Martial arts and the globalization of US and Asian film industries

Christina Klein
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA

Abstract This article investigates how globalization is affecting film industries in the USA and Asia. It argues that these industries are becoming more closely integrated with one another both materially and aesthetically, and that this in turn is leading to the denationalization of individual films and film industries on both sides of the Pacific. The article explores how globalization is experienced differently by different film industries – and by different sectors within individual industries – and how it entails both losses and opportunities for Asian film makers. Taking the contemporary Hollywood and East Asian martial arts film as an exemplary cultural style of globalization, it also looks at how integration involves both cultural homogenization and the production of difference. Specific topics discussed include the growth of Hollywood’s Asian markets, Jackie Chan and the flow of Hong Kong talent into Hollywood, Hollywood remakes of South Korean movies, the resurgence of Asian film industries, Hollywood’s local-language film production and Zhang Yimou’s Hero.

Keywords Asian cinema ● Chinese cinema ● Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia ● globalization ● Hero ● Hollywood ● Hong Kong cinema ● Jackie Chan ● Korean cinema ● martial arts

Introduction

Hollywood today is fascinated with martial arts to an extent unseen since the heyday of Bruce Lee in the early 1970s. The studios are importing major martial arts stars like Jackie Chan and Jet Li from Hong Kong and
putting them in a succession of big budget films, while signing second-tier actors like Donnie Yen to multi-picture contracts. Martial arts fight scenes have become a ubiquitous feature in action films across the genre map, from science fiction (The Matrix, 1999) to vampire (Blade II, 2002) to superhero (Daredevil, 2003) to video game (Lara Croft: Tomb Raider, 2001) to girl’s empowerment (Charlie’s Angels, 2000) to costume drama (The Last Samurai, 2003). Children’s films (Shrek, 2001) and teen comedies (Scary Movie, 2000) use martial arts to generate knowing laughs, while an independent film like Jim Jarmusch’s Ghost Dog: the Way of the Samurai (1999) uses them for existential musing. At the same time, martial arts films produced by Asian film industries are finding enthusiastic audiences in the USA, as evidenced by the expanded holdings of many video stores and the making of a parody film like Kung Pow: Enter the Fist (2002). Ang Lee’s Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000) broke box office and Academy Award records for a foreign language film when it crossed over from an art house to a mass audience, and in its wake have come theatrical re-releases of older martial arts films (Iron Monkey, 1993) and eager anticipation for new fare (Hero, 2002).

A number of factors are driving Hollywood’s embrace of martial arts, from a growing popular interest in many forms of Asian culture to the enthusiastic practice of martial arts by Americans across the social spectrum. One factor that deserves particular attention is the globalization of the world’s film industries. Hollywood, of course, has operated globally since the 1910s and 1920s (Guback, 1969; Thompson, 1985; Vasey, 1997). Since the 1980s, however, it has entered a new phase of globalization that is changing its relationship with local Asian film industries (Balio, 1998; Buck, 1992; Lent, 1990; Miller et al., 2001; Segrave, 1997; Wasko, 1994). The big story now is that of integration and denationalization. Today we are seeing a partial erosion of the boundaries that once separated Hollywood from local Asian film industries, and a consequent intertwining of industries on both sides of the Pacific. As a result, individual films and entire industries can no longer be adequately understood within a national framework (Keil, 2001; Lewis, 2001; Staiger, 2002). Hollywood is becoming Asianized in diverse ways, while Asian film industries are in turn becoming Hollywoodized.

How should we understand this process of integration? Critics of globalization who employ the cultural imperialism model (Barber, 1995) or who have a US-centric perspective that focuses exclusively on Hollywood’s production and export of film (Miller et al., 2001) would have us think primarily in terms of domination: global Hollywood is gobbling up a seemingly ever-increasing share of the world’s film markets and in doing so is driving local industries to the brink of collapse and homogenizing the world’s film culture. Defenders of globalization, in turn, tend to downplay power inequities between global and local media players: they would have us think primarily in terms of increased cross-cultural exchange, expanded consumer preferences and greater aesthetic diversity (Cowen, 2002).
However, as Charles Acland writes, ‘It does not make sense to be for or against globalization . . . [G]eneral theories of the global risk simplifying phenomena to the point of unrecognizability’ (Acland, 2003: 38). Instead, we must pay attention to the complex nature of cultural globalization by looking at the diverse ways in which it is enacted and experienced in particular instances. Ien Ang urges us to acknowledge the ‘contradictory losses and opportunities’ that the globalization of media systems allows and to explore the ways in which globalization is ‘actively and differentially responded to and negotiated within concrete local contexts and conditions’ (1996: 148). Attending to such local responses and negotiations gives us a much fuller understanding of the ‘complex and contradictory dynamics of today’s “global culture”’ (p. 153). It does so in part by forcing us to abandon the fiction of pure, homogeneous cultures that are corrupted by foreign influences (Morley and Robins, 1995: 7) and to recognize the capacity for agency and strategic maneuvering among peoples who operate outside the established centers of media production (Appadurai, 1996: 31).

My goal here is to explore some concrete instances of how the integration of US and Asian film industries is being achieved – and how it is being negotiated by local actors – as both a material and an aesthetic process. I am interested in how Hollywood and a number of Asian film industries are being knitted together through the transnationalization of audiences, labor pools, distribution networks and production capital. I also investigate the increasingly circular flows of star personae, visual styles, and modes of storytelling between global Hollywood and its local Asian counterparts. These processes of material and stylistic integration are not seamless but are marked by frictions and resistances, as institutional, social and cultural pressures channel the transnational flows of film culture along certain routes and raise up obstacles in their pathways.

While homogenization is undeniably one consequence of such integration, so is heterogenization. Localization, as Stuart Hall has argued, is an integral part of globalization. It leads to the proliferation of difference in two distinct ways. First, through global capitalism’s strategy of working through the local by absorbing, penetrating and negotiating with it without entirely destroying its unique particularities. And second, through local cultures’ ability to reinvigorate themselves as refuges from and alternatives to global capitalism’s homogenizing tendencies, in part by appropriating innovations generated by the global that enable them to speak their locality more effectively (Hall, 1997). The global and the local, far from existing as neatly dichotomized and opposed entities, are in fact so interpenetrated as to be ‘mutually constitutive’ of one another (Ang, 1996: 153).

The contemporary Hollywood and East Asian martial arts film is a material product of an increasingly transnational, trans-Pacific mode of film production; it is also an expressive sign of cultural localization, in Hall’s double sense of that term. We can thus read these films – with their
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We can see one kind of integration taking place in the globalization of Hollywood's audience. Hollywood in the 1990s became an export industry, making movies primarily for people who live outside the USA – and increasingly for people who live in Asia. This has not always been the case. Foreign audiences have always been important to Hollywood, but their relative value to the studios has fluctuated. From the 1910s through 1941 they generated about 35 percent of the studios’ film rental income (Vasey, 1997: 7); that figure rose to about 50 percent in the 1960s and early 1970s (Guback, 1969: 3), and then dropped back to about 35 percent again in the early 1980s (Segrave, 1997: 288). Foreign earnings began to climb in the mid-1980s and in 1994 they topped 50 percent (Balio, 1998: 60; Segrave, 1997: 288). While foreign film rentals have dipped below domestic earnings since 1999, Hollywood today remains heavily dependent on overseas audiences: big Hollywood movies typically earn most of their money outside the USA and executives now consider foreign audiences a primary, rather than secondary, source of revenue (‘All-Time’, 2003; Groves, 2001a). This dependence on overseas markets has profoundly affected the form and content of Hollywood movies, as studio executives have concentrated their resources on the types of films that can best cross national, cultural and linguistic borders: spectacle-driven films such as special-effects-heavy blockbusters, action films, star vehicles and physical comedies (Wasko, 1994: 236–7). The globalization of audiences has had a denationalizing effect on the US film industry: while Hollywood’s blockbusters proclaim their Americanness on the surface, their style and content has been so tailored to the world market that their cultural identity, as Jonathan Rosenbaum (2002: 221) has suggested, must be seen as more multinational than national.

Asian markets did not become very important to Hollywood until the 1990s. Although American films overwhelmingly dominated most Asian markets from the 1910s through the 1930s, the scarcity of theaters plus low-ticket prices kept these markets small and unprofitable (Thompson, 1985: 141–5; Vasey, 1997: 85). After World War II many Asian film markets expanded, but the studios’ share of them often declined as newly independent countries developed their own prolific film industries and protected them with trade barriers; in 1953 Hollywood films occupied 48 percent of the screen time in Asia, the lowest percentage for any region in the world (Segrave, 1997: 286, 230). By the 1990s, however, Asian markets had become an important arena of growth, as overall economic growth, trade liberalization and multiplexing expanded these film markets and made them more accessible to Hollywood. In Japan the market share of
imported (mostly Hollywood) films increased from 46 percent in 1989 to 68 percent in 2000 (Segars, 1991: 243; 2002b: 198); in South Korea it grew from 60 percent in 1983 to 84 percent in 1993 (Paquet, 2004a; 2004b); and in Hong Kong it jumped from 22 percent in 1989 to over 50 percent in 1997 (Elley, 1991: 190; 1999: 161). For the first time, Asian markets began generating substantial revenues for the studios: Japan became Hollywood’s largest single overseas market and although Europe remained Hollywood’s largest regional market, Asia was its fastest growing one (Buck, 1992: 129; Hollinger, 2000). Studio executives today have their eyes trained on China and India, which are poised to embark on the market growth already experienced by other parts of Asia. Although these markets are still relatively small in terms of total box office receipts and difficult to operate within – China’s remains heavily regulated, while local films are overwhelmingly popular in India – their potential is vast, given their increasing economic prosperity and populations of over 1 billion each. Already, Hollywood films claim about 60 percent of the ticket sales in China while being limited to only about 30 percent of the screen time (Jones, 2002). In India they take about 3 percent to 5 percent of the overall market (a significant improvement over their paltry 0.5 percent share in 1996), and have begun to out-perform Bollywood films in some major cities (‘Hollywood Gears Up’, 2002; Nag, 2002; Pearson, 2002).

The corollary to Hollywood’s growing Asian audience has been the declining market share of local Asian film industries. Many of these industries saw their production rates and revenues decline in the 1980s and early 1990s, as home entertainment technology became widely available, piracy ran rampant, and Hollywood presented increased competition. Some of these declines have been quite dramatic: China, for instance, saw its theatrical attendance rates plummet a nearly unbelievable 98 percent between 1979 and 2000 (Jones, 2002; Xu, 2002).

As the Hollywood studios became increasingly export-oriented they began hiring a broad range of Asian film workers, from big-name stars to anonymous skilled craftspeople; sometimes these workers came to Hollywood, and other times Hollywood went to them. This transnationalization of Hollywood’s labor pool was driven by two developments, both of which had roots in the growth of Hollywood’s foreign markets: the increasing importance of spectacle-driven films and the consequent skyrocketing of film budgets.

In the 1990s there were more Asians working in Hollywood than ever before, with most of them coming from the world’s third largest film industry in Hong Kong. John Woo’s arrival helped pave the way for other directors (Tsui Hark, Peter Chan, Kirk Wong, Ringo Lam, Ronny Yu, Stanley Tong), actors (Jet Li, Chow Yun-fat, Donnie Yen, Sammo Hung, Michelle Yeoh) and martial arts choreographers (Yuen Wo-ping, Yuen Cheung-yan, Corey Yuen). This flow of talent out of Asia and into Hollywood was unprecedented. Although Hollywood had often borrowed from European and Anglophone industries, it had never before borrowed so
heavily from Asia. Several commentators have suggested that studio executives saw these high-end workers – many of whom had loyal fans across Asia – as a means to penetrate Asian markets more effectively. ‘It’s not just a matter of seeing great talent’, explained one observer. ‘It’s a matter of seeing this talent that comes with a built-in audience which we are highly covetous of’. Others suggested that Hollywood was skimming the cream off one of the few other film industries capable of making movies popular with audiences worldwide (Hong Kong is the second-largest film exporting industry after Hollywood; Major, 1997: 26–8). The strength of the Hong Kong industry has always resided in its unparalleled ability to portray action, with martial arts being the form of action that Hong Kong unquestionably did better than anyone else: after World War II, Hong Kong film makers took a local cultural form deeply rooted in Chinese religion, literature and opera and transformed it into a globally recognized form of cinematic spectacle. Hollywood hired Hong Kong actors, directors and choreographers in the 1990s because they had skills Hollywood needed. They brought the ability to produce a sophisticated, distinctive form of spectacle to an industry whose global expansion depended upon the selling of spectacle.

Jackie Chan is a good example of the transnationalization of one kind of film worker: the star. As an actor, director and producer of martial arts and action films, Chan has been a pillar of the Hong Kong film industry since the 1970s and the most popular star in Asia since the early 1980s. Chan’s box office power while he was in Hong Kong was based on his unique – and spectacular – star persona. He combined an acrobatic style of martial arts (based on years of grueling Peking Opera training) with death-defying physical stunts (which he always performed himself) and leavened the mixture with a heavy dose of physical comedy (inspired by silent masters like Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd). Aspiring to become a global rather than merely a regional star, Chan tried to break into the US market twice in the early 1980s but failed both times, in part because producers unwilling to accept his existing star persona pushed him into the mold of the conventional American action hero. Chan’s breakthrough came in the mid-1990s, when a re-edited and dubbed version of *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995) performed well in the USA and encouraged Hollywood to invite him back (Fore, 1997). With the commercial success of *Rush Hour* (1998), Chan became the first male Asian star since Sessue Hayakawa in the 1910s to make it big in Hollywood. (Bruce Lee’s Hong Kong films were popular with American audiences in the 1970s, but he died before he could become a major player in Hollywood.) He has since become a reliable earner for the studios, making a steady stream of big-budget films that perform well in the USA and abroad.

Jackie Chan’s Hollywood films are hybrid works in which the qualities that made his Hong Kong films so distinctive have been both modified and maintained. The Hollywoodization of Jackie Chan is undeniable. He has been squeezed, patted, nipped and tucked in order to fit into a different
culture industry. Chan’s studio-made films insert him into familiar Hollywood genres, give him a loquacious native-English speaking partner to carry the dialogue scenes, curtail his tendency towards non-stop action, and de-emphasize his acrobatic martial arts skill in favor of less physically challenging forms of action. The diminished scale of action in these films is partially explainable by the limitations of Chan’s aging body, which has endured decades of abuse in Hong Kong. It is also evidence of certain industrial and cultural frictions: Chan has had to conform to Hollywood’s convention that spectacle be subsumed to the demands of the narrative, an industrial standard that has defined Hollywood films since the 1910s and that contrasts sharply with Hong Kong’s tendency to privilege spectacle at the expense of narrative. While the ability to produce spectacle is precisely what Hollywood desired from Chan, it wanted his unique contributions to enhance – rather than challenge – its established mode of storytelling.

At the same time, however, the unique comic-action star persona and performance style that Chan cultivated in his Hong Kong films remains the defining quality of his recent Hollywood productions. In *Shanghai Knights* (2003), as in his early Hong Kong film *Drunken Master* (1979), Chan portrays an everyman figure whose basic decency coexists with a near-masochistic ability to endure pain. All his films – both Hong Kong and Hollywood – foreground his graceful athleticism and his inventive use of props, from stools, umbrellas and horses to clock-towers and helicopters. And several of his Hollywood films include scenes with Chinese dialogue, which allow the viewer to see Chan as an authoritative linguistic insider, rather than always as a foreigner in English and, by extension, America.

This transnationalization of Jackie Chan’s star persona is compounded by the fact that even after cracking Hollywood he has continued to make films within the Hong Kong industry. Although his Hollywood and Hong Kong films are distributed and perform differently in different markets (with American viewers having easiest theatrical access to his Hollywood films and Hong Kong audiences strongly preferring his locally made films; Lo, 2001: 474), there remains a degree of continuity between them recognizable by audiences everywhere. As one reviewer wrote in Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post*, ‘Is there one person left on Earth who, upon coming across a cinema screening a Jackie Chan film, could seriously ask: “Hmmm. I wonder what that one is about?” Hardly. We all know exactly what we will get . . .’ (Scott, 2002: 4). A film in which Jackie Chan appears and has some creative control is always to some extent a ‘Jackie Chan film’. Chan’s decision to work in both industries at the same time has led to the simultaneous production by these two industries of a single cinematic product – the ‘Jackie Chan film’ – that has become familiar to audiences around the world. Chan’s transnational ‘brand-scape’ (to modify Appadurai, 1996) erodes the boundary between the Hollywood and Hong Kong industries, knitting them together at both the material level of Chan’s labor and the aesthetic level of his unique performance style.
The move of many of Hong Kong’s top directors, stars and martial arts choreographers to Hollywood has been experienced within the Hong Kong industry as an economically painful brain drain, and it reflects the highly unequal relations of power between these two industries. As one Hollywood entertainment lawyer warned a Hong Kong industry audience in the late 1990s, ‘If you have talent, we’ll steal it’ (Murdoch, 1999). Such poaching of talent strengthens Hollywood while weakening the Hong Kong industry’s ability to compete in its own domestic market and in other Asian markets. One of the features of globalization, however, is that it has different consequences in different situations. The transnationalization of labor does not always weaken local film industries; sometimes it can strengthen them.

While the studios have looked to the Hong Kong industry primarily for workers skilled in the planning, performance and representation of spectacular displays of action, they are turning to South Korea for a very different pool of workers: screenwriters. As Hollywood has focused its energies on making the spectacle-driven blockbusters that sell well around the world, production and marketing budgets have ballooned from an average of $14 million in 1980 (Maltby, 1998: 37) to $102 million by 2003 (Di Orio, 2004). In response, producers have tried to cut costs wherever they can, especially in the area of non-star labor. This effort has led them, in the past year or so, to discover the booming South Korean film industry. Impressed by recent Korean films’ high production values and strong narratives – especially their fresh ideas, well-developed characters and imaginative storytelling – studio executives have been snapping up their remake rights (along with the rights for a number of Japanese films as well; Elley, 2001; Friend, 2003; Lyons, 2002). The studios are in effect buying the labor of South Korean and Japanese writers – which is much less expensive than that of their American counterparts – and incorporating these workers into the Hollywood system at arm’s length. Rather than weakening the South Korean and Japanese industries, as is the case with Hong Kong, this form of transnationalized labor is providing them with a much-needed source of additional revenue.

The remakes of these South Korean and Japanese films will be, along with Jackie Chan’s films, another example of an Asianized Hollywood cinema, as American actors portray characters and explore themes originally created by South Korean and Japanese writers and aimed at South Korean and Japanese audiences. It may be difficult, however, to distinguish between the American and Asian parts of these films, insofar as some South Korean writers have taken to emulating Hollywood modes of storytelling as a way of winning their own audience back from Hollywood films. Some South Korean critics, in fact, deride their local industry as ‘Copywood’ and claim it has a tendency to produce ‘Hollywood movies featuring Korean faces and Korean food for the purpose of localization, barely a step above dubbing or inserting subtitles’ (Kim, 2003). In buying
up the labor of these Asian writers, is Hollywood buying something distinctly South Korean or Japanese, or simply localized Asian versions of Hollywood’s globally successful modes of storytelling? While the studios are bypassing films that echo Hollywood overtly, part of the appeal of South Korean films no doubt lies in their combination of familiarity and difference. Like its embrace of Jackie Chan’s Peking Opera- and Buster Keaton-inspired star persona, the integration of Asian screenwriters points to both Hollywood’s new openness to Asian material and to the circular (rather than one-way) nature of global cinematic flows.

There are other instances of the transnationalization of Hollywood’s labor pool. When the Wachowski brothers hired Hong Kong martial-arts-choreographer-extraordinaire Yuen Wo-ping to take charge of the action scenes in *The Matrix*, they radically transformed the visual style of the American action film – and brought it into closer aesthetic affiliation with the contemporary Hong Kong action film. They also precipitated a flow of Hong Kong choreographers into Hollywood, where they have found steady employment. Quentin Tarantino’s decision, in turn, to shoot much of his martial arts film *Kill Bill* (2003/2004) in China is part of an increasing trend in Hollywood to cut production costs by taking advantage of China’s inexpensive yet skilled film workers. In a manner similar to the purchase of remake rights, these runaway productions may help strengthen the struggling Chinese film industry by providing a transfer of both capital and technical knowledge. Even when they do not draw so directly on Asian workers, Hollywood films are being influenced by Asian styles. Disney animators have started to borrow from the work of Japanese anime master Hayao Miyazaki, while Bollywood’s musical and narrative conventions are seeping into such mainstream studio fare as Daisy Mayer’s romantic comedy *The Guru* (2002).

The transnationalization of labor and style is clearly leading to the Asianization of Hollywood – but this Asianization is taking diverse forms. In some cases Hollywood movies are looking more like Asian films, as they embrace star personae, visual styles and narrative conventions that are strongly identified with a particular Asian film industry. In other cases, Hollywood’s use of Asian labor facilitates the ongoing, circular flow of cinematic culture, as Hollywood imports indigenized versions of its own, previously exported styles and modes of narration. In still other cases, the use of Asian labor has no visible effect on style at all, but affects the financial organization and strength of both Hollywood and Asian film industries. The costs and benefits of transnationalization are distributed unevenly across the industries concerned – each of which is internally segmented into multiple economic sectors – in ways that muddy the notion of one national film industry dominating another. Hong Kong producers have been hurt by the brain drain of high-end talent to Hollywood, South Korean and Japanese producers welcome the influx of Hollywood remake money, Chinese directors may benefit from Hollywood’s runaway productions, American blue-collar film workers and some
screenwriters worry about jobs lost to their Asian counterparts, while others find inspiration in Japanese and Indian sources.

The Hollywoodization of Asian film industries

A few years after Hollywood’s foreign audience outstripped its domestic one, the world’s film industries approached another turning point in their process of globalization. Around 1997 Hollywood executives began to notice that although foreign markets were still expanding, the growth rate of the studios’ share had slowed down considerably and in some cases even reversed (Groves, 1998). Local film industries, it turned out, were showing signs of resurgence. Having been lured back into the theaters by multiplexes and Hollywood blockbusters in the 1980s and early 1990s (Stern, 2001), audiences around the world were now returning their attention to local films. By the end of the 1990s it looked like the overwhelming domination of local markets by Hollywood films might be a stage rather than the endpoint of globalization and that it might be coming to an end. ‘None of us believe that U.S. product will sustain the 60% to 70% market share that it currently has in many of these territories’, one Columbia executive noted in 1998. ‘Our assessment is that the market for local-language and local culture films is growing, and will grow substantially over the next 10 to 20 years’ (Carver, 1998). In 2001, the studios’ overseas receipts fell almost 20 percent from the previous year, due in large part to competition from what the president of Twentieth Century Fox called ‘vibrant’ local industries (Foroohar, 2002; ‘O’seas Rentals See Downturn’, 2002).

While signs of revitalization first appeared in Europe, they were soon visible in Asia as well. Local films secured the number one slot in Thailand in 1999 (Nang Nak) and in 2000 (Bang Ra Jan), in 2001 they were the top earners in Japan (Spirited Away), Hong Kong (Shaolin Soccer), Thailand (Suriyothai), and South Korea (Friend), and in 2002 they took the top slot in Hong Kong (Internal Affairs), China (Big Shot’s Funeral), and South Korea (Marrying the Mafia). This trend continued into 2003, when local films again topped the box office in China (Hero), Japan (Bayside Shakedown 2), and South Korea (Memories of Murder). The nature of this resurgence varies: in some instances, the local market share has been boosted by the extraordinary popularity of a single movie (Hero in China, Spirited Away in Japan) and thus may indicate little about the industry’s overall strength. Other industries, such as Hong Kong’s and Thailand’s, have been able to produce a steadier flow of popular films. In 2001 local films took in nearly 50 percent of Hong Kong’s box office receipts (Kan, 2002a), the highest share in a decade, and in Thailand they garnered about 30 percent, the highest share in 20 years (Chaiworaporn, 2003b). While these figures still represent declines from historic high points, they signal a movement towards growth and ongoing viability.
Buoyed by their success at the box office, a number of Asian industries have increased production. Thailand had 60 films scheduled for release in 2003, up from a typical slate of about eight in the late 1990s (Amnatcharoenrit, 2002; Chaiworaporn, 2003a); Japan’s Shochiku studio is using revenues earned from exhibiting and distributing Hollywood blockbusters to expand its production schedule (Groves, 2003d); and production is up in Hong Kong, where the Shaw Brothers studio marked its return to film production with the release of *Drunken Monkey* (2002), an old-school martial arts film starring Gordon Liu Chia-hui, whose career profile was significantly raised by his appearance in Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* (Kan, 2003b).

South Korea offers the best example of a resurgent Asian industry. In 1988 the government, acquiescing to years of pressure from Washington and Hollywood, lifted its restrictions on the importation and direct distribution of foreign films, a move which caused the market share of local films to drop from 27 percent in 1987 (Paquet, 2004a) to a mere 16 percent in 1993 (Paquet, 2004b). The first signs of rejuvenation appeared in 1997, when two local films performed particularly well at the box office. The boom hit its stride in 1999 with the release of *Shiri*, a terrorist thriller that beat out *Titanic* as the highest grossing film in South Korean history, and three other local films that made the top ten (Paquet, 2004d). *Joint Security Area* quickly surpassed *Shiri*’s box office record in 2000 (when local films took five of the top ten slots; Paquet, 2004e), and in turn was out-earned by *Friend* in 2001 (when local films took six of the top ten slots; Paquet, 2004f). In 2001 local films secured just over 50 percent of the domestic market, making South Korea one of the few countries in the world where viewers preferred local movies to Hollywood fare. Although the industry’s market share dipped slightly to 48 percent in 2002, it rebounded to an even more impressive 53 percent in 2003 and to a whopping 68 percent in the first half of 2004, when two record-breaking films (*Silmido* and *Taegukgi*) pushed Hollywood’s share of the market down to a mere 39 percent (KOFIC 2004a, 2004b). These numbers are particularly impressive when one takes into account that the South Korean industry released only 78 films in 2002, compared to the 262 it imported from Hollywood (KOFIC, 2004c). A number of factors spurred this revitalization, including solid government support, a screen quota for domestic films of 146 days a year, an increase in private investment, and multiplexing, which boosted attendance rates and increased the opportunity for big box office returns. The industry is also learning lessons from its competitors: a new generation of writers and directors is appropriating stylistic elements from popular Hollywood and Hong Kong films, while producers are devoting more of their budgets to marketing (Kim, 2000, 2002; Segars, 1992, 1995, 2001, 2002a).

This resurgence of local film industries can be seen as an unintended consequence of Hollywood’s domination of world film markets, as audiences turn away from the homogenizing tendencies of global culture and
seek out movies that express their own cultural particularities. Such strengthening of local cultures – one form of localization – can be as much a part of globalization as is cultural homogenization. It would be a mistake, however, to see these revived local film industries in a relationship of simple opposition to global Hollywood. Asian film industries are not so much resisting globalization as learning how to turn some of the transformations it has unleashed to their own advantage.

Hollywood’s response to the revitalization of local film industries has been to pursue its own strategies of localization. Looking for ways to turn a profit on local audiences’ desires to see local movies, Hollywood since the mid-1990s has moved into the distribution of local films, both within their own domestic markets and internationally (Dawtrey, 1995). Hollywood’s unparalleled distribution system has long been the key to its domination of foreign markets. No other film industry can match the worldwide network of branch offices, the sophisticated marketing techniques, the financial resources, and the privileged relationship to the multiplexes. Today Asian films are being integrated into that system. Disney’s Buena Vista distributed Japan’s blockbuster anime film Spirited Away in the USA and the popular South Korean horror film Phone (2002) in South Korea and Japan. Sony Classics distributed India’s hit film Lagaan (2001) in the USA and internationally, and Universal recently pre-bought the Japanese distribution rights for Taegukgi, the latest South Korean blockbuster (Groves, 2003c). (Local Asian distributors are also increasingly handling Hollywood films in their own domestic markets: Japanese studios regularly distribute Hollywood films and CJ Entertainment distributes all DreamWorks films in South Korea, a result of its parent conglomerate’s investment of over 10 percent in the Hollywood production company; Segars, 2002a.)

While Asian film makers are thrilled to have access to Hollywood’s powerful distribution system, the studios are not simply opening up channels through which Asian films flow around the world without friction. The studios also act as gatekeepers, filters, regulators and sometimes even impediments to the circulation of these films. Films that do not satisfy studio notions of marketability are unlikely to be picked up, thereby creating a disincentive to produce such films, and there is no guarantee that those films that are purchased will be marketed well, as Disney showed when it gave Spirited Away a half-hearted US release (Kehr, 2003). Although Disney’s semi-autonomous Miramax division is a major distributor of Asian films, it has recently become notorious for actually inhibiting their circulation in the USA. Miramax has long delayed the release of many films whose theatrical distribution rights it owns – including Thailand’s Tears of the Black Tiger (2000) and Hong Kong’s Shaolin Soccer (2001) and The Touch (2002) – and is blocking the import into the USA of legitimate VHS/DVD versions of the many films to which it owns the US home entertainment rights. When it does distribute Asian films – especially commercial action films – Miramax often modifies them by dubbing them, editing them,
altering dialogue, changing titles and creating new soundtracks (Alliance, n.d.; Dombrowski, 2003; Elley, 2002; Kan, 2002c). In effect, the studio is culturally ‘de-odorizing’ these films by removing or changing those elements it believes might hamper the films’ reception among a mass US audience, including elements that are too culturally specific, potentially offensive, or not up to ‘international’ – i.e. Hollywood – standards (Iwabuchi, 2002: 27). We can see here how globalization’s homogenizing and heterogenizing tendencies work side by side: in making Asian films available to American viewers, Miramax contributes to the heterogenization of American film culture, while its modifications of these films strips them of some of their culturally distinct features.

Hollywood’s second response to the resurgence of local film industries has been to go into the business of making local – ‘foreign’ – movies. Following their move into local-language television production, a number of studios – including Columbia, Warner Brothers, Disney/Buena Vista, Miramax and Universal – have created special overseas divisions or entered into partnerships to co-produce local language films in Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Brazil, Argentina, India, South Korea, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Brodesser, 2000; Dawtrey, 2002; Dunkley and Harris, 2001; Foroohar, 2002; Groves, 2001b). Their goal is to use Hollywood production methods to produce commercially successful local-content films. While some of these films target an international market, most address local audiences. ‘This is a way’, explained one Buena Vista executive, ‘to tap into the increasing local demand in these countries for their own domestic product’ (Grove, 1997). Local language production has other benefits for the studios as well, insofar as it allows them to take advantage of production subsidies and tax breaks offered by local governments, and to evade local import restrictions and screen quotas. It also produces content for the studios’ media conglomerate parents, whose worldwide distribution pipelines can carry more movies than can be produced and released in the USA (Horst, 2002). Such productions have the added political benefit of fending off charges of cultural imperialism. ‘Pouring money into a territory’s local pictures’, observed one Hollywood executive, ‘dissipates the amount of anti-U.S. feeling’ and backs up Hollywood’s claims to national governments that it is interested in strengthening, not destroying, local film industries (Carver, 1998).

Much of this foreign-language film production is taking place in Asia, where the Japan-based Sony Corporation has made the biggest investment. In 1998 Sony created Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, a Hong Kong-based subsidiary of its Hollywood studio. This division has since produced a number of Chinese films, including Zhang Yimou’s Not One Less (1999) and The Road Home (1999), He Ping’s Warriors of Heaven and Earth (2003), and Feng Xiaogang’s Big Shot’s Funeral (2001) and Cell Phone (2003). It has also made Hong Kong films, including Tsui Hark’s Time and Tide (2000), Corey Yuen’s So Close (2002), and Stephen Chow’s Kung Fu Hustle (forthcoming), and a Taiwanese film, Double Vision.
(2002), directed by Chen Kuo-fu. In addition, it has a Korean-language remake of David Mamet's *Things Change* in the works (Dunkley, 2002). Most of these films have performed respectably in their own domestic markets and some, such as *Big Shot's Funeral*, *Cell Phone* and *Double Vision*, were major hits: audiences embraced these films as local productions and took pride in their ability to beat out the imported Hollywood competition ('Cell Phone', n.d.; Wu, 2002a). The studio had its greatest international success with diasporic Taiwanese director Ang Lee’s martial arts epic *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. While the film performed variably across Asia, it took North America and Europe by storm, generating the highest box office returns of any foreign-language film in US history, carrying away four Academy Awards, and raising hopes among Asian film makers that they might finally be able to penetrate America’s lucrative but notoriously closed marketplace.

Hollywood’s decision to begin producing Asian language films is an example of the corporate strategy of global localization, or ‘glocalization’. In this approach, transnational corporations seek to expand their worldwide market share not by exporting identical products, but by producing their products locally under the supervision of managers who can tailor them to local tastes and conditions (Robertson, 1995). A degree of heterogenization, rather than wholesale homogenization, becomes the means through which these corporations extend their reach. Having basically invented the concept of glocalization in the 1980s, Sony urged the studios to increase their foreign-language production in the 1990s. ‘The Hollywood-centric view of the world’, said one Sony executive, ‘just doesn’t work anymore’ (Weiner, 1997). And indeed, this change in worldview has proved profitable for the studios, which in 2002 recovered some of their lost ground in overseas markets, in part because of their success in producing and distributing local – or ‘glocal’ – films (Groves, 2003a).

One of the consequences of glocalization is that it no longer makes much sense to think of Hollywood as being separate from and in competition with local Asian film industries. Far from being outsiders to many Asian film industries, the studios today are thoroughly integrated into them as local players at the levels of production, distribution and exhibition. Box office figures delineating the relative market share of domestic and imported films are losing their relevance as gauges of Hollywood’s position in overseas markets, since so many ‘local’ films are now being produced and distributed by Hollywood studios. In fact, Hollywood has become so invested in local industries that declines in their domestic market share have become cause for concern rather than celebration. Says the president of Buena Vista International, ‘We’re very active in co-productions and acquisitions, so we want to see strong local industries’ (Groves, 2002). The result is a denationalization of film industries on both sides of the Pacific, as Hollywood produces foreign language films for foreign markets, and as Asian industries become increasingly integrated into a corporate system headquartered in the USA.
It is tempting to see Hollywood's move into local language production as a form of cultural imperialism, a backdoor way to take control of local film industries and erode their distinctive qualities by producing Hollywood movies with a local veneer. And indeed the cultural identity of these Hollywood-produced Asian films is sometimes ambiguous: viewers in China and Hong Kong sometimes saw *Crouching Tiger* as a faux-Chinese Hollywood movie (Klein, 2004). The charge of cultural imperialism becomes less clear cut, however, if we shift our perspective and see these films as a strategy on the part of local Asian film industries to go global themselves: to remake themselves so that they can compete more successfully with imported Hollywood movies and thus reclaim a greater share of their own domestic markets. Throughout Asia there are reform-minded producers and directors – including many Hong Kong returnees from Hollywood (Landler, 2000) – who are changing the way they make movies and who believe their industries will prosper as a result. For these film makers, *Crouching Tiger* is one of the most important Asian movies of this generation because it offers them a model to emulate (Chute, 2003; Hansen, 2001).

The Chinese film *Hero* has perhaps hewed most closely to Ang Lee's model. Like *Crouching Tiger*, *Hero* is a swordplay martial arts film set in the historical past. It was directed by Zhang Yimou, like Lee an art house director with a solid reputation in the West, and shot on the mainland with all Mandarin dialogue (although Zhang, learning from one of Lee's blunders, dubbed the voices of his Cantonese-speaking actors so as not to offend his Mandarin-speaking viewers with their accents; Elley, 2003). *Hero* was a huge critical and commercial success in China, where its $36 million box office made it the highest-grossing Chinese film ever and second only to *Titanic* in overall earnings (Jones, 2003; Muzi News, 2003). It was also nominated for an Academy Award as best foreign language film. The film's success has given the struggling Chinese industry a much-needed boost in earnings and morale. For all these reasons, *Hero* offers a clarifying example of the tactics that Asian film industries are pursuing as they seek to reinvent themselves as global players.

The first imperative in the eyes of many Asian film makers is to improve the production values of Asia's commercial cinema (Kan, 2002b; Muzi News, 2001; United Press International, 1994). While Asian art cinema has always had extremely high standards, trade barriers allowed commercial film makers to churn out cheaply made films and still be assured a viable share of the market. Once Hollywood films flooded in, however, audiences' expectations changed and the local commercial fare looked threadbare in comparison. Film makers throughout Asia became convinced that they could win their viewers back if they offered them production values more in keeping with the Hollywood standard: stronger scripts, better acting, improved mise-en-scene, and advanced sound and image technology. National governments, no longer able to protect film industries with trade
barriers, are encouraging this move towards market competitiveness by redirecting resources away from the production of art films, which hold little appeal for local viewers, and towards higher-quality commercial fare (Jazmines, 2002; Wu, 2002b). Zhang Yimou treated *Hero* as a showcase for his view that the future of Asian cinema lies in well-crafted commercial productions (Wu, 2003). Zhang has been very clear that he sees *Hero* as a ‘commercial action film’ that differs in important ways from his earlier works (‘*Hero News 58*’, n.d.). Yet he brought to this unabashed piece of genre work the same exacting standards that one finds in *Ju Dou* (1990) or *Raise the Red Lantern* (1992): *Hero* has first-rate cinematography, exquisite costumes and settings, internationally known stars, and even special effects. The Chinese government, which had banned some of Zhang’s earlier films, put its weight behind *Hero* by promoting it enthusiastically in the press, allowing it to premiere in Beijing’s hallowed Great Hall of the People, and making every effort to prevent its piracy. *Hero* embodies the joint effort by Asian film makers and governments to reclaim their own domestic markets by producing high quality commercial films that local viewers will want to watch.

The second imperative driving Asian film makers is professionalization. Many Asian film industries, including the region's largest in Hong Kong and India, have been run in a seat-of-the-pants fashion since the collapse of their studio systems decades ago. Financing came from individual producers or organized crime, projects were approved and shooting began without completed scripts, sound and camera equipment was outdated, and pre- and post-production were rushed. Today a number of producers and directors are promoting disciplining and rationalizing processes that echo some of the changes that Hollywood underwent in the 1910s (Bamzai, 2001; Chute, 2003; ‘*Dil Chahta Hai*’, 2002; ‘India: This Lagaan’, 2001; Kan, 2002a; Kripalini, 2002; Thussu, 2002). Often these reformers have done a stint in Hollywood (Jackie Chan, Michelle Yeoh), have made a local-language Hollywood film (Zhang Yimou), or have other ties to global capitalism (India’s Aamir Khan has been a spokesman for Coke and Pepsi). Together, they are institutionalizing film financing, using newer technologies, allocating more time for pre- and post-production, and devoting more attention to marketing. Such professionalization costs money, of course, and today film budgets are increasing to record heights throughout Asia. While the average Asian film costs less than $1.5 million, South Korea’s *Resurrection of the Little Match Girl* (2002) cost $9.2 million, India’s *Devdas* (2001) cost $10.2 million, Hong Kong’s *The Touch* cost $20 million, and *Hero* cost $31 million.

Where is this money coming from? In addition to professional sources of financing such as banks and well-capitalized media companies, local producers are following Hollywood’s model of pre-selling their films to the ancillary home entertainment markets, and some industries are concentrating their resources on fewer films. Collaboration with a Hollywood studio is one of the most common means of big-budget financing,
and as such should be seen as a local Asian strategy for survival as much as a global Hollywood strategy for domination. Zhang Yimou, for instance, financed *Hero* by pre-selling North American distribution rights to Miramax for a reported $20 million. (Like other Asian films, *Hero* has encountered some friction with Miramax: despite apparently demanding that Zhang trim the film by 18 minutes to make it more palatable to American viewers, the studio did nothing to promote it after it received an Academy Award nomination and has repeatedly pushed back its US release date; *'Hero Breaking News 247'* , n.d.).

A third tactic pursued by Asian film industries involves regionalization. By pooling resources across national boundaries, producers are able to improve production values while keeping costs down. A transnational Chinese film industry that brings together Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the mainland has been taking shape since the early 1980s (Lu, 1997), and ties are also being forged among Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, South Korea and Japan. Extending such regionalization westward, Asian industries are also forging production ties with the USA, Australia and some European countries (Dore, 2003; Hopewell, 2003). *Hero* is an example of such regional film making. Zhang Yimou co-produced the film with Bill Kong of Hong Kong, who also produced *Crouching Tiger*, and he used his huge budget to buy the best talent that the region had to offer. Zhang hired stars based in China (Zhang Zhiyi), Hong Kong (Tony Leung, Maggie Cheung) and the USA (Jet Li, Donnie Yen). He brought in a cinematographer (Christopher Doyle) and an action director (Tony Ching Siu-tung) from Hong Kong, an Academy Award winning costume designer from Japan (Emi Wada), and an Academy Award winning composer (Tan Dun, who also worked on *Crouching Tiger*) and a violinist (Itzhak Perlman) from the USA. He shot the film in China, where skilled labor is cheap, and used US and Australian post-production houses for the special effects. The result is a stylistically hybrid film. The actors and martial arts choreography give the film a distinctly Hong Kong feel, the costumes impart a vaguely Japanese look, the soundtrack has clear echoes of *Crouching Tiger*, while the overall slickness of production and the special effects suggest Hollywood’s influence.

The regionalization of Asian film industries can also be seen in their increasing orientation towards foreign markets. Most Asian film industries other than Hong Kong have historically produced films exclusively for their domestic markets, and the small size of these markets has kept budgets and production values low; even exporting industries such as India’s have been largely, although not exclusively, confined to their own diasporic markets. As budgets have risen, Asian producers are beginning to focus more on exports – both within the region and to the bigger markets of the USA and Europe – and overseas earnings are rising to new heights (Segars, 2002a; ‘Thailand Movie’, 2002). Bollywood film makers, jealous of the success that Chinese-language art and action movies have found in the West, are particularly eager to produce cross-over films, although they have not quite succeeded yet (Boland, 2001; ‘Bollywood Kitsch Goes International’, 2002;
Dunkley, 2002, Pearson, 2003; ‘1,500 Delegates to Attend Meet on Entertainment’, 2003;). The tailoring of films for foreign markets is inevitably leading to changes in the form and content of Asian films, just as it has in Hollywood. Multinational casts and crews have become increasingly common as producers seek to satisfy the tastes of diverse audiences, and US locations, English or American actors, and interspersed English dialogue can be found in films made with an eye towards Western markets, such as Hong Kong’s *The Touch*, China’s *Big Shot’s Funeral*, Taiwan’s *Double Vision*, and India’s *Lagaan* and *Kaante* (2003). As is the case with Hollywood films, action and spectacle export well, as attested to by the regional success of the terrorist thriller *Shiri* and the horror film *Ringu*. *Hero*, which Zhang designed to ‘cater to international tastes’, emulates *Crouching Tiger’s* synthesis of art-house and action-film conventions, providing viewers with plenty of dynamic martial arts spectacle as well as an intellectually satisfying aesthetic experience (Muzi News, 2002). It has also exported well, earning over $30 million in Japan, plus another $40 million in the rest of Asia and Europe (Schwarzacher, 2003; Oei, 2003).

A fourth tactic pursued by Asian film makers bent on winning back local audiences has been to borrow elements of Hollywood’s visual and narrative style. In many cases, the films that have broken box office records in their own domestic markets are the ones that have learned the most from the competition and appropriated those elements that seem to attract viewers. One of the primary concerns of Asian film makers has been to improve the quality of their screenplays (Kan, 2003a; Young, 1996), which often means subordinating spectacle to the demands of a strong narrative. The makers of *Infernal Affairs* pared down their action scenes to a bare minimum in order to focus more attention on the story (which prompted a frenzied bidding war for the remake rights among Hollywood studios; Fleming, 2003), and a Miramax executive explained his company’s eagerness to invest in *Hero* by pointing to its ‘really good’ script, noting that ‘a thought-provoking action film is rather unusual’ (Mazurekewich, 2002). At the same time, Asian directors are also borrowing Hollywood’s style of spectacle. The director of *Shiri* took great pains to emulate Hollywood’s realistic scenes of violent gunplay, going so far as to rent his prop guns from a Los Angeles company, while *Shaolin Soccer*, a martial arts-sports film that became the highest-grossing film in Hong Kong history, was one of the first Hong Kong films to devote a substantial portion of its budget to digital special effects.

If these Asian films slavishly copied Hollywood in every aspect, they would be fine examples of cultural imperialism. But invariably they pursue a fifth tactic as well – going local. ‘Local themes with global resources’ seems to be the motto of reformers throughout Asia (*Bollywood Kitsch Goes International*, 2002). The director of Taiwan’s hit film *Double Vision* credited his film’s success to its combination of ‘typical (Hollywood) structure’ and ‘Taiwanese content’ (Kaur, 2002): ‘We have Hollywood production values, a tight story and smart script, but it has themes Asian audiences can identify with’ (Wu, 2002a). These films must not be so local, however,
as to jeopardize their exportability; their local stories must also have some broader appeal. Spirited Away resonates with Japanese religious traditions, while also echoing Western fairy tales and journey myths. Shiri and Joint Security Area focus on the tensions between North and South Korea and the deep emotional appeal of South Korea’s ‘sunshine policy’ of rapprochement, while also telling stories of trust and betrayal. Lagaan narrates both a fictional episode in India’s anti-colonial struggle and a universal story of an underdog defeating an unjust oppressor. Shaolin Soccer displays a very Hong Kong sense of humor rooted in masculine humiliation, while also replicating the visual look of globally popular video games. The hybridity of these films is thus triple. They combine Hollywood production values with local themes that also have trans-local appeal.

Hero expresses its local cultural identity through its adherence to many of the genre conventions of the Chinese martial arts film and especially through its display of genuine martial arts virtuosity – precisely the things that Hollywood martial arts films tend to ignore. The scene of Jet Li and Donnie Yen’s encounter is one of the strongest in the entire film, as the film’s pace slows down and the camera pulls back to allow the viewer to linger in the visual pleasures of their highly-skilled combat. The film communicates a more political sense of the local through its story and theme. The film offers a sympathetic retelling of the well-known story of China’s first emperor, the ruthless Qin Shihuang, who unified the country circa 220 BC by brutally crushing all opposition, and the several unsuccessful attempts to assassinate him. Qin’s reputation was rehabilitated by Mao Zedong, who saw him as an inspirational figure, and he remains a touchstone figure for the Communist Party today as it tries to hold China intact while making the wrenching transition to capitalism (Kahn, 2003). At its heart, this is a film about state formation. It reaffirms the need for a strong leader who can create a coherent state out of social chaos, and it defines heroism as the ability to recognize social stability as a supreme value and to sacrifice one’s life for it. Needless to say, such values are not common in even the most Hong Kong-influenced Hollywood films and they hardly seem designed to appeal to individualistic Americans (which may partially explain Miramax’s delay in releasing it). Hero stands as an exemplary instance of the kind of hybrid film that is being produced within an increasingly transnational system. Materially and aesthetically indebted to Hollywood, no one could confuse it for a ‘Hollywood’ film – neither textually, in terms of its visual style, narrative, and ideology, nor in terms of its reception, insofar as Chinese and East Asian audiences have embraced it as a local film.

Conclusion

My goal here has been to give an overview of what the globalization of US and Asian film industries entails. In doing so, I have tried to move beyond
the condemnation or celebration of cultural globalization in general by exploring some of the specific complexities that mark the transnational relationships within this particular culture industry. I have tried to highlight how all the parties involved are being transformed, although not all in the same way. While Hollywood has the most power to shape these transformations, it is a mistake to see Asian film makers and industries merely as passive victims – or as being on the brink of death.

One of globalization’s most important consequences is the increasing difficulty in making clear distinctions between what is a local Asian film and what is a global Hollywood film, at both the material and the aesthetic level. Hollywood, in many ways, is no longer an American film industry: the major studios are not only divisions of global media conglomerates, but transnational corporations in their own right that think about markets, labor pools, production and distribution on a global rather than a national scale. Precisely in order to become more globally marketable, Hollywood films are absorbing many Asian elements, including various kinds of workers, star personae, styles of action and stories. Asian film industries are likewise becoming less exclusively Chinese, Hong Kong, Japanese, South Korean or Indian, as the Hollywood studios become ever more powerful players in local production, distribution and exhibition, and as Asian film makers, in an effort to win back their local audiences and increase their films’ export potential, appropriate and indigenize Hollywood conventions. Hollywoodization and Asianization – globalization and localization, homogenization and heterogenization – go hand in hand.

The proliferation of martial arts in contemporary commercial Hollywood and Asian cinema belongs to a century-long cinematic history of trans-Pacific borrowing and negotiation. It should also be seen, however, as a cultural expression of the new social and economic formations that have been brought into existence by the latest phase of globalization. When we look at these displays of martial arts on our movie screens, we should also look through them to the global flows of labor and capital, to the heightened demand for market-expanding spectacle and action films, to the corporate strategy of glocalization, to the deeply felt need for cinematic expressions of cultural particularity. We should see these displays as stylistic manifestations of the complex process of integration that has reshaped film industries in the USA and Asia over the past 20 years. The unique properties of the martial arts film make it particularly amenable to global appropriation. It is both a strong genre with deep roots in many forms of East Asian culture and a flexible one whose many subgenres enable it to blend well with other kinds of films. To borrow from James Clifford (1997: 251), the martial arts film partakes of both roots and routes: its origins lie deep within particular cultural traditions and it also travels well. It is a form of local culture that is thriving under global-  ation, adapting to new conditions and taking on new meanings without losing all connection to its origins.
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**Christina Klein** is an associate professor of literature at MIT. She is the author of *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (University of California Press, 2003) and of ‘*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*: A Diasporic Reading’, in *Cinema Journal*. Address: 179 Appleton St., #3, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA. [email: cklein@mit.edu]