional evaluative criteria. Shown by V.Vale (qtd in Sanjek, 1990: 150) in *Incredibly Strange Films* and his observation that cult films are “sources of pure enjoyment and delight, despite improbable plots, “bad” acting, or ragged film technique”, this ironic stance toward cult cinema implies consensus with authorities in, for example, Britain's middlebrow, over what makes a film sincerely “good”. In other words, to appreciate something ironically for containing “ragged film technique”, there would need to be a consensus over what made “good film technique” elsewhere.

The tastemakers discussed in this chapter took Hong Kong’s popular cinema absolutely seriously, sincerely and generally without irony and productions were regularly held up as examples of accomplished filmmaking. These men would not, for example, have proclaimed *kung fu* film *Dragons Forever* (1988, Sammo Hung) to “set a new precedent in modern day action” or *A Better Tomorrow* (1986, John Woo) “one of the finest gangster movies ever made” had their appreciation been based on anything less than sincere admiration (Baker and Russell, 1994: 171, 212). Throughout a number of editorial activities, these men and their associated operations spread new evaluative modes of treating Hong Kong cinema that existed outside of a recognisably cult space. Rick Baker and Toby Russell circulated these opinions through the *Eastern Heroes Magazine* which developed out of a fanzine for the unofficial *Jackie Chan Fan Club*. Alongside numerous monographs and books released (Baker and Russell, 1994, 1995; Logan, 1996) these publications were repositories of editorials, reviews, star profiles, and lists on Hong Kong cinema. In addition to its print form, there were video editions of the magazine, containing footage and interviews with stars, conducted by Baker and

Russell in Hong Kong. Outside of *Eastern Heroes Magazine*, Bey Logan covered films for martial arts magazine *Combat* and was the founder of *Impact*, which focused on global action cinema. Across this literature, there was rarely, if ever, irony in the treatment of Hong Kong films which were promoted as nothing less than “masterpieces”.

In this evangelical and entrepreneurial mode, these tastemakers betrayed their cult cinema lineage through aspirations to be integrated into the commercial mainstream. The realisation of these ambitions can be seen through contemporaneous distribution operations that Baker, Logan and Russell were involved with: Made in Hong Kong and later, Hong Kong Legends. Made in Hong Kong were a distribution operation based on London's Portobello Road who released over 100 Hong Kong films into Britain in the 1990s and early 2000s, more professional in appearance and diverse in content than Eastern Heroes and sold in nationwide retail chain shops including Virgin, H.M.V, and Tower Records. These were action films for the most part, but the label also sold early films by Wong Kar-wai including *As Tears Go By* (1988) and *Days of Being Wild* (1990) before he was appropriated as an auteur in the art cinema space⁴⁵. While Eastern Heroes dealt in the territory of B-movies and exploitation films, Made in Hong Kong supplied films of a more conventionally higher quality, made by large studios, starring Hong Kong's biggest actors that were more critically liked in Hong Kong and abroad. While details about the key personnel behind Made in Hong Kong are obscure for a contemporary researcher, we can see that Baker, Logan and Russell were involved here in significant ways: each VHS release contained liner notes with detailed information on the film written by one or two of these men. Similarly, most videocassettes pointed toward the two Eastern Heroes retail shops (one in Camden and one near London's Chinatown) as a destination for Hong Kong film fans. Whether directly responsible for acquisitions or not, these men were certainly involved in the operation at Made in Hong Kong and their collaboration continued into the late 1990s when their work became much more integrated into the mainstream through Hong Kong Legends.

Formed in 1999, Hong Kong Legends was a distribution operation developed with input from Baker, Logan, and Russell which bought the UK distribution rights to all the films owned by Eastern Heroes as well as a significant number from Made in Hong

⁴⁵ The reception and distribution of Wong Kar-wai within the “art cinema” context is discussed at length in Chapter Five.

Kong's catalogue. The label released 101 films into the UK between 1999 and 2007, capitalising on the popularity of DVDs with fan audiences for the potential to add special features and audio commentaries, many of which were provided by Logan. Utilising the fidelity of the DVD format, another key selling point of the Hong Kong Legends releases was that they were all digitally restored versions of a much higher quality than any previous VHS release: their slogan in print advertising was "Best for quality, best for action" (*Impact*, 2000: 1). Few of the films released by Hong Kong Legends were contemporary, but this stress on restoration and on imparting knowledge about the "legends" of the film industry helped to justify the historical focus. Between 2005 and 2007 the distributor sold *Hong Kong Legends*⁴⁶, a monthly DVD-magazine release across nationwide newsagents that repackaged notable acquisitions and refined editorial activity down to a small magazine. *Hong Kong Legends* ultimately folded in 2007 however their catalogue was bought by Cine-Asia, a label specialising in home media and occasional theatrical releases, which has since continued to re-release Hong Kong Legends acquisitions.

The professionalisation of these distribution and editorial operations as time progressed and the integration of these artefacts into nationwide retail environments like HMV show that these men were intent on popularising Hong Kong films outside of the cult space. It is important to bear in mind the wide-reaching impact of their curatorial vision. To name two further examples beyond the commercial availability of their VHS and DVD releases. Baker assisted film critic and television personality Jonathan Ross on a number of television programmes around 1990 including episodes of Ross's *Son of The Incredibly Strange Picture Show* (1988 – 1989) series – a programme whose name and approach borrowed from *Incredibly Strange Films* (Vale and Juno, 1986) – on Jackie Chan and director Tsui Hark. Similarly, in 2000, as part of a night of *kung fu* programming, Logan created and presented the documentary *Kung Fu Fighting* (1997) for the BBC, in which he detailed the working practices of Hong Kong's action film industry. For these programmes, footage was supplied by Eastern Heroes and Made in Hong Kong.

⁴⁶ Hong Kong Legends the distributor and their *Hong Kong Legends* magazine share the same name. To avoid repeatedly noting whether it is the distributor or the magazine being discussed, the latter will always be italicised, the former not. As with *Kung Fu Monthly*, issues of *Hong Kong Legends* are not dated so will be referenced by issue number going forward.

Through this plethora of activities, these men and their organisations have been the key cultural intermediaries in the UK and the most commanding in their curatorial vision of Hong Kong's popular genre cinema since 1989. Clear aspirations for mainstream acknowledgement and the sincerity with which they have treated Hong Kong cinema (developed throughout this chapter) problematise the utility of understanding their activities as "cult" in nature. I show instead in this chapter that, somewhat paradoxically, the entrepreneurial ambition of these men was realised through a self-conscious presentation of their activities as "subcultural" more generally. The result of these processes was the gendered curation of a Hong Kong cinema, defined by action performance and stars, understood as inherently valuable by default.

Subcultures and subcultural capital

The term "subculture" as it is generally understood today has its origins in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies where it was first used to characterise social activities across Britain's working class. This early scholarship on subcultural theory was, for Sune Jensen (2006: 263) "about how people in underprivileged social positions create culture when attempting to resolve, handle, work through or 'answer' shared problems". Subcultures are, in this original understanding, "collectivities of people who are in one sense or another underprivileged or even oppressed" (Jensen, 2006: 262). This early work has been criticised for over-simplifying cultural experience and reducing complex social relations into monolithic blocks wholly determined by class background. Christine Griffin (2011: 248) argues that this approach failed "to recognise that many subcultural forms involve young people from a range of class locations and trajectories, incorporating considerable internal diversity and contradiction" and that even within shared class groups, subcultural forms are shaped by numerous factors. Others have criticised the bourgeois-working class binary implied by these original theorisations which unquestioningly circulated the assumption that "working class culture was seen as an 'authentic' culture separate from the dominant culture's bourgeois (and commercial) ideological domination" (Wheaton and Beal 2003: 158). These criticisms of reductionism since early forms of subcultural studies have encouraged new, nuanced

modes of inquiry in more recently.

There has been, for example, a turn to classlessness since the 1990s that seeks to introduce factors beyond class and social standing into the discussion. Sarah Thornton's (1995) Bourdieu-inspired study of British music fans is a particularly widely reference example. Thornton's *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* introduced a framework through which elements ancillary to class could inform analyses of subcultures. Echoing theories of cultural capital that have already informed much of this thesis, Thornton's "subcultural capital" provides a framework that includes considerations of legitimation, distinction, and taste. Important for this argument is that, in the turn to classlessness: "participation in subcultures is now a matter of choice", rather than an unavoidable repercussion of social standing (Muggleton qtd in Jensen, 2006: 261). This suggestion of intention means subcultural capital is pursued for certain reasons, not thrust onto participants without consent. It is through this vital nuance that Thornton's considerations of subcultural capital are of most use in this chapter because those like Rick Baker and Bey Logan clearly *perform* their subcultural positioning in ways that implicitly support entrepreneurial aspirations.

For a shared activity to be considered subcultural according to Jensen there must first be the construction of a "symbolic binary" of "*underground versus mainstream*" (Jensen, 2006: 263). Such a binary is regularly highlighted by Baker, Logan and Russell in repeated observations that their work had gone unappreciated by the cultural establishment in Britain. This has, on occasion, materialised in a combative opposition to the mainstream in frustrated acknowledgements of their inability to command respect with the cultural gatekeepers of foreign-language film in Britain. One such moment appeared in an article for *Eastern Heroes Magazine* where Logan (1995a: 27) detailed his participation in a Hong Kong cinema lunch at the NFT. In his recollection of the event, Logan told the story of attending with Nishiwaki Michiko, an action heroine popular in Hong Kong's film industry. Despite understanding himself as important to Nishiwaki's international fame through his own writing, Logan found he was: "shunted off to one end of the table...while the beautiful Ms. Nishiwaki was surrounded by all the rich old boys who had funded the Hong Kong retrospective at last year's London Film Festival".

Logan explicitly referred to men at the BFI with a clearly dismissive opinion of these

“rich old boys” responsible for curating the middlebrow space, and he continued to map the distinction between these two space as one of class, as it had been during the *kung fu* craze. This lies at the more directly hostile end of the spectrum and elsewhere reference is made to these “rich old boys” without pejorative sentiment. In an example showcasing these grassroots entrepreneurs’ genuine passion for the widening consumption of Hong Kong cinema in Britain, Baker (1995a: 55) noted in *Eastern Heroes Magazine* that with *The Killer* (1989), an action film popular within the fan audience: “it took an article by Tony Raynes [sic] in *Time Out* magazine and several screenings at the ICA to ignite the enthusiasm of filmgoers that there was a new style of movie in town”. Rayns also received thanks by Logan (1996: 2) as being one of the “Hong Kong film fan fraternity” alongside Baker and Russell in *Hong Kong Action Cinema*.

Antagonism was not ubiquitous, but the writing of Baker and Logan defined their activities as subcultural by reinforcing a separation between their own and those of an imagined mainstream. This “mainstream” in this context was either the middlebrow, as noted above, or the many “laymen” and “virgin viewers” who were yet to be “enlightened” by the work of Eastern Heroes et al. (Brennan, 1995: 37; Baker, 1995b: 9). An advantage of this underdog positioning was that it allowed these underground tastemakers to retain their status as fans and thus trustworthy curators of Hong Kong cinema (Jancovich, 2002: 307). However, in defining themselves as separate to the institutionally supported network of the middlebrow, Baker and his colleagues had few shortcuts to legitimacy that were needed to grant them authority and separate them from their readership/consumers. As a result, these men persistently sought legitimation (in Bourdieu's (1990) terms) and subcultural capital to craft a hierarchy within the subculture in which they occupied powerful positions. This permeated all aspects of editorial practice, combining with the entrepreneurial need to earn money in ways that had significant repercussions for the curation and presentation of Hong Kong’s action cinema to the British audience.

For those seeking powerful positions in a subculture, there is a need to “produce and protect a sense of rarity and exclusivity” for the stability of their operation (Jancovich, 2002: 309): to separate them from “laymen”. This materialised in *Eastern Heroes Magazine*, *Impact*, and *Combat* through a strategy that stressed privileged

access to people and films that were inaccessible to a general audience. Across these publications are regular examples of writers showcasing knowledge of films and regaling stories of personal contact with Hong Kong stars. Examples of this legitimization are ubiquitous and too plentiful to discuss here (see Ducker (2000), Cooper (1996), Impact (2000) for a few) but perhaps the ultimate example can be found in Baker and Russell's (1994) *The Essential Guide to Hong Kong Movies* which opens with a letter written by internationally renowned Hong Kong director, John Woo.

Regarding the reach of Hong Kong cinema to global audiences, the director states that "none of this could have happened without the support and constant championing by Hong Kong film aficionados like Rick Baker and Toby Russell. I have never met anyone else who has such a deep knowledge of and passion for the Hong Kong movie scene" (Woo, 1994: 10). Baker and Russell include this letter as the introduction to their guide to Hong Kong cinema, sending a clear statement of authority to their reader. This extended to domestic celebrities, and Baker often reminded readers that he was involved with Jonathan Ross on television. Of Ross' *Son of The Incredibly Strange Film Show*, Baker claimed that his production assistance created the "first big breakthrough in bringing Jackie [Chan] to the attention of the mainstream" (Baker, 1995c: 5). Baker here took credit for shaping and starting Jackie Chan's mainstream attention, reminded readers of his professional connections to Ross and the BBC (and hence the trustworthiness of his knowledge and critical opinion), all while using only the forename of Jackie Chan in a show of familiarity with the action star. Here, Baker cements his position through both access to stars and the legitimization of his knowledge as an adviser to British tastemakers in the mainstream.

Jensen (2006: 268) reminds us that for Pierre Bourdieu, "capital is only capital to the extent that it can be converted into other types of capital". For the tastemakers of my focus it is clear that the subcultural capital accumulated through these tales of privileged access sought to legitimise their knowledge and grant them an authority position that would support the sales of their VHS tapes, magazines, and Hong Kong film ephemera. Regarding Issue 11 of *Eastern Heroes Magazine*, for example, Baker told readers of the time he met Hong Kong superstar Chow Yun Fat. Discussing the scarcity of the issue (which had Chow on the cover), Baker stated: "I myself didn't even have a copy until John [Brennan] lent me his, because back in 1993 when I went to

Hong Kong to visit Chow and try to convince him that he had a following in the UK, I took my own copy – alas, I didn’t get it back!”. This is one of many comments that mapped the importance of unobtainability in subcultural appreciation onto the products sold by these men. Mentions of scarcity are printed so ubiquitously throughout *Eastern Heroes Magazine* that they are difficult to read as anything other than contrived attempts to artificially increase the market value of the publication.

Baker’s (1995e: 59) observation in a retrospective of the magazine that issues were “vanishing” and that readers ought to keep them in good condition as no-one know what they would “be worth in a few years [sic] time”, was clearly born out of his entrepreneurial goals, but it simultaneously raised the value of the magazine, legitimised the content of its pages, and rewarded those who owned copies with a higher fan status than those who did not. As in the *kung fu* craze, these strategies presented readers ways to increase their subcultural capital through consumption. Regarding club cultures, Sarah Thornton (1995: 11) notes the ways “subcultural capital can be *objectified* or *embodied*...in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections” (emphasis in original). For Hong Kong cinema fans in the space of my focus, objectification was realised through collecting magazines and paraphernalia, with VHS tapes playing a significant role. In a “Hot Hits of Hong Kong” feature by Baker (1995f: 72), readers were asked to test themselves on “how much of a Hong Kong film connoisseur” they were by “noting how many of the films listed” had been seen or bought for their collection. These kinds of articles reinstated the knowledge of the writers as trustworthy curators of an objective canon of valuable Hong Kong films while simultaneously promoting collecting as an important activity for “true” fans.

VHS promotional strategies encouraged these practices, from Eastern Heroes collection's mentioned above to Made in Hong Kong's practice of including index numbers on the spine of each release in the formant of “HK001”, “HK002”, and so on. At the time of writing online communities continue to gauge the completeness of their collections by compiling lists of their purchases and noting the index number of each (Jack J., 2009). Readers were encouraged to become collectors of magazines, VHS tapes, and other paraphernalia, and urged to compete with one another over the size of their collections as representations of who was a better fan. Again a clear result of

entrepreneurial ambition, the promotion of collecting as a hobby or pursuit had vital repercussions on the modes of consumption suggested. These processes, according to Joanne Hollows (2003), nurture a specifically male-gendered space. Writing of cult consumption – a discussion which remains of relevance here despite the nuanced differences from cult cinema outlined above – Hollows (2003: 36) notes that collectors are defined as transgressive, active fans through their opposition to a perceived passive, mainstream consumer. This is a gendered process as “the characteristics derided in portraits of the mainstream” and its passive consumers “are those associated with femininity” while the characteristics of subcultural consumption, promoted here, “are those commonly associated with masculinity”. In seeking out unobtainable films, those like *Eastern Heroes* and their readership engage in a subcultural operation to “distance themselves from the feminine shopper”, adopting “dispositions towards consumption which are more assertively masculine” (ibid).

A gendered, non-Chinese space

It will no doubt be clear at this point that the cultural space focused on in this chapter was exclusively male, explicitly referred to as the “Hong Kong film fan fraternity” by Logan (1996: 2), as noted above. There is some continuity here with the characteristics *kung fu* cinema’s early consumption in Britain: midnight screenings at inner city cinemas like those at the Harlesden Coliseum discussed in Chapter Two offered a rowdy night out for groups of young men but they would not have offered women an equally safe space (Hollows, 2003: 42)⁴⁷. However, the practices of Baker and his colleagues generally support Hollow’s (2003: 43) assertion that “refiguring the cult fan as ‘manly adventurer’” simply continued through the “means of distribution and retailing, rather than the viewing context”. The arrival of home media represented an opportunity to democratise audiences because it was not entrenched in the spatial problems of the *kung fu* craze, but this potential remained unrealised. The team at *Eastern Heroes Magazine* and the other case studies of this chapter were mostly white

⁴⁷ Despite the spatial politics of midnight screenings, *Kung Fu Monthly* and its contemporaries wrote to young girls and boys alike. Their editorial crew appeared similarly diverse in gender though, as noted in Chapter Two, it was pervasively unreliable and dishonest in its editorial policy, particularly with its contributors’ names, so it is difficult to argue for this diversity with conviction.

and male and they sold to a readership that was assumed to be likewise.

Emerging in the early 1990s, these publications shared characteristics with the UK's "lad culture" of the day, pre-empting the conventions of "lad's mags" like *FHM* and *Loaded* with articles that were "highly heteronormative, frequently accompanied by sexualized images of women, [which endorsed] typically masculine sexual norms" (Coy and Horvath, 2011: 146 – 147). As the organisation most concerned with excess, Eastern Heroes keenly covered films with female leads in the contemporary "girls with guns" and "femme fatale" genres. Around 1995, an "Asian Babe Special" issue of *Eastern Heroes Magazine* was released containing information on (and salacious images of) stars like Chingmy Yau and Maggie Cheung and not long after, the organisation released the book-length *Deadly China Dolls*: "The essential guide to the toughest and most glamorous femme fatale stars of oriental cinema"⁴⁸. This early interest in films with female-leads persisted through to 2007 and the film choices of *Hong Kong Legends* where films with scantily clad female leads made up a healthy number of their acquisitions. *Naked Killer* (1992, Clarence Fok Yiu-leung), an erotic action film about a professional female assassin, was one film repeatedly re-released across labels with its salacious design of the almost-naked Chingmy Yau and Carrie Ng invariably on the cover (Figure 6).

⁴⁸ By this point Maggie Cheung had cemented a name for herself as a respected and reputable actor in films like *Days of Being Wild* and *As Tears Go By* in addition to her appearances in genre films. Her reduction to an "Asian Babe" here is perhaps surprising.



Figure 6: *Naked Killer* (2002) VHS. *Hong Kong Legends*

Within magazine articles, writers clearly wrote to an imagined heterosexual male reader keen to engage in the lad culture of the day. A published interview by Logan (1995b: 60) with action star Jade Leung about her new film *Black Cat* (1991, Stephen Shin) ran with the by-line: “Bey Logan goes on a pussy hunt, and tracks down the Black Cat herself, that sensuous, sexy, and ever-so-slightly psychopathic Jade Leung”. Logan then set up the interview wondering if speaking a shared language with Leung would “be enough to ensure a meaningful exchange of phone numbers...um...views”. These quips and distribution strategies helped to frame this circulation of Hong Kong cinema as a boys' club, which was both exclusive and exclusionary and perpetuated the Orientalist trope “that presents attractive Asian women as sexually available, dangerous and deadly” while supporting the agency of their male readership (Martin, 2014: 97). Such editorial activities consolidated various elements of the fan space that had since the 1970s been working to develop an audience of mostly young men and they went hand-in-hand with the curation of this space as a predominantly white, or at least non-Chinese, one.

The “Hong Kong film fan fraternity” that Logan thanked in *Hong Kong Action Cinema* was a collection of exclusively white, British men. Outside of the occasional personal practice of martial arts, the writing of these grassroots entrepreneurs gave little sense that they were interested in Hong Kong or Chinese culture beyond the region’s films. In fact, their writing reveals the retention of distance from Chinese cultures, including British Chinese communities in the UK (except for occasional trips to London’s Chinatown restaurants). Writing of Hong Kong horror films and their lack of distribution in Britain, Logan (1995c: 43) once warned that “for now fans will have to brave their local Chinese video shop to check out far-out, far eastern versions of the horror movie”. Logan implied that readers would be uncomfortable amid Chinatown’s video shops despite their useful function as an alternative distribution network. This is one example of a clear hint in Logan’s work that he was specifically not writing to British-Chinese fans of Hong Kong martial arts cinema or those who frequented Chinatowns without concern.

As a result, when the Chinese characteristics of Hong Kong’s genre films were highlighted, they often were “representations of the Far East as Other” (Martin, 2015: 163). Particularly on the occasions where the practices of these underground enthusiasts most intersected with a general, nationwide audience, they relied on the same strategies that had defined the circulation of Hong Kong cinema during the 1970s. For example, in addition to his programmes on Jackie Chan and Tsui Hark, Jonathan Ross hosted a season of films on Channel 4 in 1990 called “Chinese Ghost Stories”. The season showed films from a variety of genres and filmmakers, including: *Mr Vampire* (1985, Ricky Lau), *Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain* (1983, Tsui Hark), *Rouge* (1988, Stanley Kwan), *Spiritual Love* (1987, David Lai and Taylor Wong), and *Espirit d’amour* (1983, Ringo Lam). The collection was diverse and contained films that would have been impossible to see in Britain otherwise, introduced in detail by Ross. However, in addition to the thematic focus on ghost stories playing into fears of a supernatural and mysterious Orient, the formal characteristics of Ross’ introductions depended on stereotypes. Each began with a gong sounding to reveal Ross speaking in front of a red-lit temple, surrounded by dragon statues and smoke effects (Jim Lynn, 2014).

I believe we can attribute these characteristics specifically to the nature of the

subcultural operation performed and maintained by Baker, Logan and Russell in their roles as cultural intermediaries. I have shown that these men understood themselves to be (and performed as) subcultural in the face of the middlebrow establishment and the commercial mainstream. Their tastemaking practices developed out of this positioning in the form of carefully crafted personalities whose reliability and privileged knowledge of Hong Kong cinema was reinforced through their publishing of magazines. These publications acted as tools that legitimised their evaluative preferences which are shown here to be grounded in heterosexual, masculine, non-Chinese investments. Through Hollows' observations of collecting in film consumption, we can see that these evaluative preferences become developed and consecrated through distribution. The resulting effect for Hong Kong cinema in this space was that it returned to the practices of the *kung fu* craze, shaped through this lens as mysterious and Other, continuing the circulation of "inauthenticity" that had propelled martial arts films and maintained their separation from the middlebrow during the 1970s. As with this earlier period, notions of authenticity continued to play a commanding role over the circulation of Hong Kong cinema, however the form it took in the 1990s was notably different.

Authenticity and action cinema

Within discussions of subcultural capital, "authenticity" is a loaded term. In the club cultures of her focus, Thornton (1995: 66) understood authenticity to be "the ultimate end of enculturation" in reference to the degree by which certain *practices* – like dancing to records at nightclubs instead of live entertainers – become legitimised within a subculture as activities authentic to the ideological and social ideals of the group. While an investment in agreed-upon practices certainly informs the subcultural tastemakers of my focus, for the circulation of Hong Kong cinema in Britain "authenticity" has a number of different inferences. In previous chapters I have discussed the desire in the middlebrow to find an authenticity in cultural representation (as it is understood by critics) when it comes to the reception of Chinese cinema. This explicit desire was nowhere to be found in the discursive space of these subcultural tastemakers. Hong Kong did not represent a space filled with signifiers of cultural authenticity that could be realised by filmmakers. Instead, as one geographic

base in the global production of contemporary action cinema, Hong Kong offered an ideal of authenticity within the generic expectations of action film appreciation.

Martial arts and action performance were at the centre of the evaluative preferences of those writing for those at *Eastern Heroes Magazine*, *Impact*, and similar magazines, to the extent that writers were happy to discuss Hong Kong genre cinema within a global action industry. The broad sweep of coverage within *Impact* magazine was indicative of this international focus. *Impact* labelled itself the “ultimate action magazine” and Hong Kong’s action films were discussed alongside visual entertainment from across the globe, from American television programmes *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 – 2003) and *The X-Files* (1993 – 2002), to stars Jean-Claude Van Damme, Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger and even videogame protagonist Lara Croft. The films of Hong Kong were seen as the leaders in this international scene so they were often granted their own sections in *Impact*, distinguished by their Chineseness, as was the case with its “China Beat” feature. Yet, despite these acknowledgements, their positioning alongside international productions clearly situated the films of Jackie Chan, John Woo, and all others mentioned more firmly within a global context than within the same Chinese cinema that contained the productions of “film artists” Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige.

Within this global positioning, the relationship between Hong Kong's films and Hollywood's was complex. On the one hand, tastemakers and distributors were keen to stress the distinction of Hong Kong's films over their international counterparts. For example, writing of John Woo, *Hong Kong Legends* (Issue 4: 5) suggested that the director's films had a “visual flare and emotional core [that]...put most American efforts to shame” and distributor Tartan were keen to include *Empire* magazine's assertion that Woo's film *Hard Boiled* (1992) was “more exciting than a dozen *Die Hards*” on its DVD release. On the other hand, however, there are more numerous examples that show these subcultural tastemakers as distinctly more open to Euro-American influence than their middlebrow counterparts. Reviewers like Stuart Cutler (1996: 47) were happy to offer positive evaluations of films such as action-comedy *High Risk* (1995, Wong Jing) because of a “large Hollywood streak running through it” as he understood this characteristic to raise the quality of action on display. Equally, following a trend in the early 2000s for Hong Kong filmmakers and stars to create films

in Hollywood, Bey Logan (2000: 40) was confident in suggesting that “Hong Kong cinema [was] going to have its best year to date, but that year will be spent in America rather than China”. It did not matter that Hong Kong cinema was becoming more like and more involved with America when this international cooperation increased the quality of action produced.

Another contributor to this complexity was the simultaneous anxiety felt about the persistent failure of Hong Kong stars to break into the Hollywood market. While this did complicate these tastemakers' positive feelings toward America, the lack of success here helped to instate Hong Kong with its own kind of subcultural positioning in the face of an apathetic Hollywood mainstream and reinstate Hong Kong's status as the authentic home of martial arts cinema. Jackie Chan, for example, attempted numerous times to break into the US market, all of which failed until *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995, Stanley Tong) found success. One such failed attempt was *The Protector* (1985, James Glickenhaus) whose American cut was deemed so lacklustre by Chan that he re-shot half of the film and released a wholly new edit in Hong Kong. *Eastern Heroes* had a strong preference for the Hong Kong version, noting that Chan dispensed “with the nudity and crass American style...replacing it with the Jackie formula his Asian fans expected...Chan purists will definitely want to see the [Chan version]” (Baker and Russell, 1994: 200/201). The magazine awarded the US version three stars and the Hong Kong version four. The failure to get recognition in Euro-American productions heightened the underground status of these actors in Britain and aided in the accumulation of subcultural capital for those who “knew” the value of Hong Kong's overlooked stars. In turn, this bolstered the perceived authenticity and privileged positioning of Hong Kong productions within this space.

While geographically rooted, this was not an authenticity in cultural representation related to compatibilities with British expectations of Chineseness, but an authenticity of action performance and spectacle that a situatedness in Hong Kong assured. This is a unique approach to authenticity for British film cultures and we can tease out the specifics of its character through a brief analysis of the British response to Hong Kong's white, international martial artists: of whom the American Cynthia Rothrock is a productive example. Rothrock starred in a handful of Hong Kong films in the 1980s, from big budget theatrical releases like *Righting Wrongs* (1986, Corey Yuen) in which

she starred alongside Jackie Chan's collaborator Yuen Biao, to straight-to-video productions aimed at international consumers. Before acting, Rothrock was a successful competitive martial artist and her real-life abilities were important to her star recognition: they “laid the foundation for her acceptance by the fans of martial arts movies who place a great deal of store in the idea of 'authenticity'” (Willis, 2003: 174). Andy Willis notes that Rothrock's authentic abilities resonated well with writers at *Impact* magazine and that this affection helped the distribution of her films through British companies. Her international success was bound to subcultural appreciation and the interest in “real” martial arts, so much so that she “has been forced to accept that success in this market has meant her opportunities to cross over into mainstream, Hollywood, productions have become limited” (Willis, 2003: 177).

Meaghan Morris (2004: 185/186) has written on the phenomenon in Hong Kong during the 1980s and 1990s to produce films starring international martial artists like Rothrock that specifically targeted the global straight-to-video market. According to the standards expected of the middlebrow this conceited targeting offered an inauthentic product. One of only three mentions of Rothrock in either *Monthly Film Bulletin* or *Sight and Sound* is in a review of *The Outlaws* (1990, Frankie Chan Fan Kei), which Rothrock is not actually in, where she is raised as an inauthentic negative point of comparison to Japanese actor Yukari Oshima who “steals the show...with an alacrity which makes Cynthia Rothrock look leaden-footed” (Tunney and McNab, 1997: 70). While Rothrock was held by the middlebrow as representative of dislikeable inauthenticity at this time, for the various underground tastemakers of my focus, she slotted neatly into the expectations of their subcultural operation: well-liked by Baker (1995a: 56), who professed, as he often did, to having a personal friendship with the star.

Bey Logan and Toby Russell have both worked in the Hong Kong film industry, as a martial arts practitioner and producers respectively, so it is not unreasonable to suggest that far from being disappointingly inauthentic or manipulative of international audiences, appearances by Rothrock might have been inspirational. More importantly, these strategies that cynically targeted the international straight-to-video market directly supported the acquisition of subcultural capital for Logan, Baker and Russell. As known evangelists for Hong Kong cinema, any success of these films with an

international audience returned to increase their own renown and social standing; validating their tastes and rewarding their “ear-to-the-ground” knowledge of upcoming trends in cinema (Oliver Dew, 2007). Remembering that cultural capital is only useful to the extent it could be converted into economic capital, any wide success of Hong Kong cinema in Britain meant financial profits for Eastern Heroes, Made in Hong Kong, and Hong Kong Legends as the major distributors of these films. In this way, any authenticity in cultural representation was repeatedly and intentionally squandered by these tastemakers to stress elements of action performance or excess that were thought to increase sales. Hong Kong productions were bent and shaped to foreground their action content in ways that severely misrepresented the films themselves.

The most egregious example of such a practice came from their rebranding of stand-alone action film *The Last Blood* (1991, Wong Jing) as *Hard Boiled 2: The Last Blood* to capitalise on the popularity of John Woo's *Hard Boiled*, despite being not only unrelated to Woo's film but also released a year earlier. Eastern Heroes complicated and confused the canon of Hong Kong cinema here to support their aims, favouring the assurance of action over clarity for the British consumer. This was equally true for the promise of sexual content. Coinciding with the publication of their essential guide to Hong Kong's “most glamorous femme fatale stars”, Eastern Heroes released a film with the same title, *Deadly China Dolls*, in 1995. The film was originally released as *Lethal Panther* (1991, Godfrey Ho Jeung-Keung) in Hong Kong four years earlier. The name change here emphasised the sexualised and mysterious allure of sought-after “Asian babes” but was particularly confusing because the distributor then chose to release the sequel *Lethal Panther 2* (1993, Phillip Ko) in Britain. As they had released the first film in the series under a different name, they decided to release the sequel with the title *Lethal Panther*.

The marketing of stars

These distributors were keen to sacrifice transparency and clarity if it benefited their entrepreneurial aspiration, curating a brand identity centred on action cinema (and sexual excess in the case of Eastern Heroes) that was supported by a collection of sympathetic films. Daniel Martin (2015: 1) has illustratively used Tartan's Asia Extreme

sub-label to highlight the *productivity* of these kinds of distribution practice, noting how his case study “elided the differences between different Asian national cinemas in order to create a single, strong, indelible brand image”. Through their acquisition choices and marketing decisions, Tartan created a “genre” of East Asian cinema that did not necessarily exist in order to cultivate a niche, but invested, audience. The same was true for Eastern Heroes and Made in Hong Kong, years before Asia Extreme was launched, who created the “indelible brand image” of a sexually provocative and overtly violent Hong Kong cinema.

Martin notes that these practices are readily mapped onto film stars, whose personae become signifiers and guarantees of generic characteristics. Removed from their local industry, Martin (2014: 19) suggests that “international star personae are often constructed by distributors for specific marketing purposes, serving to create meaning and context as required”. These “new star images” often “have little to connect them to the actual actor’s screen persona” but they “operate as signs and symbols, as brands, as rhetorical instruments to frame promotion and consumption”. Thanks to the fetishisation of action and hence physical performance, stars were the driving force of Hong Kong’s popular cinema in Britain for the cultural gatekeepers of my focus. Analysis of the presentation of these stars shows the specific shape taken by the productive distribution and exhibition practice of tastemakers at Eastern Heroes, Made in Hong Kong, and Hong Kong Legends, who mapped onto these performers the gendered preferences of their evaluative practices.

Within Hong Kong, stars are notoriously polysemous. Most celebrities in the territory will traverse “different media, with a multifarious and often simultaneous existence in the entertainment press, advertising, Cantonese opera films, the martial arts genre, musicals and as recording artists” (Leung, 2015: 127). Even within the sole medium of film, Hong Kong stars generally resist typecasting and move fluidly between film types that would be kept for separate actors in a Euro-American context (Bettinson, 2015: 400)⁴⁹. However, the function these stars play in Britain is significantly narrower than that in their domestic cultures: stars remain central but their polysemy

⁴⁹ Much of this is thanks to the multimedia landscape of Hong Kong in which little distinction is made between star appearances in *kung fu* films, independent social commentaries, brand sponsorships or supermarket adverts. See Leung (2015) for a detailed study of Hong Kong stardom and celebrity.

is reduced into personae that are parochial in their signification of individual generic elements. The star focus is clear from a surface level glance across these grassroots distribution operations. It is foregrounded in the naming conventions at Eastern Heroes and Hong Kong Legends, both of which imply people at the centre of their activities rather than genre or martial arts style. The covers of the *Hong Kong Legends* magazine and DVD combinations, similarly, all contained an image of a film's lead star, cut out from an original screenshot and placed on a blue or red background with their name alongside the image (Figure 7).

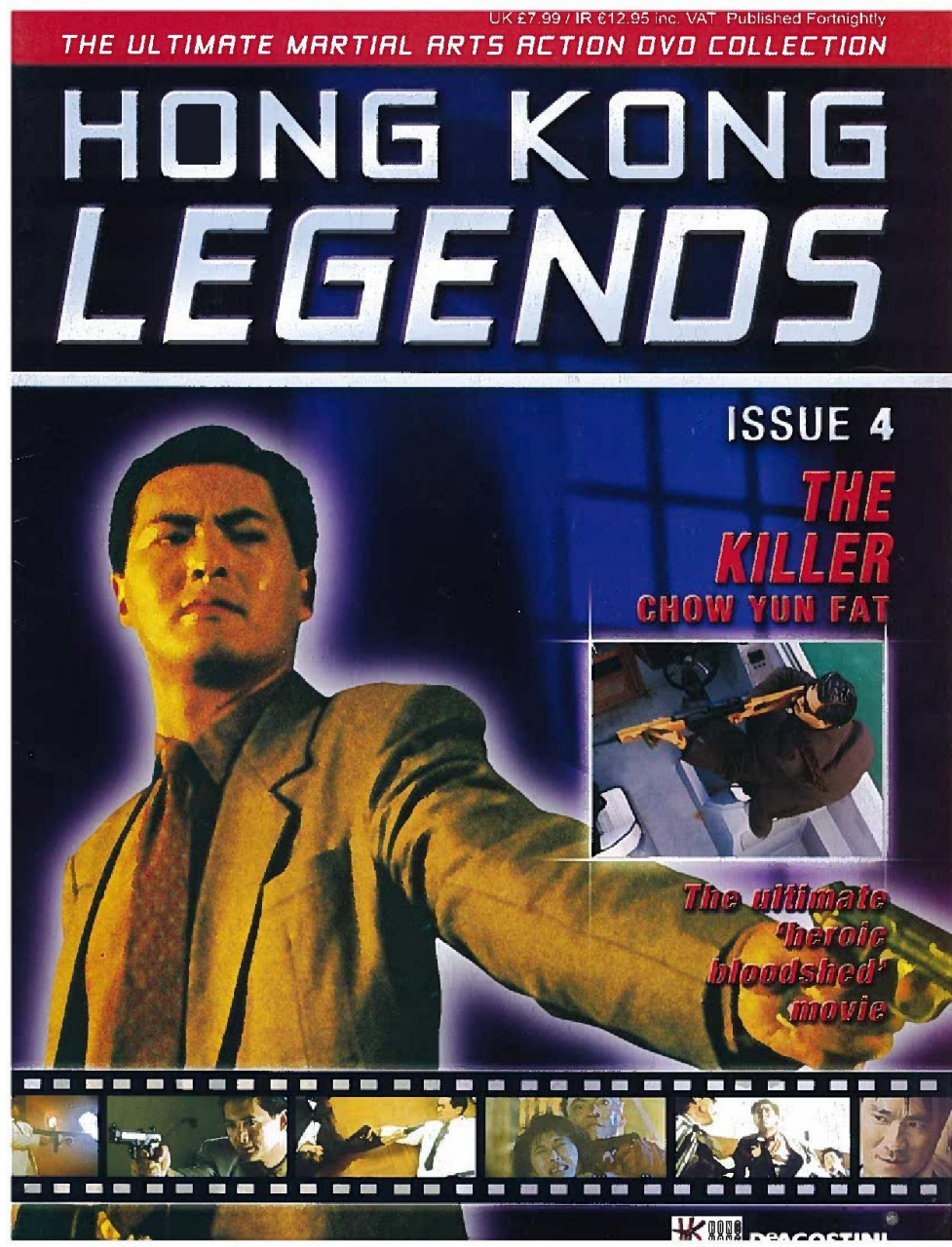


Figure 7: Hong Kong Legends, Issue 4

Names are invoked on the covers of VHS tapes and magazine issues as guarantees of quality for those already in the know and they serve a simultaneous function as signifiers of a narrow set of cinematic characteristics, usually humourless action (Martin, 2015: 20). We can see this clearly in *Pedicab Driver* (1989, Sammo Hung), a film directed by and starring superstar Sammo Hung, one of Hong Kong's most famous filmmakers of the 1980s. In the film, Hung plays the leader of a group of rickshaw drivers. He falls in love with a woman who is poorly treated by her boss. Over the

course of the narrative, Hung works to overcome this threat through his *kung fu* and win the hearts of his love interest. Made in Hong Kong released *Pedicab Driver* on VHS with a design that implied Hung's role in the film as *the* reason to see it: the tag-line reads "Sammo's out to get even!" in large font over an image of Hung brandishing a clenched fist on the tape's cover, accompanied by numerous images of Hung in action on the back (Figure 8). The design suggests Hung's role in the film is of sole importance and the forename familiarity and lack of contextualising information elsewhere on the cover implies a consumer who will be knowledgeable of Hung's star persona as to know what to expect.

Made in Hong Kong evoke a star persona here that promotes *Pedicab Driver* as a humourless, excessively violent action film. While these elements are present, this marketing material does not acknowledge the strong comedic tone that runs throughout, one that is suggested in the softer tone of film's original Hong Kong poster, used on the American DVD release (Figure 9). The film is full of "pratfalls, slapstick, mixed messages, bizarre comedy, heightened emotions, sudden tragedy and...incredible fight scenes" but none of this variety is alluded to by Made in Hong Kong (Kozo, 2002). Both the British VHS design and Hong Kong poster reveal Hung's star leverage in *Pedicab Driver* but different star personae are invoked: Made in Hong Kong's cover is one example of many that reduce the polysemous potential of Hong Kong stars and suggest a singular focus on serious martial arts violence. A good example of the productivity of distributors in Britain and their ability to present their own vision through marketing films, this goes further than simply pushing the significance of action in Hong Kong cinema. The cover of *Pedicab Driver* shows how the gendered assumptions and hypermasculinity of wider editorial practice permeates the distribution and presentation of Hong Kong films to general consumers.

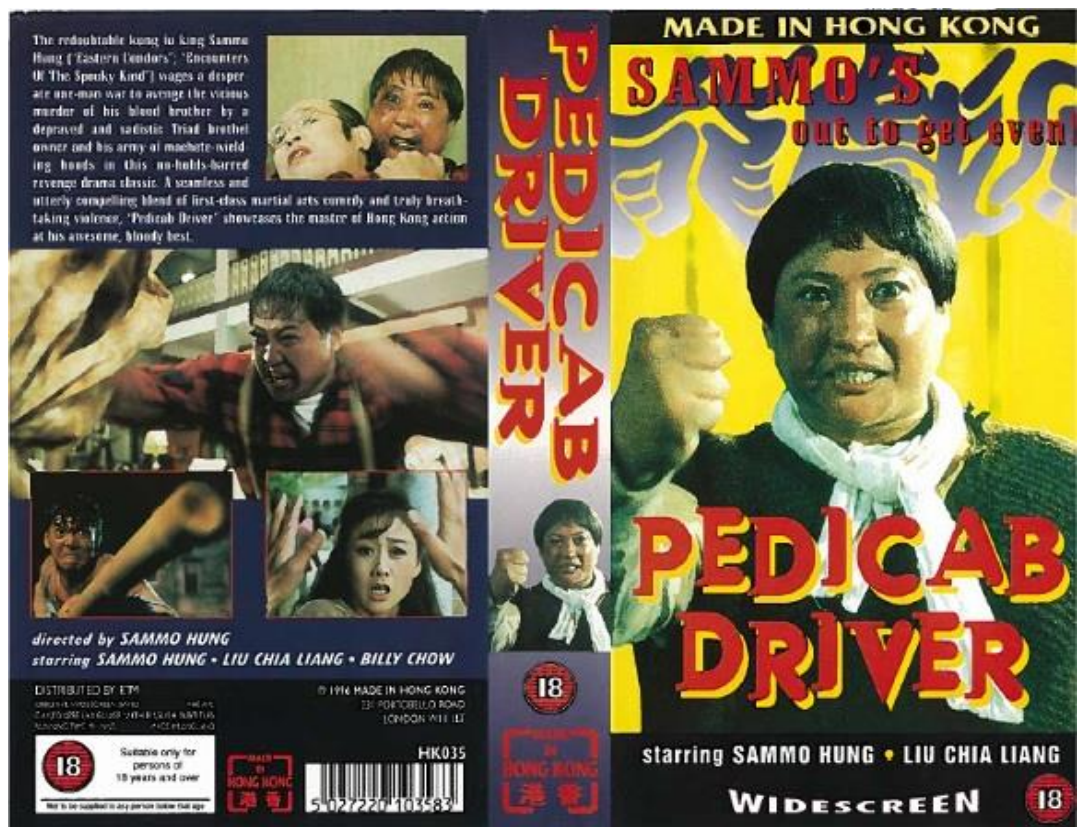


Figure 8: Pedicab Driver (1996) VHS. Made in Hong Kong



Figure 9: Pedicab Driver (2015) DVD. Warner Archives

It is useful to remain on the comedy-action genre here, and Hung's more famous colleague Jackie Chan, to show that the actual content of the films sold by these distributors was almost irrelevant to the way in which they were presented to fall in line with the gendered, generic, and cultural expectations that were nurtured through editorial practice. In the 1980s, Chan starred in a number of comedy-action films that were extremely popular in Hong Kong and later in Britain's fan communities following *Police Story*, Chan's major breakthrough, which was released in London in 1987. In addition to these films, which were equal parts action and comedy, Chan also starred in numerous releases that were primarily comedy productions which also included action elements⁵⁰. The most famous of these appearances was a collection of films called the *Lucky Stars* series. The original three releases in the franchise – known in English as *Winners and Sinners* (1983, Sammo Hung), *My Lucky Stars* (1985, Sammo Hung), and *Twinkle Twinkle Lucky Stars* (1985, Sammo Hung) – were released in Britain through Hong Kong Legends and then re-released later by Cine-Asia after Hong Kong Legends folded (Figure 10). The epitome of Hong Kong's comedy-action, the *Lucky Stars* films saw Chan, Hung and Yuen Biao in minor roles alongside major comedy actors as they were entangled in criminal and sexual escapades. These films were comedies punctuated with moments of action and as the series developed Chan, Hung and Yuen Biao's roles became smaller despite their prominent inclusion in marketing material. It is clear from the DVD covers that the star personae of Chan and Hung, and to a lesser extent Yuen Biao, carried the marketing for the films and it is noticeable that there is a total absence of any suggestion of comedy. The Cine-Asia releases in particular promote the films as humourless, explosive action vehicles for their hypermasculine performers.

⁵⁰ For Hong Kong's blockbuster filmmaking during the 1980s it was uncommon to find films that conformed neatly to a single genre as they may have done in Euro-American industries. Most high-profile releases would contain hybrid characteristics of romance, thriller, comedy, action, and drama genres, to name only a few.



Figure 10: *Winners and Sinners* (2004) DVD. *Hong Kong Legends*; *My Lucky Stars* (2012) DVD. *Cine Asia*; *Twinkle Twinkle Lucky Stars* (2012) DVD. *Cine Asia*.

Mark Gallagher (1997, 2003) notes that Jackie Chan's star persona, as curated through his personal brand of comedy-action, has actually worked to destabilize notions of hard masculinity in action cinema. In a departure from the hard-bodied aggression of Bruce Lee, Schwarzenegger or Stallone, Chan's films "rely on comic treatments of escape and flight" (Gallagher, 1997: 29) challenging global notions of masculinity and foregrounding the "connotations of femininity that the mobile male body produces" (Gallagher, 2003: 116). There were significant repercussions for Euro-American perceptions of East Asian men through Chan's strategies which redressed the problematic representations of the Oriental Other that had been promoted by Bruce Lee. As noted by Yuan Shu (2010: 55), Chan "humanizes the hero of the Kung Fu tragedy" a genre pioneered by Lee whose hard-bodied rigidity had been "construed as stubborn, inhuman, and superhuman, confirming another aspect of the Orientalist representation of Asians". Chan's feminised choreography subverted these assumptions but the marketing of films like *Twinkle Twinkle Lucky Stars* undercuts this subversion: repositioning the films and their stars within the "Hollywood conventions of active masculinity" (Gallagher, 2003: 132) that graced the pages of *Impact* magazine, putting forth the hard-bodied rigidity of Bruce Lee types and rekindling assumptions of the unassimilable Other therein.

The marketing of the films of Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan was therefore at odds with their content, often to the extent that it contained images of events that were

nowhere to be found within the films themselves (Gallagher, 2003: 123). Distributors relied on the lowest common denominators of sex, violence, and generic similarities to Euro-American productions to sell copies of films regardless of the implications for representation, in an entrepreneurial strategy to increase profits. Inaccuracy here was, however, less important than we might initially believe and I would contest that it actually played into the entrepreneurial ambitions of these organisations. New fans who bought *Twinkle Twinkle Lucky Stars* on the promise of action and ended up enjoying elements that were ancillary to martial arts might then seek out more comedies starring other members of the cast. For those already in the know, VHS covers were one part of a network of resources that also included the editorial activity of the various magazines available which covered the films in more depth. Equally, the promotion of collection as part of the accumulation of subcultural capital meant that there was no risk in being untruthful in marketing practice: the act of consumption was a reward in itself.

These are also strategies that suggest an acute targeting of two distinct audiences. Despite reductionist presentations of actors like Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan on these VHS covers, inside these releases and within the pages of *Impact*, *Eastern Heroes Magazine* and all other publications mentioned in this chapter, were highly detailed and holistic considerations of the actors' varied credentials. Examples here are numerous: from Logan's chapter in his Hong Kong cinema book dedicated to Chan as "The Clown Prince of *Kung Fu*", to *Hong Kong Legends* discussion of Chan's innovation in injecting humour into martial arts across a number of issues⁵¹. The consumer who moved within the subcultural scene would likely have had a detailed knowledge of actors like Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan through consuming the various magazines and books available. Already converted and willing to purchase new releases, these fans did not necessarily need to be targeted by marketers. Such a dissonant reduction of these films to serious and excessively violent films or soft-core pornography suggests that the distributors also had another audience in mind: one who would not have noticed these contradictions.

⁵¹ A special issue - "Jackie Chan: My Story, My Stunts" - dedicated a section to Chan as "King of Comedy". Elsewhere in Issue 7, in their focus on *Project A* (1983, Jackie Chan), *Hong Kong Legends* detailed Chan's connection to Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin and the injection of slapstick comedy into his martial arts choreography.

This may have been a consumer outside of the subculture, whether a shopper who might stumble upon a Made in Hong Kong VHS release or a television viewer for Jonathan Ross' curated seasons, who was less likely to read *Eastern Heroes Magazine*. Oliver Dew (2007) refers to this promotional practice as the “polysemic sell”, whereby individual films are presented to appeal to more than one audience. This savvy negotiation of the marketplace was an extension of that practised by the tastemakers themselves, who curated similarly polysemous personae to increase their own subcultural and financial capital. While Logan often appears as the archetypal “lad” in his work for *Eastern Heroes Magazine* and *Impact*, he has taken on a much more detached and almost academic tone in other contexts: as seen in his appearances on the television – such as the BBC documentary *Kung Fu Fighting* – and his DVD audio commentaries for Hong Kong Legends releases.

These marketing materials thus show the processes by which the pursuit of financial capital – as a related to subcultural capital – filtered through to the presentation of “Hong Kong cinema” for audiences around Britain as it was steered by these powerful tastemakers. Focusing on subcultural capital in this way clarifies the apparent contradictions in the presentation of Hong Kong's genre productions in this reception space. The centrality of action performance resulted from the positioning of Hong Kong films within a global cinematic context through which connections to Euro-American stars and genres were stressed, extending the heteronormative, masculine discourse that ran throughout editorial practice. This distilled Hong Kong stars and productions into narrow signifiers of cinematic genres – that may or may not have been supported by the films themselves – serving a double purpose: acting as shorthand for those in the know while simultaneously targeting a general audience unfamiliar with Hong Kong cinema. Working to both consolidate the boundaries of the subcultural group *and* open up Hong Kong's action films to a general audience, these practices show that the entrepreneurial ambition of these men has always been at the centre of their discursive activity. It also points toward some slippage in the “symbolic binary” of underground and mainstream in subcultures: these tastemakers are shown to engage in the pursuit of subcultural capital but they do so in order to attract and capitulate to the mainstream.

An influential by-product of the centrality of entrepreneurial ambition in these tastemakers was that, by continually reinforcing action performance as *the* reason to see the films, their collection of Hong Kong cinema was curated as “critic-proof” and valuable by default. The editorial conventions of the *Hong Kong Legends* magazine show this process in its clearest form: each acquisition understood by the magazine as a “masterpiece” with the pages of each issue working primarily to help readers understand “how each film was made and why it [was] a classic of the genre”⁵². Elements of this practice appear to welcome the kinds of criticism that Tony Rayns’ opened this chapter with as a largely “uncritical” approach to cinema that does not define “any kind of aesthetic criteria or moral criteria” with which to deem films worthwhile or worthless. Though it is appropriate to maintain a level of cynicism about these financially-oriented conventions, to close the chapter I will show that while these evaluative frameworks may have resulted directly from entrepreneurial ambition they did, in fact, bring informed ways of consuming Hong Kong cinema to this new space in Britain. These tastemakers cultivated a perceptual framework based on the possibilities newly afforded by home media technology – namely rewinding and pausing during key scenes – to counter a hesitant cultural establishment and find new support for Hong Kong’s genre films. The stress on utilising these technologies devalued the films as whole products, lending support to the primacy of action as the yardstick by which value was judged and teaching readers and viewers how to conduct their own close, textual analyses of films.

It is important to note generally that in understanding the films as valuable by default, this welcoming tone overrode a number of preferences that had rendered

⁵² Notably, this evangelism extended to films without action, that would otherwise be considered part of the “art cinema” canon, not generally discussed in such genre-focused publications. In his “Hot Hits of Hong Kong” feature in *Eastern Heroes Magazine*, Baker (1995f: 75) sung the praises of numerous releases including *The Boat People* (1982, Ann Hui), *An Autumn’s Tale* (1987, Mabel Cheung), *Rouge, C’est La Vie Mon Cherie* (1993, Derek Yee) and Wong Kar-wai’s *Days of Being Wild* with only slight warning that they would “not be to everyone’s taste”. Baker noted that these films would not be appropriate for his own label, but he hoped the ICA or a similar institution might pick them up with an openness indicative of this evangelical space. Cultivating a readership that was actively engaged in Hong Kong film appreciation was the key goal of these tastemakers and, as such, many of the limiting evaluative practices found elsewhere – notably the middlebrow – were absent from their operations.

Hong Kong productions undesirable in other contexts prior, particularly the middlebrow. Most elements, such as dubbed audio, noted in Chapter Two as being disliked by middlebrow authorities, were rarely a concern as long as a film had worthwhile action sequences. Preference for subtitles did exist, but generally only if there were associated characteristics of subtitled versions that bolstered the quality of action available to see. For example, writing in *Eastern Heroes Magazine*, Baker (1995a: 58) found the subtitled VHS release of the Cynthia Rothrock and Michelle Yeoh film *Yes, Madam!* (1985, Corey Yuen) to be “far better” than the dubbed alternative not because of the quality of its audio, but because it had “several longer scenes, including extra footage”. With shared footing in the collector’s mentality of this space, Baker shows how the focus on action subverts other critical concerns, helping films avoid hurdles that would otherwise have resulted in negative evaluations.

In supporting films that would be seen as worthless by standards of the middlebrow, the tastemakers of my focus allowed for a film like *The Black Sheep Affair* (1998, Lam Wai-Lun) – which was poorly received critically – to be seen and have its characteristics investigated. Also known as *Another Meltdown*, *The Black Sheep Affair* has not been well remembered in the canon of Hong Kong cinema. It is an action film about a patriotic Mainland Chinese policeman – played by Vincent Zhao Wenzhuo, a relatively little-known martial arts actor – reposted to Europe after ignoring the orders of his superior on an earlier mission. Hong Kong Legends released this film in its magazine run and was open about its lacklustre reputation. The magazine told readers “the script” lay “at the root of many of the films problems” and that, being “brutally honest”, it could see why director had not “exactly blazed a trail through the Far East film world” since (*Hong Kong Legends*, Issue 22: 3). Nevertheless, *Hong Kong Legends* found that the “the superb fight choreography, stylish camerawork, and Wu Shu acrobatics of star Chiu Man Cheuk⁵³ make this a wholly entertaining action movie” (*Hong Kong Legends*, Issue 23: 5). The narrow focus on these elements of *The Black Sheep Affair* justified its inclusion in the *Hong Kong Legends* run. As always, this helped vindicate the sale of a film that was not well liked universally (that may have been cheap to acquire because of this reputation) but it did so by offering a plethora of information about its various textual and extra-textual elements: *Hong Kong Legends*

⁵³ This is a less common, Cantonese rendering of actor Vincent Zhao Wenzhuo's name.

noted the Wu Shu training of Vincent Zhao Wenzhuo and how it informed the film's martial arts choreography; offered a biography of star Kenneth Tsang; and grounded the nationalist narrative of the film in its socio-political context.

The Black Sheep Affair shows well the resuscitative function these evaluative preferences served regarding films that were otherwise not well liked. Additionally, rather than simply manoeuvring around potential criticism, the “critic-proof” mentality on display cultivated modes of consumption unique to this space that not only welcomed a different type of film to that which had been available prior, but also served to consolidate the subcultural community. As it had done in the *kung fu* craze, martial arts performance and its practice were key here. The stress on action materialised in *Hong Kong Legends* in two editorial features (repeated in every issue of the magazine): “Excellence in Action” and “Fight Scenes”. The former of these offered a breakdown of one or two key action sequences in a film, usually taking up four pages, with illustrated deconstructions of the moves on show and how they were realised formally (Figure 11). The format of this section is remarkably similar to the “Kung Fu in Action!” segment of *Kung Fu Monthly*, discussed in Chapter Two, though the pedagogical function of teaching readers how to replicate the moves was replaced by a more analytical tone in *Hong Kong Legends*.



Figure 11: "Excellence in Action" in Hong Kong Legends (Issue 1: 6 – 7)

As it had done in the 1970s, the practice of martial arts encouraged or promoted by these editorial conventions offered readers ways of creating embodied subcultural capital, akin to the "fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections" of those in the club cultures of Sarah Thornton's focus. These practices differed from those of the 1970s in that, within the subcultural space of the 1990s, this embodied appreciation existed in tandem with the promotion of highly detailed textual analyses. Specifically, these were detailed breakdowns of action set-pieces and martial arts choreography that relied on a film's availability on VHS or DVD for the viewers' ability to pause, rewind, and fast-forward through individual scenes. The "Fight Scenes" column which went alongside "Excellence in Action", listed every fight in each film with an associated time stamp for the DVD sold with the issue, containing a key describing what type of action the viewer could expect: hand-to-hand, group, weapons, battle, props, and stunts. With this highly detailed action focus, magazines like *Hong Kong Legends* and special features on DVD releases offered explicitly pedagogical materials with which readers could understand Hong Kong productions.

One of the most detailed considerations of film form in *Hong Kong Legends* came in

Issue 4 with their coverage of *The Killer* (1989), directed by John Woo. *The Killer* was a popular film with tastemakers in this space: released on VHS by Made in Hong Kong after a theatrical run⁵⁴ and repackaged by Hong Kong Legends both individually and in a “John Woo Collection”. Well liked and widely available since its first UK release, *The Killer* tells the story of an assassin, Ah Long (Chow Yun-Fat), who takes on one final job to earn the funds to cover an eye operation for his love interest. There is little hand-to-hand combat in the film and most of the action comes from highly choreographed shoot-outs between gun-wielding gangsters in contemporary Hong Kong. The scene chosen by *Hong Kong Legends* for its “Excellence in Action” section is a shoot-out in a church, one of the climactic centrepieces of the film (Figure 12). Within this feature, the reader is provided a dense framework through which to read *The Killer* and its action sequences.



Figure 12: “Excellence in Action” in Hong Kong Legends (Issue 4: 6 – 7)

⁵⁴ The British Board of Film Classification has record of *The Killer* being classified twice in film format for theatrical releases: once in 1990 by Palace Pictures and again in 1993 by Made in Hong Kong (BBFC, no date a; BBFC, no date b).

There is textual analysis, considerations of cinematic space and histories, and acknowledgement of the production characteristics and the time it took to complete the shoot. The anonymous author delineates the historical influence of Woo's action, noting its similarities to the American Western but also the formal debt Woo has to classical Chinese opera, swordplay, and *kung fu* films. In this analysis there are screenshots accompanying a description of the unfolding action, a page of text, an original computer-generated diagram showcasing the space of the scene, and a small text-box discussing the guns in use. The editing strategies are shown in this shot-by-shot breakdown of the scene and the numbered key of this sequence links with the diagram to show how Woo created a logical sense of space in the church that allowed the realisation of his action set piece. Action performance and direction anchors this discussion, but even in this one example we can see the breadth and depth of topics and approaches covered that surround the interest in on-screen violence.

This is very different to the manner used by Tony Rayns in his *Monthly Film Bulletin* review of the film which, though equally complimentary, took on the usual oratory tone of criticising other reviewers and imparting knowledge onto readers rather than encouraging their own analysis. Rayns (1990: 260) also notes the similarities between both American films and the Chinese *wuxia pian*, for example, but his acknowledgement is framed in an attempt to assert his own eminence in the field over those infringing on his cultural capital, suggesting that “American fans have missed” the *wuxia* influence “doubtless because they failed to pick up on Hong Kong genre cinema last time around”. With the breathing space of an entire magazine issue, *Hong Kong Legends* had a different pedagogical imperative to the middlebrow and sought to engender in its readers the tools with which to conduct their own analyses: it is as much an educational textbook as it is a critical publication.

Chapter One of this thesis discussed *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin* and the observation by Melanie Selfe (2013: 458) that, through editorial strategies and programming, these institutions circulated an “informal pedagogy” that “helped shape the terms on which ‘quality’ and cinephile taste would be defined in Britain”. In taking on the form of an educational textbook, *Hong Kong Legends* offered an explicit pedagogy that set the parameters by which Hong Kong productions were deemed

valuable. As an organic development of the relationship between a more sophisticated viewership and advances in home media technology, these resources formalised the evaluative criteria that had circulated since the 1980s. They offered yet another set of rules for joining the “Hong Kong film fan fraternity” and another way of accruing and displaying subcultural capital for those who could show martial arts knowledge or a savvy employment of textual analysis. While they may have worked to devalue films as whole products, they did so by providing highly detailed analyses of films, empowering their readers by providing them perceptual frameworks through which to appreciate film. Despite these consumption practices resulting directly from entrepreneurial ambition (and the need to maintain all acquisitions as “masterpieces”) the explicit wide-reaching pedagogical function that has resulted from these community building strategies has surely opened up a space for the circulation of Hong Kong cinema that did not exist prior.

Conclusion

In the years after the release of *The Killer*, John Woo became known internationally as a director whose name guaranteed the delivery of a specific brand of violence and quality (Dew, 2007: 67). Woo has been well liked across disparate spaces thanks in part to an explicit international influence in his direction. Much has been made of the formal debt his films share with Euro-American productions. Historical overviews in *Hong Kong Legends* (Issue 4: 6; Issue 10: 1) list references to *The Terminator* (1984), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Assault on Precinct 13* (2005) and directors Sam Peckinpah, Martin Scorsese, and Stanley Kubrick and these links have been detailed by influential experts across spaces including Tony Williams (1997) in *Asian Cult Cinema*. These connections have different meanings for different parties. For the middlebrow, references to European art cinema like Woo’s explicit homages to French director Jean-Pierre Melville are invoked to legitimise the violence contained within the narratives to serve an artistic purpose (Rayns, 1990: 260; Dew, 2007: 65). For the grassroots entrepreneurs, this violence suited the preference for action while Euro-American comparisons offered opportunities to praise the superiority of Hong Kong productions and welcome new audiences more familiar with their Western

counterparts (*Hong Kong Legends*, Issue 4).

As Woo's reputation was sealed in the early 1990s, his name became synonymous with the term “heroic bloodshed”, a phrase that referred to his films that channelled the fraternal narratives of early *kung fu* cinema into gun-based action set in contemporary Hong Kong. The term appears as a generic standard found in academic writing (see Stokes and Hoover, 1999: Martin, 2015), newspaper articles (*The Guardian*, 2002), videogame reviewers (Ruhland, 2016: Kim Justice, 2014), and Wikipedia pages. Now ubiquitous in its international usage, the term was actually coined by Rick Baker in 1990 in Issue 7 of the *Jackie Chan Fan Club* magazine in an attempt to reconcile the themes present in Woo's films into an identifiable genre that could be extended beyond the director's own catalogue. Lamenting that “the sleepy blinkered eyed movie scene of the UK [had] not yet been woken up”, to this “genre”, Baker (1995a: 9) told readers “I have decided that in this issue I should take it upon myself and start to try and enlighten the public as to what is in store for them”. Baker keenly employed the term as widely across his operations as possible. It was used as one of the four categories representing the entirety of Hong Kong cinema in his *Essential Guide to Hong Kong Movies* and it appeared across Eastern Heroes, Made in Hong Kong and Hong Kong Legends releases of films with generic similarities to Woo's: such as *Rich and Famous* (1987, Taylor Wong), *A Better Tomorrow III* (1989, Tsui Hark) and *Man Wanted*. The rest of the “Hong Kong film fan fraternity” were equally quick to employ “heroic bloodshed” across their operations and Logan (1996: 115) adopted the term in his seminal book on Hong Kong action cinema in a chapter on “The Ballistic Ballet of John Woo”.

While these discursive conventions may have originated through the subcultural structures and the ambitions of these grassroots entrepreneurs, their impact has permeated the mainstream across national boundaries. In this way, “heroic bloodshed” unites many of the themes of this chapter: its early usage by this “Hong Kong film fan fraternity” was a communal act of legitimation in their editorial practice; its ubiquity resulted from the intersection of this self-legitimation with entrepreneurial goals, secured by distribution operations; and the term itself centres on the violent and masculine curation of Hong Kong's genre productions, promoting action as the primary point of engagement. The proliferation of “heroic bloodshed” also points toward

contradictions in the subcultural nature of this space and of film circulation within it. The pursuit of financial gain and the inevitable desire for integration into dominant film cultures to this end problematises the “symbolic binary” in subcultural theory between a “mainstream” and a “subculture”, showing a degree of slippage here. These men adeptly curated a space based on their subcultural capital and reputations but they did so through evangelical means and an overwhelmingly positivity about Hong Kong cinema that curtailed criticisms of “selling out” when a larger audience was pursued.

Throughout previous chapters I have discussed how central intersections of evaluative preferences and cultural assumptions toward Chineseness have been in the circulation of Chinese cinema in Britain. This is a concern that has played a role in each cultural moment focused on in previous chapters but the form it took here was quite different as the evaluative frameworks offered by Baker and his colleagues rarely, if ever, made explicit mention to a film's cultural character. Despite this ambivalence, in editorial and adjudicative practice these tastemakers continued contentious cross-cultural practices explicitly through distribution and implicitly through the structural implications of their subcultural practice. The gendered characteristics of their operations crafted a potentially exclusionary space that returned to concepts of a masculine collector who assumed an active gaze over a passive, feminised Orient. The role of women was foregrounded through acquisition choices and marketing design, though often only to emphasise the sexual allure and availability of “Asian babes” in a return to historically problematic practices. Equally, varied presentations of masculinity worked to instate a Euro-American ideal of hard-bodied action heroes who spoke to an imagined exclusively white, male, heterosexual consumption culture.

Technological developments and the widened availability of Hong Kong cinema during the 1990s thus dictated a different kind of discourse around Chinese cinema than had been circulated prior, when restricted access and quirks of the middlebrow encouraged readings based on how *Chinese* productions were. In the following chapter I close this thesis with a return to the middlebrow and an investigation of how these purportedly “universalist” modes of reading international productions materialised with Britain's cultural authorities of foreign-language film. Returning to *Sight and Sound*, nationwide newspapers and the cultural establishment, Chapter Five details the critical frameworks and analytical practices of the late 20th century that appear to

deflect focus from the earlier desires for Chinese cinema to be valued and analysed through reference to assumed Chinese characteristics. Focusing on auteur theory and the circulation of Chinese-language filmmaking in an art cinema context around the year 2000, this final chapter reveals the lineage of Britain's earlier film cultures on the contemporary moment, revealing that the same cultural assumptions that hid beneath the surface of these grassroots entrepreneurs continue to affect the circulation of Chinese cinema in the activities of the middlebrow.

5. Contemporary Auteurism: The Cultural Specificity of Universal Modes of Appreciation

The purportedly universalist modes of appreciation as developed alongside a selection of genre films circulated by the grassroots entrepreneurs discussed in the previous chapter are not unique to subcultural and enthusiast spaces. This phenomenon and the proliferation of Chinese-language films during the 1990s also occurred in the art cinema network and the middlebrow. While for the tastemakers based at Eastern Heroes or Hong Kong Legends it was action cinema and generic expectations that supported this curtailment of cultural specificity, I argue in this chapter that for those responsible for circulating Chinese cinema in the middlebrow space it was the concept of the “auteur”. Though I have alluded to conceptions of the auteur earlier in this thesis I have not directly engaged with it because, as noted in Chapter Three, Chinese-language filmmakers were left out of this academic discussion for most of the 20th century. Following the work of Song Hwee Lim (2007, 2014), I suggest that this is no longer the case and that filmmakers from Chinese-speaking regions are at the heart of changing ideas of what constitutes an auteur in contemporary film cultures. This is particularly true in the practices of three directors: Taiwan-based Tsai Ming-liang, Mainland Chinese Jia Zhangke and the Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Kar-wai.

Since the millennium, scholars have observed the importance of these filmmakers in the international marketplace, but have noted a reluctance in Chinese film studies to discuss their work through an auteur framework. Victor Fan's (2016: 323) observation that “most international film festivals and their audiences treat Jia Zhangke as an auteur” but “film scholars...rarely discuss him and his work in those terms” or Lim's (2007: 224) lamentation that “there have been very few English-language book-length publications on auteurs from Chinese cinemas” are just two examples here. The work of these two scholars is somewhat corrective in this regard, both highlight ways the working practices and aesthetic strategies of these directors confirm or problematise classic understandings of auteur theory. In this chapter I extend this scholarship through my methodological approach and the foregrounding of circulation in these discursive practices. Vitally, this chapter uses the discussion of

directors of Chinese-language films and contemporary auteur theory to remind readers at this stage in the thesis that, while I am focusing on circulation within British film cultures, these discursive processes are not isolated misinterpretations, but negotiations of regional Chinese industry practices.

To support this argument I focus on Wong, Tsai and Jia: three of the most ubiquitous directors of Chinese-language film in the international art cinema network whose popularity in the press has historically been matched in Britain by a consistent (if incomplete) availability across theatrical and home media releases. Each predominantly make films in different regions – Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China respectively – and each are second generation directors, making films in the 1990s after new waves and creative movements had already secured their locations as internationally recognised sites of creativity. All have also regularly sourced funding from European cultural organisations, particularly from France (Udden, 2011: Bettinson, 2014; 6), representing a significant shift in production economics and in their own situatedness as *Chinese* auteurs in a global context. Using contemporary developments in auteur studies to frame my discussion, I suggest that the discourse of auteurism surrounding these directors has shifted the means by which these Chinese-language films are circulated by Britain's cultural intermediaries.

In this final chapter, I aim not just to consider contemporary auteur studies to understand those taste structures that shape the presentation of Chinese cinema in Britain. Equally, it is my aim here to introduce, through this case study of British circulation, those pervasive and commanding intersections of cultural assumptions and attitudes toward preferred renderings of Chineseness in the discussion of contemporary auteurs. By focusing on themes of intertextuality, universality and the maintenance of a newly commodified Chineseness, I note that there is a visible shift away from the desire to locate these products as Chinese. However, while these films are no longer *always* evaluated on the extent they grapple with national and cultural contexts, this new discourse based on intertextual knowledge, phenomenological affect, and easy consumption is itself a mode of appreciation interlaced with cultural assumptions. There remains a significant implicit cultural bias. Through case studies of *Platform* (2000, Jia Zhangke) and *In the Mood for Love* (2000, Wong Kar-wai), and a comparison of how production centres in Mainland China and Hong Kong continue

competing notions of value in Britain's tastemakers, I note the extent to which this contemporary turn to universalism actually perpetuates the culturally coded lineage of Chinese cinema's British circulation that began in the 1950s

Auteur theory and national cinemas

In my discussions of Chinese cinema in middlebrow spaces I have, throughout this thesis, alluded to the centrality of directors in the circulation of films across the UK. This pervasive trend is observed in the preference for "film artists" in the middlebrow of the 1950s and 1980s alongside the arrival of auteur theory and the development of film studies in the 1960s and 1970s. I have been careful not to conflate these two permutations of director-led means of appreciating cinema because, while they share characteristics, they are not the same. Auteur theory has its origins in the French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, where it developed out of the specific conditions of post-war Paris, following the high number of Hollywood productions that were made available for the first time since the Nazi occupation. Appearing first as "*la politique des auteurs*" in an article by François Truffaut (1954), the theory berated the French cinema of old for being "literary" and "not truly cinematic", favouring instead filmmakers that brought "something genuinely personal" to their film subjects (Buscombe, 1973: 76). This extended to Hollywood's genre productions that had previously been overlooked by the critical establishment, reclaiming this kind of cinema through observations of stylistic and thematic consistencies. Out of these specific origins, a set of general "basic assumptions" spread to film appreciation around rest of the world: generally, that a film "is most likely to be valuable when it is essentially the product of its director" and that the personality of this filmmaker "can be traced in a thematic and/or stylistic consistency over all...the director's films" (Caughie, 1981: 9). The method was popularised in the English-language study of film initially thanks to its translation by New York based scholar Andrew Sarris in 1962.

Remembering Chapter Three, while Sarris led the dissemination of auteur theory in North America, numerous enthusiasts did the same in Britain: from Ian Cameron's *Movie* to the number of monographs on individual directors by Robin Wood. John Caughie (1981) has noted how Britain became a key environment for the

development of auteur theory through these supporters and these discursive trends had effects on exhibition and film consumption through their influence on sites like the EIFF (Lloyd, 2011). It is vital to remember both Sarris's English-language translation and the version of auteur theory employed in Britain were translations in the first instance and not reproductions of Truffaut's original observations. Adding a host of attributes resulting from their own cultural positioning, these early supporters have been criticised from the start for "misunderstanding" the original *politiques des auteurs*. Peter Wollen (1972: 77) suggested in the early 1970s that the British permutation was "interpreted and applied on rather broad lines; different critics developed somewhat different methods within a loose framework of common attitudes". Most heinous for contemporary detractors (in *Screen*) was that Truffaut's original assertion was never a "theory" in the first instance but this character was cast over it by Sarris and his translation in his attempt to avoid "confusion" (Buscombe, 1973: 75).

While Wollen's accusations of misunderstanding did include film scholars writing alongside him, the language he used levied the charges more strongly on the film critic, from whom these educationalists had long sought to be differentiated. Wollen (1972: 77) argued that the "looseness and diffuseness of the theory has allowed flagrant misunderstandings to take root, particularly among critics in Britain and the United States", suggesting this furthered the parochial appetites of these writers for whom "ignorance has been compounded by a vein of hostility to foreign ideas". Wollen's tone is polemic but observations from the early chapters of this thesis do confirm a different understanding of the "auteur" across educational and critical spaces. In its original form, academic auteur theory had reclamation at the core of its activities: cinematic texts were ascribed authors in order to enable their study in forums where they would previously have been overlooked and undervalued (Grant, 2008). The preference for authors in Britain's middlebrow, however, especially regarding foreign-language productions, was a continuation of that for Romantic artists and singular authors which supported anti-Hollywood and anti-commercial tastes. In other words, authors allowed the middlebrow to reinforce pre-existing evaluative methods, while auteur theory in academic spaces disrupted these.

In the 55 years since auteur studies first entered academic vernacular its use has been whittled down and its validity problematised by challenges from

psychoanalysis, cultural studies, structuralism, and semiotics, to name a few, which all consider the more diverse and multiple ways in which meaning is created and read in a cinematic “text” (see Hayward (2000) for a concise summary). Despite these various challenges within academia and the oft-cited “death of the author” proclaimed by Roland Barthes (1967), the auteur remains a figure of semantic value in the global film economy in the 21st Century. “Auteurism”, according to Timothy Corrigan (1990: 45) has long been an exercise in legitimation and Bourdieu’s cultural capital - “the desire and demand of an industry to generate an artistic...aura” which is “needed to distinguish itself from other, less elevated, forms of mass media” - and, as such, has proved remarkably adaptable and persistent across the industry since its first usage. For Corrigan (1990: 46) the auteur has escaped the confines of the film critic and academic and has since the 1990s been a “commercial strategy for organizing audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims”. This is clear to see in the marketplace: from the gravitas afforded “Best Director” awards at film festivals and ceremonies through to the ubiquity of phrases like “from the producer who brought you” in marketing materials, film cultures remain well invested in authorship (Grant, 2008: 1; Bordwell, 1985: 46).

Until very recently, the continued fetishisation of directors in these spaces has meant that various national cinemas within the art cinema context have been understood through the selective output of collectives of filmmakers, as observed in Chapter One. Thomas Elsaesser (2005: 48) notes that directors become cultural heroes, “representative...of the values and aspirations” of the cultures from which they create and come to represent the totality of cinematic output from their nations, hiding a number of diverse popular cinema industries in the process. The various national cinemas that constitute international film production on the film festival circuit and its associated channels, including academia, have long been defined by the work of auteur directors, collected into these nationally representative groups. This was certainly the treatment given to the Fifth Generation discussed in Chapter Three. Academic practice must be included in this process as historically its own investigations have depended on the initial circulation of films on the international circuit. James Udden (2011) has observed that the prominence of Chinese-language filmmakers in academic studies correlates to the extent of their appearances and acknowledgement at international

film festivals: noting the frequency of academic publications on Tsai Ming-liang and Jia Zhangke, both of which are popular at film festivals, compared to the slight coverage of a Hong Kong director with fewer festival accolades, Fruit Chan.

It is unproductive to lay any blame at the feet of film festivals and their curators for the propagation of potentially limiting understandings of international cinema, because their practices have developed alongside changes in filmmakers themselves. Corrigan (1990: 47) discusses this trend through observations of the auteur figure's "rematerialisation" in the 1980s "as a commercial performance of the business of being an auteur". Since this decade, auteurs are no longer chosen from outside, by cultural commentators, instead filmmakers perform as self-styled artists in the first instance. Directors, in particular, are now "valued for their capacity to concentrate on a tour de force, demonstrating qualities which signify that they are, in a sense, "staging" authorship, rather than, as was the case in the days of *Cahiers du cinéma*, earning the title of author as the honorific sign of achievement at the end of a long career" (Elsaesser, 2005: 51). The process occurs both inside and outside of the cinematic texts created by these self-styled auteurs.

Valentina Vitali (2008) has offered a compelling analysis of the role played by international tastemakers and reviewers in the circulation of Hou Hsiao-hsien's films in this regard. Similarly, Song Hwee Lim (2007, 2014) has dedicated journal articles and a monograph to Tsai Ming-liang on the utility of applying auteur theory to his work and practice and this research shows clearly the negotiation between textual characteristics and an extra-textual performance of auteurism in the construction of contemporary auteurs. Lim (2007: 224) shows this by looking at both the international circulation of Tsai's films and aesthetic notions of inter- and intra-textuality within them. Vitali and Lim's research are vital pieces of literature on contemporary Chinese art cinema and both sit alongside numerous monographs on individual directors (see Udden (2009), Teo (2005), Bettinson (2014), and Larson (2017)) that point toward the steady but rising interest in Chinese auteurs. Outside of Vitali's work, when these studies include considerations of film circulation they tend to remain focused on the film festival network as the main consciousness-raising bastion of the art cinema world. This vital research is yet to be efficiently complemented with an investigation of what happens in individual reception contexts after the festival, as this thesis seeks to do.

Wong Kar-wai

Chinese-language films have been at the heart of the transition toward commercial auteurs and in Britain the specific forces that have propagated these changes have worked to ensure a visibility for Chinese art cinema that is much wider reaching than before, but still the terrain of the middlebrow. We can see these processes in their clearest form through the Hong Kong based director Wong Kar-wai who anecdotally appears the most ubiquitous of Chinese-speaking auteurs in Britain and across much of Europe and North America. Wong began directing in the 1980s and found his first big festival success with the Best Director prize for *Happy Together* (1997) at the 1997 event in Cannes following the momentum gained from the internationally popular *Chungking Express* (1994) and *Fallen Angels* (1995). Unlike the work of older generations of Chinese-language filmmakers, all of Wong's films have been made readily available for British audiences across a variety of cultural spaces. *Chungking Express* was his first to see theatrical exhibition in the UK, in 1995, and according to advertisements and cinema listings in British newspapers (Display Ad, 1995; Anon, 1995) it did so around the country in independent venues.

Before 1995, Wong's earlier films *As Tears Go By* (1988) and *Days of Being Wild* (1990) had been released in the territory on VHS by Made in Hong Kong. Since then, every feature film directed by Wong has been made available on DVD in Britain and all since 1995 have been shown theatrically relatively contemporaneously with their international release dates outside of *The Grandmaster* (2013), as noted in the introduction, which arrived in Britain in November 2014, nearly two years after its initial international showing. Wong's films including *Fallen Angels* and *Happy Together* have screened on television since the mid-1990s and the director has been interviewed on numerous magazine-style television programmes on the film industry including *Moving Pictures* (1996) and *Talking Movies* (2006). The influential pedagogical function of these programmes for a general, nationwide arts audience who may not have been readers of film magazines such as *Sight and Sound* should not be overlooked. The particular feature from *Moving Pictures* was repackaged and released as a special feature on a DVD release for The Criterion Collection, a highly influential distribution label in North America, spreading this pedagogical impulse overseas. Compared to the

niche value of the Hong Kong New Wave, China's previous communist cinema, or even to the critical and festival success of Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, this general cultural penetration of Wong is significant. Thanks to such comprehensive distribution and regionally wide reaching exhibition, Wong has become part of the cultural establishment's canon to the extent that *Chungking Express* is a core text on the A Level Film Studies syllabus.

Despite this contemporary coverage, outside of educational spaces, it has remained the remit of middlebrow tastemakers to discuss, and in some ways contain, the films of Wong Kar-wai. This manifests itself in various forms, from the first time his films were distributed in Britain down to examples far removed from Wong himself – including pastiche reference to the director in British music videos. While in the United States, *Chungking Express* was released on VHS by Quentin Tarantino's Rolling Thunder Pictures label with all the (sub)cultural “cool” that Tarantino sought to represent in the 1990s, in Britain the film's home media release was by the ICA, a bastion of the art cinema establishment. More telling of the specific character of Wong in the UK are the homages paid to him by Scottish band Texas in the music video to their 1997 single, “Halo”.

Texas are a Scottish pop-rock band formed in the late 1980s, named after the Wim Wenders film, *Paris, Texas* (1984), who, though commercially successful, have had a reputation as “unimaginative” and situated within a movement of Glaswegian music of a “middle-brow artsiness” (Himes, 1991). “Middlebrow” is used here in its pejorative, colloquial sense to denote coverage that is sanitised, without passion and lacking in contentious subject matter. It is a term that has been used to criticise BBC Arts programming, for example, for being unimaginative (see Claypole, 2015) or as Lim (2014) suggests as “well made but...too soft on its subjects and just out to praise them”. Texas have actually collaborated frequently with BBC Arts, releasing the album *The BBC Sessions* in 2007 compiling the songs they had played for BBC radio over a 16 year period. In 1997, Texas continued their knowing references to respected cultural brands in the music video to their single “Halo”, which took the form of a direct recreation of *Chungking Express*: complete with lead singer Sharleen Spiteri posing as Hong Kong superstar Faye Wong (Figure. 13).



Figure 13: *Chungking Express* (1994, Wong Kar-wai); “Halo” (1997) Music Video. Texas. Mercury Records

Texas were not the first English speaking musicians to make reference to Hong Kong's cinema in their music. Years prior to the video's release, the American hip-hop outfit Wu Tang Clan had taken stage names, album titles, and audio samples from the dubbed versions of 1970s Shaw Brothers *kung fu* films that populated New York City's VHS and alternative theatre network. The vital difference between these two uses of Chinese-language cinema is that, as discussed in Chapter Two, while the adoption of *kung fu* culture by black artists in America served as a “disruptive” affront to the hegemony of political and cultural institutions (Ongiri, 2002: 39), the conservative invocation of Wong's aesthetic style by Texas did the opposite. The video to “Halo” reads more as a surface display of knowledge – an exercise in cultural capital shown to Britain's middlebrow establishment – and the sanitisation of *Chungking Express* into “kitschy commodified paraphernalia” (Ongiri, 2002: 32) than an interventional rejection of cultural hegemony. The video fits a definition as “middlebrow” explicitly as “well made” but “just out to praise” Wong's film.

For Texas' kitschy references to have leverage with their middlebrow audience, Wong's films had to be part of the art cinema establishment and culture. For this we should not downplay Wong's own savvy negotiation of the international marketplace and, in particular, British film cultures. Much of this positioning in the UK is thanks to Wong's maintenance of public relationships with key tastemakers in the country's middlebrow culture, particularly his acquaintance with Tony Rayns. Interviews between these two men have taken place on numerous occasions, prompting a growing collection of articles by Rayns on their discussions and his artistic collaborations with the director (see Rayns, 1995; 2000a; 2005; 2008), a number of which have appeared

on international DVD releases of Wong's films (Wong, 2001). Furthermore, Rayns is credited on most of Wong's films for the English-language subtitle tracks⁵⁵ and has purportedly helped Wong edit and redraft working scripts for upcoming productions. Rayns (2005: 23) has a clear sense of ownership over Wong's British success, shown by his skirmish for cultural capital in the mid-2000s through the observation that, after his years of support, "even the editors of BBC arts programmes, invariably the last to notice anything beyond the Anglo-American frame" had finally "began to pay attention" to the work of Wong Kar-wai.

Despite this sense of ownership displayed by Rayns, Wong is equally to thank. Wong is clearly in "the business of being an auteur" and through the cultivation of these relationships and star images he has successfully negotiated the cultural and commercial conditions through which to maintain a reputation on the international film circuit (Promkhuntong, 2014; 348). Though long defined as a "Hong Kong filmmaker" (see Teo, 2005), tangentially considered a part of the second cohort of the Hong Kong New Wave, Wong has for a long time worked within the economy of the European film festival circuit: regularly using the annual Cannes festival as a deadline for his protracted editing schedules and a place to premier his latest productions. He is an emblematic reminder that the contemporary "art film" does not, as Betz states, "happen on occasion to find an international audience but is *intended* for such an audience in the first instance" (Betz qtd in Lim, 2014: 25). In this way, Wong represents the continuation of a global shift in power noted generally as starting with the Fifth Generation filmmakers, in terms of who is "active" in the creation, representation, and propagation of Chinese cinema. In his specific mode of "staging authorship", Wong's work prompts considerations of Rey Chow's (2010b) discussions of ownership and "selfwriting" in the cinematic output of non-Western nations, discussed in Chapter Three.

This intention materialises as Wong "stages" his own auteur persona in a number of knowing ways, from threading intertextual references throughout his films to nurturing an influential social network abroad. This staging goes as far as the

⁵⁵ As alluded to in Chapter Three, Rayns is not only involved with Wong Kar-wai. His name is attached to an number of East Asian films in general from directors including Jia Zhangke (discussed later) and Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

cultivation of his physical appearance – his personal brand – seen most readily in his fashion choices: Wong always wears a trademark pair of sunglasses, even “when it is overcast... when he is indoors, and possibly when he takes a shower” (Brooks, 2008). Through these practices, a Wong Kar-wai mythology is developed so that the director's public “biography” can pre-emptively set the expectations of an eager international audience. Corrigan (2011: 48) suggests that such actions are taken on by directors to retain agency within the transnational network of the 21st century film industry. Commercial success results from the successful mediation between the intentions of the filmmaker and the expectations of their audience, which can be managed by cultivating this “promoted biography” through interactions with international tastemakers. It is another explicit reminder of the extent to which the international reception of films like Wong Kar-wai's is always a negotiation and mediation between those at the site of production and those who frame consumption. Through the specific example of Wong in Britain we can see how these attributes of the contemporary “commercial auteur” of Corrigan's reckoning can work to further situate Chinese-language cinema within specific cultural divisions in receiving cultures. In this case, the middlebrow.

The extreme conclusion drawn here is that the films themselves begin to no longer matter: “the auteur-star can potentially carry and redeem any sort of textual material, often to the extent of making us forget that material through the marvel of its agency” (Corrigan, 1998: 43). While a hypothetical suggestion, it is not too unrealistic a consideration if we remember the distribution activities discussed in Chapter Four that often sold films with images for scenes not included in the attached film and with arbitrary titles and taglines often irrelevant to the original production. However, we should not forget the films themselves in this discussion and, again, contemporary auteurs from Chinese-speaking regions serve as a useful case study through which to note how auteurism is negotiated through formal strategies and their role in circulation. For a comparison to hold against Wong Kar-wai, I will focus on Tsai Ming-liang for this consideration, as a director who stages his authorship through complex intertextual strategies.

In his various studies of Tsai Ming-liang, Lim (2007, 2014) pays particular attention to inter- and intra-textuality in the director's films to work through a number of characteristics of auteur theory in its contemporary form. Intertextuality – the act of referencing other films or pieces of art through formal strategies – within a director's own filmography satisfies a central tenet that has informed auteur studies from the start: that one can trace “a thematic and/or stylistic consistency over all (or almost all) the director's films” (Caughie, 1981: 9). As noted above, it is also one way in which filmmakers can perform as auteurs before that title is ascribed onto them by critics and scholars. Elsaesser (2005: 52) refers to practices like weaving intertextual nods across films as the dissimulation of “signatures of selfhood”, creating a body of work with “its own memory, its own self-reference and *mise-en-abyme*”. Though it is unlikely to find this terminology in the pages of *Sight and Sound* or *The Guardian*, the identification of intertextual references in auteurs' oeuvres has become a common practice in British film critics' evaluations of Chinese-language films. As a point of intersection between academic investigations of “auteurs” and critical inquiries into “film artists”, the ability to point out connections between a director's films is a common strategy for accruing cultural capital. As Vitali (2008: 283) observes regarding Tsai's colleague Hou Hsiao-hsien, there is a “perceived urgency on the part of the critic” to point out these connections: “as if, in a mirror situation, his or her professional status appears to depend on the prompt ascription of some (any) themes to Hou, to be held as distinctive of the film-maker's work and constitutive of his status as film-author”. In their rush to point out connections between films, international critics are often overwhelmed by intertextual devices in auteur productions.

Tsai made a name for himself on the international art cinema circuit in the mid-1990s following his Golden Lion win at the Venice Film Festival for *Vive L'Amour* (1994). He is known for his contributions to “slow cinema” whereby narratives pass at a glacial pace with very little dialogue to guide the spectator. These productions circulate within a niche subset of the international art cinema circuit: “a relatively stable economy of demand and supply of films classified as a cinema of slowness” found all over the world (Lim, 2014: 24). Like Wong, Tsai is also associated with a second “new wave”

movement in his Chinese-speaking region: he has generally, though not exclusively, made films in Taiwan for which he is tangentially connected to the second wave of New Taiwan Cinema. All of Tsai's directed feature-length films share the same actor, Lee Kang-sheng (one of many recurring performers) and most contain direct references to previous narratives and events in other films, including those yet to be made. These characteristics led Roger Clark (2007: 96) to proclaim that "the films of Tsai Ming-Lai, more than any other living director, form a homogeneous whole" and, likewise, Lim (2014: 49) to suggest that connections within his films are actually "intratextual" because he finds it makes more sense "treat Tsai's body of work as one single text rather than as multiple texts".

As with Wong, however, for critics and audiences in Britain to focus on inter/intra-textuality across Tsai's directed films, those films must first be available. Tsai made his first feature film, *Rebels of the Neon God* in 1992 but the earliest UK release of his films was *The River* (1997) in 1997. Since then, almost all have been released theatrically – *Vive L'Amour* (1994), *What Time is it There?* (2001), *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (2006), *The Wayward Cloud* (2005), and *Stray Dogs* (2013) – in varying numbers of venues, and these each have associated DVD releases in the country. This is a significant, if incomplete, collection of Tsai's directed features whose regularity has ensured that critical assessments can more easily revolve around intertextual considerations and comparisons with previous "Tsai Ming-liang films"⁵⁶. The resulting familiarity means that distributors and critics can reliably point toward formal characteristics that show off Tsai's authorial hand. In Adrian Martin's (2007) *Sight and Sound* review of *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* the reader is offered numerous considerations of "Tsai's career", "Tsai's characters", "Tsai's cinema" and "Tsai's world" across three detailed pages which are all enforced by the promise of a film by "modern cinema's reigning genius", included on the cover of the British DVD of the film (*I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*, 2008). Critics and distributors alike bolster Tsai's authorial command in visibly productive ways through their mediation between Tsai's textually

⁵⁶ As with the Hong Kong films discussed in Chapter Four, home media is particularly important here. As Lim (2014: 54-55) notes, the possibilities for the "cinophilic spectator...to pore over Tsai's earlier films in light of his later films for retrospective enlightenment" is encouraged on DVD and previously VHS through rewind and pause functions in ways that would have been impossible to films restricted to the cinema in previous decades.

staged authorship and British audiences.

The formative function of this mediation is seen in the case of Phillip Kemp's (1998) introduction to Tsai in *Sight and Sound* whereby he proclaims *The River* to be "the third in what might be called Tsai's Taipei trilogy" as it shares "actors, characters and motifs" with *Rebels of the Neon God* and *Vive L'amour*. This is the first instance I have found which refers to these films collectively as the "Taipei Trilogy", a term which has gone on to inform academic inquiries into the director (Wu, 2002; Hong, 2011) just as "heroic bloodshed" had for the grassroots entrepreneurs discussed in Chapter Four. Showcasing the productive role of film critics in the discursive shaping of Chinese-language films in Britain, the role of the trilogy in the circulation of contemporary auteurs is notable. In addition to Tsai's "Taipei Trilogy", Jia Zhangke, discussed below, has had his first three films collected as the "Hometown Trilogy" in a BFI-published book (Berry, 2009) and a DVD collection by distributor Artificial Eye. Likewise, Wong Kar-wai (who has produced his own loosely connected trilogy with the films *Days of Being Wild*, *In the Mood for Love*, and *2046*) has had his films *Ashes of Time*, *Chungking Express* and *Happy Together* bundled together as "The Wong Kar-wai Collection" by Artificial Eye in 2009, despite there being little to directly connect these three films.

Building on the work of Elsaesser, Claire Perkins considers the mutual desire between critics and auteurs to create and assess collections of films through shared actors, characters and motifs specifically in the form of trilogies as a strategy to reinstate the importance of a director's canon and, importantly for my concerns, to offer new modes of consumption for prospective audiences. The trilogy, for Perkins (2012: 25-26),

can be interpreted to play a specific function in this idea of national auteur cinema. On one hand, the trilogy offers an ideal framework within which to establish the moral vision and aesthetic language that constitutes a personal style or authorial signature. With an emphasis on the process of authorial *remaking* as semantic and syntactic repetition, critical delineations of the trilogies of European art cinema offer precise examples of classic auteur theory....On the other hand...the historical trilogy can be understood to work in a manner that goes beyond the personal: a regular cast of players and a consistent aesthetic approach can be seen to compensate for the European cinema's absence of pre-defined genres and stars. The repetition, which is typically interpreted as highly *individualist* can be read here as the effort to link a particular directorial universe to

Perkins offers two stances in which the auteur is at once reinforced and pushed into the background, and both reveal modes of consuming these “national” films in different ways to earlier Chinese-language productions precisely because of familiarity bred by availability. Chinese cinema had become a known quantity by the mid-1990s following not just the boom of the Fifth Generation in the 1980s but also close to two decades of appearances at British and international film festivals and, within that, the “worlds” of Tsai Ming-liang and Wong Kar-wai had quickly established themselves in the UK through competent distribution and promotional strategies. Intertextual nods and the “semantic and syntactic repetition” across these auteur oeuvres were visible in new ways which counterbalanced the importance of place and nation for those watching. As shown by the desire to curate trilogies, these are replaced by the ability to note and discuss “a regular cast of players” and other continuities in this “consistent aesthetic approach” which warrant a kind of consumption shared with fans of genre cinema that is otherwise absent from art cinema discourse due to a lack of generic conventions and internationally recognised actors.

Just as the primacy of action performance and martial arts had offered the subcultural tastemakers of Chapter Four's focus avenues into Chinese-language film that did not need to return to explicit considerations of Chinese cultures and histories, the focus on “semantic and syntactic repetition” facilitated by the continued fetishisation of the auteur afforded tastemakers in the art cinema context the possibility of equally culturally unspecific modes of evaluation. As Vitali (2008: 287) notes, this shapes an auteur's filmography to be “hollowed out of any sense of historicity and reduced to a cluster of ostensibly universal formal devices”, allowing reviewers to focus on, for example: characterisation and sexual politics as Adrian Martin (2007) does in his discussion of *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone*, or on “alienation and the problematic nature of intimacy” as Roger Clarke (2007) speaks of *The Wayward Cloud*. The trilogy represents the most acute example of this new negotiation between contemporary auteurs and those responsible for circulating their films internationally. Displays of knowledge and the quest for cultural capital in critical practice thus transforms from its form in the previous 40 years of cinema appreciation in Britain

whereby tastemakers had to prove their knowledge of Chinese cultures and industries toward a new status where it is a knowledge of the auteur's oeuvre that must be displayed.

At the core of this transition is an increasing value attributed to universal aspects of film production and consumption which circulate both within and around the text. This suggests that the power of the commercial auteur within the art cinema economy is strong enough to accommodate filmmakers from all over the world in a detached, culture-free space of formal accomplishment. Preferences for the kind of engagement implied here are part of a number of trends noted by Vitali (2008) in her discussion of European reviews where she found “ascriptions of universalism” to be commonplace. Vitali suggests that through critical and translational practices the greater European public receive direct and indirect suggestions that their consumption of films should not be “inhibited by the irrepressible perception of cultural differences that make the understanding of films at best difficult, at worst impossible” (Vitali, 2008: 285). These practices rely on a critical tendency to “hollow out” the historicity of a film and efface its various localities to *mise-en-scène* for an auteur's formalist experimentation.

This “new set of guidelines legitimises the suspension of intellectual faculties” and has a pedagogical imperative which maintains a general mode of film consumption in European audiences disinterested in international histories and politics. It represents a significant departure from the modes of evaluation propagated earlier by the art cinema establishment and their sole interest in Chinese-language films that explicitly grappled with socio-cultural contexts. Contemporary criticism and its pedagogical imperatives are becoming aligned with the strategies of film marketers in the maintenance of a reformatted spectator keen for a “universal film language” of “grooving” and not for wider “intellectual” debate (Vitali, 2008: 286). Vitali observes that, for the most part, the films of her study were unavailable to European audiences so these hollowing out processes were less likely to be problematised by a film's content as it was physically invisible. We can, therefore, develop these observations by applying them to films, like those of Wong and Tsai, which *have* been widely circulated and available during this move toward universalism. This approach reveals that within these purportedly universalist modes, there are in fact implicit and structural biases

dictated by the familiar cultural assumptions observed earlier in this thesis.

To engage with this issue in detail, the remainder of this chapter is a comparative case study of the circulation of Jia Zhangke and Wong Kar-wai, specifically their films *Platform* and *In the Mood for Love*. These are two films by contemporary auteurs whose different production bases and filming locations (Mainland China and Hong Kong respectively) are shown to play a significant role these new modes of consumption. I show in these concluding sections that despite the variations afforded by the mediation of contemporary auteurism, the circulation of these films continues the lineage of Chinese cinema in Britain from their respective regional sites, both in terms of film canons and social cultures, which either support or hinder their compatibility with the practices of Britain's cultural intermediaries. Analysis of these two films, both from the year 2000, brings together conclusions reached across the previous chapters of this thesis to remind readers of the extent to which domestic modes of appreciating and circulating international cinema are mutually constituted with those foreign-language productions themselves. For all the fragmentations across British film and social cultures, cultural assumptions remain surprisingly consistent and commanding in the 21st Century as they did in 1954.

Jia Zhangke and *Platform*

Jia Zhangke is a filmmaker who has almost exclusively worked on the Chinese mainland as a leading figure in China's Sixth Generation of filmmakers. Also known as the Urban Generation, this collection of directors refocused the efforts of their Fifth Generation predecessors through films dealing with issues facing the current generation of young citizens, set mostly in cities and urban locations. At the time of writing, Jia is held up by the cultural establishment of the BFI as a “modern Chinese master” (Berra, 2016): one of the “greatest filmmakers to emerge in Chinese cinema since the 1980s” (Berra, 2017). To a partial extent, Jia’s international acclaim and popularity relate to the degree to which his films satisfy the conditions of commercial auteurism noted above. Jia has been supported in Britain since his first feature film,

Xiao Wu (1997), which saw a theatrical and home media release in the UK two years after it premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival.

Xiao Wu set the tone for Jia's early work: following a pickpocket (Wang Hongwei) around a small town near Fenyang city in North-East China through a generally detached and measured formal style, watching as he drifts along a path of illegal activities while his friends and colleagues work to become upwardly mobile. This debut feature was received well by a handful of influential tastemakers in Britain's critical establishment like Tony Rayns specifically because it was understood to be presentational, rather than *representational*. Suggesting a departure from the observations of China's Fifth Generation, Rayns praised *Xiao Wu* because he understood it to not serve an allegorical function for China's history at large. He understood the narrative to be "specific and singular", nowhere suggesting that the lead character was a "victim of social change or an index of what has happened in China since Mao's death" (Rayns, 2000b: 59). This transition in China's cinema from "social observation" into "darker, psychological ground" represented something new for those well versed in the country's film industry. It also revealed a notable shift in Rayns' preferences in Chinese cinema, likely brought on by specific mode of individuality encouraged and preferred in the practices of contemporary auteurism. These critical preferences were developed in the response to Jia's next film *Platform*, a film shown first as "The Platform" at the 2000 London Film Festival, which saw a limited theatrical release around independent exhibition venues in the UK in late 2002 through distributor Artificial Eye.

Much like *Xiao Wu*, *Platform* does not contain a traditional cinematic plot, choosing instead to observe a collection of young residents in a small city, again around Fenyang, between the 1970s and 1990s. Specifically, *Platform* focuses on a troupe of theatre performers which fragments and splinters alongside developments in Mainland China's social, technological and cultural make-up between the Cultural Revolution and the years immediately preceding the film's production. Cultural intermediaries in Britain that praised *Platform* did so generally through reference to formal achievement and characteristics that supported an understanding of Jia as a singular auteur. *Time Out's* praise of this "masterly" achievement (TR, no date), Derek Malcolm's (2000: B4)

promotion of its “first rate film-making”, and the BBC’s complimentary understanding that the film was “pleasingly ambivalent towards the impact of historical forces on ordinary lives” (Dawson, 2002) all confirm Vitali’s understanding of the preferences for authorship, universality and dislocation from complex historical contexts discussed above. In the years since *Platform*’s release, Jia has only satisfied these expectations further through his performance in interviews in which he has honed his individuality and singular authorship. In discussions cited and reinforced by academic investigations (Jaffee, 2006: 79/80), Jia has “rejected the attitudes of his immediate underground ancestors” in the Sixth Generation, to craft an individualism in a way that is “more pointed than the sixth generation’s rejection of the achievements of the fifth”. These comments share incentives with those toward Hou Hsiao-hsien, whereby reviews collated by Vitali (2008: 284) are shown to “take great care to present Hou and his work as marginal to both Taiwanese society and the national film industry”.

The detachment from his social and industrial settings is one significant aspect of Jia’s auteur characterisation, developed through the availability of his films, that has worked to increase the receptivity of Britain’s tastemakers to his productions. While visible across a number of cultural authorities, this trend is clearest in the writing of Peter Bradshaw, leading resident film critic and heir to Derek Malcolm at the *The Guardian*. In his role at the newspaper, Bradshaw reviews films for a large, left-of-centre readership across the country and is of notable stature and authority. In addition to these writing duties, Bradshaw is occasionally consulted as an expert for magazine-style television programmes including the BBC’s *Film...* series. He did not provide an original review of *Platform* for the newspaper but he did return to the film in a review of Jia’s follow-up, *Unknown Pleasures* (2002), when it was released in UK cinemas in 2003. Bradshaw (2003) stated that

[Jia’s] second movie, *Platform*, was originally 195 minutes long, but cut to a relatively painless two and a half hours for its UK release, and allegedly told the story of a Maoist street theatre troupe in the 1980s, but did so in such a dull, torpid way, and with so little sense of narrative light and shade, that it was difficult to tell what was going on or how much time was supposed to be passing. Even there though, in a movie which tested your patience to destruction and beyond, there were flashes of arresting talent: a facility for framing

and delineating a mood and a moment.

His discussion of *Platform* is littered with dismissive remarks about the “relatively painless” story it “allegedly” told in a “dull” and “torpid” way whose alleged suggestion of social commentary was faint enough to be missed entirely. Bradshaw’s criticism are confined to those formal characteristics that others had praised, but in this reappraisal they are reframed as a cautious commendation for Jia’s potential at framing mood and moment.

Here, Jia’s “auteur-star image” appears to encourage revaluations of characteristics: rather than dismissing *Platform*, Bradshaw uses it to remind readers of Jia’s detached political stance and transform the director’s “torpid” narrative logic – now characteristic of his trademark style – to praise *Unknown Pleasures*. Bradshaw’s revaluations further confirm Corrigan’s (1990: 50) suggestions that evaluating the productions of an auteur rests on “being able to know already, not read, the meaning of the film in a totalizing image that precedes the movie in the public images of its creator”: that “auteurist films are often made before they are made”. Whether through Bradshaw’s (2008) reading of Jia’s following film *Still Life* (2006) as “a film that moves with the unforced, unhurried speed of a leaf on a stream” or his praise of Jia’s *24 City* (2008) for offering “neither criticism nor celebration: [Jia] simply chronicles and pays gentle tribute to the unnoticed” (Bradshaw, 2010), if we continue to trace Bradshaw’s personal relationship to Jia Zhangke films we can see an increasingly uncritical voice develop. There may be numerous reasons for these changing shifts in addition to the repercussions of Corrigan’s observations of the circulation of the contemporary auteur yet it is notable that, as Jia becomes a more established auteur on the international scene, Bradshaw converts the director’s “gentle” and “unmannered” style from something that tests “your patience to destruction and beyond” into the most important and praiseworthy aspect of his filmmaking practice.

Bradshaw is one particularly commanding voice within a new economy of film circulation whereby critics and programmers still retain their status as necessary knowledgeable gatekeepers through their sites of access at international film festivals. However, proof of their ability now rests in their knowledge about the films themselves and in their analytical ability to connect and analyse them, rather than draw on

knowledge of the countries where the films originate as was the case in previous decades. It is in this transformation of the role of the critic that the mutually constitutive nature of “staged authorship” and the contemporary auteur is most noticeable: as the reputation of individual directors increases over time so does the need for the critic to be able to recognise and praise their authorial continuities. Art cinema becomes re-contextualised through this process so that meaning appears to be produced and discussed through a variety of focal points – from formal accomplishment to actors, stars, thematic consistency or deviance – all of which help to decouple global “national” cinemas from the shackles of their local sites of production.

However, positivity toward *Platform* and Jia Zhangke’s lack of allegorical impulses was only half of how the film and this director’s style were understood in Britain. The appetite for social commentary in Mainland China’s films remained strong with *Platform*. Distributor Artificial Eye chose a quote from popular film magazine *Empire* to promote the film on the cover of its DVD release. The quote, describing *Platform* as “assured social satire”, was one of the few available from positive critical appraisals that offered evidence of Jia’s allegorical edge. More common were dismissals that showed Bradshaw was not alone in his initial dislike of *Platform*. Positivity around the film was constrained by expectations related to a Mainland Chinese production thanks to the lineage of films from this regional base across Britain’s history. When *Platform* suffered critically for reasons other than its “torpid” style, it was because of its lack of allegorical importance. *Sight and Sound*’s review was written by Phillip Kemp (2002: 47) who expressed a disinterest in the film due to its lack of political and social significance. Kemp took issue with the time period: “Jia describes the 1980s, when he himself grew up, as “the decade in which Chinese society experienced its greatest changes”, but one would have thought the 1940s (WW2, the Communist takeover) or the 1960s (the Great Leap Forward, the Red Guards) had an equal claim”. It was not just that Jia did not engage with *Platform*’s context as much as this reviewer would have liked, but that the context around which Jia chose to frame his narrative was not the same as that desired by this critic.

In his claims to know more about China’s histories and cultural currents than those working and living through them, Kemp’s dismissal here resumes the processes

of “kidnapping” lambasted by Clyde Taylor in 1987, visible across the circulation of Fifth Generation films discussed in Chapter Three. Even those discussions of *Platform* that praised its allegorical edge often cared little for the finished product because, no matter how successful the social commentary the film was not trading with a representation of Chineseness or a specific social context that Britain’s tastemakers preferred. As Steve Rose (2002) of *The Guardian* observed: Jia’s films “corresponded to the reality of present-day China, but not necessarily the tastes of international audiences” who remained seduced by the films of the Fifth Generation. Rose’s piece was ostensibly written to mark the British theatrical release of *Platform*, yet the feature is overwhelmingly about Fifth Generation directors and contemporary China’s inability to scale “the heights of Chinese film’s golden years”. The reputation of Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou remained remarkably commanding over the circulation of Mainland Chinese productions after the millennium both in critical writing and academia (see Wang, 2007; Berry, 2009).

Jia Zhangke shows how Mainland Chinese directors complicate universalist preferences in Britain and that if a filmmaker does not engage with a portrayal of China these tastemakers want to see, even if they present a sought-after rejection of China’s politics, their circulation will be limited. Anxieties of film critics and academics appear to be strictly formal, yet they are laced with the same cultural assumptions as those in the post-war period. Rose (2002) famously concluded his criticism of Jia’s films through the following comparison to his cinematic forefathers: “If the Fifth Generation’s films were like a stay in the Beijing Hilton, the Sixth Generation experience was like a night in a backpackers’ hostel”. He was referring here to formal characteristics. The films of Zhang Yimou, for example, offered expensive and luscious production values with oversaturated colours and often long, measured takes while those of Jia Zhangke were shot on cheap digital cameras whose technical qualities were not distinct from any number of cameras used by amateurs for their “home movies”. However, while Rose here is alluding to this difference in technical quality, the simplicity of his statement is disingenuous. It is clear from the rest of his writing and that of many others, that in this analogy it is not just the type of hotel or hostel that is relevant, but *where* that accommodation is located. These aesthetic strategies and representations are not as dislocated from their social contexts as these tastemakers suggest. To see this at its

clearest we can compare the circulation of Jia's films to that for Wong Kar-wai's, particularly *In the Mood for Love*, as this proves an apt example to showcase how this aptitude for universality is grounded in the specific variations of Chineseness a film espouses.

Wong Kar-wai and *In the Mood for Love*

In conducting research for this thesis, I have found *In the Mood for Love* to be the most critically acclaimed Chinese-language film in Britain and also one of the most widely circulated art cinema films (regardless of language or place of origin) in British film cultures. Named the “Best Film of the Decade” by *The Sunday Times* (2009) and the best of the 21st Century for *Sight and Sound* (2012), *In the Mood for Love* is renowned for its seductive allure with both *The Guardian* (Bradshaw, 2013) and *Time Out* (Bray et al. 2016) placing it in their top five romantic films of all time. The film was released in 2000, the same year as *Platform*, and has been widely available to nationwide audiences ever since. Following its initial theatrical release, *In the Mood for Love* has been sold in three separate DVD packages, across online streaming services, regular television screenings, and repeat appearances at nationwide cinemas up to the time of writing⁵⁷. Building on the hesitance observed toward *Platform*, I argue that the popularity of Wong's film results from an almost unique ability to satisfy key tastemakers with characteristics preferred in contemporary auteurism through a cultural representation of Hong Kong that, though historically and geographically specific, supports “universal” readings.

The film is set mostly in Hong Kong across a number of years during the 1960s, telling the story of a cautious love affair between two characters – Mr Chow (Tony Leung) and Mrs Chan (Maggie Cheung) – who come together on the shared suspicion that their partners are being unfaithful. Their fears are confirmed and, over the course of the narrative, meetings between the couple increase in frequency as their feelings

⁵⁷ Following the initial theatrical release, it has been sold on DVD in a standard edition, a “2-Disc Director's Special Edition”, in a bundle with its sequel *2046* (2004), and at the time of writing it is available on the streaming service Amazon Instant Video. It was even given away free with *The Sunday Times* at one point. In addition to occasional individual screenings at cinemas across the UK, *In the Mood for Love* formally screened in cinemas around the country as part of the British Film Institute's “Century of Chinese Cinema” season in 2014.

do in strength. Unable to engage in the same infidelity that has already caused them both such distress, their relationship is restricted to furtive glances and nervous conversations. It is on this cautious romance – this “desire repressed” as Tony Rayns (2015a: 1) understands it – that the central narrative focuses. It does so, however, against the backdrop of a very specific time and place in the history of Hong Kong: a community of Shanghainese immigrants who have recently moved to the British colony to evade the social and political turmoil unfolding in 1960s Mainland China. Both the film and its British reception view this setting in contradictory ways, as simultaneously vital and irrelevant to *In the Mood for Love*'s success.

In interviews Wong (2001) has spoken of his direct intention with *In the Mood for Love* “to tell of certain attitudes in certain periods of time in the history of Hong Kong” to tell a story that could *only* have taken place in that singular historical-geographical setting. The *mise-en-scène* is littered with small idiosyncrasies specific to this time and place to help situate itself in this corner of Hong Kong in the 1960s; “objective reminders of a bygone era” (Chow, 2007: 73). Stephen Teo (2005; 126 – 129) notes the various objects – from seasonal dishes used to denote the passage of time to the arrival of the home's first rice cooker – that construct a diegetic world dense with the cultural signification of a narrow time and place for those in the know. Yet, for all its apparent importance, required knowledge of this context is repeatedly undercut. For example, while “the whole thing is about the time period” for the director, Wong (2001) removed reference to the various seasonal dishes and their particular ingredients from the English subtitle track, despite their importance for establishing place and time, because he deemed they would be “too much” for the international viewer. Similarly, the film's Cantonese title roughly translates to “Age of Flowers” and is an idiomatic phrase used normally to describe a woman in the “prime of her life” but employed by Wong to suggest that Hong Kong was in the prime of its own urban life in 1962. Wong changed the English title to “In the Mood for Love” after finding a Bryan Ferry song of the same name as he preferred the emotive power of this new title (Lühns, 2001).

In political terms, the 1960s were a particularly fraught time for Hong Kong and

its neighbouring China⁵⁸. Yet, these tumultuous events are of minor importance to *In the Mood for Love*, in which “there is little feeling for this atmosphere of political and economic disquiet” (Blake, 343). As with the initial response to *Platform*, the near irrelevance of the specificity Hong Kong's political and social contexts in the narrative is confirmed in a number of reviews of the film by critics in Britain's key magazines and newspapers. Amy Taubin (2000: 55), author of *Sight and Sound*'s initial review, was keen to highlight the importance of Hong Kong for the success of *In the Mood for Love*: she saw the city as “not so much the star of the film as the indispensable ground of its being”. However, it is specifically the *reconstruction* of Hong Kong that is indispensable for Taubin, as it facilitates a cinematic contemplation on nostalgia, rather than anything inherent to the setting itself. Likewise, although *The Guardian*'s Peter Walker (2011) found it significant that he lived in Hong Kong at the time of the film's release, and that on his first viewing he found the urban setting to be a “very different city” to the one he occupied, he denounces the importance of place and his connection to it as “a bit immaterial” in the end: for Walker, “*In the Mood for Love*'s glory is its universality”.

Hong Kong as a social, political, and historical location begins to matter little in appraisals of the film. It becomes, to echo the words of Olivia Khoo (2006, 242), “spectral, in the sense of its functioning as a supplement” to a universally relevant act of contemplation. The majority of this film “exists outside the frame” for Khoo but this vacuity was not used as an example of poor film-making by its British reviewers as it was for *Platform*. Instead, the collapsing of social context into *mise-en-scène* into aesthetic elements played with by Wong, supports *In the Mood for Love*'s status as an auteur production. This vacuity foregrounds culturally unspecific themes of nostalgia and desire, as they can be related to tastemakers universally, nurturing a film about authorial command rather than social critique. This helps relate the film to “our” experience but, also, acts in similar ways to the semantic ascription of trilogies noted by Perkins in offering international viewers a variety of formal considerations that

⁵⁸ On the Chinese mainland, campaigns led by Chairman Mao and the Communist Party of China were particularly tumultuous. The mass industrialisation and collectivisation of rural communities known as the Great Leap Forward which ran from 1958 to 1962 led to the suspected deaths of (up to) 45 million (Dikotter, 2010) while the Cultural Revolution brought the infamous Red Guard and a period of economic and social instability for the ten years after 1966. In Hong Kong, the 1960s were a time of rising conflict between communist supporters and the colonial British government, leading most famously to the widespread Hong Kong riots of 1966.

assuage the need to engage with social contexts.

In a short piece written to advertise a screening at a student exhibition society at the University of Edinburgh, the film was promoted with the following caveat: “Even if the story might seem quite far from your own experience, this film is worth watching for its cinematography, its production and costume design alone – and moreover it will put you in the mood for love” (Stark, 2001). This exhibitor anticipated an audience whose primary mode of engagement with *In the Mood for Love* would be through a general “mood”, induced through its cinematography, production and costume design *alone*. There is, however, a lot within these areas of *In the Mood for Love*'s production that are visibly and unavoidably rooted in Hong Kong's social/cultural context. As Pam Cook (2005) notes, the *mise-en-scène* is overwhelmed by a “*mélange* of cultural allusions”: “the film reconstructs 1960s Hong Kong through a promiscuous blend of references to popular cultural forms such as songs, films, novels and fashions from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, spanning traditional and modern manifestations”. That these do not get in the way for those seeking a culturally unspecific formal experiment is testament to both the film's ability to fold their signifiatory function into a discourse contained by “mood” and desire *and* the inherent vacuity understood in their specific cultural character.

Within this *mélange*, the most instantly recognisable items are the clothes worn by Mrs Chan which have become *In the Mood for Love*'s most discussed feature in the general press (see Wong, 2013; Trouillaud, 2010). Across the film Maggie Cheung dons upwards of 23 *cheongsam/qipao*⁵⁹ dresses with a variety of patterns, colours, and designs. The film's release coincided with the international resurgence of this dress design, through bases in Hong Kong and Taiwan, observed by Matthew Chew (2007) as an item of clothing that came to advertise a brand of Chineseness to the world as a commodity, dislocated from politics. Noting the popularity of the *cheongsam* in Japan as a dedicated uniform for female employees in certain hotels and nightclubs, Chew (2007: 156) suggests that the contemporary invocation of the dress is one which appeals to touristic and sexual desires in heterosexual, male patrons: cultural

⁵⁹ Both of these terms refer to the same kind of tight-fitting, patterned dresses that Maggie Cheung wears in the film, the difference is simply linguistic. *Cheongsam* is the term for the dress in Cantonese, while *qipao* is the Mandarin equivalent.

associations are played with to encourage financial transactions and associated consumption. This use of the *cheongsam* is one whereby its Chineseness becomes an aesthetic commodity only tangentially related to its associated transaction, when it is useful to be so connected. Chew's observations are confirmed in the references to the Cheung's dresses in the British reception and circulation of *In the Mood for Love*, which fold these items of clothing into culturally unspecific catalysts for sexual desire.

Peter Bradshaw, in particular, furthers the British fascination with Maggie Cheung's "sizzling sexuality" (*Hong Kong Legends*, Issue 5) in the subcultural space by focusing on the sexual appeal of Cheung's appearance in *In the Mood for Love* in his initial review of the film. Bradshaw (2000) commended Maggie Cheung's "stunningly beautiful, statuesque screen presence, her hair always worn glamorously up, with discreet droplet earrings...whose elegant, roof-raisingly sexy form the camera is wont to follow as she sashays along alleys". His admiration is clear in this paragraph but he does not choose offer any insight into (or praise of) Cheung's acting ability, unlike his response to the "estimable Tony Leung...who grows inexorably in depth and acuity" over the course of the narrative. Cheung's character and costuming coalesce into a singular passive site of sexual conquest for seduced viewers, representing the totality of her achievement. Through the hollowing out of Mrs Chan into an empty frame on which to carry the iconic *cheongsam* dresses, Maggie Cheung extends the universalist reading of the film and becomes "a spectral body that makes Hong Kong modernity visible through surface display rather than an embodied depth" (Khoo, 2006: 244).

Sexual encounter – often entwined with Mrs Chan's costuming – has been key to the promotion of the film in Britain's exhibition and distribution networks. To name just two examples: the image used across the theatrical posters and DVD covers for the film shows the two leads, bathed in a sultry red light, leaning against a wall in a passionate embrace and an image used on the back of every DVD edition shows Cheung getting dressed, scruffy haired after an implied sexual encounter (Figure 14). Both of these images are taken from promotional material – neither event captured happens in the film (at least in this form) – and both are significantly more salacious than anything that appears in the muted narrative of the finished film. It is in fact the *lack* of a physical sexual encounter that is crucial to the success of the unrequited love narrative that has enthralled international critics so the inclusion of these images is

somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand it chimes with Wong's auteur mythology in which he films far more footage than needed for the final product – a popular narrative around the making of *In the Mood for Love* (Teo, 2005: 124/5) – and helps reinforce the world of Wong's auteurism. On the other, their incongruity with the finished film itself speaks to the power understood in these images to appeal to potential buyers, just as action performance had for the distributors of Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung films discussed in Chapter Four.

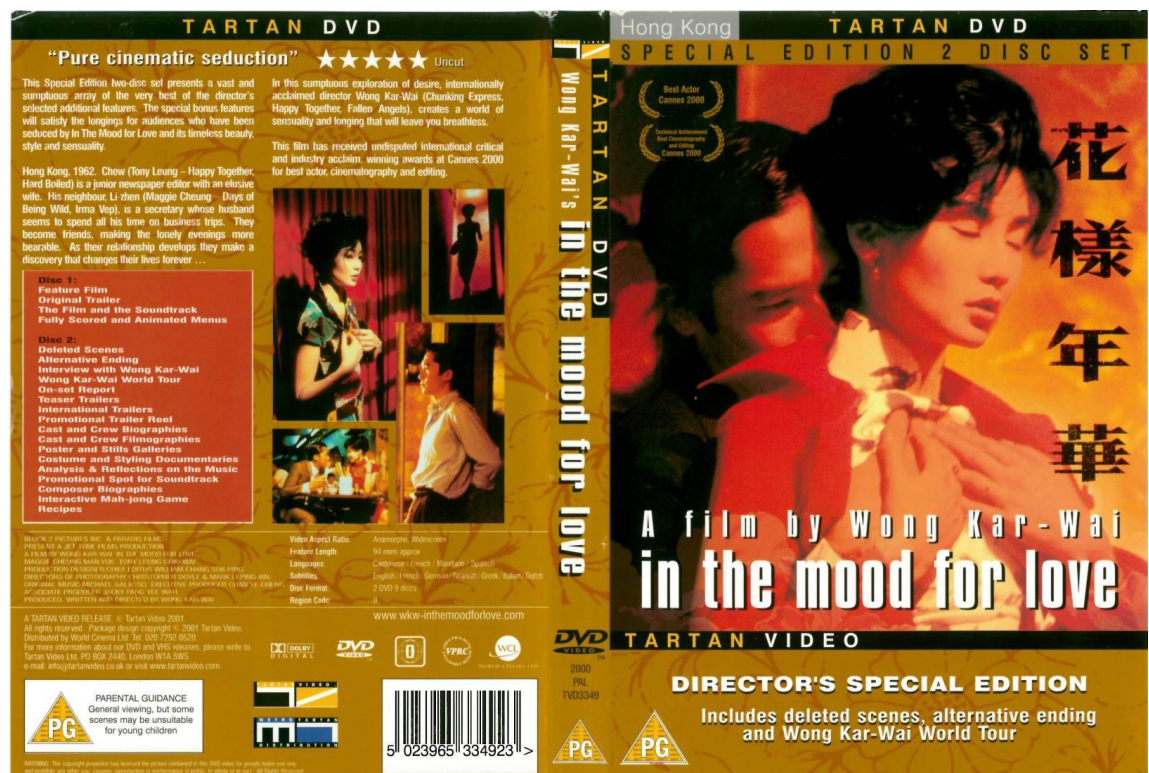


Figure 14: In the Mood for Love (2001) DVD. Tartan

Close analysis of these releases reveals the contradictory ways the distributor, Tartan, appear to view the film's Chineseness as something that both prohibits and catalyses this erotic appeal. None of the film's British trailers contain dialogue, their audio replaced with Bryan Ferry's eponymous song, and though they replicate the inter-title design of the film itself to name its cast and crew, they replace the Chinese characters with their romanised spellings. These are two strategies which point toward a distributor fearful of locating the film as Chinese. Simultaneously, however, every release of the film on British home media contains its original title in Chinese

characters, predominantly placed to the right of the main image. This is rare in Britain where, as with trailers, the majority of DVD covers attempt to hide a Chinese-language film's foreign-language status through various standardised designs and the total exclusion of any text not in the Roman alphabet⁶⁰. This practice shows for Tartan that the appeal of buying a copy of *In the Mood for Love* as it pertains to the exaggerated eroticism across the rest of the DVD packaging should be heightened by reference to the film's (linguistic, cultural and geographical) Chinese origin.

In this retail context we can see how associations of eroticism and Chineseness, are employed to enhance the desirability of *In the Mood for Love* as a DVD to be purchased. There is an implied touristic gaze here that is informed more by faint shades of sex tourism in Asia than by family holidays. Indeed, the exoticness of Hong Kong as a location is equally employed by these DVD distributors. Tartan names every interactive menu after a location from the story: from the hotel, to a restaurant, the residences of the two protagonists, and many others. The user navigates these locations in a crudely realised taxi and selecting a menu option prompts a short video sequence of a Hong Kong taxi from within the film driving to the place they want to "visit". It does not really matter whether these locations are as lavish as a Hilton or as sparse as a backpackers' hostel, it is the Hong Kong location that is important. As an extension of *In the Mood for Love*'s own aesthetic strategies, these DVD releases further remind us that the film's specific representation of life in Hong Kong and the particular Chineseness therein are especially compatible with dominant modes of reading international films in the British context: they do not get in the way.

As a result of its particular vacuity, *In the Mood for Love*'s specific mediation of Chineseness encouraged by Wong's commercial auteurism has afforded it a flexibility across various parts of British film cultures⁶¹. However, in comparison to the strict

⁶⁰ The majority of releases by Hong Kong Legends and Tartan Asia Extreme employed similar strategies. Most use exclusively English font and present a standardised design with no suggestion of the films' cultural origin. Further research needs to be conducted on this theme erotically charged narratives are concerned as they seem to complicate this practice. (See the Hong Kong Legends release of *Naked Killer* (1992) in Chapter Four as an example which prominently includes Chinese characters in its cover design)

⁶¹ *In the Mood for Love* has proved remarkably malleable in Britain's exhibition cultures where it has been used to support a variety of incentives without its positioning being misleading. To name just a few examples from recent years, it has been shown: as exemplary of film costuming to an open air audience in London; to cinephiles at the British Film Institute's Southbank venue as a "loveletter to much of Chinese cinema history" (BFI, 2014b); to sinophiles in Glasgow paired with a "lantern

positioning of Jia Zhangke's *Platform*, we can see that this malleability owes a great deal to its status as a “Hong Kong film” and the international community's understanding of the Hong Kong identity. Specifically, as Alex Chun (1996: 121) notes in his polemically titled “Fuck Chineseness”, Hong Kong has historically been recognised as an apolitical space: the result of a colonial strategy by the British who, during their governance of the region, attempted to divert the community's growing awareness of communism in the 1950s and the potential for a political coup by focusing cultural policy on financial growth and “utilitarianism”. It is understood that this distraction foregrounded unrestrained capitalism as a social enterprise, particularly between the 1960s and 1980s, which led to the global understanding of the city as a “vacuous social space”, neither British or Chinese, revolving almost entirely around the value of commodities and financial transactions. Although it bears acknowledging that since the handover to China in 1997 the Hong Kong identity – at least as it is seen internationally – has become increasingly associated with political strife⁶², Chun's consideration of the city as a vacuous social space is supported by its presentation by Wong and the film's circulation in Britain.

While these cultural characteristics – these “Westernisms” - deterred the middlebrow critic of the 20th century observed earlier in this thesis, here they do the opposite. In line with the universalist preferences of contemporary auteurism, the cultural identity of Hong Kong, as explored through *In the Mood for Love*, appears inherently hollow. If these opinions are deeply embedded in Britain's culture at large, Hong Kong stands little chance of interfering with *In the Mood for Love*'s appeal. The ease with which the film has been accommodated is then a double result of both its status as a “Hong Kong film” and the ways in which this Hong Kong identity is mediated by Wong's direction and his staged authorship. This suitability is serendipitous and rare, and if we briefly consider other international films, in addition to Jia's films,

painting workshop” (SCEN, 2014); or even to London School of Economics students as part of Black History Month (LSE, 2013).

⁶² The territory is currently a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, until 2047. This is part of China's “One Country, Two Systems” act which was agreed upon by the British and mainland Chinese governments to ease the handover of Hong Kong to China following over a century of colonial rule. It is understood in the agreement that Hong Kong will retain autonomy over the governance of its territory during this 50 years, but recent events have complicated this agreement and the associated growing civil unrest was shown to the world through the Occupy Central/Umbrella Revolution movement of late 2014.

through the same adjudicative criteria, we can see how the mode of consumption implied in the positive response to *In the Mood for Love* is almost unique and dependent upon these international assumptions about Hong Kong. Two useful points of comparison to conclude with are the films *Suzhou River* (2000, Lou Ye) and *My Blueberry Nights* (2007, Wong Kar-wai).

A concluding comparison

Suzhou River is a film directed by Lou Ye, a filmmaker generally associated with China's Sixth Generation but whose global impact has been less than Jia's. The film, produced and is set in Mainland China, was often mentioned in the same breath as Wong Kar-wai on its initial release in 2000. Despite being initially well received, it has barely been re-visited in non-academic forums since the turn of the century: only released once on home media in the UK by Artificial Eye; and not available on any streaming services during the writing of this thesis. The film tells the story of a young videographer who falls for a mysterious, mermaid-impersonating go-go dancer. It is formally ambitious, making explicit reference to Western cinema and culture and many critics read the film's subjective hand-held camera as knowingly referential to Wong's output in the early 1990s; particularly *Chungking Express* (Francke, 2000). Yet, *Suzhou River*'s positioning as a Mainland Chinese production brings with it a that host of associations to British critics of, at least, inescapable politics, a communist populace, and in the 21st century, a culture of counterfeiting.

These are associations that I have shown across this thesis to command much of the circulation of Mainland Chinese cinema in the UK and the same that *Platform* was criticised for not grappling with in explicit enough ways. For *Suzhou River*, its Mainland Chinese status meant reviewers understood Western references as “illicit” in the face of the government or as representative of shifts in globalisation (Francke, 2000). These formal strategies that aided the universality of *In the Mood for Love* inevitably became politicised into “social comments” on life on the Chinese mainland (Parkinson, 2000). Unlike Wong's reverential international pop-culture *mélange*, Lou Ye's intentions were seen as duplicitous; his global outlook as an attempt to “court Western audiences” in

this “beguiling” appropriation of other national film industries (Feng, 2009: 187). In other words, the process that *In the Mood for Love* passed through so easily was impossible for *Suzhou River*, which has been kept rooted in its political and geographical location.

These accusations of duplicity were also levied against Jia Zhangke on his initial arrival in the UK. Much like the Fifth Generation before him, Jia was assumed to be intentionally targeting international audiences through his aesthetic strategies and distribution practices, in ways which his detractors understood to represent an “inauthentic” practice. These continued concerns about self-Orientalism which date back to the arrival of Zhang Yimou and his Fifth Generation compatriots at the international film festival circuit (Dai, 1993). However, by 2002, international critics had reframed these criticisms into positives by suggesting that directors like Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou *had* to target international audiences in the late 1980s because there was no suitably robust domestic audience in China (Rose, 2002). This was not the case for Jia Zhangke thanks to a better infrastructure of the domestic Chinese film industry. For this reason, Steve Rose (2002) criticised Jia for seeking international recognition returning to accusations of duplicity at Jia's employment of vacuous formal strategies and appearances on the film festival circuit.

Film histories and cultural histories have become intertwined under the semantic umbrella of Mainland Chinese cinema in British film cultures in the years since 1954, curated as a cinema exclusively bound to social commentaries or portrayals of an historical Chineseness, of which Jia and Lou were understood to offer neither. The opposite is true for Hong Kong's productions where, from the *kung fu* craze and Hong Kong's invisibility through a general East Asian character, to the explicitly culture-free consumption of 1980s and 1990s action cinema, “Hong Kong cinema” has long been curated as a space dislocated from politics and specific cultural moments. While earlier on this had been limiting for Hong Kong productions, by the time of Wong Kar-wai and the specific auteurist brand he offered, these cultural characteristics satisfied the appetites for universal traits wished for in the middlebrow. We must not forget that this particular vacuity has always been specifically rooted in the Hong Kong cultural context and we can see how Wong's vacuous auteur style is disliked when removed from the Hong Kong setting.

Set in America, *My Blueberry Nights* is Wong's only English-language feature film at the time of writing. It stars Jude Law, Norah Jones and Natalie Portman, and tells the story of Elizabeth, a recently heartbroken young woman who meets a host of other attractive, misguided young folk on a road trip across the country. *My Blueberry Nights* trades with the same themes of “melancholy romance” that Wong has dealt with across his Hong Kong output but Wong’s vacuity and the *mélange* of cultural allusions that brought *In the Mood for Love* praise garnered here the opposite. Writing for *Sight and Sound*, Michael Brooke's (2008, 74) “biggest problem” with the film was “that the narrative is so vaporous it barely exists” and he bemoaned Norah Jones as a “wispy shadow of Maggie Cheung” (who was already something of a spectral figure in *In the Mood for Love*). In *The Guardian*, Xan Brooke's (2007) impressions of the film from its first screening at the Cannes film festival are particularly illuminating:

My Blueberry Nights is full of such false notes, such lost-in-translation moments that might conceivably have worked in a Hong Kong setting but fall flat on the road to California. True to form, Wong's curtain raiser is beautiful to look at and unabashedly romantic. But it is also vapid and ephemeral, trading in a kind of karaoke Americana that bounces us from cafe to bar to truck stop for the simple reason that they are there to be bounced between

Again, “vapid and ephemeral” become pejorative and the *mélange* of cultural allusions in an American context is read as somehow inaccurate, not rooted in reality, and detrimental to the overall product. Brooke's acknowledgement that these themes might have worked in a Hong Kong setting confirms that this particular brand of vacuity is unusually, and exclusively, bound to that location: that the vision of “Hong Kong” carried by British critics is one that lends validity to a style of filmmaking based primarily on the empty encouragement of personal recollections and desires. In this brief comparison we can see that in British film cultures the universal possibilities of contemporary auteurism continue to be informed by cultural contexts and the specific histories of regional Chinese cinemas. Audiences are asked to partake in a specific kind of *cultural consumption* which continues a particularly parochial mode of circulating international film.

The legacy of Chinese cinema's circulation across the 20th century continues to influence the contemporary moment. The practice of “staging” authorship, noted by

Elsaesser as a defining characteristic of the cinematic auteur in the contemporary marketplace, is confirmed here as a mediation between filmmakers themselves and the groups of international critics, distributors and exhibitors that receive their films and define the valuable strands among them. This chapter has highlighted the extent to which the processes focused on throughout this thesis are not necessarily ones of misreading or inaccuracy on the part of British cultural commentators but are rather mutually constitutive through their interactions with (and negotiations of) international changes in film production and direction. Preferences in Britain for intertextuality and universally relevant themes, and the pedagogical implications therein, do not become fashionable through an objective and detached decision on the part of critics and writers in Britain, but are instead the result of a negotiation between such preferences and the types of films being made available through international streams of distribution and exhibition. It is vital to remember, though, that this mediation process continues to clash with, or be informed by, assumptions at a wider social, cultural and political level about the locations and nations from which these films are being made. While these concerns may be less restrictive than they were in earlier decades, they continue to have a commanding effect on the consumption and definition of a valuable Chinese cinema in Britain up to the time of writing.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to utilise a new methodological framework with which to achieve a set of research objectives that could not be met through a focus on discrete areas of film circulation as they had previously been studied. These objectives were: to map the circulation of Chinese-language films in British film cultures to understand how Chinese cinema is discursively formulated across the UK; to investigate the impact of this circulation on processes of film programming and selection; and, to foreground and analyse the extent to which perceptions of Chineseness intersect with these otherwise film-specific processes. I have satisfied these goals through an historical survey of five key moments in Chinese cinema's presence in the UK, identifying and analysing the tastemakers and cultural intermediaries responsible for the circulation of Chinese-language films at each time. Maintaining the middlebrow as the thread pulled throughout developments of the 60 years between 1954 and 2014, I have worked to paint a picture of cultural conflict across numerous challenges from oppositional circulation networks. Highlighting new publishing spaces, developments in film studies, and specialist "subcultures", I have used this comparative framework to analyse shared assumptions and deconstruct the taken-for-grantedness of Britain's cultural spaces.

Analysis of these five moments has confirmed the starting hypothesis that processes which have previously been understood as film specific are shown, when considered as part of a cultural whole, to depend significantly on perceptions of Chinese politics, cultures, arts and histories. In particular, this methodology reveals the previously unknown extent to which these cultural assumptions are themselves dependent on the same domestic skirmishes and pursuits of "cultural capital" as evaluative preferences to cinema more generally. The form of these intersections has remained largely consistent since 1954. For the middlebrow, this has been a limiting interest in perceptions of Mainland China as the source of a preferred and "authentic" Chineseness. This developed out of the post-war context where critics framed their reviews around portrayals of China to ensure their necessity in British middlebrow culture's ecosystem and has been maintained through various skirmishes of distinction ever since. The cultural preference for Mainland China has been extraordinarily commanding in the discourse curated by Britain's gatekeepers of foreign-language film,

yet, while persistent, the specific invocations of Mainland Chineseness vary depending the contexts in which they appear.

There have been divisions within the middlebrow itself between ideas of China as a contemporary, socialist community whose “better” films documented the political atmosphere of the day but also as the source of a more ethereal, “traditional” Chineseness that may never have existed which had the potential to be realised formally only by talented (but hypothetical) film artists. These are inconsistent displays of favouritism that indicate the complexity of British film cultures and Chinese cinema therein but they are deconstructed in this thesis and shown to be situated within identifiable, researchable, and specific ongoing conflicts for legitimacy. For example, it is true that the middlebrow's apathy toward the *kung fu* craze was partly because of the absence of both their preferred Chinese “essence” and accomplished formal characteristics. However, the truth of this apathy is only fully realised when considered as part of those intersections of taste with understandings of class, economic, and cultural capital. The marketplace success of martial arts films in the 1970s or action films in the 1990s diluted the importance of the middlebrow as gatekeepers of foreign-language film and helped define these cinematic “movements” as part of an undesirable culture of filmmaking and consumption.

Acknowledgement of this conflict shows that the intersectional prioritisation of Mainland China in the middlebrow has worked to affect the canon of Chinese cinema as it is understood in Britain. It affords China's Fifth Generation directors and the presentation of Chineseness their films espouse a plethora of regional and nationwide opportunities across the UK and a diverse collection of influential supporters. Simultaneously, it has allowed less space for Hong Kong and Taiwan productions, including the Hong Kong New Wave or New Taiwan Cinema. This thesis showed that a number of regional productions, inside and outside of these movements, have failed to find traction in British film cultures as part of the canonical history of Chinese cinema in the country, despite their presence at film festivals in the UK. These existing domestic cultures in Britain, therefore, play significantly into how robustly individual components of Chinese cinema are canonised and supported, but I have foregrounded how these cultures are themselves dependent on, and shaped by, available films. It is shown that the overwhelming availability of Hong Kong productions during the *kung fu* craze and

their theatrical success shaped the practices of keen-eyed entrepreneurs who capitalised on the cultural moment to popularise modes of reading films that required fans to spend money. Similar processes occurred in the home media space and the magazine cultures around the turn of the 21st century through the work of evangelical fans of Hong Kong action cinema. In both these cases, activities of the middlebrow transformed in ways that curated these films as worthless so that its key tastemakers could retain their necessity in a different ecosystem of “better” films.

I have shown through my focus on a diverse collection of cultural authorities responsible for circulating Chinese-language film that, while important, these processes are not willed by individual tastemakers dislocated from international, technological, and institutional developments. Following changes in the 1980s and the widening availability of films through home media platforms, television, and new international events, explicit preferences expressed across Britain's diverse cultural intermediaries have shifted. Thanks to this new access to a significant body of work, characteristics of film analysis and circulation no longer needed to rest explicitly on films' compatibilities with cultural assumptions. Whether this relates to commercial auteurs in the middlebrow, or newly available genre productions for fans of *kung fu* and action cinema, this new ubiquity opened up modes of consumption of generic characteristics, stars, and production trends not previously possible that have appeared to deflect the need to engage with Chinese histories and cultures in discursive activities. However, I have shown the legacy of the power of cultural assumptions as they implicitly and structurally permeate apparently universalist activities: whether the gendered space and violent narratives in the circulation of Hong Kong's action cinema, or the parochial modes of consumption suggested in the middlebrow's promotion of films by Chinese auteurs.

Across the variety of its case studies, the methodological framework for this thesis located and deconstructed the notions of value, alluded to by Bourdieu (1984) and Harbord (2002) in the introduction, that have entirely commanded Chinese cinema's presence in British film cultures. Whether this is the value placed on artistic merit according to the standards of the middlebrow, the value placed on “authenticity” in cultural representation and martial arts practice, or the value placed on the performance of auteurism, I have contextualised the domestic structures within British

film cultures that dictate why certain attributes are considered valuable. From the middlebrow's preoccupation with accurate depictions of China as a means of ensuring the necessity of their own knowledge about Chinese regions, to the distributors of Hong Kong action cinema whose preoccupation with action performance is used to sell films deemed invariably "masterpieces", this is only superficially about *what* is considered authentic or "good" in these discrete spaces. It is much more about *why* elements like authenticity and artistic accomplishment are desired. In other words, it is about what, or who, it serves to define a film as valuable according to their category of choice. This is a question of how the framework of authenticity, to use one example, works to satisfy the ancillary goals of Britain's tastemakers and cultural intermediaries; how their projects are furthered by claiming a film to satisfy or counter notions of authenticity, whether this supports one's cultural legitimacy and necessity within a cultural ecosystem, class distinction and social standing, or financial security.

Contextualising value as this thesis has done answers Rey Chow's (2000: 7) calls to understand what it means for those in international spaces "to expound so freely on the Chinese tradition, culture, language, history, women and so forth in the postcolonial age". What it means in the British context is an assurance of posterity for a certain kind of Chinese cinema in Britain. This can be seen in the swathes of Chinese-language films whose British histories unpacked in this thesis have been almost forgotten from contemporary colloquial and academic discourse. There are specific examples of this, including those martial arts films that played at club venues like the Harlesden Coliseum and the Golden Harvest Cinema Club in the 1970s of which almost none are recognisable or known today. More generally, these tend to be the films that did not satisfy the middlebrow in their gatekeeping role – whether this means Mainland China's communist cinema of the 1950s, the majority of Hong Kong's martial arts films of the 1970s, or straight-to-video genre productions of the 1990s – and whose supporters in enthusiast circles had no eye for preservation. The thesis is corrective in this regard: democratising our contemporary knowledge, inserting Chinese cinema into the current academic study of film festivals and national cinemas, and providing a platform for past voices in British film cultures whose significance is felt today despite their specific actions being rarely mentioned.

These are publications like *Framework*, whose vital role in the Edinburgh

International Film Festival presented China's Fifth Generation to British audiences for the first time, and tastemakers such as Eastern Heroes, whose subcultural operation gave the world the term “heroic bloodshed” and numerous other conventions in the global appreciation of Hong Kong cinema. In raising these forgotten histories and deconstructing their practices, this thesis recontextualised a number of our contemporary understandings of Chinese cinema in Britain, positioning the origins of key debates and preferences in the contexts they first appeared. Thanks to these discoveries we now have the tools through which to study and understand the dynamic contemporary moment for Chinese cinema in Britain. In the introduction to this thesis I alluded to a collection of noteworthy events and trends in the current moment that I was unable to study due to the lack of an appropriate methodology. These included the numerous releases of Chinese-language films since 2015 in multiplex venues; the proliferation of films available on online streaming platforms; the BFI's Century of Chinese Cinema season; and the delayed release of *The Grandmaster*.

Through my methodological framework we are now able to learn about these various phenomena. For examples, the tension observed between the middlebrow and the marketplace at various moments across Britain's history offers reasons to explain why *The Grandmaster* had such a difficult time in the UK. The film was directed by Wong Kar-wai, released in Chinese regions and around the world at the start of 2013. Despite the popularity of Wong and the role of British tastemakers in his international career, the UK was the last place in the world to host *The Grandmaster* when it did so in December 2014 (IMDb, no date). While a surprising delay for one of the middlebrow's best-loved directors, the discoveries of this thesis lay out reasons for this postponement. *The Grandmaster* is a martial arts narrative that contains a handful of action scenes enveloped in a sprawling narrative akin to Wong's other features discussed in this thesis: it is an auteur's “art cinema” take on a commercial genre. British film culture is not equipped to deal with this kind of hybrid production because of the divisions between art and commerce that have long driven cultural conflict in Britain. *The Grandmaster* does not competently satisfy any notions of value elucidated in this thesis so it ultimately had no space to fit in.

As such, when the film finally was released in 2014, the version that screened in the UK was one heavily edited by American producer Harvey Weinstein to be shorter

and more intelligible to those unfamiliar with film's cultural context (Sandwell, 2013). Continuing the disregard for “authenticity” and anxieties about cultural specificity in hindering a general audience's enjoyment, the distribution decision to choose this edited version shows the extent to which concerns reaching back to the 1950s continue in Britain in 2014. Equally, the edited version incurred apathy from the middlebrow who, offended as one *Sight and Sound* reviewer was at being treated like an “idiot”, used the opportunity to promote the authenticity and auteur credentials of the Wong's original version which the British audience had no access to: the “bottom line” for Vadim Rizov (2015: 75) was that “big-screen viewing will help, but unless you want to experience the thought experiment of watching a Wong film in which every elision and ambiguity has been systematically removed or debased, a Region 0 DVD of the uncut work may be a better choice”.

A more significant event than the release of *The Grandmaster* for the middlebrow was the BFI's 2014 season, “A Century of Chinese Cinema”. The season displayed a large collection of films unlike any similar event in the UK before, giving a platform for many productions that had never screened in the country during the years of scarcity before the millennium. However, this selection was not arbitrary and its presence foregrounds the urgency of the methodological work I have conducted in this thesis. While the event productively showed the heterogeneity of regional Chinese-language film production with the inclusion of Hong Kong and Taiwan films, the framing of the event recreated the limiting discursive practices of the previous century. Films were presented to audiences through the same tastemakers that have steered the direction of Chinese cinema in the middlebrow for 40 years. Tony Rayns, for example, introduced multiple screenings for audiences in London and chaired discussions with directors including Xie Fei, the Fourth Generation filmmaker and in the BFI's book that accompanied the season, Rayns was the only contributor to get multiple articles published (Rayns, 2014a; 2014b).

The curation philosophy of the season worked on the assumption of a unified Chineseness – of cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical “common ground” (Cowan, 2014) – which was strongly weighted in favour of Mainland China. In the same publication for the event that Rayns contributed multiple articles, films from Hong Kong and Taiwan are only given one chapter each. The book, edited by James Bell of

Sight and Sound, relegated “Hong Kong and Taiwan to the margins” (Udden, 2014). It is telling that the one excerpt from the book that *Sight and Sound* chose to republish in a promotional drive for the season was Michael Berry's (2014) revisiting of the Fifth Generation. As concluded across the thesis, the preference for a Mainland Chineseness in the middlebrow and Britain's cultural authorities is cultivated through inextricable links to specific modes of art cinema. Though the season prioritised a Mainland Chinese “essence”, in Rey Chow's words, nowhere to be found were any of the innumerable contemporary productions that supported the Chinese film industry's post-2000 growth. Equally, while Hong Kong's action cinema did form a more significant part of the season than one might expect, these films were in the minority. Instead, the selection contained: films such as *Yellow Earth* and *The Horse Thief* that engage either with Mainland China's recent political history or are carried by an historical Chineseness; films that are the project of internationally renowned auteurs such as Wong Kar-wai and Jia Zhangke, part of cinematic movements consecrated on the festival network; and films that, as Clyde Taylor observed in 1987, could be co-opted to support Euro-American modes of reading film popularised by academia and the middlebrow establishment.

This shows that the preferences in Britain's middlebrow cultural authorities for a specific kind of Chinese cinema have barely changed since the 1980s. Observations of earlier historical moments suggest that, in pushing a certain version of Chinese cinema both in aesthetic and cultural terms, “A Century of Chinese Cinema” will play a key role in shaping what kinds of Chinese-language films will receive distribution and support in the future. It is urgent that we unpack the selection processes of events like this BFI season because this curation is not arbitrary. The whole existence of “A Century of Chinese Cinema” was a political manoeuvre. The season was not a British creation: it was put together by the Toronto International Film Festival where it had screened prior. It was hastily brought to the UK by the BFI as a statement of solidarity with British and Mainland Chinese governments following a trip to China by then British Prime Minister David Cameron who, during his time in Beijing, had promised “a year of business, trade, creative and cultural collaborations between the UK and China” (BFI, 2014b). Working with money allocated directly from the British government, the season is a clear example of politicised programming and a contentious extension of Mainland China's

“soft power” in the international marketplace, used to strengthen political relations between nations. Due to its adoption by key tastemakers and institutions across British film cultures, it is likely that these politicised programming strategies will have a long-lasting effect. Cultural authorities such as Derek Malcolm (2014) promoted the event in regional newspapers; academic institutions including the University of Glasgow shaped a course around the season (Anon, 2015); and at the time of writing, streaming service MUBI hosts a list of all the films shown in the BFI's season, with links to watch the productions if they are available (Castaño, 2014).

Far from relegated to historical observation, the debates covered in this thesis are therefore live and ongoing and we can use the methodological approach employed here to uncover both the reasons for, and implications of, these characteristics of film circulation. Going forward, I am able to apply the findings gleaned from this methodology to those areas of the current moment that I was unable to productively investigate before. This can be an analysis of streaming services like MUBI, but also Netflix and Amazon Instant Video who are reticent to share information about their curation processes. Observing who the distributors are, what the film selection is, how they are picked and framed by these services but also tastemakers in other spaces, will all offer insights into these otherwise avoided areas of research. Equally, this will help clarify reasons for the recent boom in Chinese-language blockbusters at multiplex cinemas around the country. These films are completely invisible to the middlebrow and the majority of Britain's cultural authorities yet they are proving increasingly frequent and financially lucrative for distributors (Gant, 2016). My early understanding here is that distributors are targeting Mainland Chinese students: films chosen for release correspond to those that are most successful in Mainland China; Hong Kong films are played dubbed in Mandarin; and promotion for the films appears to take place only in Chinatowns and on Chinese social media platforms.

These are nascent, anecdotal observations but they show that the methodology I developed in this thesis reframes the dynamic, live, and changing contemporary moment from its previous status as a hindrance for the contemporary researcher into a wealthy resource to be analysed. In this way, this thesis has paved the way for my future research endeavours into Chinese cinema in British film cultures by grounding my knowledge of the specifics of film circulation in Britain within ongoing historical

processes. Although many of the conclusions drawn in this thesis relate specifically to the unique history of Chinese-language films in the UK, the methodological framework used here can be extrapolated by other scholars and applied to any number of cinema's discursive formations. This is a model of how to understand any “national” cinema as it is consecrated within a specific film culture but it could equally be applied to discrete genres or movements. It allows researchers to join together previously discrete analyses of film industries and cultures with all their heterogeneous characteristics therein, to glean new insights into the structures that determine the canon of international cinema and the parameters that command our own academic activities.

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Assault on Precinct 13 (2005: Jean-François Richet)
A Better Tomorrow (1986: John Woo)
The Big Boss (1971: Lo Wei)
The Big Parade (1986: Chen Kaige)
The Black Cannon Incident (1985: Huang Jianxin)
The Black Sheep Affair (1998: Lam Wai-Lun)
Black Cat (1991: Stephen Shin)
Brief Encounter (1945: David Lean)
The Butterfly Murders (1979: Tsui Hark)
La Chinoise (1967: Jean-Luc Godard)
Chung Kuo, China (1972: Michelangelo Antonioni)
Chungking Express (1994: Wong Kar-wai)
Cleopatra Jones (1970: Jack Starrett)
Cold Sweat (1970: Terence Young)
Confessions of a Window Cleaner (1974: Val Guest)
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000: Ang Lee)
Days of Being Wild (1990: Wong Kar-wai)
The Deer Hunter (1978: Michael Cimino)
Deadpool (2016: Tim Miller)
Dragon Dies Hard (1975: Li Kuan-Chang)
The Dragon on Fire (1978: Joseph Kong)
Dumplings (2004: Fruit Chan)
Early Spring in February (1964: Xie Tieli)
Emmanuelle (1974: Just Jaeckin)

Empress Wu Tse-Tien (1963: Li Han-hsiang)
The Enchanting Shadow (1960: Li Han-hsiang)
Enter the Dragon (1974: Robert Clouse)
Eraserhead (1977: David Lynch)
Espirit d'amour (1983: Ringo Lam)
Fallen Angels (1995: Wong Kar-wai)
Farewell My Concubine (1993: Chen Kaige)
Father and Son (1981: Allen Fong)
The Final Programme (1973: Robert Fuest)
Fist of Fury (1972: Lo Wei)
The Forbidden City (1947: Chu Shih-Ling)
The Grandmaster (2013: Wong Kar-wai)
Hap Ki Do (1971: Huang Feng)
Happy Together (1997: Wong Kar-wai)
Her Sentinels Under the Neon Lights (1964: Ge Xin and Wang Ping)
Hero (2002: Zhang Yimou)
Hibiscus Town (1986: Xie Jin)
High Risk (1995: Wong Jing)
The Horse Thief (1986: Tian Zhuangzhuang)
House of Flying Daggers (2004: Zhang Yimou)
I Don't Want to Sleep Alone (2006: Tsai Ming-liang)
In the Mood for Love (2000: Wong Kar-wai)
Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan (1972: Chor Yuen)
Inspector Wears a Skirt (1988: Wellson Chin Sing-Wai)
Ju on: The Grudge (2002: Takashi Shimizu)
The Killer (1972: Chor Yuen)
The Killer (1989: John Woo)
King Boxer (1972: Chang Cheng Ho)
King of Children (1987: Chen Kaige)
The Last Blood (1991: Wong Jing)
Legend of the Mountain (1979: King Hu)
The Legend of Mount Tianyuan (1980: Xie Jin)

Lethal Panther (1991: Godfrey Ho Jeung-Keung)
Lethal Panther 2 (1993: Phillip Ko)
Letter with the Feathers (1954: Shi Hui)
Liang Shan-Po and Chu Ying-Tai (1953: Sang Hu and Huang Sha)
Love Eterne (1963: Li Han Hsiang)
The Magic Paintbrush (1954/55: Jin Xi)
The Magnificent Concubine (1962: Li Han-hsiang)
Man Wanted (1995: Benny Chan and Steve Cheng)
Master of the Flying Guillotine (1975: Wang Yu)
The Mermaid (2016: Stephen Chow)
Mr Vampire (1985: Ricky Lau)
My Blueberry Nights (2007: Wong Kar-wai)
My Lucky Stars (1985: Sammo Hung)
Naked Killer (1992: Clarence Fok Yiu-leung)
New One Armed Swordsman (1971: Chang Cheh)
New Year Sacrifice (1956: Hu Sang)
Oldboy (2003: Park Chan-wook)
Operation Pink Squad (1988: Jeff Lau Chun Wai)
The One Armed Boxer (1971: Wang Yu)
The Outlaw Brothers (1990: Frankie Chan Fan Kei)
Paris, Texas (1984: Wim Wenders)
Pedicab Driver (1989: Sammo Hung)
Platform (2000: Jia Zhangke)
Police Story (1989: Jackie Chan)
The Protector (1985: James Glickenhaus/Jackie Chan)
Rebels of the Neon God (1992: Tsai Ming-liang)
Rich and Famous (1987: Taylor Wong)
Righting Wrongs (1986: Corey Yuen)
Ringu (1998: Hideo Nakata)
Rouge (1988: Stanley Kwan)
Rumble in the Bronx (1995: Stanley Tong)
Sacrificed Youth (1986: Zhang Nuanxin)

Singin' in the Rain (1952: Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen)
Snake in the Monkey's Shadow (1979: Chang Shen)
Spring in a Small Town (1948: Fei Mu)
Spiritual Love (1987: David Lai and Taylor Wong)
A Star is Born (1954: George Cukor)
Still Life (2006: Jia Zhangke)
Stray Dogs (2013: Tsai Ming-liang)
Superfly (1972: Gordon Parks Jr.)
Suzhou River (2000: Lou Ye)
Taipei Story (1985: Edward Yang)
Tang Fu Yu Sheng Nu (1958: Tien Shen)
The Terminator (1984: James Cameron)
A Touch of Zen (1971: King Hu)
Twinkle Twinkle Lucky Stars (1985: Sammo Hung)
Vive L'Amour (1994: Tsai Ming-liang)
Way of the Dragon (1972: Bruce Lee)
The Wayward Cloud (2005: Tsai Ming-liang)
What Time is it There? (2001: Tsai Ming-liang)
The White Haired Girl (1950: Wang Bin)
Why the Crow is Black (1956: Chien Chia-chun)
Winners and Sinners (1983: Sammo Hung)
Xiao Wu (1997: Jia Zhangke)
Yellow Earth (1985: Chen Kaige)
Yes, Madam! (1985: Corey Yuen)
Yi Yi (2000: Edward Yang)
Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain (1983: Tsui Hark)

Appendix One - Chinese-language Films at the Multiplex, 2016

This is a list of the Chinese-language films released into multiplex cinemas across the UK during 2016. This does not include those that played at independent venues, such as *The Assassin* (2015, Hou Hsiao-hsien) and *Behemoth* (2016, Zhao Liang). These are films released by distributors including China Lion Film, Lionsgate and Sony Pictures. The distributors are generally clandestine in their operation and little information exists about their involvement here.

These are all films that played at the Manchester Printworks ODEON cinema and a handful of changing venues nationwide.

Ip Man 3 (2015, Wilson Yip)
Dragon Blade (2015, Daniel Lee)
Detective Chinatown (2015, Chen Sicheng)
From Vegas To Macau 3 (2016, Andrew Lau and Wong Jing)
The Monkey King 2 (2016, Cheang Pou-soi)
The Mermaid (2016, Stephen Chow)
Finding Mr Right 2 (2016, Xue Xiaolu)
The Bounty Hunters (2016, Shin Terra)
Cold War 2 (2016, Longman Leung and Sunny Luk)
Mission Milano (2016, Wong Jing)
L.O.R.D: Legend of Ravaging Dynasties (2016, Guo Jingming)
Call of Heroes (2016, Benny Chan)
My Best Friend's Wedding (2016, Chen Feihong)
League of Gods (2016, Koan Hui and Vernie Yeung)
So Young 2: Never Gone (2016, Xin Yiwu)
I Belonged to You (2016, Zhang Yibai)
S Storm (2016, David Lam)
Time Raiders (2016, Daniel Lee)
Line Walker (2016, Jazz Boon)

Appendix Two: Chinese-language Films in *Monthly Film Bulletin*

This is a list of all Chinese-language films reviewed in *Monthly Film Bulletin*. While this does not give a comprehensive view of all the films that saw a theatrical release in the UK during these times, *Monthly Film Bulletin* did endeavour to publish reviews of every film that received a press-screening. General trends can be observed from this survey. The *kung fu* craze of the mid-1970s (discussed in Chapter Two) and its move away from theatrical releases toward home media around 1983 is visible, as is the slow increase in films following the success of China's Fifth Generation (discussed in Chapter Three) as the 1980s progressed.

The format of these films follows that of the publication for reference. This is:

Year of Release

Title (date; region of origin; director)

All details are included as they appear in the publication, including contemporary spellings. "NG" is used when no director is given. Where these were not feature-length productions, "short film" is included.

1942

- *China Fights* (1942; China; T.M. Yuan)

1953

- *The Forbidden City* (1947; China; Chu Shih-Ling)

1955

- *Liang Shan-Po and Chu Ying-Tai* (1953; China; Sang Hu and Huang Sha)

1958

- *The Letter with the Feathers* (1953; China; Shih Hui)

1959

- *New Year Sacrifice*

1961

- Short film: *An Underground Palace*
- Short film: *Training Players for Chinese Classical Theatre* (1958; China; Ching Chao-ping, Chen Cheng-chu)
- Short film: *Early Spring* (1958; China; NG)

1962

- Short film: *Monkeys Galore*
- Short film: *Conquering the World's Highest Peak*

1963

- Short film: *A Feast of Fun* (1959; China; Hsieh Tien)

1966

- Short film: *Flower of Chinese Sport*

1968

- Short film: *The Magic Stone*

1971

- *Red Detachment of Women* (1970; China; NG)
- *Red Flag Canal* (1970; China; NG)
- *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy* (1970; China; NG)

1972

- *King Boxer* (1971; Hong Kong; Chang Cheng Ho)

1973

- *Valley of the Fangs* (1971; Hong Kong; Chang Cheng Ho)
- *The East is Red* (1965; China; NG)
- *One Armed Boxer* (1972; Hong Kong; Wang Yu)
- *Dragon Swamp* (1971; Hong Kong; Lo Wei)
- *The Last Woman of Shang* (1964; Hong Kong; Yueh Feng)
- *Fist of Fury* (1972; Hong Kong; Lo Wei)
- *The New One-Armed Swordsman* (1972; Hong Kong; Chang Cheh)
- *The Killer* (1973; Hong Kong; Chu Yeun)
- *Wang Yu – Ten Fingers of Steel* (1973; Hong Kong; Kien Lun)
- *The Chinese Connection* (1973; Hong Kong; Chang Cheh)
- *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (1973; Hong Kong; Chu Yuan)
- *The Big Boss* (1971; Hong Kong; Lo Wei)
- *The Magnificent Chivalry* (1973; Hong Kong; Leen So)
- *Enter the Dragon* (1973; Hong Kong; Robert Clouse)

1974

- *Beach of the War Gods* (1972; Hong Kong; Wang Yu)
- *Hap Ki Do* (1972; Hong Kong; Huang Feng)
- *The Fists of Vengeance* (1972; Hong Kong; Chen Hung Man)
- *Kung Fu – Girl Fighter* (1971; Hong Kong; Hou Chin)
- *The Bloody Fists* (1972; Hong Kong; Ng Sze Yuen)
- *Death Kick* (1973; Hong Kong; Ho Meng Hua)
- *The Deaf and Mute Heroine* (1970; Hong Kong; Wu Ma)
- *Temple of the Dragon* (1973; Hong Kong; Chang Cheh)
- *The Kung Fu Girl* (1971; Hong Kong; Lo Wei)
- *The Skyhawk* (1973; Hong Kong; Chang Cheng Ho)

1975

- *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973; Hong Kong; King Hu)
- *The Peking Man* (1973; Taiwan; Chang Mei Chun)

- *Return of the Dragon* (1972; Hong Kong; Shen Chiang)
- *Deadly China Doll* (1971; Hong Kong; Huang Feng)
- *The Dragon's Teeth* (1973; Hong Kong; Chang Cheh)
- *Kung Fu Fighting* (1972; Hong Kong; Doo Kwang Gee)
- *Fist of Justice* (no date; Hong Kong; Kao Li)
- *Fist of Shaolin* (1973; Hong Kong; Li Hsun)
- *The Hong Kong Connection* (1974; Hong Kong; John Lomar (Lo Ma))
- *Dragons of Death* (1972; Hong Kong; Jimmy L. Pascal (Chu Huan Jan))
- *The Godfather of Hong Kong* (1974; Hong Kong; Shu Mei Chin)
- *Shanghai Lil* (1973; Hong Kong; Chu-Ko Ching Yun and Yang Ching Chen)
- *Match of Dragon and Tiger* (1973; Hong Kong; Yu Kuan Jen)
- *Enter the 7 Virgins* (1974; Hong Kong/West Germany; Kuei Chih-Hung and Ersnt Hofbauer)
- *Legend of Bruce Lee* (1975; Hong Kong; Lin Ping)
- *Shao Lin Kung Fu* (1973; Hong Kong; Kuo Nan-Hung)
- *Five Fingers of Death* (1974; Hong Kong; Chang Cheh)

1976

- *Acupuncture Anaesthesia* (1972; China; NG)
- *Execution in Autumn* (1971; Hong Kong; Li Hsing)
- *The Invincible Iron Palm* (1971; Hong Kong; Chu Mu)
- *Iron Ox The Tiger's Killer* (1973; Hong Kong; Tieh Han)
- *Kung Fu Gangbusters* (1973; Hong Kong; John Sun (Sun Chia-Wen))
- *A Touch of Zen* (1969; Taiwan; King Hu)
- *Stoner* (1974; Hong Kong; Huang Feng)
- *Death Blow* (1973; Hong Kong; Teddy Yip)
- *Super Dragon* (1973; Hong Kong; Tommy Lu Chun)
- *Blood Reincarnation* (1974; Hong Kong; Ting Shan-Hsi)
- *Seaman Number Seven (Wang Yu's 7 Magnificent Fights)* (1972; Hong Kong; Lo Wei)

1977

- *Dragon Gate Inn* (1966; Taiwan; King Hu)
- *Exit the Dragon Enter the Tiger* (1976; Hong Kong; Lee Tse Nam)
- *The Magic Lotus Lantern* (1959; China; Yeh Ming)
- *The Opium War (Lin Tse-Hu)*

1978

- *800 Heroes* (1975; Taiwan; Ting Shan-Hsi)
- *Sky Wars* (no date; Hong Kong/South Korea; Ko Yung Nam)
- *Magic Curse* (no date; Hong Kong; Tommy Loo-Chun and To Man Po)
- *Bruce Lee's Game of Death* (1978; Hong Kong; Robert Clouse)
- *Master of the Flying Guillotine* (1975; Hong Kong; Wang Yu)
- *Fist of Fury Part 2* (1976; Hong Kong; Li Tso-Nan)

1979

- *The Black Dragon Revenges the Death of Bruce Lee* (1975; Hong Kong; Tommy Loo Chung (Lu Chun))
- *Stranger from Canton* (1972; Hong Kong; Yeo Ban-Yee (Yang Man-Yi))
- *Bruce Lee: The Man The Myth* (1976; Hong Kong; Wu Szu-Yuan)
- *Dragon Dies Hard* (Chin-Se Tai-Yang) (1976)

1980

- *Confessions of a Concubine* (1975; Hong Kong; Yang Chun)
- *Snake in the Monkey's Shadow* (1979; Hong Kong; Chang Shen)
- *The Dragon Lives* (1976; Hong Kong; Wang Hsing Lei)
- *The Clones of Bruce Lee* (no date; Hong Kong; Joseph Kong (Chiang Hung))
- *A Fistful of Dragons* (1977; Hong Kong; Iksan Lahardi)

1981

- *Two Stage Sisters* (1964; China; Xie Jin)
- *Tough Guy* (no date; Hong Kong; Pao Hsueh-Li)
- *Big Boss 2* (no date; Hong Kong; Cheng Kay Ying)

1982

- *The Valiant Ones* (1974; Hong Kong; King Hu)
- *Duel of the Tough* (no date; Hong Kong; Godfrey Ho)
- *The Dragon on Fire* (no date; Hong Kong; Joseph Kong)
- *The Dynamite Trio* (no date; Hong Kong; Danny Cheung)
- *Rivals of the Dragon* (no date; Hong Kong; Steve Tsui)

1983

- *Enter the King of Kung Fu* (no date; Hong Kong; John Liu)
- *Father and Son* (1981; Hong Kong; Allen Fong Yuk-Ping)

1984

- *The Butterfly Murders* (1979; Hong Kong; Tsui Hark)
- *Dynasty* (1977; Taiwan/Hong Kong; Zhang Meijun)

1986

- *Yellow Earth* (1984; China; Chen Kaige)

1987

- *The Black Cannon Incident* (1985; China/West Germany; Huang Jianxin)
- *Armour of God* (1986; Hong Kong; Jackie Chan)
- *Horse Thief* (1986; China; Tian Zhaungzuang)
- *A Summer at Grandpa's* (1984; Taiwan; Hou Hsiao Hsien)
- *Police Story* (1985; Hong Kong; Jackie Chan)

1988

- *Sacrificed Youth* (1985; China; Zhang Nuanxin)
- *Hibiscus Town* (1986; China; Xie Jin)
- *King of the Children* (1987; China; Chen Kaige)
- *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (1985; Taiwan; Hou Hsiao Hsien)
- *Swan Song* (1985; China; Zhang Zeming)
- *The Big Parade* (1986; China; Chen Kaige)
- *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987; Hong Kong; Ching Siu-Tung)
- *Red Sorghum* (1987; China; Zhang Yimou)

1989

- *The Terroriser* (1986; Taiwan/Hong Kong; Edward Yang)
- *Daughter of the Nile* (1987; Taiwan; Hou Hsiao Hsien)
- *Rouge* (1987; Hong Kong; Stanley Kwan)

1990

- *A City of Sadness* (1989; Taiwan; Hou Hsiao Hsien)
- *Dust in the Wind* (1986; Taiwan; Hou Hsiao Hsien)
- *The Killer* (1989; Hong Kong; John Woo)

Appendix Three: 1970s Kung-Fu Magazine Scans

Items for sale, including "Bruce Lee Type Kung Fu Slippers" in *Kung Fu Monthly*, Issue

23



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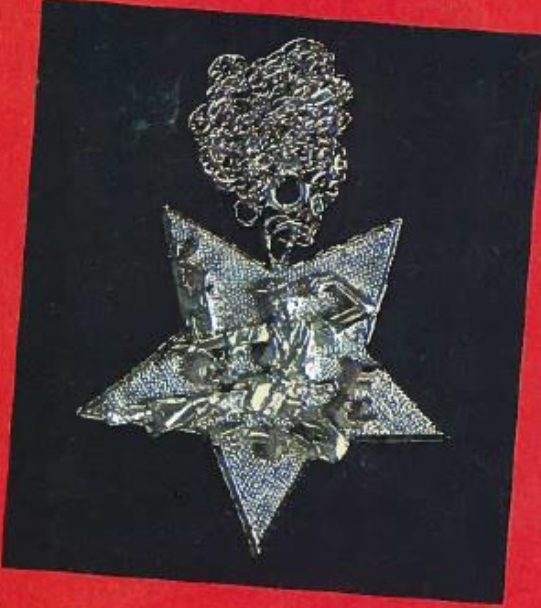
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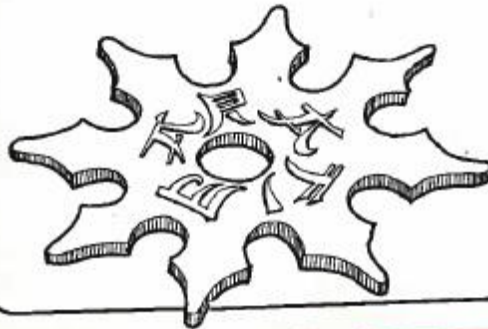
Dragon (1975), an image of the 'Kung Fu Star' (shuriken) and "Bruce Lee's Code"



THE DEN

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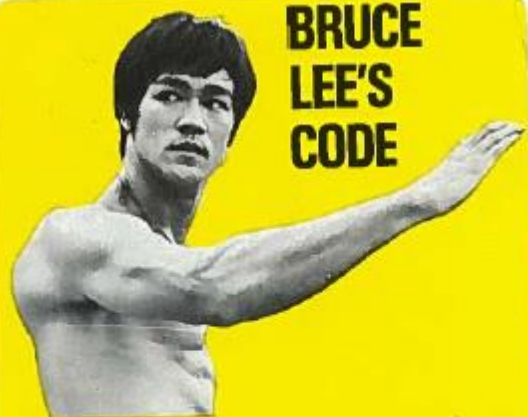
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