

**Where has Bruce Lee gone?:
Or the case of the sudden disappearance of
Hollywood's hypermasculine Chinese martial
arts hero**

Abstract

When ethnic Chinese martial arts actor Bruce Lee burst onto the screens in 1973 with *Enter the Dragon*, he made a sudden but profound impression on Hollywood. Lee's martial arts hero was physically strong and powerful as conveyed by his hypermasculine image (martial arts skills and muscled body). This countered previous incarnations of Asians in Hollywood who were often portrayed as unscrupulous, weak and comical. Yet, this image of the Chinese martial arts hero was never sustained even though others such as Jackie Chan, decades later, made similar lasting impressions. This paper examines Hollywood's Chinese martial arts hero as he metamorphosises from hypermasculine Lee to vulnerable and playful Chan. What has happened to the hypermasculine martial arts hero as represented by the image of a sombre, bare-chested and muscled Lee? Why does the re-emergent Chinese martial arts hero in Hollywood, as embodied by Chan, concentrate more on martial arts skills rather than the physical body? To answer these questions, this paper turns to issues concerning genre and ethnicity in Hollywood cinema.

Keywords

martial arts genre/Hollywood/hypermasculine

In 1973, ethnic Chinese martial arts hero Bruce Lee made an impact on audiences in the West with the film *Enter the Dragon* in a genre commonly associated with Hong Kong cinema. For the first time in American cinemas, the image of the Chinese male was portrayed as heroic and, physically strong and powerful. Lee's physical strength and power were conveyed on screen by his hypermasculinised presence as seen through his martial arts skills and highly toned muscular body. His displays of martial arts and chiselled torso came to arguably symbolise complex political associations connected to him such as the subaltern (i.e. relating to the perspective of the colonised and those outside the hegemonic power structure as defined within post-colonialist discourse) politics of Chinese nationalism and anti-colonialism. Lee's hypermasculinity problematised Hollywood's previous racial stereotyping of the Asian male as unscrupulous and morally deplorable, weak, in service and comical. In her groundbreaking work on the portrayal of Asians in Hollywood cinema entitled *Yellow Peril: Romance*

and the “Yellow Peril”, Gina Marchetti (1993) suggests that Hollywood portrayed the Asian male as an object to be feared, yet was rendered harmless when gendered with submissive feminine traits. Sadly, Lee’s death in 1973 also witnessed the disappearance of the Chinese martial arts hero as a leading Hollywood action hero. It would take another two decades before the action genre — particularly its martial arts sub-genre — was to witness the rise of the Chinese martial arts hero to such prominence.

Since the mid-1990s, cross-over ethnic Chinese martial arts heroes from Hong Kong cinema such as Jackie Chan (*Rush Hour*, 1998 and *Shanghai Noon*, 2000), and Jet Li (*Lethal Weapon 4*, 1998; *Romeo Must Die*, 2000 and *The One*, 2001) have been dominating Hollywood mainstream martial arts cinema. These actors, together with their (Eastern and Hollywood) films enjoy tremendous international cult popularity. A cursory search on Google, for instance, reveals the millions of websites featuring these three actors: Chan with 2.02 million and Li with 1.9 million. The popularity these actors enjoy is first and foremost due to their phenomenal martial arts skills. Chan, for instance, is well known for his comedy kung fu (*gongfu*), a sub-genre of the martial arts genre which combines martial arts skill with Hollywood silent era comedy. Jet Li presents another kind of martial arts skill in his films — *wushu*. This form of martial arts — established by the Chinese communist government as a rival to kung fu — emphasises power through fluid and lyrical body movements. *Wushu* thus allows Li — who at 169cm and 66kg is a relatively small Hollywood action leading man — to visually display his power on film. Yet while these actors showcase incredible martial arts skills, they do not exhibit the same hypermasculinised image of the body in cinema as Lee did decades earlier. For instance, in *Fist of Legend/Jing Wu Men*, the 1994 remake of another Hong Kong film *Fist of Fury* (1972), Li takes over the role of Chen Zhen, originally played by Lee. While both Li and Lee perform masculinity through martial arts, their performances differ from each other. For example, whenever Li fought, he did so clothed, unlike the bare-bodied Lee twenty years earlier. Hence Li’s masculinity was not enhanced by visual displays of the naked body, rather by Li’s martial arts expertise.

While Li has made some successful martial arts themed films in Hollywood, in addition to carving out a niche in this genre, it is Chan who can be considered the more prominent (ethnic Chinese) star. Chan's films, for instance, are more successful as *Shanghai Noon* and *Rush Hour* produced popular sequels such as *Shanghai Knights* and *Rush Hour 2* and *Rush Hour 3* (2007), respectively. More significantly it is Chan, more so than Li, who has achieved popular global recognition beyond cinema. (Chan 2006) The "Jackie Chan" brand is recognised internationally with Chan lending his name and image to multinational companies such as Visa and California Fitness and to events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics, for which he sings the official song "We are ready". Chan also has his own entrepreneurship with chain of international restaurants know as "Jackie's Kitchen" and is committed to philanthropic ventures such the development of the Jackie Chan Science Centre located in the John Curtin School of Medical Research at the Australian National University.

Film commentators such as Gary Gang Xu (2005), nevertheless, have suggested that the Asian in Hollywood cinema is still viewed from Orientalist frameworks, therefore upholding Marchetti's initial observations of the feminised Asian man. However, by focusing on the career and legacy of Bruce Lee and the theorisations of his most prominent successor Jackie Chan, I suggest that there are issues other than Orientalism at work in the sudden demise of the hypermasculine Chinese martial arts hero from Hollywood cinema. In particular, I argue that the complexities connected to the martial arts genre after its adoption by Hollywood and the changing tropes associated with the Chinese martial arts actor, are contributing factors to the resulting containment of the hypermasculine Lee archetype. At this point of the discussion, it is necessary to working definition of "hypermasculine".

Defining Hypermasculinity

Hypermasculinity is a term used across disciplines to explain hyper-gendered traits. In psychology, hypermasculinity is used to describe "being a stud" or exaggerated forms of stereotypical male behaviour such as physical power, virility, strength, aggression, control, achievement and competition (Riso and Hudson 1996: 118). This term is used in opposition to hyperfemininity, a form of exaggerated female behaviour stereotyped as represented by physical weakness, service and servitude. Hypermasculinity is also a term used in postcolonial studies and developmental studies. In

her study of British colonial rule in India, Ashis Nandy (1988) notes that an impact of British imperial rule was the need for both the coloniser and the colonised to disparage that which they considered feminine (women, the poor, homosexuals, intellectual activity and social welfare) in order to uphold and glorify the masculine. L.M.N Ling (1999) associates the term hypermasculinity with modernity in East Asia. She suggests that economic development and globalisation are considered hypermasculine activities. Ling explains:

In East Asia's Confucian-based "miracle" economies, hypermasculinity adopts the traditional rhetoric of the state taking manly revenge against the West's (and later Japan's) emasculating imperialism in the past. Economic development, in particular, is the site of this enactment of hypermasculinity. By inflating the mantle of classical Confucian paternalism, the state locks society into a hyperfeminized position of classical Confucian womanhood, that is, into a role involving subordination, self-sacrifice, discipline, and deference. In this way, the state assumes that society *consents* to the imposition of the burdens and responsibilities of economic development--without its receiving commensurate concessions to political representation or even a political voice. (283-4)

Hypermasculinity, in other words, is a gendered term used to describe and comment on objects, concepts, institutions and movements that display ultimate strength and power. Lee's deliberate displays of hypermasculine strength and power — through his muscular body and superior fighting skills — became iconic political symbols of subaltern power during a period of heightened racial politics. For example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the US was experiencing the effects of the end of African-American desegregation through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. This was also a tumultuous time for Asians in America as they were viewed with suspicion and experienced racial bullying because of American involvement in the recent wars in Asia such as the Pacific War (1941 to 1945), the Korean War (1950 to 1953) and the Vietnam War (1959 to 1975) and the communist threat posed by Mainland China (Desser 2000a: 38). To investigate Lee's political significance, it is necessary to explore his short yet significant career.

The Career of Bruce Lee

Bruce Lee first appeared in a 1966 television series called *The Green Hornet* (1966 – 1967). This television series featured American comic book characters The Green Hornet (Van Williams) and his sidekick Kato (Lee). While the series lasted for only one season, it exposed Lee's brand of Hong Kong-style martial arts cinema to Western audiences. However, it was not until the early 1970s, with the release of *Enter the Dragon* that the first successful Hollywood films featuring the martial arts hero were made. Prior to *Enter the Dragon*, Lee had made three very successful Hong Kong martial arts films in the 1970s. They were *The Big Boss* (1971), *Fist of Fury* (1972) and *Way of the Dragon* (1972).¹ When *The Big Boss*, *Fist of Fury* and *Way of the Dragon* were released in Hong Kong, thousands of people lined the streets of the colony in order to watch these films in cinemas (Ciapparelli 2006). When Lee died in 1973, twenty-seven thousand fans went to pay their respects during the funeral wake (Ciapparelli 2006). It has been argued that one of the reasons for Lee's success in Hong Kong, America and third world countries such as India, was because his characters Cheng Chao-an in *The Big Boss*, Chen Zhen in *Fist of Fury* and Tang Lung in *Way of the Dragon* embodied anti-colonialism as they always defeated their white enemies. Vijay Prashad (2003: 54) for example, notes that Lee's "antiracist ethos" in his films destabilised "the pretense of superiority put in place by white supremacy" in Asia. Looking at the impact of Hong Kong-style martial arts films, David Desser (2000a 38) points out that Lee's films and the martial arts films that came thereafter were popular amongst African-American audiences because they "offered the only non-white heroes, men and women, to audiences alienated by mainstream film and often by mainstream culture." Desser continues to explain that the kung fu films were "the genre of the underdog, the underdog of color, often fighting against colonialist enemies, white culture and the Japanese (2000a 38)."

In the West, Lee's association with martial arts became momentarily symbolic of the values of hard work. Lee, who developed a style of kung fu called *Jeet Kune Do* (Way of the Intercepting Fist), was known to do sit-ups in his free time, such as when he was watching television (Bordwell 2000: 52-3). While Lee has often been credited with bringing martial arts, particularly kung fu, to the West, Lee's iconic status was not merely that of kung fu master. Rather, he was considered in the West as personifying what martial arts embodied: that it gives its practitioner power and strength

to defeat his/her enemies.² The characters Lee portrayed were also vengeful heroes.³ In *Enter the Dragon*, for example, Lee's character Lee goes after the men who caused the death of his sister Su Lin (Angela Mao). Su Lin had committed suicide as an escape route when confronted by a gang of rapists.

One of the principal reasons why Lee made the martial arts hero popular globally, was because, as Desser (2000a) and Prashad have pointed out, the hero was an icon of strength and power for the racialised underdog. Lee symbolised anti-colonialism and anti-racism in such films as *Fist of Fury*, *Way of the Dragon*, *Enter the Dragon* and the posthumously released *Game of Death* (1978). Race was placed as a central theme that divided the good (Lee's characters) from the bad (his Caucasian enemies and opponents) in this film. According to Lee's fans such as "firehouse44@hotmail.com" (n.d.), Lee was the empowered other who was "often proudly Chinese and battled foes who racially oppressed his people as in when he smashed a 'No dogs or Chinese allowed' sign with a flying kick" in *Fist of Fury*. However, Lee's popularity as an anti-colonial icon was not confined to ethnically Chinese people. As noted previously he was also popular with African-Americans, who, like the Chinese diaspora in Hong Kong and the United States, saw Lee as a powerful symbol of repression to white supremacy (Desser 2000a: 27-30). Lee's influence as a symbol of anti-racism goes beyond Chinese ethnic or American national borders. In November 2005, a statue of Lee was unveiled in the Bosnian city of Mostar "as a symbol of the fight against [the] ethnic divisions" of Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs ('Bosnia Unveils Lee Bronze' 2005). The tropes that made Lee a hypermasculine Chinese martial arts hero such as strength of mind and character; nationalist zeal; and righting wrong-doing — often displayed through his martial arts power and muscular body — were soon to be tropes associated with Hollywood as it appropriated and developed the martial arts genre as its own.

Lee's Hollywood Legacy: Hollywood's Appropriation of the Martial Arts Genre

In the decades that followed the success of *Enter the Dragon*, Hollywood started to prominently feature the martial arts hero. Like Lee, Hollywood's martial arts hero also became an allegorical figure. Rather than merely

embodying anti-racism, the martial arts hero also came to represent American values and gender equality.

In 1972 a made-for-television feature-length film called *Kung Fu* (1972) debuted in the United States. It thereafter spawned a television series from 1972 to 1975. Thereafter, two made-for-television feature-length films were produced, followed by another follow-up television series. The two made-for-television feature-length films were *Kung Fu: The Movie* (1986) and *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues* (1992). The follow-up television series was also called *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues*, which ran between 1993 to 1997. The title role of Kwai-Chang Caine went to American actor David Carradine. In the *Kung Fu* series, Kwai-Chang Caine is a Shaolin monk who flees China for the American West after avenging the death of his master, Master Kan (Philip Ahn). Even though Kwai-Chang Caine is a fugitive chased by the evil Chinese imperial forces who killed his master, Caine is a champion for the oppressed wherever he goes (Hunt 2003: 67).

At the height of its popularity, *Kung Fu* was rated one of the top ten television shows in the U.S (Hunt 2003: 67). However, the critical reception for *Kung Fu* was mixed. While the series has a large fan base, it has also been criticised by film critics for not giving Lee the part of Kwai-Chang Caine. Although Lee created the concept of *Kung Fu* for television, he was not given the role of Kwai-Chang Caine. Film critics also critique *Kung Fu* for feminising Asian masculinity. Yvonne Tasker, for example, points out that Chinese culture is stereotyped as feminised because Kwai-Chang Caine was portrayed as a “*partially feminised* [Tasker’s emphasis] Western hero, who becomes a gentle, pacifist figure who is able, at the same time, to take on anyone who challenges him” (Tasker 1998: 69). Like the Arthurian knight and swordplay knight-errant, Kwai-Chang Caine’s heroic persona was made up of a chivalric and honourable code of conduct. Kwai-Chang Caine wanders the countryside challenging wrongdoers.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a prolific number of films starring actors such as Steven Seagal, Chuck Norris, Michael Dudikoff, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Don “The Dragon” Wilson, who were also well known martial arts champions.⁴ While these films dazzled with their array of martial artistry, the predominant theme in these films was the protection, defence

and preservation of American persons, values and way of life (Desser 2000b: 77-110). These films, in other words, represented American nationalism.

The heroes of these films were rebellious loners who were fiercely loyal to America. Their characters were often jaded and mysterious, but would defend all things American through martial arts. Their nemeses, who were usually non-Americans, were portrayed as either militaristic non-Caucasians from third world countries such as those in Latin America, Central America (Colombia) and Asia (Philippines), or from organised crime syndicates such as the Japanese Yakuza. The villains threatened America by destroying American military bases and by kidnapping the beautiful love interest of the martial arts hero. The kidnapped heroine was often epitomised as the Californian blonde beauty. Often, she was the daughter of the colonel or general in charge of the American military base under attack. However, while the white male martial arts hero was a figure of American conservatism, this was not the case when Hollywood transposed the martial arts hero onto marginalised groups such as African-Americans and women.

The 1970s and 1980s proved to be a flourishing time for Hollywood martial arts films featuring Americans who were not of Asian descent. The 1970s, in particular, saw a rise in “blaxploitation” martial arts films. These films featured a largely African-American cast, as they were aimed at an urban African-American audience. While “blaxploitation” films have been heavily criticised as perpetuating African-American stereotypes, cultural theorists such as Meaghan Morris argue that these films empowered African-Americans against racial oppression through the use of martial arts (Morris 2001: 171-86). Films such as *Cleopatra Jones* (1973) and *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold* (1976) — starring former model Tamara Dobson — and *Black Belt Jones* (1974) — featuring Jim Kelly — portrayed African-American empowerment through martial arts expertise (Desser 2000a, 19-43; Marchetti 2001a: 137-58). In these films, it was the African-American who was the hero and protagonist. *Cleopatra Jones* is a U.S. special agent while *Black Belt Jones* is the neighbourhood karate champion and community leader. Furthermore, the African-American also fights and defeats his or her enemies, who were often portrayed by Caucasians. For example, Caucasian actresses Shelley Winters and Stella Stevens play the

villains respectively in *Cleopatra Jones* and *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*. Likewise, in *Black Belt Jones*, Caucasian Andre Philippe plays villain and mafia boss Don Steffano. “Blaxploitation” martial arts films continued into the 1980s with *The Last Dragon* (1985). The hero Leroy Green (Taimak Guarriello) was styled as an African-American Lee. Leroy Green, like Lee’s character Lee in *Enter the Dragon*, was a hardworking underdog in the narrative. Several sequences in this film also feature Leroy Green practicing martial arts to Lee films.

The martial arts genre not only allowed heroes to counter racial oppression, but gender oppression as well. Prior to the introduction of the martial arts genre to Hollywood, the heroines in Western narratives were portrayed as physically weak. This traditional heroine, frequently cast as virgin or wife, finds her roots in Arthurian mythological traditions. In earlier Greco-Roman mythology, the figure of the mortal heroine did not really exist. Maureen Fries explains that heroines within the Arthurian narrative tradition are “conservative, passive, instrumental non-actors, useful for provoking, renewing and rewarding the actions of their knight-agents” (Fries 1996: 60-1). In other words, the heroine is often feminised and acts as support to the male hero, usually a potential king or god of the world she inhabits. Her support of this male hero is through kindness and reassurance. The Arthurian heroine does not wander the land like the male knight. Rather, she stays in one place, often from the place where the hero originates. She is frequently cast as the hero’s reward when he returns from his quest. In addition, the Arthurian heroine’s only virtue is beauty which she uses in order to secure marriage with the male hero. Moreover, tragedy seems to haunt the heroine. One of the heroine’s most famous roles is that of the virgin sacrifice (Fries 1996: 60-1). If not sacrifice of life, heroines in early Christian era narratives used to be subject to tragic circumstances such as being sold into slavery or forced into a marriage with a man she did not love.⁵ The tragedy of such heroines also involves bad things happening to their loved ones such as the sudden death or torture of their lovers.

The physically strong female martial arts hero made her Hollywood debut in *Enter the Dragon*. Besides introducing the character Lee as the male hero, the film also featured the character of Su Lin as a heroic woman warrior who attempts to fight off her assailants with martial arts. In her analysis of Su Lin, Tasker notes that *Enter the Dragon* still constructed Su Lin as a

Western heroine as she chooses to sacrifice her life rather than be raped. By doing so, Su Lin preserves her virginity (Tasker 1993: 118). However, it was the “blaxploitation” *Cleopatra Jones* films that featured the Woman Warrior Hero who battled her enemies regardless of threat to life, limb or virtue, while at the same time upholding American justice. Tamara Dobson, who played Cleopatra Jones, was not portrayed as feminine or delicate as Su Lin was. Rather, she was the antithesis of femininity as she had the same stature as a man. Tamara Dobson is one of the tallest leading ladies in any film, standing at 1.88 metres tall (Walker 2002). In the meantime, Britain was experimenting with the figure of the martial arts woman in the television series *The Avengers* (1961 to 1969), a show about British secret agents. Some of the female characters in *The Avengers*, such as Dr. Catherine “Cathy” Gale (Honor Blackman) who appeared from 1962 to 1964 and Mrs Emma Peel (Diana Rigg), who appeared from 1965 to 1967, were portrayed as beautiful, confident British agents with superior martial arts skills and excellent fashion sense.

Likewise, films featuring women using martial arts as a sign of their power and strength were not unfamiliar in the 1980s. Films such as *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) and *Red Sonja* (1985), for example, featured strong female characters whose power was displayed through their use of martial arts. In *Conan the Barbarian*, the woman warrior Valeria (Sandahl Bergman) proves to be as skilful a fighter as Conan while Red Sonja (Brigitte Nielsen) is the fearless warrior woman whose quest is to exact vengeance on those who killed her brother.

Nevertheless, it was the 1990s that saw a rise in the number of films and television series featuring Women Warrior Heroes who used martial arts to show strength and power. In her study of women and martial arts, Martha McCaughey explains that the practice of martial arts is non-gender biased. Hence the adoption of the discipline by women encourages them to become physically strong, in addition to developing mental and emotional confidence. She suggests that martial arts allows women to redefine traditional codes of femininity that were once associated with weakness and subjugation (McCaughey 1997: 200-1). In an essay on the television series *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, Dave West (2002: 166-86) argues that Buffy uses martial arts in order to come to terms with herself. By referring to films featuring Lee, West argues that when film protagonists engage in

martial arts displays, what is actually being displayed is the characters' own inner turmoil. In addition, he argues that there is a kind of spirituality when characters resort to martial arts to do battle against the villains they are up against. However, rather than expressing spirituality through words of wisdom as Kwai-Chang Caine does, this spirituality is expressed through martial arts displays. West's paper reveals the way many Western commentators of martial arts films engage and relate to these films: that they locate martial arts as a primary and fundamental indicator of "the Far East".

While Hollywood helped facilitate the restriction of the hypermasculine Chinese martial arts hero by appropriating the genre and tropes associated with him, this was not the sole contributing factor. The mid-1990s witnessed a new tide of Hollywood-made martial arts films starring cross-over Hong Kong-based actors Jackie Chan and Jet Li. This re-materialisation of the Chinese martial arts actor in Hollywood proved to be a well placed move as films by these actors such as *Rush Hour* (Chan), and *Romeo Must Die* (Li) became box office successes. Both these actors returned to starring in Chinese-language martial arts films after firmly establishing his careers in Hollywood. For example, Chan in *New Police Story/Xin Jing Cha Gu Shi*, *The Myth/San Wa* (2005) and *Rob-B-Hood/Bo Bui Gai Wak* (2006); and Li in *Hero* and *Fearless/Hua Yuan Jia* (2006). Both these films went on to become international financial and critical successes. However, perhaps the most significant Chinese martial arts actor to find success in Hollywood after Bruce Lee is Jackie Chan. Known for his martial arts skills and his comedic "good guy" image, Chan is the antithesis of the brooding Lee.⁶ While Chan's martial arts skills display obvious physical power and strength, his comedic persona de-emphasises subaltern politics, namely Chinese nationalism and anti-colonialism (Shu 2003: 52). Instead, the tropes connected with Chan symbolise contemporary Chinese issues such as Chinese transnationalism.

Jackie Chan: Hollywood's New Chinese Martial Arts Actor

Jackie Chan first appeared in American mainstream theatres in *The Big Brawl* (1980) and through the comedy "road" films *Cannonball Run* (1981) and *Cannonball Run II* (1984). Chan's limited appearance in both these films, however, did not garner enough of attention for Hollywood to take notice. Chan's fortunes changed, however, with the international release of

the 1995 English-dubbed Hong Kong action film *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995). The film featured Chan, already a megastar in Asia, in the starring role as a Hong Kong tourist battling street gangs and the mafia in New York City. Rather than the narrative or storyline, it was Chan's own brand of spectacular kung fu fight sequences that helped the film, according to *Box Office Mojo*, earn US\$32.4 million at the US box office. This time Hollywood took notice of Chan's obvious mass appeal and signed him up to star in his first Hollywood film in 1998 — *Rush Hour*. *Rush Hour* and its sequel *Rush Hour 2* are historically significant in cinema as these films are the most successful Hollywood productions featuring an Asian as lead actor, earning US\$141.2 million and US\$226.2 million respectively at the US box office.

While both Chan and Lee produce extraordinary martial arts sequences, both differ in style as Lee's martial arts persona is sombre, serious and political while Chan's brand of martial arts is uniquely comedic. Chan is strongly associated with the genre of martial arts known as kung fu comedy through films such as *Snake in Eagles Shadow* (1978) and *Drunken Master* (1978). While both Lee and Chan used their bodies to display masculinity as both often paraded their shirtless well-toned and chiselled torsos in their 1970s, Chan has challenged this image in later films such as *City Hunter* (1993) by cross-dressing.

In his PhD thesis "Asian Scopic Modernities: Alternative Visibilities of Transnational Chinese Masculinity in Global Cinema", Alvin Koh (2006) suggests that Chan exhibits a vulnerable type of masculinity as his characters constantly grimace in pain whenever severely injured. Koh also argues that the circulation of Hong Kong films at an international level and the appearance of Asian actors in Hollywood films present a new kind of global cinematic masculinity. This Asian masculinity thus challenges Western hypermasculine archetypes as represented by Hollywood actors Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jean-Claude Van Damme. Yuan Shu (2003), on the other hand, observes that the "vulnerability of the male body" is also strategic as it broadens Chan's appeal to include female viewers as well as male viewers attracted to the kung fu action (50-1).

The subaltern politics of Chinese nationalism and anti-colonialism once associated with Lee have also since changed. When Lee first appeared in

the 1970s, he did so against a backdrop of Western imperialism in Hong Kong, emerging nationalisms in postcolonial Southeast Asia and the Chinese cultural memory of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-45). It was also a time when Asians in Europe and North America were themselves facing bigotry in their adopted countries. In the documentary *Bruce Lee: A Warrior's Journey* (2000), Lee's wife Linda Lee Cadwell comments that since an early age, Lee experienced racism in North America. Hence his appearance in mainstream films represented the image of a strong and invincible ethnic Chinese who countered racism with powerful kicks from a hard muscular body (Chiao 1981: 37).

However, since then, the experiences of the Chinese in East Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe and America have changed because of economic prosperity. Groundbreaking work by Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (Ong and Nonini 1998 and Ong 1999), for instance, observe that economic prosperity has allowed the overseas Chinese in Europe and North America to become middle-class. Ong and Nonini also note that globalisation has heightened the development of transnational Chinese who circulate between Mainland China and their host countries. It is Chan who represents that transnationality and his mobility between cultures and countries particularly has its roots in his Hong Kong heritage. Because of its colonial history, Hong Kong occupies a transnational space between East and West. Hong Kong's heritage and values are Chinese while its economy and financial system is Western. Films by Chan emphasise the theme of transnationality as his films are mostly filmed in international locations such as Europe, Africa, America, Australia and Asia.⁷ For example, *Meals on Wheels* (1984) was set in Spain, *Armour of God II: Operation Condor* (1991) was set in the Sahara Desert, *Police Story III* (1992) was filmed in Malaysia and *Rumble in the Bronx* was set in New York. Observers of Hong Kong culture such as Esther CM Yau (2001: 1-28) and Gina Marchetti (2001b: 251-60) theorise that these films serve as allegory for the transnational space Hong Kong occupies. Interestingly, Chan's significance and appeal as a transnational figure is not limited to the overseas Chinese as it has extended to other non-white audiences in North America, in particular, African-Americans. In her thesis on Chan's popularity with African-American audiences, Marchetti (2001a) argues that it is Chan's transnationality that allows this to happen as she considers that transnationality to be the connecting force that allows African-American audiences to recognise themselves in Chan.

Conclusion

The effect Bruce Lee had on Hollywood cinema is phenomenal. He not only introduced the martial arts genre to audiences outside Asia, but also advanced Hollywood's adoption of it. In addition, through his hypermasculinised persona, Lee came to represent the subaltern politics of Chinese nationalism and anti-colonialism which gave symbolic power to the underdog. This he did through the power and strength of his physical body which he used to display his martial arts skills. However, while Lee's impact on cinema and its audiences is extraordinary, the hypermasculinised Chinese martial arts hero was restricted to just Lee himself. Lee's hypermasculinised template, instead, was reproduced in Hollywood by Caucasian and African-American rather than Chinese actors (and actresses). Hollywood also revised the tropes associated with the hypermasculinised martial arts hero to reflect American concerns. The Chinese martial arts hero, however, made his reappearance in Hollywood films in the mid-1990s. However, he had undergone a transformation for although he possessed extraordinary martial arts skills, he did not replicate the same hypermasculine overtures Lee did decades earlier. This transformation was aided by the changing circumstances of the Chinese diaspora, particularly in Europe and America. By the time Jackie Chan — the most successful Chinese actor after Lee — started making films in Hollywood, the subaltern politics of Chinese nationalism and anti-colonialism which concerned Lee, made way for more contemporary Chinese issues: namely Chinese transnationalism. In other words, Lee's hypermasculinised martial arts hero did not totally disappear. Instead, this figure was displaced through Hollywood's adaptation of the martial arts genre and modified because of changing overseas Chinese experiences.

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Endnotes

¹ *The Big Boss* is also known as *China Mountain Big Brother*, *Fists of Fury* and *Fists of Glory*. *Fist of Fury* also went by other titles such as *School for Chivalry*, *The Chinese Connection* and *The Iron Hand*. *Way of the Dragon* was otherwise known as *Fury of the Dragon*, *Return of the Dragon* and *Revenge of the Dragon*.

² There are a plethora of resources on Lee. For some examples, see Bordwell (2000), and Teo (1997).

³ In her 1974 book *Cinema of Vengeance* the first English-language work on martial arts cinema Verina Glaessner observes films (7-14) that the theme of vengeance strongly permeates the narratives of Hong Kong martial arts films and Lee.

⁴ Steven Seagal starred in films such as *Above the Law* (1988), *Under Siege* (1992) and *On Deadly Ground* (1994). Chuck Norris appeared in *Missing in Action* (1984), *Forced Vengeance* (1982) and *Delta Force* (1986). Michael Dudikoff starred in *American Ninja* (1985) and *River of Death* (1989). Jean-Claude Van Damme is

well known for his roles in *Double Impact* (1991) and *Hard Target* (1983). Don "The Dragon" Wilson has appeared as the martial arts hero in *Bloodfist* (1989) and *Terminal Rush* (1995).

⁵ Early Christian narratives of the heroine were influenced not only by Arthurian narratives but by biblical narratives. The heroine in early Christian narratives was based on the figure of the Virgin Mary, who sacrifices her son Jesus to save humanity (Davis, 1997).

⁶ Even one of Jackie Chan's Hong Kong films is called *Mr Nice Guy* (1997).

⁷ See Li Siu Leung's (515-42) writing on martial arts cinema acting as a site for the representation of modernity and nationalism in Hong Kong.