

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Diasporic Reading

by Christina Klein

Abstract: This article proposes that Ang Lee's Chinese-language martial arts film, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, be seen as a work of diasporic cinema. The essay explores how the film's material production and its aesthetic form have been shaped by Lee's ties to his Chinese homeland, to other members of the Chinese diaspora, and to the Hollywood films of his American homeland.

Ang Lee's martial arts melodrama *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was a worldwide cinematic phenomenon in 2000–2001. Made with a relatively modest budget of \$15 million, it earned more than \$200 million worldwide,¹ outperforming all other Chinese-language films in Asia as an aggregate territory and prompting the jaded critics at the Cannes Film Festival to give it a standing ovation. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* achieved extraordinary success in the United States, where it earned \$128 million in the theaters, plus another \$112 million in video and DVD rentals and sales.² It made the rare transition out of the art houses and into the multiplexes, and in so doing became the most commercially successful foreign-language film in U.S. history and the first Chinese-language film to find a mass American audience.³ Critically acclaimed as well as popular, the film set records at the Academy Awards, where it was the first foreign-language film to be nominated in ten categories and the first Asian-language film to be nominated for best picture.⁴ The press heralded it as a breakthrough film that might succeed in prying open the lucrative American market to Asian film industries.⁵

In addition to its critical and financial success, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is significant for the way it displays the simultaneously localizing and globalizing tendencies of mass culture today.⁶ In its visual and narrative content, *Crouching Tiger* comes across as a resolutely “local” film—that is, a product of China's unique history, culture, values, and aesthetic traditions. Based on a pre–World War II Chinese novel by Wang Du Lu that has never been translated into English and set in the *jiang hu* underworld of bandits and heroes during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), the film tells the story of two renowned martial artists (Chow Yun-Fat and Michelle Yeoh) who must retrieve a sword stolen by a rebellious young aristocratic woman (Zhang Ziyi). Thematically, the film focuses on the tension between the

Christina Klein is an associate professor of literature at MIT, where she also teaches in the Comparative Media Studies Program. She is the author of *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (University of California Press, 2003) and “Martial Arts and the Globalization of U.S. and Asian Film Industries,” forthcoming in *Comparative American Studies*.

© 2004 by the University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819

characters' Taoist aspiration to follow the "way" and their Confucian sense of obligation to others. Like director Ang Lee, all of the actors are ethnic Chinese and several are major stars in East Asia. The film offers stunning vistas of mainland China—location shooting was done in the Gobi Desert; the Taklamakan Plateau, north of Tibet; the Uigur-speaking city of Urumqi, in the far western part of China; the bamboo forests of Anji, in the South; and the imperial city of Chengde, in the North⁷—and it brings ancient China vividly to life through sumptuously detailed period costumes and decor. The film matches this visual texture aurally by using Mandarin for all the dialogue. The conspicuous Chineseness at the narrative, thematic, visual, and aural levels locates the film within a cinematic renaissance—exemplified by the work of directors such as Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou in China, John Woo and Wong Kar-wai in Hong Kong, and Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien in Taiwan—that since the mid-1980s has called the world's attention to the diverse local film industries of greater China.

Crouching Tiger's production, in contrast, was astoundingly global. The prominent contributions of American James Schamus, Ang Lee's longtime creative and business partner, immediately complicate any simple notion of the film's Chineseness. In his capacity as screenwriter, Schamus cowrote the script with Taiwanese writer Wang Hui Ling in a process that entailed translating drafts back and forth between English and Chinese; Schamus also wrote the lyrics for the film's Academy Award-nominated theme song.⁸

In his capacity as executive producer, Schamus put together a financing scheme that, in keeping with current Hollywood practice, was complexly global. Much of the money came from various divisions of Sony, the Tokyo-based media conglomerate: production funds were provided by Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, Sony's Hong Kong branch that is dedicated to making local-language films for the Asian market; Sony Pictures Classics in New York bought the U.S. distribution rights; Columbia Pictures in Hollywood picked up rights for Latin America and several Asian territories; and Sony Classical financed the soundtrack. Schamus's own Good Machine International contributed its portion of financing by selling rights to a bevy of European distributors. The actual cash for the film came from a bank in Paris, while a completion bond company in Los Angeles insured the production.⁹

Production of *Crouching Tiger* involved five different companies in five countries. Ang Lee, who lives in New York, produced the film through United China Vision, a Taiwanese company he created with his fellow producers Bill Kong of Edko Films in Hong Kong and Hsu Li Kong of Zoom Hunt Productions in Taiwan; Lee's company also created a subsidiary in the British Virgin Islands and a limited-liability corporation in New York. Two mainland Chinese companies were also brought in: the privately owned Asia Union Film and Entertainment and the state-run China Film Co-Production Corporation. (Chinese regulations require all foreign films shot and distributed in China to partner up with a state-owned company.) Once the location and Beijing studio shooting were finished, the soundtrack was recorded in Shanghai, postproduction looping took place in Hong Kong, and the film was edited in New York.¹⁰

The simultaneously global and local nature of *Crouching Tiger* has led many viewers to grapple with the film's national-cultural identity. Some tried to wish this complexity away by identifying the film in singular terms as a Chinese, Hong Kong, Taiwanese, or even Hollywood movie. The more analytical responses unfolded along a continuum whose poles are marked by two popular models for thinking about cultural globalization. At one end stands Salman Rushdie who, writing on the op-ed page of the *New York Times*, viewed the film as an act of local resistance against the global domination of Hollywood. Rushdie celebrated *Crouching Tiger* as an unambiguously "foreign" "art" film and an exemplar of a revitalized "world cinema" that could potentially break America's stranglehold on the world's movie screens. Affiliating Ang Lee with Akira Kurosawa, Satyajit Ray, Federico Fellini, and Ingmar Bergman—directors who had "pried Hollywood's fingers off the cinema's throat for a few years"—Rushdie praised *Crouching Tiger* as a descendant of the self-consciously national European and Asian cinemas that arose after World War II and that he saw as resisting an earlier stage of U.S. cultural domination.¹¹ Many of the Western reviewers who gave the film high marks shared Rushdie's views.

At the other end of the continuum stands Derek Elley, who reviews Asian films for the Hollywood trade journal *Variety* and who emphasized *Crouching Tiger's* global identity. Reading the film via a model of cultural imperialism, he dismissed it as "cleverly packaged chop suey . . . designed primarily to appeal to a general Western clientele." Elley condemned *Crouching Tiger* as culturally inauthentic, asserting that its Asianness had been fatally corrupted by its absorption of Western cinematic conventions, and he damned Ang Lee as a "cultural chameleon"—an "international filmmaker who just happens to have been born and raised in Taiwan"—who did not belong in the canon of Asian filmmakers. In Elley's eyes, far from loosening America's grip on the world's screens, *Crouching Tiger* embodied Hollywood's colonization of the martial arts genre and Hollywood's power to render invisible the genuinely Chinese artistry of earlier directors such as King Hu of Hong Kong.¹² This charge of inauthenticity was echoed by genre purists who complained about the actors' lack of real martial arts skill, academics who questioned the historical accuracy of the costumes and setting, and native-Mandarin speakers who winced at some of the actors' pronunciation and the "Dan Quayle-like spelling misdemeanours" in the subtitles.¹³

Both Rushdie's and Elley's critiques make for interesting reading, but neither offers an adequate model for understanding Lee's film, and by extension contemporary cinema in general. Each assumes that movies can still be understood in terms of national singularity, as more or less culturally pure artifacts that take shape within individual countries and film industries. Rushdie assumes that one can still draw a clear line demarcating Hollywood from "world cinema," while Elley works furiously to shore up a hard-and-fast distinction between "Asian" and "Western" cinematic styles. Both men see the local and the global in oppositional terms, as impulses that can be neatly delineated and that exist in a relationship of domination and resistance that necessarily implies authenticity. Lee's film demands, instead, a more transnational critical perspective, one that enables us to see how the

local and the global are inextricably bound up with one another and that can illuminate what Aihwa Ong has called “the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space” that characterizes our current moment.¹⁴

Crouching Tiger is worth studying precisely because it is embedded within a network of transnational flows—of people, capital, texts, and ideas—that muddy the distinction between the global and the local.¹⁵ The film emerged not out of any neatly bounded national or cultural space called “China,” “Taiwan,” “Hong Kong,” “Hollywood,” or even “the East” or “the West” but from the boundary-crossing processes of war, migration, capitalist exchange, aesthetic appropriations, and memory.

We can best see *Crouching Tiger* from a global perspective if we think of Lee as a member of the Chinese diaspora and consider the film a work of diasporic filmmaking. A diaspora is a transnational ethnoscape created when a people disperses, willingly or unwillingly, from an original homeland and resettles in other locations.¹⁶ Out of this historical experience of uprooting and resettlement often emerge works of culture that have a distinctive diasporic shape. *Crouching Tiger* can be profitably read as such a work: it is materially grounded in multiple geographic locations, has multiple aesthetic affiliations, and fails to map neatly onto a single nation-state or cultural tradition. Awareness of this multiplicity enables us to step beyond the sterile binaries of domination and resistance, corruption and authenticity, that structure Rushdie’s and Elley’s mechanistically predictable moral-aesthetic judgments. In reading *Crouching Tiger* as a diasporic film, I want to focus on how its material production and its aesthetic form have been shaped by Ang Lee’s embeddedness within a triangulated set of transnational relationships: Ang Lee’s ties to his Chinese homeland, to other members of the Chinese diaspora, and to the culture of his American hostland.¹⁷

The Axis of Origin and Return. Ang Lee has thought carefully about the cultural dynamics of globalization. In *Ride with the Devil* (1999), the film he made immediately before *Crouching Tiger*, Lee used the genre of the American western to explore the nineteenth-century origins of contemporary globalization. Lee felt drawn to this American Civil War story, which focuses on three southerners who are radically transformed by their encounter with the North, because it captured something about his own experience growing up in 1950s Taiwan, “where older people always complained that kids are becoming Americanized—they don’t follow tradition and so we are losing our culture.” In making the film, he “realized the American Civil War was, in a way, where it all started. It was where the Yankees won not only territory but, in a sense, a victory for a whole way of life and of thinking.” The Civil War marked for Lee the moment when Americans began to export their values of individualism, democracy, and capitalism.¹⁸

It is tempting to read *Crouching Tiger* as a response to the issues raised in *Ride with the Devil*, as an authentic expression of Chinese particularity that stands in contrast to a homogenizing Yankee American global. In interviews, Lee has described *Crouching Tiger* as a “Chinese film” and has cast it in cultural-nationalist terms.¹⁹ Dipping into the language of cultural essentialism, he has described the film’s emotional subtext—the anguish of lovers who cannot express and act on their

feelings for each other—as “the great Chinese theme” of literature, painting, and other art forms, something that “is just in our blood.”²⁰ Lee here presents his film as a deeply rooted Chinese endeavor, one that not only resonates with other works of Chinese art but that emanates from the depths of the Chinese soul.

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

Lee has described *Crouching Tiger* as a personal “homecoming of sorts.”²¹ His qualifying “of sorts,” however, needs to be taken seriously; China is not Lee’s “home” in any simple way, and *Crouching Tiger* did not emerge organically out of a mainland Chinese locale. Rather, Lee is working with a fundamentally diasporic notion of homecoming.

Crouching Tiger is perhaps best understood as a symbolic act of diasporic return. James Clifford describes diasporas, and by implication diasporic cultures, as being oriented along “an axis of origin and return.”²² The existence of a homeland, perhaps more than any other characteristic, shapes diasporic cultures. Unlike a conventional home, a diasporic homeland is defined by its absence rather than its presence; it is an emotionally resonant home from which one has been separated by time, physical distance, and the experience of loss. Despite this separation, the members of a diaspora remain bound to the homeland through material, symbolic, or psychological ties. A collective memory of the homeland—sometimes invented—suffuses diasporic cultures and fuels a central diasporic desire: the desire for return. The nature of this return can take various forms, from the physical to the millenarian to the symbolic. However that desire manifests itself, it imparts a linear quality to a diasporic culture by directing it toward a singular point of reference that is physically elsewhere and temporally in the past.²³

The American press invariably refers to Lee as “Taiwanese,” but this identification masks a complex history and identity. Lee is better understood as a member of the Chinese diaspora, a world-spanning ethnoscape that does not map easily onto the political boundaries of any single nation-state or the cultural boundaries of any region or civilization. The Chinese diaspora, which originated in the fifteenth century and expanded alongside European imperialism and the coolie trade, today encompasses thirty million people living on virtually every continent.²⁴

Lee’s family joined the diaspora relatively late. His parents fled mainland China during the civil war of the late 1940s, the only members of their respective families to escape execution by Mao’s forces. Like many anticommunists, they settled in Taiwan. There, the refugees quickly became permanent settlers who dominated

the local Taiwanese population, imposing their Nationalist political party and their mainland culture onto a people who, after fifty years of Japanese colonialism, already possessed a complexly hybrid culture.²⁵

Lee was born in Taiwan in 1954 and grew up in an exclusive society that simultaneously looked back to its mainland origins and outward to the culture of its Cold War patron, the United States. After failing his college entrance exams and studying acting for a few years, Lee left Taiwan for the United States in 1978, thus participating in a second diasporic remove that sent many Taiwanese to America to pursue higher education. He earned a bachelor's degree in theater at the University of Illinois and a master's in film production from New York University. He married a microbiologist who had been a fellow graduate student at Illinois, had two children, moved to the suburbs of New York, and began making movies. By the time he made *Crouching Tiger*, Lee had lived in the United States for almost as long as he had lived in Taiwan.²⁶

In some ways, Lee seems a typical immigrant who could be considered an ethnic American filmmaker. He has evaded these categories, however, by retaining significant legal, financial, and cultural ties to Taiwan. He made his first three movies—*Pushing Hands* (1992), *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994)—with financing from Taiwan's largest film studio; he shot *Eat Drink Man Woman* in Taiwan; and all three films feature Taiwanese actors and are partially or wholly in Mandarin. In addition, Lee has retained his Taiwanese citizenship.²⁷

Lee's status as a member of the diaspora complicates both his own sense of Chineseness and any simple cultural-national identification of *Crouching Tiger* as a Chinese movie. More important, his status challenges simple notions of cultural authenticity. Growing up in Taiwan, Lee had no direct experience of mainland China, and as an adult he made only one five-day visit there. Not until he spent five grueling months filming *Crouching Tiger* in China did he have his first sustained encounter with the mainland. Lee's sense of cultural and historical connection to the mainland, while powerful as he was growing up, was complicated by the ideological chasm that separated Taiwan from communist China during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. His sense of connection was always mediated by distance, time, other people, and the mass media. "I . . . found out about the old China," Lee has said, "from my parents, my education, and those kung fu movies."²⁸ When he finally went to the mainland to film *Crouching Tiger*, Lee "knew nothing about the real China. I had this image in my mind, from movies. . . . So I projected these images as my China, the China in my head."²⁹

This indirect experience of China—a simultaneous intimacy with and alienation from China—infuses the diaspora's cultural nationalism. In speaking of his fellow overseas Chinese, Lee has said that "in some ways, we're all looking for that old cultural, historical, abstract China—the big dream of China that probably never existed."³⁰ It is this collectively held and abstracted "dream of China," filtered through secondhand memories and fantasy, that Lee hoped to put on screen.

Lee sought to render this "dream" China cinematically by evoking a particular moment in the evolution of the martial arts genre: Hong Kong's Mandarin-language *wu xia* films of the mid-1960s and 1970s.³¹ (The Mandarin term *wu xia*

means “chivalrous or valorous combat” and is generally applied to martial arts films that feature armed combat, typically swordplay; the Cantonese term *kung fu*, which is more familiar to Americans, did not come into common usage until the 1970s and generally refers to weaponless fighting.)³² The *wu xia* tale, featuring a wandering swordsman hero who rights injustices, was popular by the ninth century and had become a staple of Chinese fiction by the seventeenth century. The *wu xia* tale was incorporated into Peking operas in the nineteenth century, emerged soon after as a staple of mass print culture in the form of serialized novels and pulp romances, and was taken up by the nascent film industry in the 1920s, which emphasized its supernatural aspects and developed it as a core genre.³³

In the mid-1960s, a “new style” of *wu xia* film took shape when directors such as King Hu and Chang Cheh began making movies that were more realistic, more emotionally intense, and more gracefully choreographed than their predecessors. Immensely popular, these “new-style” *wu xia* films dominated Hong Kong’s Mandarin-language cinema through the mid-1970s. Lee grew up reading *wu xia* fiction and watching *wu xia* films and he echoes their visual style and emotional tone in *Crouching Tiger*. This aesthetic return to a body of texts beloved from childhood constitutes a major part of Lee’s symbolic return.

Significantly, Hong Kong’s Mandarin-language films are themselves best understood in diasporic terms. Filmmaking in Hong Kong has historically been organized into two parallel industries, one making films in the mainland Mandarin language and the other in the local Cantonese dialect. The Mandarin-language industry took root when directors from Shanghai, which was the early home of Chinese filmmaking, fled the mainland in the late 1930s and 1940s, driven out by the war with Japan, the civil war, and Mao’s victory. Carrying their northern culture with them, these mainlanders settled in Hong Kong and by the 1950s had turned that southern city into the center of Chinese film production. Exiles rather than immigrants, these filmmakers refused to embrace the local culture and instead made films suffused with a longing for their lost home: they rejected Hong Kong’s local Cantonese dialect, clinging to their northern Mandarin instead; they bypassed the social problem and common-man stories popular with Hong Kong’s less educated population in favor of more prestigious stories drawn from Chinese literature and history; and they rejected Hong Kong as a setting, choosing instead locations that suggested Shanghai, Beijing, and the landscapes of the mainland.³⁴

Hong Kong’s Mandarin-language industry was also driven by the demands of its audience, which included many overseas Chinese living in Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and the West. These viewers wanted to see movies that evoked northern culture, which they felt was the most representative of the China they had left behind. The Mandarin-language cinema cultivated these viewers’ nostalgia, fueled their cultural nationalism, and promoted their sense of connection with each other.³⁵ (Far from being a purely northern Chinese cultural formation, however, Hong Kong’s Mandarin-language film industry produced a hybrid cinema shaped by regional and global cultural flows. The executives at the Shaw Brothers studio, for example, regularly screened the latest Japanese, American, and European movies and treated them as a reservoir of cinematic and narrative ideas to be drawn from at will.)³⁶

Hong Kong's Mandarin film industry declined as the northern-identified directors aged, and in the mid-1970s it was overtaken by a Cantonese-language cinema produced by directors with a defiantly local Hong Kong sensibility. The Cantonese era was symbolically ushered in by Bruce Lee's extremely popular trilogy of weaponless kung fu masterpieces: *Fists of Fury* (1971), *The Chinese Connection* (1972), and *Return of the Dragon* (1972).³⁷ The decline of the Mandarin cinema and the dominance of the Cantonese cinema was thus marked by a shift in both cinematic sensibility (from exilic to local) and martial arts subgenre (from *wu xia* to kung fu). For Ang Lee, however, the "real traditional Chinese" cinema remained the Mandarin *wu xia* and melodramatic opera films, not the Cantonese kung fu and action films of Bruce Lee, Tsui Hark, and John Woo that have become popular in the West in recent years.³⁸ Lee's decision to make a Mandarin-language *wu xia* movie rather than a kung fu film suggests the centrality of the diasporic sensibility to his artistic vision: *Crouching Tiger* can be seen as the homage of an American-based director to a body of Hong Kong films that expressed their makers' nostalgic longing for a lost Chinese homeland.

Crouching Tiger demands to be seen not as an aesthetic expression of an actually inhabited Chinese "local" culture but instead as a literal and symbolic journey along the diasporic "axis of origin and return." It is better understood as a willed *claiming* of—rather than a simple *expression* of—Chineseness. With this film, Lee sought to reattach himself to a China he had never directly known and to repair some of the ties ruptured by the psychic and material dislocations of diaspora. The location shooting and Mandarin dialogue enabled Lee to "reconfirm and retaste [his] mother tongue, to return to [his] cultural roots," and as such it restored in him a sense of Chinese origins that had become attenuated through his parents' traumatic flight to Taiwan and his own voluntary emigration to America.³⁹

That Lee uses the martial arts film as the vehicle for his return is fundamental to *Crouching Tiger's* diasporic nature. It is Lee's mastery of this quintessentially Chinese genre—not his choice of mainland locations, Qing dynasty setting, or Mandarin dialogue—that constitutes his act of return. Through this generic affiliation, Lee stitches himself into the cultural fabric of his homeland. As a lifelong enthusiast of martial arts movies, Lee hoped that his long-delayed participation in the genre would bestow legitimacy on him as a distinctly Chinese artist: "There's a part of me that feels that unless you make a martial arts film, you are not a real filmmaker."⁴⁰

Lee's choice of genre also helped restore long-strained ties to his family. Lee grew up in a household where there was "no love of art or creativity, not to mention the entertainment business," and where the pressures of Confucian "family duty"—of being the eldest son to a father who had lost all other family—made it "hard to breathe." Lee had the additional misfortune of attending a high school, one of the best in Taiwan, where his father was the principal. When he failed to pass his college entrance exams—an experience that for a member of his generation was "like death"—his relationship with his father became intolerably strained. The success twenty years later of *The Wedding Banquet*, which took the top award at the Berlin film festival and became the highest-grossing film in Taiwanese history, rescued Lee from being a "disgrace" in his father's eyes. But it was not until

he made a martial arts film that Lee was able to connect with his father through his art. "He never said anything about my other films, but he liked this one."⁴¹

Lateral Axes of Affiliation. Diaspora, unlike exile or immigration, is a collective experience, a dispersal of a people rather than simply of individuals. The collectivity maintains its sense of peoplehood through networks of travel, communication, economic exchange, and cultural interaction that crisscross national borders. Such "lateral axes" of affiliation, as Clifford calls them, offset and pull against the "axis of origin and return" by grounding one's sense of identity in the dispersed community that exists in the present, rather than in the homeland that exists primarily in memory.⁴² These lateral axes are eminently visible in *Crouching Tiger* and they make clear the extent to which the film functioned for Lee not just as an individual act of symbolic return but as a collective project. Beyond simply putting the diasporic "dream of China" on screen, *Crouching Tiger* served as what Lee has called a "bridge" to other members of the diaspora.⁴³

The screen credits for *Crouching Tiger* are as a virtual who's who of creative talent within the diaspora. Lee drew his actors from across greater China: Zhang Ziyi is from the mainland, Chang Chen from Taiwan, Chow Yun-Fat from Hong Kong, and Michelle Yeoh originally from Malaysia. Chow and Yeoh are major stars of the Hong Kong cinema who have also made films in the West. To date, Chow has made four Hollywood movies since he left Hong Kong for the United States in the mid-1990s—*The Replacement Killers* (Antoine Fuqua, 1998), *The Corrupter* (James Foley, 1999), *Anna and the King* (Andy Tennant, 1999), and *Bulletproof Monk* (Paul Hunter, 2003)—while Yeoh starred in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1997). Many members of the crew have also worked in Western culture industries. Martial arts choreographer Yuen Wo-ping, a pillar of the Hong Kong industry, gained international recognition for his work on *The Matrix* (Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, 1999). Academy Award-winning cinematographer Peter Pau was born and raised in Hong Kong, attended high school in the mainland city of Guangzhou, and studied filmmaking in San Francisco; he returned to Hong Kong to start his career, and later went back to California to shoot American films.⁴⁴ Production designer Tim Yip, who also took home an Academy Award, has made movies in Hong Kong and the United States and has worked on Hong Kong–Japanese and French–Taiwanese coproductions.⁴⁵ Mainland-born Tan Dun, who composed the film's Oscar-winning soundtrack, attended Beijing's Central Conservatory before moving to New York to study with a fellow member of the diaspora at Columbia University.⁴⁶ Yo-Yo Ma, who performed the cello solos, was born in Paris and moved to the United States at age four.⁴⁷ Coco Lee, who sang the theme song, was born in Hong Kong, raised in San Francisco, became a pop star in Asia, and is now trying to break into the American market.⁴⁸ Ma Xiao Hui, who played the Chinese erhu, stands out in this list: she was born and still lives on the mainland.⁴⁹ Taken together, these artists map a cultural Chineseness that occupies multiple geographical locations, speaks different languages and dialects, represents different degrees of assimilation into non-Chinese societies, and flows back and forth, with varying ease, across the supposed boundary dividing East and West.

Lee's ability to bring together such a collection of Chinese talent seems to confirm Robin Cohen's thesis about the economic benefits of diasporas in an era of globalization. Cohen argues that diasporas are "disproportionately advantaged" by globalization because their geographical dispersal and transnational networks enable them to make the most of the changes in technology, economics, production, and communication ushered in by globalization.⁵⁰

One can imagine how Lee's diasporic status aided in the film's production. Because he made his first three films with the Central Motion Picture Corporation of Taiwan, Lee had a preexisting relationship with his coproducer Hsu Li Kong that he could draw on; his Chinese ethnicity perhaps gave Lee an edge, despite his Taiwanese citizenship, when he asked permission from the Chinese government to shoot *Crouching Tiger* on the mainland; his ability to speak Mandarin no doubt facilitated his working with the mainland cast and crew; and his desire to put the "dream" of China on screen presumably helped enlist the participation of so many prominent ethnic Chinese artists. At a moment when many globally minded Hollywood producers are looking to hire Asian talent, in the hope of attracting Asian viewers, and to shoot their films in China, where labor is cheap, Lee's diasporic status provided him with advantages that he was able to profitably exploit.⁵¹

Lee's lateral ties of affiliation did much more than guide the film's production, however. They also exerted pressure on the very form and visual style of the film. This can be seen most clearly in the case of martial arts choreographer Yuen Wo-ping. Born in Guangzhou, China, in 1945, Yuen has been a major player in the Hong Kong film industry for more than twenty years. After studying Peking Opera and martial arts with his father as a child, he worked in the Hong Kong film industry in the 1960s as a bit player and stuntman. He began choreographing martial arts scenes in the early 1970s and directed his first movie, Jackie Chan's breakthrough film, *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, in 1978. By the time he worked on *Crouching Tiger*, Yuen was a widely acknowledged master of the martial arts genre who had made dozens of movies, including some of the genre's best known and most influential works.⁵²

The participation of two very different kinds of auteurs—Lee, a world-recognized maker of art films, and Yuen, a technical master of a popular action genre—invariably led to tensions on the set. Typically, Lee would approach Yuen with a vision for a fight scene that he had dreamed of since childhood, only to have Yuen reject it out of hand as physically impossible. According to Chow Yun-Fat, "Ang would say he didn't want to shoot things Wo-ping's way because it was an Ang Lee movie. But his ideas couldn't be worked out. Finally, he'd go to Wo-ping and say, 'Master, I'm wrong. Let's do it your way.'"⁵³ (Lee occasionally succeeded in getting his vision on screen, most notably in the encounter between Chow Yun-Fat and Zhang Ziyi atop the bamboo trees, a scene much praised by Western critics.)

As an accomplished director as well as a fight choreographer, Yuen did much more than simply arrange the actors' dynamic moves and airborne flights. His method entailed choreographing the action *and* the cinematography of each shot, seeing how they worked together, and then composing the next shot so that it



Figure 1. Jen (Zhang Ziyi) and Master Li (Chow Yun-fat) airborne in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Sony Pictures Classics, 2000). Courtesy of Photofest.

flowed seamlessly out of the previous one. This meant that Yuen was essentially editing each fight scene in the camera. According to Lee, who was very impressed with Yuen's technique, "It's all put together in this assembly fashion so if I don't like something it's very hard to take it out. . . . If you break these sequences the narrative doesn't work. . . . You can give it to any editor, it'll come out the same way."⁵⁴ This method obviously gave Yuen extraordinary control over what appeared on screen.

Crouching Tiger puts Yuen's aesthetic sensibilities on display to such an extent that it can be read, in auteurist terms, as a Yuen Wo-ping film almost as much as an Ang Lee movie. Yuen's fame derives in part from the creativity and variety of the martial arts moves that he choreographs. In addition, he is an expert in the use of space; his films stand out for the diverse ways in which his fighters interact with the physical spaces they inhabit and for the ways Yuen uses cinematography and editing to shape viewers' perceptions of those spaces. In a Yuen Wo-ping film, the fighters define a space through their movements, mapping its vertical and horizontal dimensions and marking its boundaries; sometimes these spaces constrain the fighters' movements in creative ways, and other times the fighters radically redefine the spaces they inhabit.

Yuen often stages a fight within an unobstructed, self-contained space that suggests a kind of performance arena. He does this masterfully in an early scene in

Tai Chi Master (1993), in which two young Buddhist monks-in-training take on dozens of their heavily armed colleagues in a monastery hall, and also in the dojo and subway fight scenes in *The Matrix*. In *Crouching Tiger*, the culminating encounter between Michelle Yeoh's Shu Lien and Zhang Ziyi's Jen Yu takes place in a courtyard of Shu Lien's compound—an open space whose rectilinear shape is reinforced by the worn stone floor and the vertically placed boards of the unfinished wooden walls that enclose it. This simple staging immediately establishes the contest as one between two equally skilled opponents and puts the visual emphasis on the movements of the fighters—and on their weapons.

Yuen delights in the creative use of props, a skill honed in his work with Jackie Chan, who never missed an opportunity to turn a prop into a comic device, and ostentatiously displayed in the famous tofu scene in *Wing Chun* (1994), in which Michelle Yeoh and her opponent fight each other above, below, and around a large square of bean curd that remains unscathed throughout. Much of the dynamic in Shu Lien and Jen Yu's fight revolves around the vast array of weapons—including three swords, a spear, a pair of hooked swords, a heavy cudgel, and a staff—that Shu Lien must call upon in her effort to defeat the younger woman, who is armed with only the stolen Green Destiny sword.

Most of the fight between Shu Lien and Jen takes place in the center of the courtyard, thereby enhancing the staged quality, while forays to the edges map the space's boundaries. Yuen shapes the viewer's perception of this space by varying the location of the camera. We see much of the fight in tightly framed shots that draw us into the swirling mass of arms, legs, faces, and weaponry, creating a sense of physical and emotional immediacy. Yuen periodically pulls the camera back to medium and long shots that display the fighters' bodies *in situ* as they pause to strike dramatic poses and as they fill up the courtyard space with their elegant leaps, twists, and back flips. Yuen radically alters our spatial perception when he positions the camera directly above the fighters, looking down, which has the effect—à la Busby Berkeley—of abstracting their contest into a flat, two-dimensional pattern of light-colored movements against a dark background. Throughout the fight, the boundaries of the space remain inviolable. Although Yeoh smashes the stone flooring with a heavy weapon, she cannot break through to anything on the other side. Only at the end of the fight does Yuen open up the space by allowing Jen to jump up and out of the courtyard, revealing an opening that previously occupied the camera.

As the end of this scene suggests, Yuen likes to explore the vertical dimensions of space. Yuen frequently propels his fighters through the air via unseen trampolines or wires, as in *Once upon a Time in China II* (Tsui Hark, 1992) when Huang Feihong (Jet Li) takes on the head of the White Lotus sect. At other times, the fighters seem to elevate themselves using props or walls, as in the fight set amid flaming poles that concludes Yuen's *Iron Monkey* (1993). One can see this fascination with verticality in *Crouching Tiger* in the scene in which Jen takes on a dozen male combatants in a crowded two-story tavern. Yuen choreographs the fight around a vertical space created by a central atrium, a staircase, and the surrounding open balcony. The men troop up the staircase en masse to confront Jen, then crash

down through the balcony railing and out the windows one by one as she defeats them; the patrons rush down the staircase to escape the mayhem; and Jen, displaying her superior skills, effortlessly back-flips down the staircase and twirls straight up through the atrium.

The tavern scene also displays Yuen's penchant for using a fight to transform a physical space by having the fighters penetrate the boundaries—walls, floors, and ceilings—that define it. (We can see this in *Wing Chun* when Michelle Yeoh's heroine, armed with two short swords, maneuvers the spear-armed villain into a small building whose confined space gives her an advantage; this advantage disappears when the bandit bursts out of the building through the thatched roof, thus destroying the physical constraints on his movements.) Unlike the open courtyard space in Shu Lien's compound, the tavern space is complexly obstructed with pillars, tables, chairs, banisters, walls, and people. Over the course of the fight, this space is redefined as tables are smashed, walls are crashed through, and banisters collapse. Virtually all the physical boundaries that demarcate spaces in the tavern and that separate it from the street outside are penetrated during the course of the fight. Thus, this fight does not so much take place *within* a physical space as the physical space becomes an element that the fighters incorporate into their fight and that they transform in the process.⁵⁵

One of the ways that scholars and critics evaluate a text is by mapping it in relation to other texts through a network of affiliations or ruptures. Rushdie, for instance, affiliates *Crouching Tiger* with the postwar auteurs of European and Asian art cinema, while Elley disaffiliates the film from the martial arts masterpieces of King Hu. By paying attention to the diasporic aspects of the film, particularly the lateral axes that bind *Crouching Tiger* to other films of the diaspora, we can map a different set of affiliations. Yuen's prominent contributions, for example, ground the film in the traditions of the Hong Kong action cinema, both materially and stylistically, although Lee has never worked in that industry. The contributions of Tan Dun and Yo-Yo Ma, in turn, invite us to read the film in relation to a body of contemporary high-culture texts, such as Tan Dun's "Marco Polo" opera and Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project, that explore cultural globalization from a musical perspective and that like *Crouching Tiger* seek to move beyond the domination-resistance model.⁵⁶

Selective Accommodation. Diasporic culture expresses yet a third relationship: the set of ties that connect a diasporic subject to his or her hostland. In contrast to immigrant discourse, which emphasizes assimilation, and exilic discourse, which emphasizes separatism, diasporic discourse emphasizes what Clifford calls a process of "selective accommodation" through which a member of a diaspora engages with and partially integrates into the economic, political, social, and cultural life of the host country in which he or she resides. This complex bond to the hostland pulls against both the ties to the homeland and to the diasporic community, thus orienting diasporic culture along yet a third axis. The "here" matters as much as the "there," and the ability to understand the "Other" is as valued as the sense of attachment to an aboriginal "self." This process of selective accommodation undermines

notions of purity and authenticity, insofar as it always entails cross-cultural dialogue and creolization to one degree or another. This “entanglement” with the hostland, as Clifford calls it, makes clear that works of diasporic culture are shaped not only by the experience of loss but also by the opening up of new avenues for creativity, exchange, and self-invention.⁵⁷

Lee’s selective accommodation to the United States has made him a director with a distinctly cosmopolitan sensibility. Lee rejects an ethnic model of filmmaking whereby he would focus primarily on his own experiences and those of his ethnic brethren: “I started out with three personal films. But what you know about your neighborhood can be very limiting, I think. That’s why I wouldn’t make ten films like that.”⁵⁸ After making his “Father Knows Best” trilogy, about Taiwanese and Taiwanese Americans, Lee moved out of the “neighborhood”: *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) detailed the marriage prospects of young women in late-eighteenth-century England, *The Ice Storm* (1997) explored family dynamics in 1970s suburban Connecticut, and *Ride with the Devil* (1999) probed the relationship among an unmarried white mother, a German immigrant, and a black slave during the American Civil War. These films suggest Lee’s sustained engagement with the narratives, genres, and conventions of American and, more broadly, Western culture. With these films, Lee became what Clifford might call a traveling filmmaker, one whose movies enact an imaginative travel through countries, languages, accents, time periods, and consciousnesses not his own.⁵⁹ In Lee, one can see how the experience of diaspora can produce a high level of cultural sensitivity, an ability to read across cultural boundaries and to project oneself compassionately into the experiences of others. That experience also expands the notion of what constitutes one’s “own” culture. Lee has lived half his life in the United States and studied British theater and American film, so his culture at this point may be as much American as Chinese.

In *Crouching Tiger*, Lee displays a selective accommodation to, and a creative entanglement with, the conventions of Hollywood cinema. Lee has described this film as an attempt to merge what he saw as Western and Chinese styles of filmmaking: “*Sense and Sensibility* with martial arts.” Lee saw the Chinese element as the Lego pieces of the martial arts genre—the characters, the narrative, the setting, the action—while the Western element consisted of putting these pieces together in a way that produced a fully developed narrative and psychologically complex characters.⁶⁰

In the eyes of Lee, Schamus, and many others, the martial arts genre has traditionally been plagued by a particular flaw: the lack of integration between the narrative and the displays of action. Thus, the fight scenes, while highly sophisticated in their displays of physical skill and cinematic presentation, function largely as spectacles divorced from the narrative. Rather than growing logically out of the story line, the fight scenes tend to bring the narrative to a halt and address the viewer in a presentational mode: they invite the viewer to appreciate the virtuoso fighting for itself, rather than as an expression of theme or character. The martial arts film also privileges this spectacle at the expense of the narrative, a tendency exacerbated by the seat-of-the-pants mode of production in post-studio system

Hong Kong. Directors devoted most of their budgets to bankable stars, often shot their films without a complete script, and spent most of their rehearsal and shooting time on the fight scenes, leaving the narrative scenes to be shot quickly with whatever time and money was left over. While there have been notable exceptions—including Tsui Hark's *Once upon a Time in China* (1991), Jackie Chan's *Drunken Master II* (1994), and John Woo's and King Hu's best work—the Hong Kong industry has tended to produce visually stunning action films with two-dimensional characters and thin, sometimes incoherent plots that serve mainly to link the fight scenes.⁶¹

With *Crouching Tiger*, Lee sought to integrate narrative and spectacle. To do so, he turned to one of the most distinctively American film genres: the Hollywood musical. Many observers of martial arts film have compared them to musicals, most often by noting the performers' physical skill, their graceful movements, and the precise choreography. The fundamentally rhythmic quality of most martial arts scenes—the balance between action and repose, the dialogic quality of the fight, the careful use of sound, the dynamic camerawork and editing—does make the typical scene in a Hong Kong action movie look less like a Hollywood brawl and more like a dance. Although the fight scenes in *Crouching Tiger* certainly evince these dancelike qualities, Lee looked to the musical genre for something more; he saw in the musical a solution to the structural problems of the martial arts film.⁶²

The Hollywood musical long ago confronted the problem of how to integrate the spectacle of song and dance into a compelling narrative.⁶³ As the musical took shape on Broadway in the nineteenth century and as a film genre in the late 1920s, individual musicals tended to be nonintegrated: the numbers were more or less free-standing moments of spectacular song and dance that had only limited relevance to the lives of the characters. The integrated musical first appeared on Broadway in 1927, when Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II intertwined narrative and numbers in *Show Boat*, and it took shape in Hollywood in the 1930s with the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers cycle of films at RKO. The musical numbers still served as the high points and emotional centers of the film, but instead of interrupting the narrative flow, they worked to advance the story, develop the characters, and express the themes. With *Crouching Tiger*, Lee wanted to do for the martial arts film what *Show Boat* had done for the musical; he wanted to transform the genre by creating a truly integrated martial arts movie.

In *Crouching Tiger*, Lee rebalanced the equation of narrative and spectacle found in most martial arts films. Taking his cue from the integrated musical, he subordinated the martial arts scenes to the demands of the story, rather than allowing them to overwhelm it. In most Hong Kong films, the first fight scene comes right away and the others follow in rapid succession. In *Crouching Tiger*, in contrast, the first fight scene takes place about fifteen minutes into the film. By delaying it for so long, Lee gives himself time to establish the diegetic world of Qing dynasty China, to set up the violent back story of the Green Destiny sword, and to introduce the long-simmering emotional tensions between his main characters. This generically innovative withholding of action signals to the viewer that narrative and character are important. Lee also slows down the pace of the film overall.

He spaces the fight scenes widely apart, allows the plot to emerge in a leisurely cinematic fashion instead of through hurried dialogue scenes, and develops themes that invite the viewer's sustained contemplation.

As part of this rebalancing, *Crouching Tiger* establishes a clear distinction between the narrative scenes and the fight scenes. The fights exist as clearly bounded moments nestled within, yet set apart from, the larger narrative. Because of this distinction, the movie must ease the viewer out of the narrative and into each fight—it has to give the viewer cues that this shift is about to take place. This transition is marked in various ways. Sometimes it is marked spatially, by presenting the viewer with a kind of stage space in which one might expect a fight to occur, as in the scene in which Shu Lien and Jen Yu face off in the courtyard; at other times, a transition is marked by a change in costume and setting, as in the scene in which Jen, dressed like a man, appears at the tavern, a locale that the genre has established as a privileged one for a fight.

The first fight scene, in which Shu Lien chases Jen across the nighttime rooftops of Beijing, offers several cues to the transition. One is the visual introduction of something that does not fit comfortably in the narrative world. The scene begins with a long shot of the city in which we can see a tiny figure skimming across the rooftops. A moment later, Jen climbs in through a window by hanging upside down from the roof. These are the film's first ruptures with the conventions of cinematic realism.

Lee pairs these visual cues with pacing cues, as when the night guard pauses as he detects Jen's presence on the roof behind him, and with rhythmic cues: the nondiegetic music on the soundtrack heightens in intensity and Jen's body movements become more stylized as she creeps through the room. These cues are restrained, but they set up the fight and carry us into it as it erupts: the music gets louder and more dramatic, the physical movements become more forceful and rhythmic, and the sense of the extraordinary increases as the characters defy gravity. These transitional cues serve a dual function: they mark the border between narrative and spectacle, and they ease the viewer across it.

Why, one might ask, does the viewer need to be eased through these transitions? Because, like a musical number, the fight scenes take place in a different world from that of the narrative: when a fight begins, the characters enter a different reality. In the world of an integrated musical number, people spontaneously break out into song and dance. In *Crouching Tiger's* world of martial arts fights, physical laws do not apply: people can climb up walls, fly through the air, and move from place to place instantaneously. The social rules of the narrative world do not fully apply either: in a fight scene, Jen can enact the personal freedom she desires, escape the strictures of her sex by disguising herself as a man, and proclaim her refusal to be bound by the rules of her family and class. In this sense, the fight scenes, like musical numbers, represent a kind of fantasy or utopia—a purified world that exists beneath polite society and beyond the reach of its regulation. The coexistence of these two worlds, with their distinct social and physical laws, creates a conflict that animates *Crouching Tiger* as a whole and gives depth to the main characters who cross between them.

As much as the narrative and the fight scenes are distinguished from each other, however, they are also tightly integrated. It is in this way that the film is most innovative and that Lee builds on Yuen Wo-ping's contributions. Like a romantic waltz in a musical, the fights communicate visually what it is difficult for the characters to say verbally. The fights express characters' feelings and desires, externalize their inner lives, and give physical shape to their relationships. "In other movies," Lee told an interviewer, "flying is an effect. But here it is part of the storytelling."⁶⁴

While *Crouching Tiger* is not the first martial arts film to use fight scenes to flesh out characters and themes, it does so in a remarkably sustained fashion. Jen and Lo's vigorous fight in the desert communicates their mutual sexual attraction, as well as their shared social defiance; the dreamy encounter atop the bamboo trees, in which the camera assumes Li Mu Bai's point of view and gazes down at Jen's languidly reclining body, suggests a troubling erotic dimension that extends beyond what a master should feel for a disciple; the tavern scene enacts Jen's self-liberation from the confines of her class and gender roles. This expressive quality consistently trumps the violence in the fight scenes, most of which do not involve the serious injury of the participants.

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

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

Lee was not the first director of a martial arts film to feel the pull of the Hollywood musical. Inspired both by Hollywood and the Shanghai nightclub scene of the 1930s, Hong Kong's Mandarin-language studios began producing musicals in the 1940s. The musical quickly became the industry's most popular genre, until it was displaced in the mid-1960s by the "new-style" *wu xia* film and then the kung fu film



Figure 2. Shu Lien (Michelle Yeoh) and Jen (Zhang Ziyi) in one of the many choreographed fight numbers in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Sony Pictures Classics, 2000). Courtesy of Photofest.

of the 1970s. The shift from musicals to martial arts was gradual, however, with the musical serving as an ancestor to the martial arts film rather than its antithesis; the rhythmic quality of the modern martial arts movie derives in part from the influence of the musical genre that preceded it, as well as from its roots in the Peking opera. The two genres even came together in the occasional martial arts musical, such as *The Singing Thief* (Cheh Chang, 1969).⁶⁵

Lee gestures toward this history of generic evolution and hybridity with the casting of Cheng Peipei as the villainous Jade Fox. Born in Shanghai in 1946, Cheng studied ballet for six years before moving to Hong Kong in 1960, where she made more than twenty films, both martial arts and musicals. She straddled the divide between the two genres, starring in *Come Drink with Me*, King Hu's 1965 *wu xia* film that ushered in the "new style," and in *Hong Kong Nocturne* (Inoue Umetsugu, 1966), one of the industry's last major musicals. With no formal training in martial arts, Cheng used her dance skills to invigorate the martial arts genre, and in 1969 the Hong Kong press crowned her "Queen of the *wu xia pian*." In 1970, Cheng moved to the United States, where she pursued a career as a dance instructor and performer, only to return to Hong Kong and acting in 1973. Like so many of the people who worked on *Crouching Tiger*, Cheng has migrated both within greater China and across the Pacific. Her presence in *Crouching Tiger* serves as part of Lee's evocation of the swordplay films that he loved as a child, and also an acknowledgment of those films' historical bond to the musical.⁶⁶

Conclusion. Lee assumed that *Crouching Tiger* would find its primary audience in the Chinese diaspora. Although his earlier films were aimed at the Taiwanese middle class and Western art-house viewers, Lee expected his martial arts film to be embraced most enthusiastically by East Asians who had a passionate engagement with the genre. He was thus surprised when *Crouching Tiger* turned out to be a bigger hit in the West than in the East. Although the film did well in Asia as a whole, it performed unevenly: it broke box-office records in Singapore, Malaysia, and Taiwan; performed respectably but behind local and Hollywood productions in Hong Kong and Korea; and produced dismal box-office numbers in China. Some Western commentators, such as Elley, have blamed the film's poor showing in Asian markets on the film's supposed cultural inauthenticity.⁶⁷ And indeed, some viewers familiar with the *wu xia* film were unimpressed by the technical quality of the martial arts, while others were alienated by Lee's tinkering with generic conventions. For instance, Law Kar, historian at the Hong Kong Film Archive, characterizes *Crouching Tiger* as a Hollywood film on the basis of its privileging of narrative over spectacle: "In Chinese martial arts films, you don't let the action slow down; you just feed [the audience] more fights. . . . Ang Lee knows how to weave inner drama with outer drama. That may be the Hollywood way."⁶⁸

Another explanation for the film's uneven Asian reception, however, can be found in the processes of globalization itself. The film's poor earnings in mainland China may be explained in part by that country's awkward transition from a state-run to a market economy. In a crude effort to maximize the profits going to the government, Chinese authorities pulled *Crouching Tiger* out of theaters a week after it opened and kept it off the market for three and a half months as they tried to pressure the privately owned Asia Union Film and Entertainment, which held 80 percent of the distribution rights, into giving up some of those rights to the state-run China Film Co-Production Corp., which had shortsightedly signed on for only 20 percent. By the time the conflict was resolved and the film reopened in theaters, millions of pirated DVDs and VCDs had flooded the streets, where they sold for \$2.50 or less. Everyone who wanted to see the movie already had.⁶⁹ According to Schamus, *Crouching Tiger* was also shown on national and provincial television, making it "probably the most watched movie of the year" in China.⁷⁰ *Crouching Tiger* thus may not, in fact, have bombed in China. Rather, its earnings were generated outside the theaters that tally official box-office numbers and its profits went to freelance Chinese entrepreneurs rather than to the film's producers and official distributors.

Crouching Tiger's use of the Mandarin language, so essential to capturing the "dream" of old China, created its own set of difficulties for Asian viewers. For Lee, only Mandarin could reach across the diversity of the Chinese diaspora and evoke the collectively held memories of the mainland. But the linguistic divisions within the diaspora proved more difficult to bridge than he had imagined. Of the four main actors, only Zhang Ziyi spoke fluent Mandarin; Chang Chen spoke with a Taiwanese accent, while Chow Yun-Fat and Michelle Yeoh, having been raised in Cantonese- and English-speaking households respectively, delivered their lines phonetically. While all these actors are ethnically Chinese, as diasporic subjects

they are not all Chinese in the same way. This linguistic unevenness hampered the film's reception among Mandarin speakers worldwide, who sometimes found the actors' accents laughable, and contributed to the perception that *Crouching Tiger* was not a "real" Chinese movie. In focusing on the collective "dream" of China and bringing together a pan-Asian cast, Lee underestimated the depth of the cultural divisions within the diaspora. While globalization may have made it easier for media texts to cross the supposed East-West divide, it has not erased the divisions within the Chinese diaspora itself.

Finally, Lee's version of the "dream" of China had a certain time-bound specificity that put off some younger Asian viewers. Like the idea of home carried by many diasporic people, Lee's notion of China had in some ways ceased to evolve after he left Taiwan in 1978. I am reminded of a scene from Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) in which an Indian woman who left home in the 1970s to live in England reconnects with an old friend who stayed. The Bombay friend, dressed in a hot-pink mini-skirted suit, chastises the sari-wearing Birmingham dweller for clinging to a vision of India that long ago ceased to exist at home. An element of this dynamic is at work in *Crouching Tiger*; in some ways, it is a martial arts film dressed in a sari when other Chinese movies have long ago started to wear mini-skirts.

Younger diasporic viewers, raised on the fast-paced Cantonese-language films of the 1980s and 1990s, did not necessarily share Lee's view that the Mandarin films of the 1960s and early 1970s represented the "real" Chinese cinema. Rather than reading *Crouching Tiger* as evoking tradition, they sometimes read it as simply old-fashioned: one young Hong Kong viewer, complaining about the film's slow pace, described the experience of watching it as "a bit like listening to grandma telling stories."⁷¹ This comment points to an evolution in the definition of Chineseness within the diaspora. For Lee's immediately postwar generation, only recently separated from the mainland by the communist revolution, the cultural ties to the mainland were of primary importance; for the younger generation, born and raised on the other side of what used to be called the bamboo curtain, their ties to the local culture—in this case, Hong Kong—carry greater weight as part of a more broadly defined sense of Chineseness. In bypassing the cinematic conventions of Hong Kong's recent Cantonese cinema, Lee eschewed a set of cultural markers that would have identified the film as a work of contemporary Chinese filmmaking in the eyes of some younger viewers.

Crouching Tiger stands as an exemplary instance of transnational cinema. In contrast to the "world cinema" that Rushdie invokes and the "authentic" Asian cinema that Elley pines for, transnational films tend to muddy the distinction between Hollywood and "foreign" cinema. The production and consumption of these films take place on a multinational rather than a national scale, and the aesthetic affiliations they make cross multiple cultural boundaries. Thus, the national-cultural identity of these films is surprisingly fluid; it changes depending on whether one looks at studio ownership, sources of financing, production locale, the ethnic or legal identity of the cast and crew, audiences, narrative and cinematic style, or thematic concerns. The emergence of this cinema makes it

vitality important to develop critical tools that enable us to read films from a transnational perspective. The idea of diasporic cinema oriented along multiple axes of affiliation is one such tool.

Notes

1. *Variety*, http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=filmsearch_exact&dept=Film&movieID=1261).
2. "2001 Year-End Report, Market Research," *Videobusiness*, http://www.videobusiness.com/yer2001_top_sellers_overall.asp and http://www.videobusiness.com/yer2001_top_renters_overall.asp.
3. Stephen Teo, "'We Kicked Jackie Chan's Ass!' An Interview with James Schamus," *Senses of Cinema*, www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/13/schamus.html.
4. *Crouching Tiger* took home Oscars for best foreign-language film, cinematography, art direction, and original musical score. It was also nominated for best picture, director, costume, editing, song, and screenplay based on previously published material.
5. On *Crouching Tiger's* effect on the American film market, see Ramin Zahed, "Foreign Lingo Pix: When It Rains, It Pours," *Variety*, December 16, 2001, <http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=awardcentral2002&content=jump&nav=news&jump=article&articleid=VR1117857382&categoryid=1174&cs=1&query=ramin+and+zahed&display=ramin+zahed>.
6. See Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," in Anthony D. King, ed., *Culture, Globalization, and the World System* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 41–68.
7. "A Conversation with Ang Lee and James Schamus," press release, Magic Lantern Group, www.magiclanternpr.com/films/crouching.html.
8. James Schamus, "The Polyglot Task of Writing the Global Film," *New York Times*, November 5, 2000, 2A.
9. Ibid.; Claudia Eller, "Company Town; The Biz; Funding for 'Crouching Tiger' a Work of Art," *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 2000, C9; and Reed Martin, "Studios Bank on Overseas Box Office," *USA Today*, December 13, 2000, D6.
10. Henry Chu, "'Crouching Tiger' Can't Hide from Bad Reviews in China," *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 2001, A1; "A Conversation with Ang Lee and James Schamus"; and Philip Kemp, "Stealth and Duty," *Sight and Sound*, December 2000, http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/2000_12/stealth_duty.html.
11. Salman Rushdie, "Can Hollywood See the Tiger?" *New York Times*, March 9, 2001, A19.
12. Derek Elley, "Asia to 'Tiger': Kung-Fooey," *Variety*, February 7, 2001, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117793240?categoryid=1019&cs=1&query=kung%2Dfooey&display=kung%2Dfooey>.
13. Chu, "'Crouching Tiger' Can't Hide from Bad Reviews"; Jaime Ee, "Good on You, Ang Lee," *Business Times of Singapore*, February 16, 2001, EL2; Pauline Chen, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," *Cineaste* 26, no. 4 (fall 2001): 71; and Stephen Teo, "Love and Swords: The Dialectics of Martial Arts Romance," *Senses of Cinema*, www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/11/crouching.html. Historians debated the historical accuracy of the film on the H-World electronic discussion list, <http://www.h-net.org/~world/>, during February 2001 ("I shudder to think of it used as historical teaching material," Ralph Crozier, University of Victoria, February 23, 2001; "It's great fun to watch, even if it isn't 'authentic,'" Peter Perdue, MIT, February 15, 2001).

14. Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 4. For an example of the domination-resistance model, see Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Times Books, 1995); for a rebuttal of the cultural imperialism thesis, see John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
15. On globalization as a series of transnational flows, see the essay "Disjuncture and Difference," in Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27–47.
16. The term "ethnoscape" is from *ibid.*
17. On theories of diaspora and diasporic culture, see Kachig Tololyan, "The Nation-State and Its Others," *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (spring 1991): 3–7; William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (spring 1991): 83–99; Kachig Tololyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," *Diaspora* 5, no. 1 (spring 1996): 3–36; William Safran, "Comparing Diasporas: A Review Essay," *Diaspora* 8, no. 3 (winter 1999): 255–91; James Clifford, "Diasporas," in *Routes: Travel and Transculturation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 244–77; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Vijay Mishra, "The Diasporic Imaginary," *Textual Practice* 10, no. 1 (spring 1996): 421–47; Gerard Chaliand and Jean-Pierre Rageau, *The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas* (New York: Penguin, 1995); and John Durham Peters, "Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora: The Stakes of Mobility in the Western Canon," in Hamid Naficy, ed., *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 17–41. For a different model of diasporic cinema than the one I propose here, see Naficy, "Between Rocks and Hard Places: The Interstitial Mode of Production in Exilic Cinema," in *Home, Exile, Homeland*, 125–47, and Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Diasporic and Exilic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
18. Ang Lee, "Foreword," in James Schamus, *Ride with the Devil* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999), ix.
19. Quoted in Brook Larmer, "A Director's China Dream," *Newsweek*, Pacific ed., July 17, 2000, 60.
20. Quoted in Rick Lyman, "Crouching Memory, Hidden Heart," *New York Times*, March 9, 2001, B27.
21. Quoted in Winnie Chung, "A Roots Trip with a Kick," *Asiaweek*, July 21, 2000, 36.
22. Clifford, "Diasporas," 269.
23. Tololyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s)," 15.
24. On the Chinese diaspora, see Lynn Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: A History of the Chinese Diaspora* (New York: Kodansha International, 1990); Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nolini, eds., *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*; Stuart Cunningham and John Sinclair, eds., *Floating Lives: The Media and Asian Diasporas* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1991); and Ien Ang, "Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm," in Rey Chow, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 281–300.
25. Oren Moverman, "The Angle on Ang Lee," *Interview*, September 1997, 64–68; Chris Berry, "Taiwanese Melodrama Returns with a Twist in *The Wedding Banquet*," *Cinemaya* 21 (autumn 1993): 52–54; and Murray A. Rubinstein, ed., *Taiwan: A New History* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1999).

26. Jennifer Chiu, "Ang Lee," *Free China Journal*, February 26, 1993, www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/7-av/anglee/al_1.htm; Richard Natale, "Helmer Adds Eastern Touch to Western World," *Variety*, August 26, 1999, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117755085?categoryid=13&cs=1&query=helmer+and+adds+and+eastern&display=helmer+adds+eastern>; Ann Hornaday, "A Directors Trip from Salad Days to Banquet," *New York Times*, August 1, 1993, sec. 2.
27. Jim Henry, "Ang Lee," in Helen Zia and Susan B. Gall, eds., *Notable Asian Americans* (New York: Gale Research, 1995), 180–81; Chiu, "Ang Lee"; and "President Chen Meets with Ang Lee and Lee's Father," press release, Office of the President of the Republic of China, April 24, 2001, www.president.gov.tw/php-bin/docset/showenews.php4?_section=5&_rid=586.
28. Quoted in Larmer, "A Director's China Dream."
29. Quoted in Lyman, "Crouching Memory, Hidden Heart."
30. Quoted in Larmer, "A Director's China Dream."
31. James Schamus, interview with the author, November 16, 2001.
32. Lau Shing-Hon, "Introduction," *The Fourth Hong Kong International Film Festival: A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1980), 3.
33. This capsule history of the martial arts film is drawn from David Bordwell, "Hong Kong Martial Arts Cinema," in Ang Lee et al., eds., *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Portrait of the Ang Lee Film* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2000), 14–17. More complete histories can be found in *The Fourth Hong Kong International Film Festival; The Fifth Hong Kong International Film Festival: A Study of the Hong Kong Swordplay Film (1945–1980)* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1981); Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimension* (London: BFI Publishing, 1997); David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); and James J. Y. Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1967).
34. Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 14–15, 26–27, 49, 88.
35. *Ibid.*, 23, 74.
36. For instance, Chang Cheh's *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967), which is one of the landmark "new-style" *wu xia* films, appropriated elements from the British James Bond films, the Zatoichi series of Japanese samurai movies, Chuck Connors's American TV series *Broken Sabre* (1965), and perhaps even John Sturges's *Bad Day at Black Rock*, the 1955 Hollywood western featuring Spencer Tracy as a one-armed World War II veteran who is implausibly adept at judo. "Interview with Qiu Gangjian," in *The Fifth Hong Kong International Film Festival*, 207–10.
37. Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 59, 98–99. These are the American titles for Bruce Lee's movies; outside the United States, the films were released in English as *Fist of Fury*, *The Big Boss*, and *The Way of the Dragon*.
38. Quoted in Lyman, "Crouching Memory, Hidden Heart."
39. Quoted in Chung, "A Roots Trip with a Kick."
40. Quoted in "Getting a Tiger to Pounce," *Asiaweek*, June 2, 2000, 43.
41. Quoted in Moverman, "The Angle on Ang Lee," 68; quoted in Henry, "Ang Lee," 180; quoted in Dave McNary, "Lee's 'Hidden' Talents," *Variety*, December 7, 2000, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117790181?categoryid=13&cs=1&query=lee%27s+and+hidden+and+talents&display=lee%27s+hidden+talents>.
42. Clifford, "Diasporas," 269.
43. Quoted in Larmer, "A Director's China Dream."
44. "Peter Pau, HKSC," International Cinematographer's Guild, www.cameraguild.com/awards/pau/html.

45. "Tim Yip," Internet Movie Database, <http://us.imdb.com>.
 46. James R. Oestreich, "The Sound of New Music Is Often Chinese: A New Contingent of American Composers," *New York Times*, April 1, 2001, 30.
 47. "Yo-Yo Ma," <http://www.yo-yoma.com>.
 48. "Coco Lee," www.cocolee.org.
 49. "Ma Xiao Hui" www.culture.sh.cn/scibchtm/whrs/music_dancing/EMXH.html.
 50. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 175.
 51. Wade Major, "Hollywood's Asian Strategy," *Transpacific*, March 1997, 24–35; Rana Foroohar, "Hurray for Globowood," *Newsweek*, Atlantic ed., May 27, 2002, 51; Reed Martin, "Asian Audience Is Hollywood's Hidden Dragon," *USA Today*, December 13, 2000, 6D; and Reed Martin, "The Casting Accent Is on Foreign Appeal," *USA Today*, December 13, 2000, 6D.
 52. Richard Corliss, "Yuen Wo-ping: Martial Master," *Time Asia*, February 19, 2001, <http://www.time.com/time/asia/arts/magazine/0,9754,99024,00.html>.
 53. Quoted in *ibid.*
 54. Lee, quoted in Kemp, "Stealth and Duty."
 55. The discussion of these two scenes is meant to suggest rather than exhaust Yuen's repertoire and the ways that *Crouching Tiger* draws on it; there are many other types of fight scenes that are typical of Yuen Wo-ping's style.
 56. Ma's Silk Road Project—a program of concerts, exhibitions, festivals, and educational initiatives—explores the traffic in ideas and music that took place along the ancient trade route that connected East Asia and Europe across the deserts of Central Asia and the Middle East. See Michael Church, "From Africa to the Steppes of Asia," *London Independent*, January 19, 2002, 16; James Oestreich, "A Multicultural Project Takes a High Road, the Silk Road," *New York Times*, October 25, 2000, E1; and David Wright, "Next Stop along the Old Silk Road: Persia," *New York Times*, March 11, 2001, sec. 2. Tan Dun's "Marco Polo" fuses elements of Peking opera, European classical music, Gregorian chants, Tibetan harmonics, and Italian opera in an evocation of the Silk Road's most legendary traveler. See www.schirmer.com/composers/tan_marco_polo.html.
- The ethnoscape of the Chinese diaspora is not the only way to explain *Crouching Tiger's* particular collection of talent, however. One must also consider the "financescape" constituted by the Japanese entertainment conglomerate Sony, various branches of which financed and distributed the film. Not coincidentally, a number of the musicians who worked on the film are under contract with Sony. Yo-Yo Ma and Tan Dun record exclusively with Sony Classical, which has also recorded work by erhu player Ma Xiao Hui, while CoCo Lee has released eight of her twelve albums through Sony Music's pop division. As much as the inclusion of these artists makes sense in terms of the lateral axes of diasporic affiliation, it also makes sense in terms of corporate synergy, in which one branch of a media conglomerate promotes the artists from other divisions.
57. Clifford, "Diasporas," 251, 255. Robin Cohen emphasizes the positive and creative aspects of diaspora. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 4.
 58. Quoted in Moverman, "The Angle on Ang Lee," 68.
 59. James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 96–112. Robin Cohen makes this point about diasporas and cultural sensitivity in *Global Diasporas*, 170.
 60. Quoted in Devin Gordon, "It's the Year of the Dragon," *Newsweek*, December 4, 2000, 60, and "A Conversation with Ang Lee and James Schamus."
 61. Teo, "'We Kicked Jackie Chan's Ass!'" and Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 115–29.
 62. Lee and Schamus thought consciously about the musical as a model for what they

- wanted to do. Lee, in describing the generic combination of the film, said: "It seems to me that martial arts didn't want to get along with drama very well. . . . It's more like a musical." Quoted in K. D. Shirkani, "'Tiger' Burn Bright," *Variety*, October 12, 2000, <http://www.variety.com/vstory/VR1117787642?categoryid=38&cs=1&query=k%2E+and+d%2E+and+shirkani&display=k%2E+d%2E+shirkani>. Schamus, in an interview with the author, said that they had the musical consciously in their minds as they were making the film. Their interest in the musical extends to potential future projects, as well; they have considered developing a romantic musical comedy based loosely on Alain Resnais's *Same Old Story* (1997) and inspired by Li Hanxiang's *The Love Eterne* (1963). See also Teo, "'We Kicked Jackie Chan's Ass!'"
63. The structural model of the musical that is used here and in the following paragraphs is based on Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
 64. Quoted in Gordon, "It's the Year of the Dragon."
 65. Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 29–39.
 66. "Zheng Peipei," in *The Fifth Hong Kong International Film Festival*, 238, and Cheng Pei-pei, "From the Shaw Brothers Films to My Role in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*," presentation at conference, "Constructing Pan-Chinese Cultures: Globalism and the Shaw Brothers Cinema," University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, October 2–4, 2003.
 67. Chu, "'Crouching Tiger' Can't Hide from Bad Reviews in China."
 68. Quoted in Mark Landler, "Lee's 'Tiger' Celebrated Everywhere but Home," *New York Times*, February 27, 2000, E1.
 69. Chu, "'Crouching Tiger' Can't Hide from Bad Reviews in China."
 70. Schamus, quoted in Teo, "'We Kicked Jackie Chan's Ass!'"
 71. Steve Rose, "The Film Is So Slow—It's Like Grandma Telling Stories," *The Guardian*, February 13, 2001.