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Asian representation and anti-Asian racism in contemporary Hollywood film

Peter Murphy
Ryerson University

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Asian Representation and Anti-Asian Racism in Contemporary Hollywood Film

Peter Murphy

MRP Supervisor: Murray Pomerance
MRP Second Reader: Anne-Marie Lee-Loy

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Asian Representation and Anti-Asian Racism in Contemporary Hollywood Film

A major research paper presented to Ryerson University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Immigration and Settlement Studies

By Peter Murphy

ABSTRACT

From early in the 20th Century, the Hollywood film industry has played a major role in the racialization of visibly identifiable ethnic groups in the West. Asians, and in particular East Asians, have traditionally been characterized by Hollywood as aliens. Originally such characterizations served to extol the virtues of the West by contrast with the East and to express xenophobic anxieties in movie narratives. In recent decades, corresponding to the development of the Hollywood "blockbuster," the Asian has been depicted in a more positive, idealized light, yet s/he has continued to be depicted as the archetypal Other. This paper explores portrayals of Asians in several recent Hollywood blockbusters, asserting that the under-representation of racially Asian actors onscreen throughout the West is directly related to, among other factors, the continued stereotyping of Asians and Asianness in popular American film.

Keywords: Asian representation; Asian American; Hollywood cinema; blockbuster films; racialization

Acknowledgements

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Hollywood blockbuster movies create seriously inaccurate visions of the differently racialized peoples who constitute the Western societies these films depict. Viewers who may know little or nothing about the demographic composition, racialized power structure, and cultural experiences to be found in Western societies are being initiated by Hollywood film into an imagined world in which demographics are distorted and notions of belonging and foreignness are presented in ways that reflect the Eurocentric worldview dominating Hollywood and the West. In October 2004, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) issued a press release detailing the lack of representation of racialized groups in television and theatrical productions between 2002 and 2003. The data, provided by film and television producers, showed that the number of Latino and Asian roles was far less than proportionate to the percentage that each group represented within the general population in the United States. Latino roles represented 5.4% of casting in contrast to the 13.7% of the U.S. population at the time that was Latino; and Asians and Pacific Islanders, representing 3.8% of the population, were cast in 2.5% of roles (SAG, 2004). While this data is important, it is simply quantitative and does not explore the types of roles, beyond distinguishing between leading and supporting ones, in which racialized performers were cast. It is beyond the scope of the data collected to explore whether the types of roles in which Asians and Latinos were cast, as well as the genres, settings, and plots of the productions in which these roles figured, might have contributed to the problem of under-representation. The data also does not include information relating to the budgets of the productions in which Asians and Latinos were represented, that might show if they were disproportionately represented in small-budget productions or in widely-disseminated blockbusters. The SAG press release identifies a

complex cultural problem that it describes in terms of numbers, however a qualitative analysis of the phenomenon is required to understand how and why under-representation of certain racialized groups persists.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the marginalization of Asian North Americans through the conventions of the Hollywood film industry by examining depictions of Asians and Asianness in Hollywood blockbusters. Such marginalization is of particular concern to Canadians, given a Statistics Canada report released in March 2005 that identified Chinese and South Asians as the largest visible minority groups in Canada. The report projected that those populations would remain the largest visible minority groups through 2017, continuing to grow due to immigration (Statistics Canada, 2005). Although American culture and American entertainment industries are influential all over the world, Canadians should be wary of the power of American business to shape Canadian culture and Canadians' impressions of the demographics of their society, given our cultural similarities and geographical proximity to the U.S. How Hollywood constructs notions of North American and foreign, Western and Eastern, and thereby influences our thinking about these categories, affects Canadians, Americans, and members of other Western ethnically plural societies. By uncritically identifying ourselves as members of Western societies in Hollywood's depictions of the West, we distort our perceptions of our own communities. Non-white members of Western societies are at risk of being perceived by other Westerners as embodiments of particular cultural archetypes because of the way racial and linguistic attributes are coded with particular meanings and globally disseminated though Hollywood film.

Key Terms and Concepts

In my discussion here of the representation and depiction of Asians in Hollywood film, "Asian" is used to refer to North Americans (and other Westerners) who are racialized as Asian, or to the peoples and cultures native to Asia. "Racialization" refers to the social process by which the dominant culture defines essential differences in people, identifying the Other by phenotypical characteristics and thus creating the social categories of race (Li, 1990; Gabriel, 1996). The development of race is historically linked to the imperialist projects of slavery and colonization, the notion of innately superior and inferior peoples providing moral justification for the domination of Europeans over non-European peoples, their lands, labour, and other resources (Omi & Winant, 1986). The ongoing process of racialization maintains white hegemony in increasingly ethnically plural societies in the West, disproportionately preserving positions of power and influence as the domain of whites. This can be seen in North American popular media, where white men are over-represented by up to 150% while other groups are consistently underrepresented (Gerbner, 1999).

Like other social and political institutions originally designed by and for the white patriarchy, such as the education system, social services, and government structures, pop culture, including the film industry, contributes to the perpetuation of a "racialized social system" (Bonilla-Silva, 1996). Dyer (1988), for instance, discusses the creation of racial difference between Blacks and whites in film through a content analysis of three mainstream movies from the U.S. and the U.K.: Jezebel (1938), Simba (1955), and Night

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of the Living Dead (1969). Each of these films portrays race relationships that posit "whiteness" as analogous to order and reason, and "blackness" as linked to chaos and irrationality. The characteristics attributed to Asians through the process of racialization certainly differ from the characteristics attributed to racialized Blacks, but the process of racialization is similar. This paper will demonstrate the process by which particular character traits are linked to physical appearance and assigned to the "Asian race."

In defining Hollywood for the purpose of this paper, I refer to the second of two versions of New Hollywood cinema discussed by Geoff King (2002). These versions differ from each other and from other strategies of Hollywood filmmaking by changes in styles of filmmaking and in the industrial context. The "Hollywood Renaissance" of the late 1960s and 1970s (King's "New Hollywood version 1") responded to declining audience numbers and targeted niche audiences with controversial and potentially offensive content and European-influenced stylistic innovations, as can be seen with Bonnie and Clyde (1967) and Taxi Driver (1976). King's New Hollywood 2 takes a different approach to a similar business context. Rather than target niche audiences, version 2 promotes particular films as events and markets them to the widest possible audience, attempting to inflate the audience with people who may not be regular film viewers. These are the blockbusters: expensive to make, usually with famous actors and state-of-the-art special effects, extensively promoted prior to release, and often adapted from already familiar properties. Studios' financial dependence on such films causes them to support their investments through national and international advertising campaigns often including parallel video game and/or soundtrack releases; film releases during the most popular filmgoing seasons; and the deliberate selection of particular

types of productions for blockbuster treatment. Unlike the New Hollywood films of the 1970s, the event films usually avoid socially controversial material in order to appeal to the widest possible audience. This is not a socially neutral strategy, however. It reinforces and reproduces the perspectives, norms, and biases of the dominant culture and disseminates them globally. Therefore the conventions of Hollywood blockbuster films create and define contemporary culture internationally (King, 2002; Shohat & Stam, 1994).

Scope

This paper will focus primarily on the racialization of East Asians (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean nationals), North Americans with East Asian ethnic backgrounds, and movies with themes and motifs that draw from Chinese and Japanese cultures, since these are more common in Hollywood than films that borrow from South Asian, South East Asian, or Korean cultures. This paper does not purport to be an overview of Asian American cinema or even Asian Americans in North American cinema per se. For the former, readers should find Peter X. Feng's Screening Asian Americans (2002) to be comprehensive and insightful. Feng points out that there is a tradition of Asian American filmmaking that may be interpreted by students and viewers as forming its own canon. This canon would include such films as Mira Nair's Mississippi Masala (1991), Wayne Wang's The Joy Luck Club (1993), Ang Lee's The Wedding Banquet (1993), and Deepa Mehta's Fire (1996) and Earth (1998). Such films lend credence to Stuart Hall's assertion that contemporary negotiation of identity in terms of race, ethnicity, and nationality, as

well as gender, sexuality, and class, is more likely to occur relatively peacefully in the form of cultural discourse than through violent exclusion (1996). While contemporary racialized groups in the West are not particularly less marginalized by the dominant culture now than they were in the past, in a postmodern world marginalization is the norm rather than the exception. In a culture where meanings are so readily contested, belonging and non-belonging are more fluid and more frequently coexist. There is diverse, nuanced representation of Asians in films such as the Asian American movies mentioned above, but these films are often independent and low-budget productions in comparison to Hollywood blockbusters, like The Last Samurai (2003), that consistently – and to vast audiences – portray Asians as foreigners. At issue here is not Asian North American filmmakers' opportunities for self-expression, but rather the power differential that exists between Hollywood and independent filmmakers in distribution and consumption and therefore in creating and redefining notions of the Asian in the public consciousness. More simply, what is at issue is the power to create archetypes and mythology about normalcy and belonging in contemporary Western society.

Racialized Asian bodies and notions of Asianness are certainly present in Hollywood films, but this presence is usually distorted by the prevailing conventions of the film industry. The thesis of this paper is that there is a correlation between the marginalization and under-representation of Asian North Americans in Western film and the conventions of Hollywood that code Asian bodies and Asian culture as foreign and distinctly un-Western. Asian North Americans are marginalized not only by their exclusion in Hollywood but perhaps more significantly by the ways in which Asian bodies and Asian cultural themes are depicted when they are included (Pham, 2004).

Asian actors frequently appear in Hollywood films as foreigners; Asian bodies are thus coded as foreign in the absence of other prominent portrayals. There are, of course, different degrees and spheres of representation. In the films discussed here, Asian actors and Asian cultural motifs are present but the representation of Asians is superficial: Asians are present on the screen yet not necessarily behind the scenes with the power to determine what function the Asian will have in the narrative. There are often Asian advisors and martial arts choreographers to make screen depictions more convincing, but the Asianness present is created by predominately white writers, directors, and producers to tell a story of the Westerner's experience of the foreign. The words and actions of characters in these films reflect the ideas and assumptions of the writers and directors who crafted the narrative and those of the business interests that create the conventions of Hollywood by financing and distributing particular types of movies (Goffman, 1981).

Hollywood appropriates Asian cultural themes, whether religion, philosophy, or martial arts, but it often presents them as magical, transcendent, and otherworldly: the polar opposite of the temporal materialistic West. This is especially clear in the frequent insertion of white North Americans into narratives that draw extensively and explicitly from Asian culture. In these narratives whites become supernatural "White Asians" under the tutelage of Asian or ambiguously Asian masters (Desser, 2000). For example, Danny LaRusso (Ralph Macchio) and later Julie Pierce (Hilary Swank) learn karate from Mr. Miyagi (Pat Morita) in The Karate Kid series (1984-1994). Similarly in Star Wars: Episode V- The Empire Strikes Back (1980) Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) learns about the Tao-like Force from the diminutive alien "Master" Yoda (voiced by Frank Oz) who speaks with an accent, omitting articles and rearranging conventional English word order.

By examining contemporary Hollywood blockbuster films from the same period examined in the above mentioned SAG statement (2002 to 2003), as well as their antecedents, I will demonstrate evidence of conventions that stereotype the Asian body as belonging to an outsider and that label Asianness as supernatural and otherworldly. As such, I hope to provoke discussion about, and provide a possible explanation for, the continued under-representation of certain racialized groups in Hollywood film by problematizing the practice of continually depicting the Asian as foreign. Although this paper will examine depictions of the Asian or white Asian warrior, therefore focussing on the Asian male, it is inclusive of the female warrior, particularly as portrayed by Uma Thurman and Lucy Liu in Kill Bill (2003; 2004).

The under-representation of Asians as North Americans in Hollywood and the convention of having white protagonists star in movies with Asian themes are connected and flow from the same traditional Hollywood and Western cultural perceptions of the East. The question is not whether the depictions of Asians and Asianness are positive or negative—overtly negative depictions of Asians would not only meet with objections domestically but would surely impact overseas box office revenue and create the type of social controversy that studios want to avoid with major pictures. To understand the relationship between under-representation and industry conventions we should ask, who are the directors and the traditional target audience? What are the assumptions inherent in their worldviews and the industry? And how do certain depictions reflect and reproduce the industry's stereotypical notions of what is North American and what is Asian (Shohat and Stam, 1994)?

There is a wide variety of depictions of Asians in independent and foreign film, so why does the world's most powerful and influential film industry continue to code Asians as Others? To understand how racial stereotyping and under-representation occur in contemporary Hollywood film it is important to explore the history of anti-Asian racism in American culture in general and in the film industry in particular. The film industry in the United States, particularly in California, developed in parallel with anti-Asian racism. Nativist anti-Chinese immigration movements on the west coast of North America in the nineteenth century drew on the same racist discourse that was used to justify European colonialism (Wong, 1978; Marchetti, 1993; Tiana, 1995). Discourse that portrayed Chinese people as racially inferior coincided with perceptions of cheap Chinese immigrant labour as a threat to white workers and of Chinese culture as uniquely "un-Western" in language, religion, and custom. Chinese immigrants were cast as a threat to the project of building white Christian nations across North America (Farrell, 2000). This position was given government sanction with official Chinese exclusion policies introduced in the U.S. in 1882 and in Canada in 1885. Similar racism experienced by Japanese immigrants was moderated somewhat by perceptions of Japan as a modern nation and in the face of advocacy by the Japanese government on behalf of Japanese expatriates overseas. However, the stature of Japan as an imperial power and the intervention of the Japanese state in North America became disadvantages to Japanese immigrants and North Americans of Japanese descent as Japan became a rival to the U.S. in the Pacific and then a declared enemy to the U.S. and Canada in World War II.

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbour, Hollywood moved immediately to depict the

Japanese in a manner that reflected war propaganda and anti-Japanese racism in films

such as The Purple Heart (1944) and Dragon Seed (1944). In the latter, an adaptation

from MGM of the Pearl S. Buck novel by the same name, Katherine Hepburn starred,

cosmeticized by Jack Dawn to appear Asian, as a brave Chinese woman resisting the

ruthless imperialism of the Japanese (Wong, 1978).

Early Hollywood reflected popular racist perceptions of the Chinese and

Japanese. According to Marchetti in her examination of Classical Hollywood Realist

film, this expressed itself in stereotypes and morality tales that explored the theme of the

"yellow peril." Such narratives reified American culture and Western civilization by

juxtaposing a white protagonist who represented the West with an archetypal other, like

Fu Manchu: a recurring Chinese villain in Western literature and film. The Asian was an

ideal other for Hollywood because of the long Western tradition of exoticism and

mystery associated with an Asia first imagined in the accounts of European explorers like

Marco Polo, and because of the smaller proportion of the U.S. population that was of

Asian descent during the early decades of American film history. The small numbers of

Asian Americans meant that some of the politics associated with depicting more

populous visible minority groups – Blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics – could be

avoided by treating Asians instead. Perceived associations of the occult, sexual

promiscuity, and opium addiction with Asians were juxtaposed with the sober chastity of

white Christian America. Race was a signifier of religion – defined in terms of the

duality of Christian and heathen – and therefore of morality (Hoppenstand, 1983 in

Marchetti, 1993). Furthermore, interracial sex and romance were condemned in

narratives where Asian men were depicted as sexual threats to white women, and to the white men who hoped to possess them, while Asian women who fell in love with white men frequently met tragic ends (Marchetti, 1993).

Marchetti's examination of Classical Hollywood reveals a great deal about the American perceptions and uses of the Asian Other between the beginning of the twentieth century and the early 1960s. Working from the assumption that imagining and depicting the Asian is more about exploring Western themes through juxtaposition than about the East (Marchetti, 1993), one finds an identifiable shift in the character of these depictions in the 1970s and 80s (Tiana, 1995) – this despite some similarities between depictions of militaristic Japanese soldiers and depictions of corporate Japanese businessmen of the 1980s (Murakami, 1999). The Asian remained the archetypal Other but for the most part became idealized as such, providing a noble contrast to an America disillusioned with itself after the cultural upheavals of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, and Watergate. The shift to more "positive" depictions of Asian aliens carries through to the contemporary blockbuster, as in The Last Samurai (2003). I would suggest that this change had less to do with increased immigration from Asia, which began to occur around this time period, than with white America's changing perception of itself from the apex of human civilization to a deeply flawed society. As Edward Said describes in Orientalism (1979), the Orient and the Oriental are to a certain extent inventions of the West. The characteristics ascribed to the Oriental come not from objective observation, but from a tradition of Western discourse about the East that developed in the context of countless Western cultural, political, and economic interests. Examining the product of "orientalist" industries, such as Hollywood, reveals more about the power of the West

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over the East, and the means by which notions of racial difference are culturally disseminated throughout the West, than it presents any substantive knowledge of Asia. Difference, as Hollywood constructs it, reflects the traditions of representing the outsider as the embodiment of the fears of the white Westerner and exoticizing "cultural difference" as a desirable and marketable commodity. In both of these senses, difference is constructed in binary terms – what "we" are, "they" are not (Rutherford, 1990).

Despite more positive depictions in terms of the morality of Asian characters, the Asian remains the foreign foil in Hollywood film. Most Asian characters in contemporary blockbusters continue to be archetypal alien Others, as we see in films such as Shanghai Noon (2000) and Shanghai Knights (2003), Cradle 2 the Grave (2003), The Last Samurai, Kill Bill, The Matrix series (1999; 2003; 2003), and, Bulletproof Monk (2003). The remainder of this paper will explore how this othering has manifested itself in the Hollywood blockbusters of recent years.

The Hong Kong Sojourner

One of the main ways Hollywood constructs race is through its treatment of the relationships between characters of different ethnicities in its narratives. Relationships between characters of different races in the film narrative frequently stand for racial conflict in society, and the reconciliation of conflict between the characters implies the reconciliation of the racial conflict (Shohat & Stam, 1994; Knabe, 2001; King, 2002). The introduction of racial conflict into a narrative in any form may seem to run counter to the Hollywood convention of avoiding social controversy in its blockbusters, but

projecting racial discourse onto the personal relationships between characters actually serves this agenda. The resolution of racial conflict in a narrative at the personal level twice subverts the underlying social problems associated with race. It does this in the first place with the displacement of social conflict with personal conflict. Secondly, it resolves the conflict at the personal level, suggesting that social problems are not social at all, but personal, and as we seem them repeatedly resolved through personal, not social change. King refers to the example of Die Hard: With a Vengeance (1995) as a "racial buddy film." In that film the conflict between Bruce Willis and Samuel L. Jackson's characters is articulated in racial terms as each accuses the other of being racist. The film superimposes a personal relationship on top of the racial conflict, dismissing racism as a misunderstanding as the characters get to know each other and overcome their differences to achieve an overriding common goal, in this case stopping a bomber from carrying out attacks on New York City. The central problem of the film is not racism, it is terrorism – racism is simply an obstacle in the narrative that must be overcome to solve the real dilemma. The resolution of social difference at the personal level attempts to depoliticize the racism present in the narrative. Such depoliticization may appeal to white audiences by depicting a harmonious multiracial society by movie's end (Shohat and Stam, 1994; King, 2002).

Like "New Hollywood" cinema, Hong Kong kung fu cinema, which was intentionally political in the 1960s and 1970s in its unconventional depictions of the Asian male - Bruce Lee - as defiantly powerful and masculine, became notably apolitical in recent decades, designing films to appeal to a middle-class global audience – exemplified by the films of Jackie Chan (Shu, 2003). Contemporary Hong Kong action

stars like Chan, Jet Li, and Chow Yun-Fat are therefore ideal for Hollywood's "racial buddy films." Such Asian "buddies" invoke not only racial but also civilizational and international difference as they are always presented as foreigners in the West (Pham, 2004). The characters played by these actors (themselves internationally recognizable Asian nationals) are constructed as foreign through narratives that depict them as sojourners. Plots often begin in China, taking the Asian to the West for some specific and articulated purpose, sometimes as agents of an Asian government authority. In both Shanghai Noon and Rush Hour (1998) Jackie Chan plays an agent of a Chinese government (an imperial guardsman and a Hong Kong police officer respectively) on a mission to America to rescue the kidnapped daughter of a high-ranking official. In the latter he is a sojourner, returning to Hong Kong after the successful completion of his mission, while in the former he becomes an immigrant, choosing to stay in America. Although Chan's Chon Wang remains in the West in Shanghai Noon, the narrative of the sequel Shanghai Knights again constructs him as a foreigner whose actions are motivated by events in China and by Chinese politics and values. Chon is presented as honour-bound to avenge his father's death and recover the "Chinese imperial seal" from a usurper to the imperial throne. Similarly, Jet Li plays a Taiwanese intelligence officer in California in Cradle 2 the Grave and an agent of the People's Republic of China in Paris in Kiss of the Dragon (2001); and Chow Yun-Fat plays a Hong Kong cop in New York in The Corrupter (1999). These films always contain tropes that mark the Asian character as not belonging in the West, such as getting off a plane, departing for "home," and explaining to his white or Black Western partner what he is doing in the West – as though their presence is aberrant in itself and requires justification.

These actors are usually paired with a Western male and their characters are often positioned in conflict that is associated with racial, cultural, or national differences. In Shanghai Noon, the personal conflict between Chon and Roy (Owen Wilson) is defined in racial terms when Roy denies to a white prostitute that he and Chon are closely connected, saying, "I'm not exactly riding with him. He's not my friend, you know. I mean, he's a Chinaman." But Roy and Chon reconcile in order to rescue the kidnapped Chinese princess and they are portrayed at the conclusion of the film as committed to their partnership as lawmen on the American frontier. In Cradle 2 the Grave, Su (Jet Li) and Tony Fait (DMX) come into conflict as a result of the initially opposing interests each represents. Fait is presented as a Robin Hood-like rogue who robs from drug dealers and money launderers and has a "no-gun policy" on his heists, which suggests he is concerned for the safety of others despite his dangerous and illegal occupation. This Black Western protagonist is a heroic rebel who acts outside of the law while the Asian protagonist is an agent of a foreign establishment: Taiwanese Intelligence. They team up to save Fait's daughter and prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The final shot depicts them walking off together into the night with Fait's rescued daughter in his arms and Su carrying the recovered "black diamonds"; a power source for WMDs. This ending reconciles conflict not only between races but between nations as well. With the current rapid economic and industrial development of China, many Western journalists, politicians, and academics have expressed concern about China's ambitions and lack of democracy (Bernstein & Munro, 1997). Movies starring Hong Kong action stars portraying heroic agents of various Chinese governments who co-operate with Western counterparts reassure Westerners who are nervous about the peaceful rise of

China as a political and economic power. Such characters are often scripted to represent the interests of Chinese states concerned with their own domestic affairs, or interests that are in line with American and international priorities such as opposing nuclear proliferation and transnational crime. Thus, portrayals of Asians as warrior sojourners associate the Asian body not only with foreignness in general but frequently with specific foreign states as well.

Male Hong Kong stars are sometimes paired with white Western women in Hollywood film, but in relationships that are almost always chaste. This is the case with Jet Li and Bridget Fonda in Kiss of the Dragon; Jackie Chan and Jennifer Love Hewitt in The Tuxedo (2002); and Chow Yun-Fat and Mira Sorvino in The Replacement Killers (1998). The preponderance of Asian men presented in non-sexual relationships with women can also be seen in "racial buddy movies", in which the Asian partner is depicted as innocent or asexual, consistently less sexually assertive than his Western partner. For example, in Shanghai Knights a romantic subplot is established between the white male and the Asian female, Chon's sister Lin (Fann Wong). Chon is presented as a temporary obstacle between the Western protagonist and his object of desire: an exotic foreign woman. Chon's asexuality is emphasized by the absence of Princess Pei Pei (Lucy Liu), his love interest from the first film, whom he admired from a distance due to her royal stature. His asexuality is juxtaposed with Roy's sexuality in a scene in a New York hotel where Roy, making money as a gigolo, sets Chon up with one of his clients. While Roy is entertaining one woman, Chon is down the hall in chiropractic contortions with another, innocently helping her relieve back pain. A similar dynamic is constructed in Rush Hour with Detective Carter (Chris Tucker) filling the role of the loud, impetuous,

and more sexually assertive Westerner in contrast to Chan's reserved and out-of-place Inspector Lee (Pham, 2004). Likewise, in Cradle 2 the Grave Fait is portrayed as romantically involved with Daria (Gabrielle Union) while Su apparently has no love interest or even individual agency since his actions are presented as entirely motivated by his mission objective on behalf of the Taiwanese government. Jet Li also plays Han Sing, or the "Romeo" character, in Romeo Must Die (2000). As Kim points out, the casting of Jet Li as the romantic lead "Romeo" would seem to counter the Asian demasculinization convention, but it does not (2004). Upon being reunited after the climax of the film, Han and Trish O'Day (Aaliyah), or "Juliet" with whom Han is supposedly in passionately in love, share an entirely platonic embrace. The behaviour of the alleged lovers undermines the romantic aspect of the plot and reinforces the asexuality Asian male onscreen.

These depictions are the most widely disseminated portrayals of Asian men in Hollywood film. Currently there appear to be no Western male actors of Asian decent whom the industry will trust to open a major blockbuster. From a business perspective it makes sense for Hollywood to capitalize on foreign, internationally recognized Hong Kong action stars, but in the absence of any prominent portrayals of Asian males as Westerners, Hollywood is coding the Asian male body as foreign. Although presenting these sojourners as chaste warriors may adhere to Hong Kong conventions about appropriate depictions of sexuality, the desexualization of the Asian male must also be read in the context of early Hollywood conventions that treated the Asian male as a sexual threat to white women (Marchetti, 1993). The juxtaposition of Asian male characters with more sexually assertive white or Black characters undermines the

sexuality of the Asian male through comparison. These films therefore colonize the Asian male, creating him for audiences as an asexual being who is not native to Western society.

White Students / Asian Masters: Creating the White Asian

Like "racial buddy" relationships, individual characters can also represent the reconciliation of racial difference. King (2002) uses the example of Will Smith's "crossover appeal" to illustrate this phenomenon. Through a successful television show and music career, Smith created a public persona that was likeable and apolitical. Like "The Cosby Show" (1984-92) before it, Smith's show "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air" (1990-96) was both distinctly African American and distinctly mainstream middle-class American, with broad appeal. The lack of controversy characteristic of Hollywood blockbusters could also be identified in Smith's early career in television, and notably also in his music career in the often politically charged hip-hop genre. Black cultural motifs were present in this work, but in such away that blackness was usually presented as a culture rather than invoking race with the associated politics and controversy. The main axis of difference in the series was between Smith, the working-class urban Black youth, and his wealthy Bel Air relatives, also Black, who represented the American mainstream. This removed the element of race from the conflicts that would arise between characters, making the show safe for white audiences to enjoy without having to confront the social realities of racial inequity. Smith converted this appeal into a successful Hollywood film career as a leading man in Bad Boys (1995), Independence

Day (1996), and <u>Men in Black</u> (1997). The seemingly apolitical nature of the Smith persona implies a reconciliation between racial divisions that is comforting to the predominantly white dominant culture. Smith is certainly not the only African American actor with this appeal; Halle Berry is the most obvious recent example of a Black actor with crossover appeal. Denzel Washington, Wesley Snipes, Laurence Fishburne, and Morgan Freeman are other leading men with crossover appeal who have been cast in roles originally written as white (Shohat and Stam, 1994).

What is curious in the case of Asian Americans in Hollywood cinema is that here, too, there are certain characters that represent the reconciliation of supposed opposites, in this case East and West, but they are almost always white. Wong (1978) discusses the Hollywood tradition of casting whites in Asian roles. However, this tendency was not isolated to Asian roles – the theatrical tradition of white actors in blackface portraying racist caricatures of Blacks is now notorious. Roles in which white actors are cast in contemporary films that heavily reference Asian cultural motifs are distinct from previous appropriations of Asian roles in that they are now unequivocally constructed as white. This trend began in earnest (on the big screen, at least) in the late 1970s when Hollywood, noting the success of Hong Kong kung fu cinema, created a distinctly American version of the martial-arts film genre. Desser characterizes the American martial arts genre, starring such white actors as Chuck Norris, Jean-Claude Van Damme, and Steven Seagal, as "quite possibly the most derivative genre in Hollywood's history and amounts to nothing less than a virtual stealing... of another country's popular cinematic culture" (2000, 81). With elements similar to the racial buddy picture, these films often feature a young white Western warrior who studies under an older Asian

master who embodies and imparts the exotic philosophy, spirituality, and martial traditions of the Orient to his pupil. Tension between the East and the West is traditionally part of the formula as the Western pupil is often impatient and incredulous, reflecting the notion of Western culture as rebellious and short-sighted. The master and the Orient, which he represents, are depicted as the antithesis of the West: ancient, focused, patient, and peaceful. By adopting elements of the exotic Asian culture presented in these films, the white warrior unlocks his or her potential and is able to access the power that will allow for the successful completion of his or her quest.

The Asian American, therefore, is displaced long before casting. The convention in Hollywood film is to tell stories from the perspective of a Western (white) protagonist who moves from West to East. Movement from East to West is in a sense counterintuitive and is seldom seen except in films that feature Hong Kong action stars whose characters travel from China and often return there having completed their mission. Individual protagonists who incorporate elements of both Eastern and Western cultures are overwhelmingly white. Two major blockbusters to recently portray interpretations of Asian culture and to position white protagonists at the centre of their narratives are The Last Samurai and Kill Bill. In both of these films the white hero is depicted as a samurai warrior who carries on the samurai tradition passed down from a dead or retired master. The East in both of these cases is presented as geographical and cultural space to which the Westerner can travel and become accustomed. Both involve protagonists travelling to Japan, where they are portrayed as legitimate samurai in contrast to the Japanese armies they face. In the case of The Last Samurai the enemy is the modern Japanese military of the 1870s – an integral part of a Westernization project

that is presented as destroying traditional Japanese culture represented by the samurai. The Japanese army in <u>Kill Bill</u> is a gang of yakuza/martial arts warriors that is single-handedly defeated by the white protagonist. These fighters are depicted as proficient martial artists, but "the Bride" (Uma Thurman) is better. In both cases Hollywood portrays the Westerner, rather than the Japanese warriors she or he opposes, as the authentic samurai by virtue of the white character honouring the samurai tradition or defeating the other warriors in battle. These movies represent Hollywood imperialist conventions in the appropriation of Asian cultural motifs, the subjugation of the Asian to the Western in the narrative, the depiction of whites as masters of Asian cultural forms, and the presentation of the white body as representative of the West.

Asian culture, presented from the perspective of characters located squarely within the dominant culture of the West, is depicted as exotic and alien. Sometimes Asian culture is fused with non-human alien culture, as in the case of <u>Star Wars</u>, in which the Jedi culture is an imaginary Western interpretation of Asian religion and martial arts, and <u>The Matrix</u> series, in which the most prominent seemingly Asian characters are not humans but computer programs. The notion of the Asian as exotic purposely accentuates cultural difference and suggests a reconciliation of opposites only when the Westerner incorporates the exotic into him or herself. Examples of this are the <u>Kill Bill</u> movies and <u>The Last Samurai</u>, and their precursors, <u>The Karate Kid</u> and <u>Star Wars</u> movies. Through the relationship with an Asian or ambiguously Asian master of martial arts and religion/philosophy, the white apprentice is shown through these films to reconcile a restless and rebellious Western nature with elements of Eastern culture that empower and complete him or her.

The Last Samurai

The protagonist of The Last Samurai, Captain Nathan Algren (Tom Cruise) is

psychologically traumatized by his experience of the U.S. Civil War and escapes to

Japan. There, he is healed of his war trauma through his indoctrination into samurai

culture under the instruction of a master warrior, Katsumoto (Ken Watanabe). Despite

the prominence of Asian cultural themes within it, this story revolves around Algren.

This is consistent with Said's argument in Orientalism that describes the long tradition in

the West of portraying the East as something to be known and experienced by the

Westerner. In orientalist discourse, imperial cultural institutions reproduce the positional

superiority of the knower over the known through the creation of difference and a body

of knowledge of the Other. Traditionally, notions of the West are associated with modern

rationalism, science, and technology. The West is the "mind" in relation to the "body" of

the non-West, or in this case, to the idealized "spirit" of the East (Shohat and Stam,

1994). The setting of The Last Samurai during the period of rapid Japanese

modernization at the end of the nineteenth century emphasizes the conflation of the East-

West dichotomy with the past-present dichotomy. Algren represents traditional notions

of the West as progressive, industrial, and technologically advanced, and the Japanese

request his assistance in following the Western model. The only Japanese characters who

do not look to Algren for his expertise in industrial warfare are the samurai, like

Katsumoto, whose own traditions of warfare are presented as ancient and indigenous to

Japan.

Although traditional Japanese culture is presented in a positive manner in The

Last Samurai, it is both idealized and exoticized from the perspective of the white

Westerner. For example, the samurai of the film are always portrayed as romantic and

honourable, their actions shown to be motivated by tradition and by the desire to protect a

way of life that is presented as utopian, peaceful, and picturesque. The panoramic shots

of the countryside and the familial relationships among the characters convey nostalgia

for a dying way of life presented as an archetypically serene and simple pre-modern

culture. As a morality tale The Last Samurai is unambiguous in its idealization of

traditional Japanese values. Algren's journey towards wholeness through his initiation

into the samurai culture is juxtaposed with the transformation of the Japanese state into a

modern military power. Arriving as an American advisor to the Japanese government,

Algren embodied Western militarism and its vices, but by adopting the samurai's bushido

code and mastering their martial arts, he successfully reconciles East and West, which is

to say, reduces or negates the differences between Eastern and Western cultures and

values. It is debatable whether other characters in the film can achieve such a

reconciliation. Katsumoto is representative of the samurai culture but he is also a student

of English and of Western culture and history. His ritual suicide and that of General

Hasegawa (Togo Igawa), the samurai general of the modern military forces, suggest that

for these men the samurai tradition and the Western military tradition are irreconcilable.

This fundamental opposition between East and West is emphasized by the use of the

machine gun, industrial and state-of-the-art, to halt the last charge of the samurai and

fatally wound Katsumoto. In the end the young Emperor Meiji (Shichinosuke

Nakamura) symbolically accepts the samurai culture into his modern Japan by accepting

Katsumoto's sword. However, this apparent reconciliation is undermined by the central theme of the rapid Japanese modernization that for Western and Chinese audiences implies an historical epilogue which sees Japan becoming an imperial power and military aggressor. The film suggests that the direction of Algren's journey from West to East is the right one, contrasting the movement from East to West which is clearly destructive. As a recurring theme in Hollywood film the notion that the Orient is a place for white Westerners to find adventure and spiritual healing may impact Westerners of Asian descent who represent cultural movement in the opposite, and ostensibly wrong, direction.

Kill Bill

Like Captain Algren in The Last Samurai, Beatrix Kiddo a.k.a. "The Bride" in Kill Bill is shown to be broken at the beginning of the narrative, in this case devastated physically more than emotionally or psychologically. Both Volume 1 and Volume 2 open with a close-up of the bleeding and beaten Bride as she is shot in the head. Given that Beatrix the duration of both films hunting the people responsible, her ex-lover Bill and his accomplices, it is her own "murder" and that of her unborn child that provide the impetus of the revenge plot of the film. Although Kill Bill is unlike The Last Samurai in that the Asianness experienced by Beatrix does not provide her with inner peace (at least not directly), there are important similarities between the two films. Foremost of these is the fact that the protagonist is a white American in a film filled with Asian cultural motifs. Although her training does not provide the Bride with serenity, her experience of

Asianness is shown to be the source of her power to do the seemingly impossible. For example, the Bride fighting alone defeats a small army of martial artists in <u>Volume 1</u>, and in <u>Volume 2</u> she escapes being buried alive and later kills Bill with a supposedly legendary martial arts technique. In all of these examples her success appears to be a result of her training and experience with Asian martial arts masters.

The scene of the battle at the House of the Blue Leaves is an explicit example of contemporary orientalism in Hollywood cinema. As a single white American woman, the Bride travels to Tokyo where, on what is presented as their home territory, she defeats the top yakuza gang, the Crazy 88s, through her mastery of samurai swordplay. The Bride even symbolically battles and defeats kung fu legend Bruce Lee, who is referenced by the "Kato mask" worn by Johnny Mo (Gordon Liu) and his army, similar to the one worn by Lee in the role of Kato in the "Green Hornet" television series (1966-67). The Bride's bright yellow jump suit emphasizes her blondeness in contrast to the darkness of her Asian opponents dressed uniformly in black. She is also distinguished from her enemies through her displays of mercy when she allows the injured to leave and when she spanks a young gang member with her samurai sword and tells him to go home to his mother. The Bride's superior fighting abilities and her possession of a Hattori Hanzo samurai sword identify her as both exceptional and legitimate in the Asian space depicted in the film.

The Bride's legitimacy is emphasized in her climactic confrontation with O-Ren Ishii (Lucy Liu). At first O-Ren expresses disbelief that the "revered master swordsmith" Hattori Hanzo would have crafted the Bride's sword. O-Ren also invokes race to mock the Bride, saying, "Silly Caucasian girl likes to play with samurai swords." However, as

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she recognises that she is about to be bested by the Bride she apologizes for ridiculing her and with her last words acknowledges that the sword used to kill her is indeed a Hattori Hanzo. The white woman's rebuttal to ridicule by the Asian is simply to defeat her at samurai swordplay. This sequence adheres to the positional superiority Said identifies as characteristic of orientalist discourse, "which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (1979, 7). The Bride emerges victorious over O-Ren and her gang at the end of the battle at the House of Blue Leaves. Her battle-proven mastery of Asian cultural forms is contrasted with what is constructed in the narrative as the dubious legitimacy of O-Ren as head of the Tokyo Yakuza as a result of her American nationality and half-Chinese background. The audience learns that her national and ethnic background is an issue of contention when a yakuza boss objects to her leadership on those grounds. The film presents Asianness in the form of two distinct cultural institutions in relation to the two women. For the white woman Asianness is the samurai culture, accessible to her in the world of the film through training and mastery of that martial art. For the (racially) Asian woman, Asianness is the yakuza culture from which she is forever barred due to her nationality and ethnicity.

This juxtaposition of the Bride and O-Ren is an interesting case of contemporary Hollywood orientalism that bears more examination. It is established in an animated flashback sequence that O-Ren is American. The character of O-Ren is therefore an exception to the rule of the lack of prominent Asian American roles in Hollywood films. Lucy Liu is one of the few American actors of Asian descent to be promoted as a movie star, and onewho is also frequently cast as an American. Liu has received top billing

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playing American characters in the <u>Charlie's Angels</u> films (2000; 2003) and <u>Ballistic:</u> <u>Ecks vs. Sever</u> (2002) – although in the latter she is bizarrely suggested to have been an "orphan" of the Chinese one-child policy who was adopted by the U.S. government to be trained as a killer. Liu has also been cast as prominent Chinese characters, including Princess Pei Pei in <u>Shanghai Noon</u>. In <u>Kill Bill</u>, the character of O-Ren Ishii, though Asian American, is almost always depicted in Asian space both geographically and thematically. O-Ren is born in Japan on a U.S. military base and the telling of her back story through Japanese anime stresses these Asian origins. As an adult, O-Ren is primarily depicted in Tokyo where she is positioned at the intersection of writer-director Quentin Tarantino's interpretation of two more Japanese film genres: the yakuza gangster film and the samurai film. Despite being located in the Asian space created by the film, the illegitimacy of her occupation of that space is ironic when contrasted with a white protagonist who is presented as a samurai warrior. Tarantino, a white male writer/director, creates O-Ren's illegitimacy through Boss Tanaka's (Jun Kunimura) objection to her authority, and by two references to O-Ren as a "half-breed," first by the Bride in her narration of the anime sequence and later by Tanaka.

O-Ren acknowledges the Bride's mastery of the samurai sword when she apologizes for mocking her. The film makes clear the importance of the master sword through the reverence displayed by the Bride for the swordsmith Hattori Hanzo (Sonny Chiba) and for his creations when she visits him in Okinawa. Similar reverence is later displayed for Hanzo and his swords by other white characters: Bill (David Carradine), Elle Driver (Daryl Hannah), and Budd (Michael Madsen). The Bride convinces the retired master to make and give her a samurai sword despite his swearing an oath never to

make another. In Okinawa, as in Tokyo, the Westerner is depicted as having the upper hand. At the beginning of this process Beatrix pretends to be a simple white American tourist, but reveals herself to Hanzo to be a samurai warrior through her use of the Japanese language, her identification of the master, and her abilities to appreciate and wield a sword. She knows all about him when she walks into his restaurant and knows how she will convince him to give her a sword – by telling him she will use it to kill Bill, with whom Hanzo apparently also has unfinished business.

With the ceremonial presentation of his last samurai sword, the Bride becomes a symbolic heir of Hanzo, a man who is not shown to have any family apart from his bald samurai/restaurateur companion (Kenji Oba). This is especially significant given the heritage of the character Hattori Hanzo, and of Sonny Chiba, the actor who plays him. Sonny Chiba portrayed Hanzo on "Shadow Warriors" (1980-1985) a Japanese television series that also aired on American television. In each series of "Shadow Warriors" Chiba played a different Hattori Hanzo, every one of them from the same family line but from a different generation (The Making of Kill Bill, 2003). By scripting the presentation of the final sword of the last (as far as we know) Hattori Hanzo to the Bride, Tarantino imagines a white American woman as heir to the samurai legacy as it is has been understood and consumed by North American audiences.

The Bride is also presented as the heir to the kung fu warrior, again as interpreted by Westerners, through her apprenticeship with Pai Mei (Gordon Liu). The significance of Pai Mei is established within the narrative in the recounting of his legend by Bill and through the display of his supernatural power (enhanced by Tarantino using wirework and special effects). Pai Mei's significance, like that of Hattori Hanzo, also extends

beyond the confines of the Kill Bill narrative as a character that appeared in earlier Hong

Kong martial arts films exported to the West. Pai Mei appeared as a recurring villain in

some of the kung fu films of the Shaw Brothers (The Making of Kill Bill Vol. 2, 2004),

one of the main Hong Kong film studios that broke into North American markets in the

1970s as a result of a distribution deal with Warner Bros. (Desser & Fu, 2000; Cook,

2000). The second title to appear on the screen of Kill Bill Vol. 1, after the distributor

Miramax, identifies it as a Shaw production. In his examination of American cinema in

the 1970s, Cook characterizes these Hong Kong imports as ethnic exploitation cinema

similar to the "blaxploitation" films of the same period (2000). Imported martial arts

films were often cheaply made, poorly dubbed, and rushed into theatres by distributors,

targeting primarily non-white audiences. The successful exhibition of these Hong Kong

films in the United States established the kung fu/martial arts movie as an identifiable

genre in the West.

   With the invocation of the Shaw films through the use of the Shaw logo and the

Bride's tutelage under the Shaw character Pai Mei, Tarantino offers Beatrix Kiddo as the

heir of the Chinese kung fu movie hero, and through her interaction with Hattori Hanzo,

of the Japanese samurai on film; and nominates his film Kill Bill as the Western

descendent to those Asian cinematic traditions. This line of inheritance is made clear in

the climax of Volume 2 when Beatrix finally kills Bill using the mythic "five point palm

exploding heart technique," the deadliest of martial arts moves that Pai Mei shared with

her even though, according to the voluminously knowledgeable Bill, he teaches it to no

one. Soon, with Pai Mei dead, poisoned by Elle Driver, and master weapon maker

Hattori Hanzo finally retired for good, the white American Beatrix Kiddo, programmed

with Pai Mei's kung fu software and armed with Hanzo's samurai hardware, takes up their screen legacies in Hollywood film. Although Tarantino may consider Kill Bill to be his tribute to the kung fu and samurai genres that he watched growing up in Los Angeles in the 1970s, the film must also be read as an act of colonization of Asian culture by white American industry. To portray a white character such as Beatrix as the ultimate master of Asian cultural forms, displacing and adeptly killing Asian characters presented as formidable martial artists in their own right, is an act of at least symbolic conquest by white Hollywood over Asia. This continues the hegemonic dominance of the white body over the coloured body regardless of geographic or cultural territory. The conquest is achieved, symbolically in the positioning of characters of different races in relation to one another within the narrative and literally in the power of Hollywood to appropriate foreign film traditions and globally disseminate its reinterpretation of those forms; by Spring 2004, Tarantino's $55-million-dollar paired productions had made over $280 million dollars worldwide.

The casting of David Carradine as Bill references the long Hollywood tradition of appropriating foreign cultural forms, suggesting continuity between the white Asian warrior introduced to American television in the 1970s and depictions of Asianness in contemporary Hollywood films. The scene of Bill telling the story of Pai Mei around a campfire is evocative of Carradine's popular martial arts/western series "Kung Fu" (1972-1975). There, Carradine starred as Kwai Chang Caine, a half-white-American/half-Chinese Shaolin priest in the American Old West. "Kung Fu" was Hollywood's variation on the martial arts genre that was becoming popular in the West in the early 1970s. Bruce Lee had appeared as the valet Kato on the "Green Hornet"

television series but was rejected for the lead role in "Kung Fu". Lee had not yet been seen by American audiences in an English-language movie by the time "Kung Fu" premiered, starring in the first big screen American martial arts film, Enter the Dragon (1973), the following year. "Kung Fu" was co-created by Lee for ABC television from a script developed by a white New York screenwriter, Ed Spielman, who had studied martial arts in Brooklyn (From Grasshopper to Caine: Creating "Kung Fu", 2003). There had been a long tradition in Hollywood of casting white actors in prominent roles as Asian characters (Wong, 1978), but this series established the precedent of positioning a white character at the centre of the martial arts genre at its inception in America. Caine is called a "Chinaman" several times in the "Kung Fu" pilot to establish the half-Chinese ethnicity of the character, despite the fact that Carradine is white. In Kill Bill, Bill is not only Beatrix's ex-boss and ex-lover but also her former mentor, a point that is made clear when he recounts to her the legend of Pai Mei before taking her to learn kung fu from the old master. Bill, too, is said to be a former pupil of both Pai Mei and Hattori Hanzo. By killing Bill with the "five point palm exploding heart technique" taught *only to her* by Pai Mei, the Bride not only surpasses her mentor, she also symbolically takes the place of the older white Asian warrior, Kwai Chang Caine.

Caine's apprenticeship with Masters Po (Keye Luke) and Kan (Philip Ahn) at the Shaolin Temple in "Kung Fu" also established the dynamic of the white warrior/Asian master relationship in Western movie narratives. This dynamic has been reproduced in many subsequent films and television shows, including The Karate Kid series, Star Wars: Episode V- The Empire Strikes Back, and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movies (1990; 1991; 1993) and animated television shows in which the mutant rat Master

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Splinter speaks with an Asian accent and wears a kimono while his young turtle students speak with American accents. In all of these examples the role of the Asian and ambiguously Asian is to teach the young Westerner in ancient and foreign ways – empowering him or her in martial arts, self-discipline, and often supernatural abilities as well. In their similarities Masters Po and Kan, Miyagi, Yoda, and Splinter represent an archetypal caricature of the Asian created by Western writers, directors, and producers. The Asian master is portrayed as the opposite of the Western student: old where the student is young; wise where the student is impetuous; disciplined where the student is undisciplined. Thus the notion of the Asian conveyed in blockbusters that reproduce this dynamic is characterized by exaggerated cultural difference: an Easterner who is the antithesis of the Westerner.

In "Kung Fu," Caine's "ancient Chinese values" were portrayed as exotic and idealized in the old west setting when juxtaposed with the racism of many of the white American characters, including the disregard for the lives of Chinese workers shown by the railway manager in the series pilot. This juxtaposition maintains the creation of the Asian as exotic counterpoint, but also it reveals a definite shift in this period from the earlier tendency of Hollywood to portray the Asian as vicious and thereby affirm the moral superiority of the white Christian (Wong, 1978; Marchetti, 1993). Despite its location in the American west and its relation to the western genre, this series engaged its interpretation of Eastern philosophy and spiritualism as a means to highlight negative aspects of traditional Western values: racism rather than patriotism, greed instead of industry. Asianness, as conveyed and embodied by Caine and his masters is portrayed as

the polar opposite of the temporary and progressive modern West. It is ancient and eternal, and thus eternally foreign in the West.

Star Wars

The notion of the Asian as exotic is frequently exaggerated in science fiction where a non-human alien takes the place of the Asian and vice-versa. As discussed above, this is the case with Master Yoda in Star Wars. Yoda and his training of Luke were constructed on the basis of Zen tradition as it was understood by George Lucas and Empire Strikes Back screenwriter Lawrence Kasdan (Bouzereau, 1997 in Robinson, 2005). Again, Western interpretations of Eastern teachings are contrasted against Western ways as represented by white protagonists: Luke Skywalker, the restless farm boy; Han Solo, the cavalier space cowboy who does not believe in the Force; and the wilful Anakin Skywalker who seeks to control the Force rather than be guided by it. Lucas appropriated many elements of Chinese and Japanese religious and cultural forms in his creation of the fictional Force and the Jedi who utilize it in the series (Porter, 2003). Descriptions of the Force are reminiscent of the Taoist concept of chi: life energy. Obi-Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness) instructing Luke in the ways of the Force in the original Star Wars, tells him that it guides a Jedi's actions and to "let go." This is similar to the Taoist principle of *wu wei*: effortless action. Furthermore, the Jedi uniform is a kimono-like robe, and the lightsaber is supposed to play a function in the Jedi culture similar to that of the samurai sword for the samurai. Even the term Jedi is derived from *jidai geki* which refers to period dramas (including movies) set in the age of the samurai

(Robinson, 2005) and alludes to the influence of the Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa on Lucas (Bouzereau, 1997).

The notion of the Jedi as a politically powerful order of warrior monks has precedents within Asian culture and history as well. The Jedi temple on Coruscant, visible in Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace (1999), Episode II – Attack of the Clones (2002), and Episode III – Revenge of the Sith (2005), with its hierarchical structure and training of young initiates is reminiscent of the Shaolin Temple in China with which Western audiences are familiar from depictions in "Kung Fu." The Hwa Rang on the Korean peninsula c. 1000 CE were an order of warrior Buddhist monks who served as diplomats and military commanders, exactly as the Jedi are depicted in the prequel trilogy. The destruction of the Jedi in Revenge of the Sith mirrors the destruction by the Shogun of another powerful monastic order, the Sohei, in Japan in the fifteenth century. Surviving Sohei traditions were incorporated into the training and culture of the samurai (Robinson, 2005).

Despite the clear influences of Taoism, Buddhism, and the samurai on the Star Wars mythology, there are no prominent characters played by East Asian actors in the series, and notably no East Asian Jedi. Seemingly contradictory, this casting may appear logical given the fantastical nature of the series: Star Wars is a fairly tale made by and for the dominant culture of the West. The magic in this story is the Force, a variation of East Asian philosophy and religion. The presence of a prominent Asian body – already coded as associated with martial arts and Eastern philosophy in Hollywood film and therefore in the minds of Western viewers – wielding Asian-based magic would expose the blatant similarities to Asian culture. The Asian must be absent to maintain the

suspension of disbelief that upholds the fantasy setting in a galaxy "far, far away," Asia

apparently not being far away enough. In contrast, the white Westerner (Luke, Leia,

Han, Obi-Wan, Anakin, Padme) remains as the "human," giving largely white Western

audiences a point of reference, a perspective from which to experience the adventure.

The archetypal Asian exotic is literally replaced by an extraterrestrial alien, thinly veiling

the appropriated aspects of Asian culture in the guise of the imagined otherworldly. The

alien Yoda trains Luke as the Asian Miyagi trains Daniel in The Karate Kid and presides

over the Jedi council as the Shaolin Masters do over the Temple in "Kung Fu." Thus

Asian cultural motifs make Yoda both exotic and familiar while his inhuman

characteristics preserve the fantasy of the extraterrestrial setting.

The Matrix

The conflation of the "Asian" with the "alien" is also at work in The Matrix

series. In the case of The Matrix it is the Asian that stands in for the alien as opposed to

the reverse as described in Star Wars. Certainly, the cast and characters of The Matrix are

racially diverse, but the function characters serve within the narrative and the

relationships between the characters reveal a racial hierarchy in the films, and the

attributes of many characters reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes (King & Leonard,

2004). The fact that most of the important characters played by Asians are computer

programs places them in a lower order in the racial hierarchy of the series. Writing of

another demeaned racialized group, bell hooks says that the traditional portrayal of

Blacks in the media is "as servants or in subordinate roles... to bolster and caretaker the

needs of whites" (bell hooks in King & Leonard, 2004). In the racial hierarchy of film Blacks remain secondary to whites. In The Matrix series, Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) is the prophet of the white saviour. Similarly, Locke (Harry J. Lennix) commands the defence of the human city Zion, but defers to the council which, although multiracial, is dominated by white councillors. Perhaps most notably, the Oracle (Gloria Foster, Mary Alice) is the maternal "intuitive program" that acts as the female counterpart to the cerebral white male creator: the Architect (Helmut Bakaitus). She is depicted as a "mammy" figure in the kitchen and minding a group of white children in her apartment (King & Leonard, 2004). In this context, the roles played by Asians provide a third tier of service in the Eurocentric narrative in which the white male hero is the primary player.

The prominent roles played by Asian actors in The Matrix movies are almost all presented as non-human (King & Leonard, 2004). The Key Maker (Randall Duk Kim), Seraph (Collin Chou), Sati (Tanveer K. Atwal), and Sati's parents (Tharini Mudaliar and Bernard White) are all depicted as heroic, but diegetically each of these is a computer program rather than a human person. The purpose of both the Key Maker and Seraph is to aid the humans (primarily white and Black characters} in different stages of their quest. In The Matrix Reloaded, when the Key Maker is questioned as to how he knows about the door to "the source" of the Matrix and the security system protecting it, he responds, "I know because I must know. It is my purpose": he thus exists only to serve and shows no conflict between his assigned purpose and his individual agency. Similarly Seraph, arguably the most prominent character played by an Asian actor in the series, explains his role: "I protect that which matters most." Seraph is referring to his protection of the Oracle, a more important character in the film whose purpose in the

narrative is to serve Neo (Keanu Reeves) as his teacher and guide. Seraph, as bodyguard of the Oracle, is relegated to the role of foreign/Asian servant of a Black servant of a white protagonist. Seraph's non-humanness is accentuated through his name, his nickname "wingless" (as the Merovingian's bouncer calls him), and his white clothing, all of which identify him as an angel within the mythology of The Matrix. His Asianness and inhuman nature are fused when he is introduced to the audience and to Neo in the Matrix Chinatown as a divine figure of white and yellow light (viewed by Neo against the otherwise green Matrix coding) who is, of course, also a superhuman martial artist.

Chou is a Hong Kong action star. The angelic nature of his character accentuates the stereotype of Hong Kong heroes discussed above. His character is an agent of a greater authority and therefore lacking individual agency, a formidable martial artist, and sexually neutral. Unlike most of the male main characters (Neo, Morpheus, Link, the Architect, the Merovingian), Seraph does not have a female counterpart unless it is the child Sati whom he also dutifully guards. Furthermore, Seraph, like the Merovingian (Lambert Wilson), Persephone (Monica Bellucci), and Sati's parents, is also marked as foreign and therefore non-human by his accent. Since the world of The Matrix is a post-apocalyptic world in which there appear to be no nations and where all humans live either imprisoned within the Matrix or freely in Zion, there seem to be no diegetic linguistic distinctions between the characters. Thus the Chinese, French, and Indian accents of Seraph, the Merovingian, Persephone, and Sati's parents reveal them to be something other than human in that world. There is another noteworthy parallel drawn between Asian immigrants and aliens in the treatment of the character Sati. Sati's father, Rama-Kandra, explains to Neo that he arranged to smuggle his daughter out of the machine

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world in order to save her from deletion. While the characterization of Seraph complies with Hollywood conventions that portray the East Asian male as an asexual martial artist lacking in individual agency, Sati is simultaneously depicted as a non-human computer program and a South Asian refugee seeking asylum in the Western metropolis of the Matrix.

There are some human characters played by Asian actors but these are few and tend to be minor in comparison with the non-human roles, or to be racially ambiguous. Tank (Marcus Chong) in the original The Matrix fits into the latter category. Chong is of partly Asian descent, but the character of Tank is ambiguously Black given that Anthony Rae Parker and Nona Gaye, the actors who play Tank's siblings, are both African American. Tank's in-laws, Link (Harold Perrineau) and Cas (Gina Torres) are also Black. This may be informative given the total absence of interracial romances in the series despite its racially diverse cast (King & Leonard, 2004). The character of Ghost (Anthony Wong), a member of Niobe's (Jada Pinkett-Smith) crew on the *Logos*, is less ambiguously Asian, but the role is small and hardly central to the plot.

In contrast to these depictions of racialized Asian bodies we also see the trope reproduced of the white hero who embodies notions of East and West. Although Keanu Reeves is racially mixed (white/Asian/Pacific Islander), his character Neo is initially established as white. Within the Matrix, Neo's name is Thomas Anderson, a distinctly Nordic family name (Bassham, 2002), and his whiteness is pointed out in the first scene in which he appears in the series, when Choi describes him as looking "a little whiter than usual" (Freeland, 2002). Similarly the first shot of Trinity (Carrie Anne Moss) is of her face, illuminating and accentuating her blue eyes immediately prior to her dramatic

escape from enemy agents in the opening sequence. Although these characters are presented in the series as somewhat ambiguously Asian with their proficiency in Asian martial arts, their straight black hair, their dark sunglasses that hide their eyes, and the "Mao suit" worn by Neo in the sequels, they are clearly established as white when they are first introduced. As with Kill Bill, the principal characters in The Matrix, and the romantic relationship between them that is central to the plot, are white and heterosexual. The writer-directors of The Matrix series, Andy and Larry Wachowski, create a narrative that seems to adhere strictly to Hollywood norms in the diegetic relationships it creates between people of different races and sexes, reinforcing the centrality of the white, heterosexual male. This despite the central theme of the first film of escaping the socially constructed "prison for the mind" (Ford, 2000).

Neo, who is introduced as a white Western character, becomes more Asian through the first movie, beginning with the physical rebuilding of his atrophied muscles using acupuncture - a discipline of Chinese medicine. This process continues mentally when Tank downloads programs for *ju jitsu*, kung fu, and other martial arts into Neo's head as part of his initial orientation. The notion of martial arts as a mental exercise parallels the practice of kung fu and other martial arts in Buddhist monasteries (Ford, 2003). In the (dojo) training program where both men are dressed in kimono-style robes, Morpheus plays the role of the Asian master challenging Neo not to let his perceptions of the world restrict his actions. Morpheus taunting Neo to "stop trying to hit me and hit me!" echoes Yoda telling Luke in The Empire Strikes Back, "Try not. Do. Or do not. There is no try."

The filming and choreography of the action sequences accentuate and seemingly authenticate the Asian elements in the narrative by adapting techniques from Hong Kong kung fu cinema. Action director Yuen Wo Ping, who choreographed the action sequences of Kill Bill and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000) as well as many Hong Kong action movies including Drunken Master (1978), was the fight choreographer for The Matrix trilogy. The employment of Hong Kong-style fight choreography and special effects contribute to the racial ambiguity of Neo and Trinity by depicting them as the heroes of Hong Kong action movies are depicted. In the climactic battle between Neo and Smith (Hugo Weaving) at the end of the first movie Neo rejects his European "slave name," the identity given to him by the Matrix: Thomas Anderson. As discussed above, when we see Neo at the beginning of Reloaded he is sporting a Mao suit and dark, oval-shaped sunglasses that hide his eyes. The more Neo realizes his potential as the One, the more he is depicted as Asian in his attire, in his fighting techniques, and in terms of the cinematic special effects used to convey his supernatural abilities.

Besides embodying more general disparate notions of East and West, there are many references and allusions to Neo being both a Buddha- and a Christ-figure, conflating aspects of the most iconic religious personalities of the Orient and the Occident. "Neo" is an anagram for "One" as he is referred to throughout the trilogy (Fielding, 2003). This could suggest the Judeo-Christian Messiah/Chosen One or the Buddhist Enlightened One. Neo is jokingly referred to by Choi as his "own personal Jesus Christ" (Bassham, 2002), heralded as the saviour of the world by Morpheus (Neo's John the Baptist), and betrayed into the hands of the establishment by a Judas figure (Cypher) (Ford, 2000). It is learned from the Architect that Neo is also part of the system

making him in a sense both human and "divine" as one of the pantheon of "gods" including the Architect, the Oracle, and the Key Maker who maintain the Matrix.

Prior to playing Neo, Reeves was cast as the Buddha Siddhãrtha in Bernardo Bertolucci's Little Buddha (1993). Within the narrative of The Matrix, the suggestion that Neo is like a Buddha comes when he first goes to the Oracle to ascertain whether he is the reincarnation of the One. There he encounters Spoon (Rowan Witt) and the other potentials engaged in telekinetically bending and levitating objects through concentration. Spoon, a (white!) child with a shaved head and white robes, who looks like a young Buddhist, tells Neo as he bends a spoon with his mind that it does not exist: "There is no spoon" (Bassham, 2002). This evokes the Hindu/Buddhist concept of *samsara*: that desire and sensory perception create a world of illusion in which human beings are stuck in a karmic cycle of perpetual reincarnation. Like the Buddha, the One is to teach enlightenment to others, freeing them from the world of illusion (Flannery-Dailey & Wagner, 2001). The resurrection scene at the end of the first movie has been cited as an example of Christian symbolism as Neo rises from the dead. The resurrected Neo has extraordinary new abilities; his body radiates light – transfigured – after destroying Smith; and he physically ascends into "heaven" when he flies off in the last shot of the film (Bassham, 2002). However, when Neo is reborn he is also enlightened. Whereas the elements of physical transformation parallel the Christian resurrection story, the change in Neo's perceptions, as we see when the camera cuts to a shot of the enemy agents from his new enlightened perspective, is more Buddhist. Like the Buddha, Neo can see past illusion to perceive the world as it truly is, in this case as Matrix computer coding, thereby freeing himself from its power over him.

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This combination of Buddhist and Christian elements is significant because it follows a pattern in the construction of white Asian heroes. The extent to which the world of The Matrix is informed by Buddhism, or rather by elements of Buddhism as interpreted by the Wachowskis, is debatable given the prevalence of violence in the three films (Brannigan, 2002; Ford, 2000). However insofar as The Matrix is a sort of Buddhist narrative Neo is not simply the Wachowskis' interpretation of a Buddhist, he is their Buddha: the One (Flannery-Dailey & Wagner, 2001). This fits with the Hollywood pattern of interpreting Asian culture and positioning a white protagonist in a role of central importance of the Asian cultural institution being appropriated by the narrative. In Kill Bill, the Bride is not simply a kung fu and samurai warrior; she is the most formidable of kung fu and samurai warriors. Similarly Nathan Algren in The Last Samurai is indeed the "last" samurai. The Eurocentrism of the narrative and the continued relative absence of Asian Westerners in films that combine Asian and Western cultural motifs evoke earlier imperialist narratives that create the white Westerner as the norm and the perspective from which the world is known.

These movies are fantasies, in many cases power fantasies, constructed by a white-dominated industry to appeal to Western audiences and international audiences already familiar with Hollywood product. The Asian cultural motifs that are interpolated to become elements of Western films are thus being colonized and harvested to fill the needs of the white narrative. The Buddhist elements in The Matrix do not lead Neo to surrender his personal desires, but rather impel him to find the means to achieve them. Becoming "enlightened," being able to see the truth about the world that others cannot, Neo becomes more of an individual and acquires the power to *assert his will* on the world

around him. It is a similar case in <u>Star Wars</u>, where the Force empowers Luke Skywalker by making him special among his fellows in the rebel alliance. He does not stay on Dagobah to finish his training with Yoda in <u>The Empire Strikes Back</u>, but rather leaves to save Leia and Han Solo. Luke and Neo are essentially rebels – the archetypal American heroes. Luke is an impatient student; Neo is a hacker undermining the system. Although they gain knowledge and insight through training, they remain rebels. Both are depicted as letting go of some assumed knowledge about the world, but this process releases the innate power that is their birthright – effectively in their genes. The role of "Asian" spirituality in these narratives is as a device to unlock that ultimately personal power. Thus these films colonize Buddhism and Taoism, transforming them through Hollywood narrative convention into their opposite: a means to achieve ultimate individuality, to impose one's will upon the world, and to realize one's most imperative desires.

Conclusion

Bulletproof Monk, although less successful at the box office than the blockbusters discussed above, is an example of a "racial buddy" picture that also adheres to the conventions of the white student/Asian master dynamic. The film appropriates and reinvents Asian religion, casting the Hong Kong star Chow Yun-Fat as a superhuman Tibetan Buddhist monk, a wanderer granted unnatural youth and invulnerability as guardian of a mystical scroll that gives its reader ultimate power. This monk follows the stereotype of the Asian sojourner. He is presented as an extraordinary martial artist to the point of being supernatural (his abilities enhanced by wirework and other special effects).

He is portrayed as a foreigner in the West on a specific mission, and his choices are depicted as entirely determined by that mission. Furthermore, his lack of individual agency is highlighted by the fact that the character is nameless. Like Chon Wang in Shanghai Knights and Su in Cradle 2 the Grave, the monk is portrayed as asexual in contrast to his "white buddy" Kar (Sean William Scott), a typical rebel who pursues the girl, Jade (Jaime King). In a warehouse training sequence, the monk becomes the Asian master to Kar who, along with Jade, becomes the next guardian of the scroll when the monk's period of guardianship ends.

Again we see Asian culture and religion transformed into fantasy in the Hollywood narrative in order to bestow on a white hero great power that distinguishes him as hyper-individual (although in this case the power is shared with a white female counterpart). The Asian character continues to be depicted as the hero's wise and exotic guide, teaching the white warrior how to access that power. Bulletproof Monk reveals how the Westerner knows, creates, and becomes the Asian: through film. Before training with the monk, Kar is already proficient in martial arts from studying at the "Golden Temple," the kung fu movie theatre where he lives and practices martial arts after hours. The image of Kar, the white male, in the foreground mimicking the actions of Chinese warriors depicted on the screen in the background is a visual representation of how the Asian body has been linked to martial arts and notions of foreignness through imported kung fu films and Hollywood's interpretation of the martial arts genre. The white protagonist familiar to and preferred by white-dominated Hollywood displaces the Asian body at the centre of the narrative, becoming the West's version of the Asian hero.

As stated above, Bulletproof Monk, which has at this writing earned $23,010,607 domestically, was unsuccessful at the box office in terms its production costs and when compared with other Hollywood films discussed in this paper: Cradle 2 the Grave ($34,657,731); Shanghai Knights ($60,470,220); Kill Bill: Vol. 1 ($70,098,138); Kill Bill: Vol. 2 ($66,207,920); The Last Samurai ($111,110,575); The Matrix Reloaded ($281,553,689); and The Matrix Revolutions ($139,259,759). However, compare the $23 million made by Bulletproof Monk at the U.S. box office, and the audience that figure represents, to films in which racially Asians actors portray Western protagonists: Better Luck Tomorrow (2002) ($3,802,390), Bollywood Hollywood (2002) ($1,491,083), and Harold and Kumar go to White Castle (2004) ($18,225,165). Recognizing that box office success is largely a factor of advertising and distribution, the differences in domestic earnings reveal the power differential between major studios and independents, and between blockbusters and niche films. Even the U.S. box office earnings of more widely viewed films featuring prominent Asian Westerners such as Bend it Like Beckham (2002), with a largely British South Asian cast, and Sideways (2004), starring Sandra Oh, ($32,541,719 and $71,502,303 respectively) pale in comparison with the blockbusters in terms of creating and disseminating images and notions of the Asian. Few Western movies defy Hollywood conventions about portraying Asianness and find large audiences, while many blockbusters, particularly action films, continue to appropriate and interpret Asian cultural motifs in ways that adhere to the established conventions.

With "Kung Fu" it became normal for Hollywood to replace the Asian body with the white body in the martial arts genre. As this dynamic evolved onscreen the differences between West and East became more exaggerated; the white Westerner

became a young rebel - the ideal American hero, while the Asian master became older and more exotic to the point of becoming inhumanly ancient and alien in some genres. The Asian actor continued to appear in Western cinemas in imported Asian films and in Hollywood films that featured Hong Kong action stars as warrior sojourners. Two phenomena are playing out here, each related to the other. The first is the continued coding of the Asian body as foreign. This is a convention that runs counter to demographic trends in Western countries where Asians increasingly constitute significant proportions of populations; however, this convention has a long history in Hollywood, beginning as an expression of anti-Chinese and other anti-Asian racism prevalent in the West throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Wong, 1978; Marchetti, 1993). While this convention no longer defines the difference between West and East in terms of good and evil, at least for the most part (some action films continue to position white protagonists against Asian villains, for example Elektra [2005] pits the title heroine (Jennifer Garner) against a group of supernatural Asian assassins) – a contrast between white and Asian in terms of belonging and foreignness in the West continues to be consistently reproduced.

The second phenomenon involves the appropriation of Asian cultural themes and motifs into Eurocentric Western narratives. Such appropriation is an act of cultural imperialism. It colonizes the East, recreating the Orient as Westerners would imagine and prefer it to be – ancient, eternal, and exotic. This imagines the West as the youthful upstart by comparison, which also runs counter to current trends if read allegorically; in political and economic terms it would appear that Asian countries are the up-and-coming societies and economies in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless these characterizations

continue to dominate Western cinema. In 2005, several of the most successful films reproduce these conventions, including <u>Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith</u> and <u>Batman Begins</u>, in which the young Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale) learns martial arts from the ruthless Asian master Ra's Al Ghul (Ken Watanabe). In <u>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</u> (2005), the only characters portrayed by Asian actors are the Oompa Loompas - all played by Deep Roy - and the exotic Indian Prince and Princess Pondicherry (Nitin Ganatra and Shelley Conn) who commission Willy Wonka (Johnny Depp) to build them a chocolate palace in the fantastic bedtime story told to Charlie (Freddie Highmore) by his Grandpa Joe (David Kelly). While Hollywood may characterize such conventions as conservative business strategy they are nevertheless racist. They preserve the most prominent roles in Hollywood films for white people while defining who belongs and who does not belong in North American and other Western societies according to race. By defining the Asian and Asianness as the alien Other, these Hollywood narratives preserve the West as white space, colonize Asian bodies and culture, and create the conspicuous absence of the racially Asian Westerner in the public imagination of the West.

List of Films and Television Shows Cited

(in chronological order)

Jezebel (William Wyler, 1938)

Dragon Seed (Harold S. Bucquet & Jack Conway, 1944)

The Purple Heart (Lewis Milestone, 1944)

Simba (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1955)

"Green Hornet" (1966-67)

Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penn, 1967)

Night of the Living Dead (George A. Romero, 1969)

"Kung Fu" (1972-1975)

Enter the Dragon (Robert Clouse, 1973)

Taxi Driver (Martin Scorsese, 1976)

Star Wars: Episode IV- A New Hope (George Lucas, 1977)

Drunken Master (Yuen Wo Ping, 1978)

Star Wars: Episode V- The Empire Strikes Back (Irvin Kershner, 1980)

"Shadow Warriors" (1980-1985)

Star Wars: Episode VI- Return of the Jedi (Richard Marquand, 1983)

"The Cosby Show" (1984-92)

The Karate Kid (John G. Avildsen, 1984)

The Karate Kid, Part II (John G. Avildsen, 1986)

The Karate Kid, Part III (John G. Avildsen, 1989)

"The Fresh Prince of Bel Air" (1990-96)

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (Steve Barron, 1990)

Mississippi Masala (Mira Nair, 1991)

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II (Michael Pressman, 1991)

The Joy Luck Club (Wayne Wang, 1993)

Little Buddha (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1993)

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III (Stuart Gillard, 1993)

The Wedding Banquet (Ang Lee, 1993)

The Next Karate Kid (Christopher Cain, 1994)

Bad Boys (Michael Bay, 1995)

Die Hard: With a Vengeance (John McTiernan, 1995)

Fire (Deepa Mehta, 1996)

Independence Day (Roland Emmerich, 1996)

Men in Black (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997)

Earth (Deepa Mehta, 1998)

The Replacement Killers (Antoine Fuqua, 1998)

Rush Hour (Brett Ratner, 1998)

The Corrupter (James Foley, 1999)

The Matrix (Andy & Larry Wachowski, 1999)

Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace (George Lucas, 1999)

Charlie's Angels (McG, 2000)

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee, 2000)

Romeo Must Die (Andrzej Bartkowiak, 2000)

Shanghai Noon (Tom Dey, 2000)

Kiss of the Dragon (Chris Nahon, 2001)

Ballistic: Ecks vs. Sever (Wych Kaosayananda, 2002)

Bend it Like Beckham (Gurinder Chadha, 2002)

Better Luck Tomorrow (Justin Lin, 2002)

Bollywood Hollywood (Deepa Mehta, 2002)

Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones (George Lucas, 2002)

The Tuxedo (Kevin Donovan, 2002)

Bulletproof Monk (Paul Hunter, 2003)

Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle (McG, 2003)

Cradle 2 the Grave (Andrzej Bartkowiak, 2003)

From Grasshopper to Caine: Creating "Kung Fu" (Matthew Asner & Danny Gold,

　　2003)

Kill Bill: Volume 1 (Quentin Tarantino, 2003)

The Last Samurai (Edward Zwick, 2003)

The Making of Kill Bill (2003)

The Matrix Reloaded (Andy & Larry Wachowski, 2003)

The Matrix Revolutions (Andy & Larry Wachowski, 2003)

Shanghai Knights (David Dobkin, 2003)

Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle (Danny Leiner, 2004)

Kill Bill: Volume 2 (Quentin Tarantino, 2004)

The Making of Kill Bill Vol. 2 (2004)

Sideways (Alexander Payne, 2004)

Batman Begins (Christopher Nolan, 2005)

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Tim Burton, 2005)

Elektra (Rob Bowman, 2005)

Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith (George Lucas, 2005)

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