

Crippled Action: Jackie Chan and the Incongruity of Hollywood and Hong Kong

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Early in the 1983 film *Project A*, Dragon Ma (Jackie Chan), a Hong Kong marine hunting the ruthless pirate lord San-Po, bursts into the private room of an extravagant restaurant. He has been searching for a wanted criminal who might be connected to San-Po, and he finally has the criminal cornered. Ma flashes his badge, but the criminal has no intention of cooperating. In an instant, the restaurant becomes a war zone as the outlaw dashes for safety and henchmen swarm Ma and his squad. Before long, Ma stands alone against the onslaught sending attackers flying over chairs and crashing through tables with kicks. He then leaps onto the nearby bar and over to a staircase in one, unbroken movement. His attackers follow soon overwhelming Ma, sending him headfirst down a banister with a brutal kick to the chest. After several more spectacular ascensions and painful falls, the brawl is halted by the arrival of Ma's superior officer, who chastises the tireless fighter for destroying such an expensive establishment. This is Jackie Chan's singular brand of action cinema, a style of screen fighting defined by unbroken combat rhythm, extreme emotional intensity, and extraordinary duration—a style defined by Craig D. Reid as Perpetual Motion Technique (PMT).¹ This technique is one of the most fundamental aspects of Jackie Chan's action aesthetic, and it has made him a (miraculously) living legend of international cinema.

With his Hong Kong films of the 1980s and early 1990s, such as *Police Story* (1985), *Project A*, and *Drunken Master II* (1994), Jackie

Chan established a unique action aesthetic—a singular style built upon his Perpetual Motion Technique and completely authentic death-defying stunts. This action aesthetic and combat style have been subverted in his Hollywood films such as *Rush Hour* (1998) and *Shanghai Noon* (2000). Though it has been discussed how Jackie Chan's Hollywood roles reflect broader ideas such as a transnational cinema or a westernization of Hong Kong action cinema, I will argue that Jackie Chan's entrance and success in the Hollywood system has come at the expense of his action aesthetic, which is crippled by the disintegration of Chan's combat rhythm and the dilution of his stunts due to pragmatic (commercial and legal), narrative, and stylistic incongruities between the Hong Kong and Hollywood action models. I will also argue that the advent of Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) and other modern special effects in both Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema has contributed to the effective end of the true Jackie Chan action cinema style since the release of *Who Am I?* in 1998.

It is first necessary to define what constitutes Jackie Chan's action aesthetic, and how the various aspects of his cinematic style coalesce into a subgenre of action films that are unique, even within the Hong Kong sphere. Reid defines Chan's action cinema of the 1980s as the new "Wu Da Pian," action films that combined "athleticism, martial arts, and dangerous stunts."² This comparison serves as an accurate description of Chan's action style in its most rudimentary terms. However, it is essential to further dissect Chan's unique "Wu Da Pian" formula so that the centrality of PMT³ to his screen combat and overall action aesthetic can be uncovered. The principle behind PMT is "the maintenance of continuous body motion throughout the entire fight scene to give the impression of nonstop action."⁴ Chan drew from the Peking Opera performance tradition which has influenced the entire martial arts genre and applied its portrayal of intense, exaggerated emotion through facial and bodily expression to every physical movement of an action sequence, thereby creating the impression of lethal action even when no real punches or

kicks are being thrown. This unbroken chain of kinetic energy and hyper-emotional movement gives uniquely to Chan's fight scenes the illusion of truly continuous combat, even for stretches of twenty or more minutes of screentime. Such is the case, for example, in the climactic action showdown of *Drunken Master II*, in which Chinese folk hero Wong Fei-Hung (Chan) takes on John (Ken Lo), the high-kicking henchman of a villainous artifact smuggler.

Though Jackie Chan has been the only martial arts star to match, or perhaps even surpass, the success of Hong Kong legend Bruce Lee, his action style is fundamentally opposed to Lee's. David Bordwell describes Lee as having displayed a realistic "broken rhythm," and indeed he did stretch the underlying pause/burst/pause pattern of Hong Kong screen combat to extraordinary lengths.⁵ Though Lee and Chan were in pursuit of the same dramatic goal and agree that "the action should be filled with emotion,"⁶ Chan's action aesthetic opposes Lee's rhythm by stringing together varied martial arts sets for as long as possible, maintaining energy and excitement through PMT and fully integrated comedic pauses. Once a true Jackie Chan action scene gets going, it literally sustains itself until every foe has fallen and every piece of the environment has been utilized.

This brings us to another integral aspect of the Chan action aesthetic: the incorporation of environment and ambient objects into the physical action. Ramie Tateishi has rightfully concluded that the Jackie Chan action aesthetic is founded on "dynamic movement and reconfiguring of space" by which the objects inhabiting the action environment are not only made active through Chan's incorporation of them into combat or stunts, but that they actually "become a natural extension of the very terrain itself across which Chan travels"⁷ This idea illustrates how Chan's action aesthetic is phenomenally flexible in that it does not rely on martial arts combat to generate excitement. Chan might throw a flurry of punches to dispatch one foe, then attack the next with a nearby clothing rack as he does in *Police Story*, or roll them up in a carpet as in *Project A*. These moments are important because they serve to maintain the rhythm of

the greater action sequence, a rhythm that is lost once Chan makes the jump to Hollywood.

Finally, the elements of the punctuating stunt and the absorption of pain are essential to the Jackie Chan action aesthetic. Chan's action sequences are full of spectacular physical stunts, but it is the inclusion of what I will refer to as "punctuating stunts" that solidifies the singularity and authenticity of the Jackie Chan brand. In *Police Story*, Chan plays appropriately heroic Hong Kong cop Ka Kui, who is assigned to protect a witness from a crime boss after an initial raid on the boss' organization goes horribly (and spectacularly) wrong. The action finale takes place in a crowded shopping mall, and consists of a seven-minute fight sequence in which Chan's signature PMT action builds unbroken energy and excitement. Again, numerous smaller stunts contribute to the maintenance of this kineticism, but the capstone is Chan's death-defying leap and slide down a three-story pole wrapped with live electric lights. This and other similarly placed highest risk stunts serve either to indicate a true climax of the long-building action, as it does in *Police Story*, or to establish a moment of rock-bottom adversity and punishment from which Chan can unbelievably recover and emerge victorious, as Wong Fei-Hung's scuttle across a bed of red-hot coals does in *Drunken Master II*. These moments represent the only instance in Chan's action aesthetic when the rhythm is broken, but these interruptions serve as self-contained spectacles and as extreme reaffirmations of Jackie Chan's authenticity and singularity. In this way, the punctuating stunt is a fully integrated aspect of the Jackie Chan action aesthetic because it is a definitive illustration of his "no fear, no stuntman, no equal"⁸ brand. Along with Chan's customary behind-the-scenes footage which plays during the closing credits, these punctuating stunts are Jackie Chan's personal guarantee that all preceding and following action is an authentic, unaltered representation of his physical abilities.

Inseparable from an appreciation of Chan's stunts is an understanding of his absorption of pain as an aspect of his action aesthetic.

A self-proclaimed masochist, Jackie Chan is very much in the business of bodily harm, and has “defined his genius as an infinite capacity for taking pain.”⁹ If we refer to the formative films of John Woo’s Hong Kong action aesthetic as his “heroic bloodshed” pictures, then it would be fair to refer to Chan’s as his “heroic bruising” films. As I have mentioned, the integration of physical stunts and extended martial arts combat only serves Chan’s true action aesthetic if those elements maintain the perception of authenticity, the unwavering belief that Chan has endured all that he appears to endure. Chan’s brand of cinematic heroism relies entirely on the exhibition of superhuman endurance and a threshold for suffering which he and *only* he possesses. This is one of the many fundamentals of his Hong Kong style which, as we will see, has been undermined since his transition to Hollywood.

With the authentic Jackie Chan action aesthetic, as displayed in his Hong Kong productions of the 1980s and early 1990s, clearly defined, we can now examine the subversion of that aesthetic that resulted from Chan’s entrance into Hollywood. Jackie Chan is just one of many Hong Kong actors and directors to have transitioned to Hollywood during what Minh-Ha T. Pham terms the “Asian Invasion,” a relatively recent movement which began with the 1995 production of John Woo’s *Broken Arrow* and peaked with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in 2000.¹⁰ Pham argues that this “Asian Invasion” of Hollywood has proven unique in its beneficial contributions to “Asian American representational politics,” and that Hollywood is not threatened by the influx of foreign talent because that influx “enhances Hollywood’s image as a racially inclusive, equal opportunity, global industry.”¹¹ This assertion may express part of the truth, but it is even more important to recognize that Hollywood has felt unthreatened by foreign talents such as Jackie Chan and John Woo primarily because they know that it is Hollywood’s production and stylistic systems which will take precedence over that of imported talent. Hollywood does not adopt foreign talents as they are, but instead it isolates the broad aspects of those talents that it perceives

to be appealing to an American audience and then excises or alters the other aspects of those talents until the results conform to the essentials of Hollywood classicism.¹² Even a filmmaker in such complete control of his own style as Jackie Chan is not immune to this process.

The Hollywood production method is one which fundamentally restricts Jackie Chan's action aesthetic, even independently of a film's creative content. These pragmatic differences include the restriction of Chan's relatively freeform production method because of safety (i.e. insurance) and scheduling concerns. Brett Ratner, director of *Rush Hour* and its sequels, has shared that it took significant convincing of the studio executives to allow Jackie Chan to bring members of his stunt team from Hong Kong to help with the American production. However, even with the involvement of Chan and part of his team, Ratner hired Hollywood stunt coordinator Terry Leonard to oversee the action production and to enforce those procedures that Chan would not think necessary. Leonard acknowledges "They take certain liberties with Jackie in his other films, in Hong Kong, that we can't take here, insurance-wise. We have to . . . make sure that there's no chance that he'll get hurt."¹³ In Hong Kong, Jackie Chan had complete control over his production method; if he was convinced that he could jump from a moving bus through a glass sign, he simply did it. Such differences between the Hollywood and Hong Kong production methods are not superficial, but fundamentally alter the action aesthetic.

As was established earlier, Chan's signature style relies entirely upon authentic action and the perpetuation of real physical danger— aspects exhibited most purely with climactic punctuating stunts. In *Rush Hour*, the climactic stunt is Inspector Lee's (Chan) fall from the catwalk of the Los Angeles Convention Center. In terms of narrative placement, this moment seems to conform to the model of the pole slide in *Police Story*, but the action aesthetic of the scene is actually in direct contradiction to Jackie Chan's Hong Kong style. First of all, the fall in *Rush Hour* is broken up into several shots, each

representing a disparate portion which was filmed separately and thus safely. Jackie Chan at first hangs from the rafters of the Convention Center, though we only see him in a medium shot or one in which his feet hang in the frame with the ground digitally imposed below them. A separate shot briefly shows him falling through the air, until yet another several shots show him sliding down a life-saving banner and onto his partner, Carter (Chris Tucker). Not only is the stunt fragmented into a sequence of several shots, but Chan wears a safety wire for each and every section. In contrast, the climactic pole slide in *Police Story* and the fall from a three story clock tower in *Project A* are each shown three times, in their entirety, and in single, continuous shots. The restrictions of the Hollywood method, no matter how appreciated in their assurance that Chan will survive to make another film, absolutely eliminate the sense of uncontrolled danger and the punishment-as-spectacle which are inseparable from the Jackie Chan action aesthetic.

Similarly, the presence of Chan's American co-stars completely dilutes the perception of his singularity. In *Shanghai Noon*, the first action set piece is a train robbery which contains less than thirty seconds of actual combat. The climactic stunt is one where Jackie Chan keeps his balance while running along a load of falling logs, but his American co-star Owen Wilson is seen performing the exact same feat, scrambling over the logs at Chan's side. Because of Wilson's presence and his apparent ability to do as Chan does, Chan's typically awe-inspiring physical ability is rendered ordinary.

Discussing the role of narrative and action in Hollywood film, David Bordwell explains that "chases and fights, like musical numbers, can be expanded indefinitely," just as "any story event can be expanded to any length"¹⁴ In Hollywood action films, each scene of combat contributes directly and efficiently to the central narrative conflict. The essential dilemma between Hollywood classicism and Jackie Chan's Hong Kong action aesthetic is that Hollywood has exhibited an unwillingness to expand the action to a degree that meets the minimum requirement of Chan's signature style. The episodic

nature of Hong Kong action cinema in general largely ignores “character change and motivic texture.”¹⁵ When character change and narrative development are conveyed, it is through extended action set pieces. An example of the latter is the final fight scene between Jackie Chan’s Wong Fei-Hung and Ken Lo in *Drunken Master II* (1994). The entire action set piece lasts an astounding twenty minutes, but through the progression of the combat it is intimated that the previously immature and irresponsible Wong Fei-Hung has finally learned to control his powerful “drunken boxing” style, at least enough to defeat his enemies without disgracing himself or his family. The excitement of Chan’s PMT combat contributes to the emotional quality of the narrative progression. Chan’s Hollywood fight scenes, however, simply are not allowed enough screen time to establish his true combat rhythm, primarily because they are forced to exist as entities separate from the narrative.

The complete integration of character development and action represents one of Jackie Chan’s hybridizations. The other is his integration of action and comedy. In his book *Hollywood Hybrids: Mixing Genres in Contemporary Films*, Ira Jaffe examines the recent success of Hong Kong “hybrid genre” films such as *Shaolin Soccer* (2001) and concludes that the “hybrid form” may actually represent the essence of mainstream cinema.¹⁶ His definition of these genre-bending films as “admixture of diverse styles and genres as well as of disparate events and emotions,”¹⁷ could certainly be applied to both Jackie Chan’s Hong Kong and his Hollywood films, but there is a deeper integration of comedy and action/dramatic elements which occurs as part of his true Hong Kong action aesthetic that is lost or diluted in his Hollywood films. In *Rush Hour*, *Shanghai Noon*, and *The Medallion* (2003) this dilution is due primarily to the presence of a Western costar whose foremost responsibility is comedic entertainment, which, in Chan’s authentic action aesthetic, had been fulfilled seamlessly within the action rhythm. This seamless integration of action and comedy mimics the environmental interaction already mentioned, and is the reason for comparisons made between Chan

and Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and Charlie Chaplin—all physical performers Chan has said he admires and has drawn inspiration from.¹⁸ Leon Hunt even claims that Jackie Chan “reinvents the ‘mischief machine’ of silent American comedy”¹⁹ but it is this essential aspect of his action aesthetic that is subverted by his continued pairing with comedic actors such as Chris Tucker, Owen Wilson, and Lee Evans. These pairings also reflect a fundamental incongruity between the Hollywood and Hong Kong models, as “Hollywood films that mix action and comedy usually subordinate conventions of one genre to the requirements of the other.”²⁰

This brings us to the issue of Jackie Chan’s restriction to “racial buddy” roles in his Hollywood films. This issue has been examined extensively in relation to racial representation and the transnational cinematic passage, but has not been linked to the destruction of Chan’s signature action aesthetic. Recognition of the incompatibility of Chan’s action style with Hollywood classicism becomes increasingly ironic with the recognition of Chan as an imported action spectacle in his Hollywood films. In *Rush Hour*, the shot of Inspector Lee (Chan) exiting the airplane upon his arrival in Los Angeles is accompanied by the sound of a gong. The effect is a clear announcement to American audiences that Jackie Chan has officially arrived in Hollywood. Hollywood repeatedly attempts to capitalize on foreign success, as is the case, for example, with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* where “Hollywood, Hong Kong, and Taiwan all claim nationality of the film . . . [and] the politics of labeling, naming, and categorizing becomes messy and murky.”²¹ If Hollywood is unable to claim a successful foreign film or talent, they instead force what they perceive to be its most exotic and attractive qualities into the Hollywood production and stylistic model (e.g. *Enter the Dragon*, *The Matrix*, *Bulletproof Monk*). This is precisely what has happened to Jackie Chan, and the most unfortunate casualty of the practice has been his action aesthetic. In Chan’s Hollywood films, the Eastern and Western worlds are very much established as separate. *Shanghai Noon* begins in China’s iconic Forbidden City before moving to the

equally iconic American West. *Rush Hour* involves the same physical passage of Chan's character from an often generalized Asian world to an American world. David Desser argues that Jackie Chan and Jet Li are the literal embodiment of Chinese nationalism, inhabiting a "displaced body in diaspora"²² and thus they stand for a Western perception of China, rather than Hong Kong specifically. This is true insofar as Chan's Hollywood films often characterize him as a Chinese representative, rather than a Cantonese one.

This attribution of a general exoticism to Jackie Chan extends to his separation within Hollywood films as an imported action spectacle, meaning that he appears on American movie screens to do one thing and one thing only: amaze us with his action. This characterization assumes that Chan's brand of action is something which can only be obtained from the source—Chan himself—and cannot be duplicated by Hollywood talent alone. That assumption may be true, but the hypocrisy lies in the way that Hollywood has diluted that authentic Jackie Chan action in favor of its own stylistic and commercial conventions. Existing discussions of transnational cinema and the "flexible production"²³ method, which have allowed Jackie Chan to move freely between Hong Kong and Hollywood, stop short of recognizing how extremely limited his "Asianization of Hollywood"²⁴ has been. If anything, it is Chan who has been "Hollywoodized" by this transnational flexibility. The very plots of both *Rush Hour* and *Shanghai Noon* involve the westernization of Chan's characters. Gina Marchetti correctly observes, regarding Jet Li's *Romeo Must Die* (2000), that "the casting defines this film quite clearly. Jet Li brings in Asian martial arts aficionados, and Aaliyah draws in rhythm and blues fans."²⁵ The same is true for Jackie Chan, whose sole responsibility is to attract the action crowd in *Rush Hour* and *Shanghai Noon*, while his American costars draw those anticipating comedy or those requiring a sense of familiarity. The more specific function of the Western costar is to provide American audiences with an identifiable half of a cultural clash, a clash which explains why Chan's "native" sphere is portrayed as so separate, and a clash which

is the primary generating force of comedy. In *Project A*, Dragon Ma (Chan) flees from the police in a chaotic bicycle chase through the alleys of Hong Kong. After dispatching several of his pursuers by using his bicycle and the environment as a weapon, Chan accidentally sits down on the bicycle without a seat, a comedic moment fully integrated into the surrounding action sequence and thus a moment which perpetuates the energy of that action. In his Hollywood films, those moments have largely been replaced with linguistic comedy between Chan and his Western partner, who constantly misunderstand one another. International action cinema critics have observed that “part of the transnational appeal of the genre [Hong Kong action cinema] comes from the fact that it relies on physical spectacle rather than dialogue for its appeal.”²⁶ This is absolutely true, and it is a clear illustration of why Jackie Chan’s action aesthetic is severely crippled by Hollywood’s addition of racial/dialogue comedy as the primary attraction.

Chan’s PMT combat requires an unbroken rhythm, but Hollywood interrupts that rhythm because of a need to balance Chan’s spectacle with that of his costars. The fight scene at the Foo Chow restaurant in *Rush Hour* depicts brief sets of Chan’s combat, but then deflates what energy is accumulated by cutting to Chris Tucker’s Carter as he struggles to survive on his own. In *Shanghai Noon*, the combat rhythm is disrupted in the same way when the film crosscuts between Chan dispatching several thugs (who possess no martial arts skill of their own) with a horseshoe tied to a rope, and Owen Wilson’s character engaging in a traditional Western duel with the villainous town Marshal. Furthermore, Chan’s notoriously high pain threshold, which generates much of the integrated comedy and excitement in his Hong Kong films, is diluted because his Western, non-combative partners endure the same level of punishment. In these films, even Chan’s signature end credits outtakes are corrupted, depicting his struggles to pronounce English lines, Chris Tucker’s adlibs, and Chan’s interactions with his equine costars. No guarantee of action authenticity is necessary; the intrusion of Hollywood’s

constructive editing and Chan's Western partners prevent any significant sense of danger from infusing the action.

Finally, the advent of CGI must be considered in the examination of the decline of Jackie Chan's action aesthetic. Computer generated effects have become an indispensable part of commercial filmmaking, not only in Hollywood but indeed in international film industries, including Hong Kong. It seems to have become a common point of pride for contemporary directors to insist that they generally favor the use of practical effects over digital, so as to reassure detractors that the use of CGI is minimized wherever possible. Commercial trends seem to indicate otherwise, however. As an example, just over the course of the three years between the release of the first and third installments of the blockbuster *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the project's budget increased by \$60 million, almost all of that money contributing to additional effects work.²⁷ In an age where Hollywood has become a euphemism for "cinema where digitized, special-effects driven film is the most globally marketable form of mass entertainment,"²⁸ Jackie Chan's physio-central brand of cinema has been at understandable risk. Ultimately, the use of CGI to enhance action in Jackie Chan's Hollywood and recent Hong Kong productions shoehorns Chan, the ultimate physical spectacle and most literal embodiment of the "stuntman-as-hero,"²⁹ into the anti-physical spectacle of modern digital effects.

This combination, like Chan's combination with Hollywood classicism, comes at the cost of his action aesthetic. In the joint-produced US/Hong Kong film *The Medallion*, Jackie Chan becomes superhuman with the possession of a magical ancient medallion. An action scene which takes place in a hospital sees Chan magically absorbing bullets through the use of CGI, while his English costar Lee Evans engages in hand-to-hand combat. A digitally-enhanced Chan proceeds to survive a fall from a twenty story building, as well as chase the villain at superhuman speed. The final confrontation is also an effects-heavy duel in which Chan emerges victorious with the aid of two CGI serpents. The most important subversion

of Chan's action aesthetic in these scenes is that he is replaceable by absolutely anyone. CGI is capable of granting everyone the same abilities as Chan, and thus both his singularity and authenticity are undermined. The destruction of Chan's action aesthetic comes not only from the presence of digital effects, but also from the rapid editing and repeated step-printing necessary to hide the seams of those effects. At no point is Chan's physical ability the focus of cinematic spectacle; rather, the effects take precedence and dictate the aesthetic.

The same issue is exhibited in the Hong Kong production *The Myth* (2005). In the film, Chan plays the dual roles of Jack, a modern-day archaeologist and Cantonese Indiana Jones, as well as an ancient Chinese general who invades Jack's dreams as if from a past life. CGI and wirework effects pervade the film, and what little chance there is for Chan to engage in combat relies on the effects as the primary spectacle. In the film's climactic scene, Chan battles a group of henchmen, but they fight atop carriages which literally float in mid-air. The fantasy setting of a magical, suspended palace in a forbidden tomb does not act simply as a backdrop for the attraction of PMT combat and death-defying stunts, but instead overpowers those irreplaceable aspects of the Jackie Chan action style. In the numerous flashback sequences set in ancient China, Chan's digitally-enhanced horse performs as much combat as Chan himself, kicking enemy soldiers left and right. In these sequences it becomes clear that the CGI literally does the fighting for Chan; it is impossible for him to generate excitement through perpetual physical movement because he is often barely kinetic at all.

The same disintegration of Chan's action essence is on display in *The Tuxedo* (2002), a Hollywood film in which "combat and other powers do not come from the human body, but from the suit, which is a product of modern technology."³⁰ The screen image of Jackie Chan in *The Tuxedo*, and indeed in all of the digital-centric films mentioned, is a fundamental subversion of not only his signature action aesthetic, but of the entire kung-fu genre. This subversion

suggests an interesting parallel between the trajectory of Chan's action career and the trajectory of Hollywood cinema as a whole. It could certainly be argued that the incongruity of Chan's action aesthetic with modern effects technology reflects the similar fading of classic Hollywood physical comedy as a result of the advent of sound in the 1930s.

Ultimately, the subordination of Jackie Chan-as-action-spectacle to the spectacle of digital effects is a practice which is inarguably not unique to Hollywood. However, it is possible that just as Hollywood has paired Chan with Western costars as a way of domesticating his films, Hollywood has utilized CGI as a way of masculinizing (or perhaps hyper-masculinizing) Chan's action, which has traditionally been more feminized through its emphasis on flight and escape.³¹ Chan's heroes in his Hong Kong films have mostly been more vulnerable, more comically unwilling-to-fight-unless-provoked when compared to Hollywood action heroes such as Rambo or John McClane.³² Translating Chan's onscreen persona from somewhat of a caricature of the "serious masculinity"³³ that Hollywood action cinema thrives on to a more westernized hero has caused Chan to metamorphose, with the aid of CGI effects, into an actual superhero. The ironic consequence of that translation, however, has been the dilution of Chan's heroic image through the removal of his perceived singularity and the entirely physical, entirely real superheroics which already composed his true action aesthetic.

Through this examination of Jackie Chan's transpacific passage and the integration of modern CGI in both his Hollywood and Hong Kong films, we have made explicit the connection between those elements and the deterioration of Chan's true action aesthetic, as displayed in his Hong Kong productions of the 1980s and early 1990s. As to his success in America by way of Hollywood's pan-national efforts, it is clear by now that Hollywood has always treated Chan as it does any other licensed property: as something unique and attractive, but something that must be shaped to conform to Hollywood's own perceptions of what works in American

commercial film. Meaghan Morris has concluded that the “what’s up my nigger” routine in *Rush Hour* teaches Chan’s character “about idiom and gesture, that simple imitation is not enough . . . that some gestures may just not be negotiable.”³⁴ This articulates exactly what Hollywood either does not understand or, as I suspect, chooses to ignore in the interests of its own conventions.

Ironically and unfortunately, many of the “insurmountable” incongruities between the general Hollywood and Hong Kong cinematic models are seemingly becoming irrelevant; Jackie Chan has expressed how unnecessarily time consuming it is for him to gain permission to do a stunt in an American film,³⁵ but both film industries’ recent efforts to create products which will provide thrills to worldwide audiences³⁶ have largely alienated Chan’s core fan base by transforming his action style into something else entirely. The contemporary productions discussed may include some basic elements of Chan’s action aesthetic, but only in mere glimpses and only while ignoring or altering other key aspects such as duration, rhythm, and editing. This is not to say that the dissolution of Chan’s brand of action cinema was inevitable, or that Hollywood is simply responsible for what would have happened to Chan’s style anyway. The increasing absence of Chan’s action aesthetic from even his recent Hong Kong productions is simply a symptom of modern Hollywood’s global influence. The increased importance of international audience and the worldwide advent of CGI are largely the results of foreign film industries’ efforts to imitate Hollywood as a means to compete with its exported content. Not only has Chan himself been “Hollywoodized” for presentation to American audiences, but so has much of recent Hong Kong action cinema as a whole. The scope and degree of reciprocity of this cinematic imperialism is arguable, but what is definite is that for Jackie Chan, the result of success in Hollywood has been the crippling of his action style.

Endnotes

- ¹ Craig D. Reid, "Fighting Without Fighting: Film Action Fight Choreography," *Film Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (Winter 1993), 30.
- ² *Ibid.*, 30.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 34.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 34-35.
- ⁵ David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 56.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ⁷ Ramie Tateishi, "Jackie Chan and the Re-invention of Tradition," *Asian Cinema* ¹⁰, no. 2, 78.
- ⁸ Tagline, *Rumble in the Bronx* (Tong, 1995).
- ⁹ Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, 58.
- ¹⁰ Minh-Ha T. Pham, "The Asian Invasion (of Multiculturalism) in Hollywood," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2004), 121.
- ¹¹ Pham, "The Asian Invasion," 122.
- ¹² I refer to Hollywood classicism here in both a technical and narrative sense. Hollywood adheres to classical continuity editing, meaning the film is edited so that narrative clarity is always the primary focus, and nothing distracts the audience from being able to follow that narrative. Hollywood also uses classical narrative conventions.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 105.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.
- ¹⁶ Ira Jaffe, *Hollywood Hybrids: Mixing Genres in Contemporary Films*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 133.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.
- ¹⁸ Jackie Chan, *I Am Jackie Chan: My Life in Action*, (New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 1998), 336.
- ¹⁹ Leon Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters: From Bruce Lee to Crouching Tiger*, (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 106.
- ²⁰ Mark Gallagher, "Masculinity in Translation: Jackie Chan's Transcultural Star Text," *Velvet Light Trap* 39 (Spring 1997), 24.
- ²¹ Sheldon H. Lu, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Bouncing Angels: Hollywood, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Transnational Cinema," In *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*, edited by Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 221.
- ²² David Desser, "Fists of Legend: Constructing Chinese Identity in the Hong Kong Cinema," In *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*,

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- edited by Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 281.
- ²³ Lu, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Bouncing Angels," 222.
- ²⁴ Desser, "Fists of Legend," 295.
- ²⁵ Gina Marchetti, "Romeo Must Die: Interracial Romance in Action," In *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, edited by Daniel Bernardi, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 254.
- ²⁶ Gina Marchetti, "Jackie Chan and the Black Connection," In *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies*, edited by Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejo, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 152.
- ²⁷ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 96.
- ²⁸ Laleen Jayamanne, "Let's Miscegenate: Jackie Chan and His African-American Connection," In *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, edited by Meaghan Morris, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 152.
- ²⁹ Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters*, 23.
- ³⁰ Siu Leung Li, "The Myth Continues: Cinematic Kung Fu in Modernity," In *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, edited by Meaghan Morris, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 59.
- ³¹ Gallagher, "Masculinity in Translation," 26-29.
- ³² Jaap van Ginneken, *Screening Difference: How Hollywood's Blockbuster Films Imagine Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*, (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 162-166.
- ³³ Gallagher, "Masculinity in Translation," 28.
- ³⁴ Jayamanne, "Let's Miscegenate," 162.
- ³⁵ Jackie Chan, "Feature Film Commentary," *The Myth*, DVD, Directed by Stanley Tong, (Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2007).
- ³⁶ Lu, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Bouncing Angels," 223.