

TSUI HARK'S
**Peking Opera
Blues**

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Contents

List of Illustrations	viii
List of Tables	xi
Series Preface	xii
Acknowledgments	xv
Introduction: Setting the Scene	1
Act 1 Story and Structure	30
Act 2 Warlords, History, and the Democratic Dream	85
Act 3 Shanghai and Peking Blues: Fiction as Imagined History	103
Act 4 The Shadowplay of Attractions and Painted Faces	119
Act 5 Three-Women Fiction, Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies	148
Postscript	190
Credits	197
Glossary	200
Filmography	213
Bibliography	217

Illustrations

- Shot 1A (Table 2a): Ling Pak-Hoi senses danger behind him.
- Shot 1B (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi turns around (and sees his three attackers).
- Shot 1C (Table 2a): “Dali” glares at Pak-Hoi.
- Shot 1D (Table 2a): Soldier 1 makes a move at Pak-Hoi, holding a knife.
- Shot 2A (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi throws a punch at Soldier 1.
- Shot 2B (Table 2a): Soldier 1 crashes against a wall.
- Shot 2C (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi throws Soldier 2 over his shoulders.
- Shot 2D (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi grabs “Dali.”
- Shot 3A (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi punches “Dali.”
- Shot 3B (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi punches “Dali” again.
- Shot 3C (Table 2a): Soldier 1 gives Pak-Hoi a flying kick from behind.
- Shot 3D (Table 2a): The kick sends Pak-Hoi into the air.
- Shot 4A (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi glides over the vintage car.
- Shot 4B (Table 2a): The steering wheel breaks Pak-Hoi’s fall.
- Shot 4C (Table 2a): Soldier 1 leaps into the air.

- Shot 4D (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi gets up.
- Shot 5A (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi blocks off Soldier 1's attack.
- Shot 5B (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi throws Soldier 1 over his shoulders.
- Shot 5C (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi and Soldier 1 fall off the car together.
- Shot 5D (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi flips Soldier 1 to the ground.
- Shot 6A (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi cuts Soldier 1 with a knife, while Soldier 2 prepares to attack him.
- Shot 6B (Table 2a): Tung Man shrieks.
- Shot 6C (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi stabs Soldier 2 with the knife.
- Shot 6D (Table 2a): "Dali" reaches for his gun.
- Shot 7A (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi contemplates his next move.
- Shot 7B (Table 2a): "Dali" points his gun at Pak-Hoi. Tung Man tries to intercept.
- Shot 7C (Table 2a): "Dali" turns around and shoots Tung Man.
- Shot 7D (Table 2a): The bullet hits Tung Man's left shoulder. He crashes against a wall.
- Shot 8A (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi throws the knife at "Dali."
- Shot 8B (Table 2a): The knife pierces "Dali."
- Shot 8C (Table 2a): As "Dali" falls backwards, he pulls the gun trigger reflexively.
- Shot 8D (Table 2a): The bullet makes a hole in the car's petrol tank.
- Shot 9A (Table 2a): "Dali" collapses to the ground and die.
- Shot 9B (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi gets up.
- Shot 9C (Table 2a): Pak-Hoi notices two shadows on the far wall.
- Shot 10A (Table 3a): Pak-Hoi is trapped inside the toilet.
- Shot 10B (Table 3a): Commander Lei lifts the red curtain to enter the toilet.
- Shot 10C (Table 3a): Pak-Hoi throws a bucket at Commander Lei.
- Shot 10D (Table 3a): The crowd outside the toilet ducks the bucket.
- Shot 11A (Table 3a): Warlord Tsao reacts to the commotion.

- Shot 11B (Table 3a): Some people fall down the stairwell.
- Shot 11C (Table 3a): Tung Man reacts to the commotion.
- Shot 11D (Table 3a): Pat Neil reacts to the commotion.
- Shot 12A (Table 3a): People in the backstage react to the commotion.
- Shot 12B (Table 3a): People crash through a railing on the upper floor.
- Shot 12C (Table 3a): People fall to the ground from the upper landing.
- Shot 12D (Table 3a): Amongst them is Tsao Wan.
- Shot 13A (Table 3a): Soldiers form a protective shield around Warlord Tsao.
- Shot 14A (Table 4): Fa Gum-Sao reacts to Commander Lei's proposal of marriage.
- Shot 14B (Table 4): Commander Lei appeals to Fa Gum-Sao to reconsider his marriage proposal.
- Shot 15A (Table 5): Warlord Tsao prepares to flee.
- Shot 15B (Table 5): Warlord Tsao and his daughter have a conversation.
- Shot 16 (Table 6): The bellowing painted face.
- Shot 17A (Table 7a): Pat Neil sobs under a street lamp.
- Shot 17B (Table 7a): Tsao Wan consoles Pat Neil.
- Shot 17C (Table 7a): Tsao Wan grabs Pat Neil's shoulder.
- Shot 18A (Table 7a): Snow starts to fall.
- Shot 18B (Table 7a): The party across the street.
- Shot 18C (Table 7a): Pat Neil and Tsao laugh heartily.
- Shot 19A (Table 7a): Bouncers throw Sheung Hung out of the theater.
- Shot 19B (Table 7a): Sheung Hung shivers in the cold.
- Shot 19C (Table 7a): Sheung Hung complains about the cold nosily.
- Shot 20A (Table 7a): Tsao Wan and Pat Neil roar with laughter.
- Shot 20B (Table 7a): Tsao Wan, Pat Neil, and Sheung Hung walk down the street together.

Tables

Table 1a	Story-plot segmentations and narratives	36
Table 1b	A summary of the main story	60
Table 2a	Narration and editing at a single location: the fight at the garage (thirty-five illustrations)	67
Table 2b	The fight at the garage sequence: composition and movement	68
Table 3a	Narration and crosscutting across multiple sites in a single location: the chaos in the theatre sequence (thirteen illustrations)	71
Table 3b	The chaos in the theater sequence: composition and movement	71
Table 4	The marriage proposal (two illustrations)	74
Table 5	The father and daughter conversation (two illustrations)	75
Table 6	The bellowing painted face (one illustration)	81
Table 7a	Hyperrealities in front of Kwok Wo Theatre (eleven illustrations)	143
Table 7b	The sequence in front of Kwok Wo Theatre: composition and movement	144

Introduction

Setting the Scene

I was working on the drafts for this book, for the umpteenth time, when the Hong Kong Police launched tear gas and pepper spray at the crowd of pro-democracy demonstrators who surrounded the government headquarters in Admiralty in downtown Hong Kong, on September 28, 2014. The demonstrators fended off the offensive with umbrellas. The attempt to disperse the peaceful crowd backfired. It further angered the demonstrators. They regrouped, while supporters rushed to join them. In the days that followed, the numbers of protesters grew from hundreds to thousands, eventually swelling to the tens of thousands, variously and collectively calling for free elections, an end to police violence, and the resignation of the city's chief executive, Leung Chun-Ying, who had consistently deemed the rallies as unlawful. The gathering eventually morphed into the street occupations that later become known as the Umbrella Revolution or Umbrella Movement.¹ The

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1. Chris Yeung, "Don't Call Hong Kong's Protests an 'Umbrella Revolution,'" *The Atlantic*, October 8, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/10/dont-call-hong-kongs-protests-an-umbrella-revolution/381231/> (accessed May 1, 2015).

humble umbrella thus became a symbol of defiance and resistance against the Hong Kong government; it also represented grass-root objections to the Beijing decision, or more particularly, that of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on August 31, 2014, that Hong Kong residents be allowed to elect their Chief Executive in 2017 but on the condition that eligible candidates be vetted and endorsed by the nominating committee appointed by the Central Government in Beijing first. Protesters saw the backpedaling as tantamount to a skirting act, regarding it as discordant to the "one country, two systems" framework stipulated under the Basic Law for governing the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), and also with the "international standards for universal suffrage." For them, anything short of free and fair elections that allowed the electorate to nominate and thence vote for candidates of their choice was "fake democracy."² Leung's government stood with the Beijing decision; so protesters were also venting anger and frustration against a government for compromising the city's autonomy, interests, and freedoms. Tents sprouted in Admiralty and the street occupations soon spread to Central and Causeway Bay, as far as the working class district of Mongkok in the Kowloon Peninsula, across Victoria Harbour from Admiralty. Yellow ribbons, and their variants such as yellow umbrellas (variously signaling dismay, outrage,

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2. Martin Murphy, "Hong Kong's Simmering Revolt Against Fake Democracy," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, August 7, 2014, <http://fpif.org/hong-kongs-simmering-revolt-fake-democracy/>; Robert Olsen, "Hong Kong Protesters Reject "Fake Democracy" from China," *Forbes*, July 1, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/robertolsen/2014/07/01/hong-kong-protesters-reject-fake-democracy-from-china/>; and Keri Philips, "Tracing the History of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement," *Rear Vision*, Australian Broadcast Corporation, October 28, 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rear-vision/tracing-the-history-of-hong-kongs-umbrella-movement/5848312> (all accessed May 1, 2015).

courage, and civil disobedience) became the movement's emblems. Meanwhile, counter protests from pro-China residents, including the triads, complicated the situation; they used blue ribbons to express support for the Hong Kong Police and their opposition to the Occupy Central campaigns.

Occupy Central, advocated by Occupy Central with Love and Peace (or OCLP, formed in March 2013),³ aimed to pressure the PRC Government into granting an electoral system by 2017 which satisfies “universal suffrage” and accords with “democratic procedures.”⁴ When the negotiations for electoral reforms broke down, OCLP issued an advance notice, as early as March 2014, for the non-violent occupation of Central through civil disobedience means on PRC's National Day on October 1, 2014. The Beijing decision of August 31, 2014, triggered a week-long boycott, organized by the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) and Scholarism (founded in 1958 and 2011 respectively), which then developed into a series of demonstrations, culminating with student demonstrators storming the Civic Square in front of the HKSAR government headquarters. Among those arrested was Joshua Wong (b. 1996), the convenor of Scholarism, a pro-democracy activist group primarily composed of high school students (unlike HKFS which represented college students). HKFS has, since the 1980s, been supportive of democratic developments in Hong Kong, including the student-led Tiananmen protests of 1989 and subsequent Tiananmen commemoration events in Hong Kong,⁵ while the rel-

3. OCLP disbanded in December 2014 after its founders surrendered to the police at the end of the Umbrella Movement.

4. Hong Kong Basic Law. “Article 45,” http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter_4.html (accessed May 12, 2015).

5. Yojana Sharma, “Student Federation Faces Uncertain Future in Pro-democracy Battle,” *University World News* 370, June 13, 2015, <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150520094510786> (accessed June 13, 2015). The HKFS represented college students from eight universities; four

atively newer Scholarism rose to fame when it campaigned against HKSAR government's attempt to introduce patriotic (pro-Communist) education, or "Moral and National Education," to the school curriculum; its subsequent protest occupation at the government headquarters, between August and September 2012, eventually forced the government to shelve the plans.

Four days after the police fired tear gas at the Admiralty protesters, Occupy Central commenced ahead of the scheduled date of October 1, 2014. OCLP, HKFS, and Scholarism were but three of the key players in the Umbrella Movement, which turned out to be a loosely organized political movement with no discernible leaders. Its participants, ranging from students to professors, from ordinary citizens to community leaders, including laborers and office workers who came to the rallies after work, were nonetheless united in their displeasure at the HKSAR government under the leadership of Leung Chun-Ying, calling for "fake democracy" to be replaced with "real democracy."

While reworking the drafts, it was difficult not to be distracted by these seventy-nine days of ongoing protests: they became an international media event, while my Facebook was constantly inundated with updates and highlights, as well as satirical comments and gossip, so much so that I found myself traveling from Macao

of which, namely Hong Kong University, Hong Kong Baptist University, City University of Hong Kong, and Hong Kong Polytechnic University, have, since February 2015, gradually withdrawn from this student alliance when their respective students voted in favor of disaffiliation. Although critics blamed the HKFS leadership for "acting hastily during the protests," further noting that "HKFS was not even able to wrest any concessions from the Government," others "see the hand of Beijing in the breakup of the Federation," noting that "Beijing has made no secret of its anger at the involvement of students and academics in opposing the Hong Kong Government on political reforms." In 2015, the new HKFS did not take part in the Tiananmen's 26th anniversary commemoration in Hong Kong.

to Hong Kong one Sunday and wandering around the occupied streets that stretched from Admiralty to Central as well as those in Mongkok and Causeway Bay. In doing so, I reflected on China's "other long march"—which began with the Republican dream of building a democratic China but which, up to the time of Umbrella Movement, has remained as rocky as ever.

This book is not about the Umbrella Movement specifically, nor about Hong Kong in particular, but about a film director, Tsui Hark (a.k.a. Xu Ke), and one of his films, *Peking Opera Blues* (1986), which, as a Hong Kong New Wave Classic, can be viewed in the larger context of the many struggles for democracy in modern China since the Republican times. These struggles serve as the film's spatio-temporal setting, and its stories about Republican revolutionaries combating autocratic rule, about politically committed youth seeking social transformations in post-imperial China, and about common, everyday people caught in the tumults of a turbulent time, have considerable political and poignant saliency for contemporary Hong Kong. These are stories apropos to China's "other long march" towards building a democratic nation.

Peking Opera Blues premiered in September 1986, or some seventy-four years after the founding of the Chinese Republic in 1912, which saw the demise of China's centuries-old dynastic rule based on monarchism. The premiere also occurred about two years after the announcement of the Sino-British Joint Declarations (1984) which paved the way for the Chinese resumption of sovereignty, on July 1, 1997, of the colony known as Hong Kong which Britain had ruled since 1842. *Peking Opera Blues*, set in a turbulent period marked by contestations between Republican democrats and monarchist revivalists, would seem to be an enigmatic rebus for renewed interests for democratic developments in the 1980s Hong Kong which subsequently emerged variously demanding political participation in the matter of Hong Kong's destiny in the run-up to 1997 and beyond. Viewed in this context, I ask here, does

the film as a cultural and social artifact merely tell stories about the past or does it seek to reclaim lost territory in metafictional ways, with significant resonance for reading contemporary situations?

This two-pronged question refreshes the conceptual premise for this book, which additionally highlights some of the ways in which a single film may be “read” intratextually, extratextually, and intertextually, in much the same way as a single poem, novel, play, picture, dream, movement, or any other form of textual communication may be examined in detail, by a variety of analytic and stylistic means, in order to more fully open up that text to a closer critical scrutiny, by looking at it from the inside, outside, and through other texts. This entails drawing upon “the deconstructionist impulse . . . to look into one text for another, dissolve one text into another, or build one text into another.”⁶

The reasons for wanting to do that are many and various, and differ according to academic disciplines and preferences, pedagogical priorities and rationales, and personal inclinations. Whatever those reasons may be (and mine are made clear throughout this book), any such analysis is always an enabling process—enabling to be more fully understood and to be better contextualized.

But in so doing, that opening up may also offer the possibilities for similar analysis of other individual films—not, I hasten to add, as a blueprint for the analysis of *all* films—but to offer some theoretical and analytic opportunities in the lexicon of the contemporary film student and critic. Any such analysis is always necessarily a subjective one, of course, driven by individual interests and motivations. My particular interest in this monograph lies with the multiple readings of film—from biographical to the formalist, from the historical to the postmodernist—and their value in film analysis and studies.

6. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Changes* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 51.

Before launching my multiple readings of *Peking Opera Blues* through the the lenses of deconstruction, intertextuality, and self-reflexivity in the chapters that follow, a biographical sketch of Tsui Hark is in order. In addition to highlighting Tsui's contributions in cinema, the biography will delineate contexts, considerations, and issues specific to contemporary Hong Kong filmmaking that draw a broad arch for situating my readings, through multiple lenses, of the film.

Tsui Hark the Filmmaker

Tsui Hark is a multitalented filmmaker. He has variously produced, directed, scripted and acted in around seventy movies of various genres. His colleagues and collaborators reportedly have a love-hate relationship with him: "Hate because he often makes next to impossible demands . . . Love because those demands are in fact challenges fueled by visionary passion [that bring] the best out of [his co-workers]."7

Otherwise fondly regarded as "the swordsman" who roams the *jianghu* of contemporary Hong Kong cinema,⁸ Tsui Hark was born Tsui Man-Kong in 1951, in third world pre-socialist Vietnam, to a large *huaqiao* family. He reportedly has sixteen siblings.⁹ Of Cantonese descent, he was raised against a background of internecine wars in his birth country: the nationalist struggle for independence and sovereignty from French colonialism, and subsequent to this, the American-led Vietnam War, which hindered the country's

7. Sam Ho, "Introduction," in *The Swordsman and His Jiang Hu*, eds. Sam Ho and Ho Wau-Ieng (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002), viii.

8. Ibid., ix. For an elaboration on *jianghu*, see Tan See Kam, "Shaw Brothers' *Bangpian*: Global Bondmania, Cosmopolitan Dreaming and Cultural Nationalism," *Screen* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 195–213.

9. Baidu, "Xu Ke," <http://baike.baidu.com/subview/29215/5665981.htm?toSubview=1&fromId=29215&from=rdtself#3> (accessed December 26, 2013).

unification until 1976. At the age of fifteen, Tsui Man-Kong left for Hong Kong, where he continued his schooling (1966–1969). A year later, the British colony was plunged into social chaos when the riots of May 1967 broke out. As the Cultural Revolution raged across the border, labor disputes in the territory turned into large-scale demonstrations against British colonial rule, with leftists clashing with the colonial authorities. In the aftermath, social pressure groups emerged, some demanding the recognition of the Chinese language as an official language, alongside the colonial tongue, English. Connected to the sexual liberation and anti-Vietnam War movements, youth countercultures burgeoned but, as Law Kar points out, the “politicized interest in local affairs” was simultaneous with a “love of Western popular culture.” For Law, the emergent “critical community [of] cine clubs, publications, and experimental filmmaking” laid the tracks for the renewal of the Cantonese cinema in the 1970s (dominated for so long by Hong Kong Mandarin cinema), with the New Wave Hong Kong cinema marking a culminating point before the decade was out.¹⁰

Tsui Man-Kong, who was to become closely associated with the cinematic New Wave, left for the United States in 1969. He studied film and television in Texas, and for the most part felt like an “outsider.”¹¹ Known to his friends as King Kong, he became a political activist, and participated in “patriotic” demonstrations against foreign intrusions upon Chinese territories—most particularly the 1971 Diaoyu dispute which erupted when Japanese boats sailed into

10. Law Kar, “An Overview of Hong Kong’s New Wave Cinema,” in *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, ed. Esther Yau (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 32.

11. Tsui Hark, “Tsui Hark on Tsui Hark: Three Hong Kong Film Archive Interviews,” interviews by Cheung Chi-Sing and Cheuk Pak-Tong (November 11, 1998), Yu Mo-Wan, Janice Chow, Mary Wong, Karen So, and Cynthia Liu (December 10, 1996), and Sam Ho and Winnie Fu (June 29, 2001), trans. Margaret Lee, in Ho and Ho, *The Swordsman and His Jiang Hu*, 175.

the “Chinese” fishing zone of the Diaoyu Islands. (Similar demonstrations were held in Hong Kong.) While in the United States, Tsui also took part in the growing anti-Vietnam War protests and civil rights movements. During this time he made “documentaries . . . about American imperialism, ethnic minorities and human-right[s] issues . . . [that] had a distinctive Third World perspective.”¹² His political participation, in this way, was redolent of past and lingering experiences; or, as Tsui puts it pointedly in an interview, “I grew up in a colonial environment [and was interested in colonial issues].”¹³ The political and the personal thus converged in this instance. Around this time, Man-Kong took the name of “Hark,” which in Chinese means “overcoming.”¹⁴ After graduation, Tsui Hark moved to New York, where he soon became involved in Christine Choy’s production of *From Spikes to Spindles* (1976) for the Third World Newsreel, a noted documentary about Chinese immigrants in the city’s Chinatown.¹⁵ He also edited a Chinatown newspaper, worked for Chinatown Community Cable TV, and developed a community theater group.

In 1977 he returned to Hong Kong, which, by then, was on its way to becoming one of the four economic dragons in the Far East. It was a Hong Kong quite unlike the one Man-Kong left some eight years earlier. At first, he worked for TVB and then for CTV, where he directed the sensational *Golden Dagger Romance* (1978), a nine-episode *wuxia* (warrior-chivalry)¹⁶ TV series based on Gu

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 174.

14. Fredric Dannen and Barry Long, *Hong Kong Babylon: An Insider’s Guide to the Hollywood of the East* (New York: Miramax Book, 1997), 136.

15. Christine Choy (Cui Minghui), *Realism and Ghost Shadows: The Memoirs of Female Director Cui Minghui* [Zhenshi yu guiying: Nü daoyan Cui Minghui huiyi lu] (Taipei: Yuanzun, 1998), 97–132.

16. The Chinese term “*wuxia*” has also been translated as knight-chivalry. Whether in the written form or in film and television, *wuxia* fiction typically

Long's novel. But he was soon to establish his reputation in film as a New Wave director, alongside Yim Ho, Ann Hui, Patrick Tam, and Allen Fong. He eventually went on to become known transnationally as the "Steven Spielberg of Asia"¹⁷ or "Hong Kong Spielberg."¹⁸

An admirer of Akira Kurosawa among others,¹⁹ Tsui Hark made his entry into the Hong Kong film industry via *The Butterfly Murders* (1979). This period film blends Hong Kong *wuxia* (warrior-chivalry), Hollywood sci-fi, and Japanese popular culture, from *manga* to samurai films. Since that time, his movies—regardless of format—have traveled far and wide, with uneven impact in home and global film markets. His relative "lack of success in Western countries," suggests Lisa Morton, the American author of *The*

features chivalrous warriors (both male and female) and is set in ancient China. Personal or factional feuds are a recurrent theme. In battle, the warriors would use traditional weapons such as swords and sabers, though some may additionally have superhuman skills like *qinggong*, or the ability to glide through the air effortlessly, or *shenqi* (supernatural) powers that include the ability to throw bolts of fire or thunder with their palms. The *wuxia* film genre first emerged in Shanghai cinema in the late 1920s. In the 1930s, the Nationalist government banned its production on the grounds that such films promoted superstition and heroic individualism. The genre was to lay dormant until Hong Kong Cantonese film studios revived it in the early 1950s. Their Mandarin counterparts came on to the scene a little later, around the mid-1960s. It would be another decade or so later before Hong Kong television stations started *wuxia* productions. A most notable example would be Tsui Hark's *Golden Dagger Romance*. Nowadays, the *wuxia* genre is a mainstay of both Chinese-language films and television shows.

17. Gladly Hendrix, "Tsui Hark," *Senses of Cinema* (June 2003), <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/tsui.html> (accessed February 1, 2007).
18. Richard Corliss, "Tsui Hark's New Spark," *Time* 156, no. 17 (October 30, 2000), http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/2000/1030/tsui_hark.html (accessed February 1, 2007).
19. Tsui, cited in Cheung and Cheuk, "Tsui Hark on Tsui Hark," 173.

Cinema of Tsui Hark, “can probably be boiled down to three main obstructions”:

First, unlike much of Jackie Chan’s work, Tsui’s movies tend to be intensely Chinese in theme and design; second, whereas John Woo’s films are almost entirely about men and male bonding, Tsui’s female-driven and transgendered cinema is a tougher sell in Western culture; and third, in contrast to Wong Kar-Wai . . . the Hollywood marketers simply cannot pigeonhole the prolific and versatile Tsui Hark.²⁰

The Butterfly Murders, along with Tsui’s other films such as *We’re Going to Eat You* (1980), *Dangerous Encounters—1st Kind* (1980–1981), and *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983), redefined and renewed contemporary Hong Kong cinema; they gave Tsui Hark the status of a “New Waver.”²¹ In 1984 he set up Film Workshop, variously producing, directing and scripting such award-winning classics as *Shanghai Blues* (1984), *Peking Opera Blues* (1986), the *A Better Tomorrow* trilogy (1986, 1987, and 1989), the *Chinese Ghost Story* trilogy (1987, 1990, and 1991), *The Killer* (1988), *Swordsman II* and *III* (1992, 1993), *Green Snake* (1993), and the six-part *Once Upon a Time in China* series (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, and 1997). In 1992, he won the Best Director Award for the original installment of the *Once Upon a Time in China* series at the Hong Kong Film Awards Ceremony. Jenny Lau’s summation of his career during this period is revealing:

Tsui Hark . . . almost single-handedly revised and modernized the action genre . . . [He] directly or indirectly launched the

20. Lisa Morton, *The Cinema of Tsui Hark* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2001), 1.

21. Law Kar, “An Overview of Hong Kong’s New Wave Cinema,” 31–52; Hector Rodriquez, “The Emergence of the Hong Kong New Wave,” in Yau, *At Full Speed*, 53–69.

Hollywood careers of John Woo and superstars Chow Yun-Fat . . . and Jet Li. The combined work of these talents has forever changed the cinemascapes of Hollywood.²²

John Woo, Chow Yun-Fat, and Jet Li have indeed worked with Tsui in various capacities, yielding landmark films associated with the Hong Kong New Wave in the final years of the territory's existence as a British colony. Woo, for example, was the director of *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) and *The Killer* (1989), both starring Chow. Li, on the other hand, played the male lead in *Swordsmen II and III*; Tony Ching Siu Tong, the action director of *Peking Opera Blues*, was both the *Swordsmen II and III* films' director and action director. Li additionally starred in the first three installments of the *Once Upon a Time in China* series, directed by Tsui, and then again in the series' sixth installment: *Once Upon a Time in China and America* (1997), codirected by Sammo Hung Kam-Bo and Lau Kar-Wing. These action-packed films were all produced by Tsui's Film Workshop. Tsui was also the producer and director of the TV series, *Wong Fei Hong* (1996). Like the *Once Upon a Time in China* movies, this TV series was liberally adapted from the legends of Cantonese pugilist-master Wong Fei Hong. It starred newcomer Zhao Wenzhuo, who stepped into Jet Li's role as Wong Fei Hong in the movie series' fourth and fifth installments.

On July 1, 1997, Hong Kong reverted to Chinese sovereignty. The occasion coincided with the financial collapse of the Thai baht, precipitating what has become known as the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and 1998. The Hong Kong film industry hit a slump. Tsui went to Hollywood, where he made two action films, *Double Team* (1997) and *Knock Off* (1998), both starring Claude Van

22. Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, "Peking Opera Blues: Imploding Genre, Gender, and History," in *Film Analysis: A Norton Reader*, eds. Jeffrey Geiger and R. L. Rutsky (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 739.

Damme. But Hollywood turned out to be “a very narrow alley.”²³ Around this time, he released Hong Kong’s first animation that combined 2-D and 3-D animation: *A Chinese Ghost Story—the Tsui Hark Animation* (1997). He also accepted commercial commissions that ranged from drawing the artwork for Ma Wing Shing’s comic book *Red Snow* (1999) to shooting an episode for the *1:99* (2003) film project composed of a series of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) awareness public announcements for the Hong Kong government’s Information Service Department.

In 2001, he produced Herman Yau Lai-to’s *Master Q*, which was Hong Kong’s first 3-D animation film with live action. He also remade his 1983 classic, *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain*, in collaboration with China Film Co-production Corporation. The remake, *The Legend of Zu*, dazzles the senses with state-of-the-art special computer effects. It won awards for Best Art Direction and Best Costume and Make-up (Golden Horse, 2001), the Best Special Effects Award (Asia-Pacific Film Festival, 2002), and the Film of Merit Award (Hong Kong Film Critics Society, 2002).

The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) of the People’s Republic of China oversees the China Film Co-production Corporation (CFCC).²⁴ Founded in 1979, CFCC has been solely responsible for administering affairs relating to Chinese-foreign film coproductions, resulting in notable works such as Bernardo Bertolucci’s *The Last Emperor* (1987), Zhang Yimou’s *Ju Dou* (1990), and Wayne Wong’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1993). CFCC now plays an even more important role in facilitating coproductions as such, especially since the PRC, upon becoming a member the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, has

23. Li Cheuk-to, “Through Thick and Thin: The Ever-Changing Tsui Hark and the Hong Kong Cinema,” in Ho and Ho, *The Swordsman and His Jiang Hu*, 14.

24. China Film Co-production Corporation, <http://www.cfcc-film.com.cn> (accessed May 25, 2015).

imposed an annual limit on the number of imported films to twenty productions. The import quota applies to Hong Kong productions as much as they do to those made elsewhere, although exemptions are granted to coproductions involving CFCC and other domestic collaborators.²⁵ It is therefore not surprising that Hong Kong filmmakers would henceforth strategically “head north” (*beishang*), seeking collaborative opportunities with their mainland counterparts who have the added advantage of shared resources in terms of multiple finances, film talents, and local expertise; as a result, this precipitated cross-border productions. In the meantime the film markets in the PRC have grown exponentially, offering a market size that is second only to Hollywood.

While maintaining a foothold on home turf with productions like *The Era of Vampires* (dir. Wellson Chin Sing-Wai, 2002), *Black Mask II* (dir. Tsui Hark, 2003), and *Christmas Rose* (dir. Charlie Yeung Choi-Nei, 2013) in addition to *Old Master Q*, the cross-border (Chinese) productions, as it turns out, gave a much needed boost to Tsui's otherwise waning filmmaking career when they became huge box-office hits (in the Mainland in particular). Such endeavors have granted location access to places as remote as the deserts in Xinjiang of northwest China, where he shot the award-winning *Seven Swords* (2005), whose critical success and popular reception have in turn led Ciwen Media (of the Mainland) to finance his production of a thirty-nine-part TV series of the

25. Since 2012, the quota has been raised to 34, of which 14 are reserved for “enhanced” films in 3-D or IMAX formats, including animations. CRI, “China’s Quota Change Heralds Reform,” China.org.cn (February 24, 2012), http://china.org.cn/arts/2012-02/24/content_24721975.htm (accessed December 26, 2013). See also Sabrina McCutchan, “Government Allocation of Import Quota Slots to US Films in China’s Cinematic Movie Market” (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2013), https://econ.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/sabrina-mccutchan-symposium.original.pdf (accessed May 7, 2015).

same name.²⁶ He has managed to attract other private Chinese film groups such as J.A. Media, Dong Yang Huan Yu Media, and Beijing Polybona, which coproduced his contemporary comedy, *All About Women* (2008). Like *Peking Opera Blues*, the comedy features three female protagonists. Primarily shot in Beijing, it starred mainland actresses Zhou Xun and Zhang Yuqi, with Taiwanese Kwai Lun-mei playing the film's third female lead. Huayi Brothers, another major Chinese studio, subsequently invested in *Detective D* (2010) and its prequel, *Young Detective Dee: Rise of the Sea Dragon* (2013). Tsui Hark's most recent cross-border hit is *The Taking of Tiger Mountain 3D* (2014).²⁷ Coproduced with Beijing's Bona Film Groups, this 3-D production is a remake of the revolutionary model opera film of the same title, which tells the patriotic story of how a People's Liberation Army troop vanquished a local tyrant and his army in northeast China. This book is not the place to discuss his most recent film in detail, but suffice it to say that Tsui has refashioned this genre of patriotic celebratory films with genre-mixing that includes themes of heroic valor characterized by purposeful intent and human failing. For Tsui to tamper with the classics (regardless of which kind) is, as this book's extensive discussion of *Peking Opera Blues* will show, not out of character.

Though uneven, Tsui's impact on film audiences, Chinese, global, or otherwise, has been widespread. In Hong Kong, Tsui Hark has long indeed been revered as "a rare auteur" who, as intimated above, has managed to rise above the "cut-throat commercial system [which] reigns so tightly [in Hong Kong] that it is hard to imagine the possibility of idiosyncrasy, let alone authorship."²⁸ Other film critics have praised him for making films that are

26. This film collected two more awards: Best Action Cinematography (Golden Horse, 2005) and Film of Merit (Hong Kong Film Critics Society, 2006).

27. At the fifty-second Golden Horse Awards (2015), this film won the Best Visual Effects Award, while Tsui Hark was a contender for the Best Director Award.

28. Lau, "Peking Opera Blues," 739.

“very Chinese indeed, referring as they do to Chinese history and culture, a Chinese environment,”²⁹ and, I would suggest, that view of his work constantly demands a rethinking of what constitutes “Chinese” and “Chineseness.” The 16th Busan International Film Festival (2013) adds nuances to this question of Tsui’s political and cultural identity as a diasporic Chinese working in transnational contexts when it honored him with the Asian Filmmaker of the Year Award (2013), making him the fifth diasporic Chinese filmmaker to receive such an award—the others being Hou Hsiao-hsien (2004), Edward Yang (2007), and Tsai Ming-liang (2010) of Taiwan, and Andy Lau Tak-Wah (2006) of Hong Kong.³⁰

In more ways than one, transnational Tsui Hark has indeed left indelible cine-prints, not only as a trendsetter for contemporary Chinese-language cinema, but also as a postcolonial Sinophone filmmaker who has operated within a third space of cultural citizenship; for reworking both literary and filmic Chinese classics; and for rethinking Chinese history along a historical-fictional continuum. As such, any study of the cinema of Tsui Hark, including this one, needs to take account of the social, political and cultural contexts of film production in Hong Kong, as changes in these aspects have an influence on a particular film’s content and style. Not only that, they also have an impact on production decisions, distribution modes, and consumption patterns.

29. Stephen Teo, “Tsui Hark: National Style and Polemic,” in Yau, *At Full Speed*, 148.

30. Karen Chu, “Tsui Hark to Be Honoured as Asian Filmmaker of the Year Award at Busan International Film Festival,” *The Hollywood Reporter* (September 2, 2011), http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/tsui-hark-be-honored-as-230704?mobile_redirect=false *Asia* (accessed December 26, 2013).

Contexts, Considerations, and Issues

This book therefore has five intersecting considerations when situating Tsui's work in relation to contemporary Hong Kong's social and cultural scene. The first pertains to the lived reality of British colonialism in Hong Kong, which has offered experiences of poverty, dependency, and subalternity, and paradoxically, also of mobility and other opportunities such as "flexible citizenship."³¹ If, as Tsui Hark, a Hong Kong-identified filmmaker hailing from Vietnam who has had high mobility and transnational experiences, has suggested in an interview, the colonial experience has given Hong Kong people of Chinese descent an "inferiority complex" about their ethnic origin, then they need to "liberate [themselves] from this mindset" for two reasons. One, they are "inescapably Chinese, just as Chinese immigrants are inescapably Chinese."³² Two, they should "take pride in being Chinese" because "Chinese culture is so rich, one benefits enormously with only a cursory connection." For Tsui Hark, "being 'Chinese' is not a political position or attitude, but about cultural origin." He suggests that it is "not a crime" for Chinese to "[lose] touch with their roots," but if they do, they would no longer be Chinese.³³ That is to say, to be Chinese is an option—even a personal choice—that signals the possibility of an alternative—an "other" terrain of acting and living as citizen-subjects through the interstices of colonial or colonizing frames. Thus Tsui would say, "I happen to be Chinese [and so] feel there is a lot of our [Chinese] culture worth exploring."³⁴

31. Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). See also Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 149–88.

32. Tsui, cited in Ho and Fu, "Tsui Hark on Tsui Hark," 190.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Tsui, cited in Cheung and Cheuk, "Tsui Hark on Tsui Hark," 173.

The second intersection calls forth the contradictory matter of Chinese culturalism in contemporary Hong Kong. Generally speaking, Chinese culturalism would be inimical to the ideological interpellations of political China. Political China would create highly politicized categories of culture, race and citizenry based on “ethnized reductionism” that homogenizes heterogeneities.³⁵ Chinese political parties are especially prone to do that, especially those that mobilize statist-universalist narratives like “one China, one people” as normative, while conflating the state with the party into a unified whole. For Shu-Mei Shih, these kinds of narratives are in actuality “dominant particulars masquerading as the universal.”³⁶ Whether issuing from the Guomindang (Kuomintang or KMT) of the Republic of China (ROC) or the PRC’s Chinese Communist Party (CCP), “political China”—as rhetoric or practice—would expectedly downplay ethnic diversities in China on the one hand, and on the other, glosses over cultural differences of Chinese people—both inside and outside China. In this book, Chinese culturalism is thus understood as circumscribing and composing values, practices and traditions of the Chinese-identified people, whether found in mainland China or in the Chinese diaspora, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao, but who may not necessarily subscribe to the ideological interpellations of political China. In the particular case of Hong Kong, Chinese culturalism(s), fostered in a colonial environment, have indeed been informed, shaped, and nurtured by competing varieties of Chinese nationalisms that run the gamut of the Confucian (historical China), Socialist (the PRC), Republican or Nationalist (Taiwan), and other forms of identification, including the diasporized (deterritorialized Chinese) kind. That is to say there is not one but many versions of “China” or “Chineseness”—each

35. Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 24.

36. *Ibid.*, 25.

with its own history of articulations, interpretations and practices.³⁷ Tsui points out the disparity and complexity in the following ways: “the Kuomintang, and [Chinese] Communist Party each [has] its own version,”³⁸ he says firmly in an interview, while noting that the books on or about China that he read while a child or a teenager contain another. For these authors who have mostly once lived in, but later left, China, Tsui notes, the “motherland” is “an illusion that exists only in memory.”³⁹ This “motherland” is in turn different from the Beijing he visited in 1984 as a tourist, which made him realize that Hong Kong’s “Chinese” self-consciousness is distinct to that of other “Chinese” cities.⁴⁰ Thus Tsui Hark advocates the necessity to “take [official] Chinese history with a grain of salt.”⁴¹

Tsui’s filmmaking practices manifest a Chinese culturalism that maps a precarious and problematic relation to political China. This trait is arguably a mark of “Sinophone” filmmakers. Or as Shu-mei Shih puts it:

The Sinophone may articulate a China-centrism if it is the nostalgic kind that forever looks back at China as a cultural motherland or the source of value, nationalist or otherwise; but the Sinophone is often the site where powerful articulations against China-centrism can be heard.⁴²

37. See, for example, Shu-mei Shih, “Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production”; Rey Chow, “On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem”; Ien Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm”; and Mirana May Szeto, “Intra-Local and Inter-Local Sinophone: Rhizomatic Politics of Hong Kong Writers Saisai and Wong Bik-wan,” in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, eds. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 24–52, 43–56, 57–73, and 191–206.

38. Tsui, cited in Cheung and Cheuk, “Tsui Hark on Tsui Hark,” 173.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. Tsui, cited in Ho and Winnie, “Tsui Hark on Tsui Hark,” 190.

42. Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 31.

In this regard, *Peking Opera Blues*, to invoke one representative example from Tsui's prolific corpus, neatly fits the bill. For a start, the film's original language is Cantonese. At first glance there is nothing remarkable about this at all since Cantonese is not only the lingua franca of Hong Kong but also standard to Hong Kong-made films at the time. But when viewed in the context of the language hierarchy of political China that has privileged standard *hanyu* (otherwise known as *putonghua* or *guoyu* in the PRC or ROC respectively) as the national language of China, the particularizing of Cantonese in Hong Kong film practice underscores "a dynamic of linguistic power struggles" between cultural and political Chinas.⁴³ Marginalized as a "minor language" of political China and relegated to the lowly status of a Chinese dialect, Cantonese accordingly lacks the linguistic prestige and cultural esteem that the institutionalized *hanyu* enjoys. Yet this minoritized language has endured. Characteristic of the Sinophone in cultural China, it is generative of a "minor literature" that variously resists Chinese domination (whether of the PRC or the ROC kind), displaying "anti-colonial intent against Chinese hegemony," and ambivalence for the imperatives of political China.⁴⁴

Tsui's Sinophone utterances also underscore postcolonial sensibilities. This involves eschewing Chinese nativism that offers "the illusion of cultural virginity" and "the excitement of its possible rehabilitation," while seeking and articulating "a third space between the colonizer and the dominant native culture,"

43. Ibid. See also Gwynn Guilford, "Here's Why the Name of Hong Kong's 'Umbrella Movement' Is So Subversive," *Quartz* (October 22, 2014), <http://qz.com/283395/how-hong-kongs-umbrella-movement-protesters-are-using-their-native-language-to-push-back-against-beijing> (accessed December 4, 2014).

44. Shih, *Visuality and Identity*, 30. See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

respectively embodied in British colonialism and the nativism of political China.⁴⁵

That “third space” questions binary thinking and introduces instead an element of crisis—a crisis which is symptomatized by both the overdetermination and the underestimation of dominant colonial or nativist cultures. It is a mode of articulation, a way of imagining a space of possibility in which oppositional, subcultural, negotiated, and interstitial acts, practices, and discourses, coexist in order to broach questions of identity, self-sufficiency, and self-knowledge.⁴⁶ Rather than being a “postmodern hybridite”—who, for instance, would “flatten out past injustices” and criticize Chinese nationalism but not British colonialism⁴⁷—I would argue that Tsui is simultaneously postcolonial and postmodern in practice. As I have shown in my analysis of his works elsewhere,⁴⁸ and emphasize again here with respect to *Peking Opera Blues*, Tsui is a postcolonial/postmodern filmmaker who is adept at assembling pastiche, parody, and other postmodern approaches and techniques, yielding hybridized film forms and genres, while engaging with the dominant cultures of Hong Kong’s colonizers.

The third intersection concerns the place of late colonial Hong Kong as a globally connected city which enjoyed a living standard comparable to first world countries. Whether as a British colonial

45. Chow, *Ethics after Idealism*, 157.

46. Majorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 11; and Charles T. Lee, “Bare Life, Interstices, and the Third Space of Citizenship,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2010): 57–81.

47. Chow, *Ethics after Idealism*, 155–57.

48. Tan, “From *South Pacific* to *Shanghai Blues*,” 13–34; and Tan See Kam, “Surfing with the Surreal in Tsui Hark’s *Wave*: Collage Practice, Hybrid texts and Flexible Citizenship,” in *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier*, eds. Esther Cheung, Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 33–50.

trading outpost with a laissez-faire economy and a predominantly Chinese population, as a newly industrializing “Chinese” society under British colonial rule, or as one of the four economic dragons in the Far East, Hong Kong in the 1980s—as before—had at the same time been territory to and for a global traffic in people, ideas, images, cultures, and capital that both fermented and disturbed the territory’s simultaneously local, cosmopolitan, and global tastes and outlooks. This kind of global traffic has, from the beginning, informed and influenced the Hong Kong film industry.⁴⁹

The fourth intersection concerns the film industry, which is sometimes called the “Hollywood of the East.” It has had a long history of distributing its products to diasporic Chinese communities in the region and beyond; and for a time in the 1970s (and again since the 1990s), reached Hollywood-dominated markets. From the 1980s onwards, the industry has made increasing contact with international film festivals and art-house film circuits beyond the Chinese diaspora, including cinema outlets in mainland China. Access to the mainland Chinese markets has remained relatively unrestricted (except for the period between the 1950s and the early 1980s). In turn, the industry’s multifarious repertoires of filmmaking traditions have, over the years, developed in conversation with and in resistance to both intra and interregional filmmaking practices and cultural influences—be they emanating from the Far East (e.g., mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan), the South (e.g., Australia, Singapore, and other Southeast Asian locations), or the West (e.g., the US/Hollywood and Europe). This force of diverse traditions was and still is an issue Tsui Hark constantly engages with, as he carved out his niche as a postcolonial Sinophone

49. Stephen Teo, “*Wuxia* Redux: Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon as a Model of Late Transnational Production,” in *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, eds. Meaghan Morris, Siu Leong Li and Stephen Chan Ching-kiu (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 192–200.

filmmaker within the context of what Ackbar Abbas and Wimal Dissanayake have described in this book's series preface as a "new cultural and political space . . . where the problems of colonialism were overlaid with those of globalism in an uncanny way." The local in Hong Kong, or in Hong Kong's self-consciousness, as evident in Tsui's film corpus, is therefore—and has always been—translocal, transregional, and transnational, in turn problematizing any unified notion of Chinese or Chineseness.

The final consideration relates to Tsui Hark's location within the interstices of competing forces of colonialism, nativist culturalism, Chinese nationalisms, localism, and globalism. These forces have shaped production agendas, marketing strategies, and distribution patterns in one way or another, and so would inform Tsui Hark's own filmmaking decisions.

I take account of all those contexts, considerations, and issues throughout this book. For now, I shall turn my attention to the film's cast which draws on talents not only from Hong Kong but also elsewhere in the Chinese diaspora such as Taiwan and Canada. This mixture marks Hong Kong's Sinophone cultural practices in cinema.

The Cast⁵⁰

Peking Opera Blues took approximately HK\$17.6 million at the Hong Kong box office, making it the seventh top-grossing film of the year. In 1987, it received five Hong Kong Film Awards nominations: Best Actress (Sally Yeh Chian-Wen), Best Action Choreography (Ching Siu-Tung), Best Art Direction (Ho Kim-Sing, Leung Chi-Hing, and Vincent Wai Kai-San), Best Cinematography (Poon Hang-Sang), Best Film Editing (David Wu), and Best Supporting Actor (Paul Chun). It was scripted by Raymond To Kwok-Wai.

50. See the credits in the back matter for a complete list of the cast and crew.

The three female lead actresses, Sally Yeh, Brigitte Lin Ching-Hsia, and Cherie Chung Cho-Hung, are all stars of the day. Taiwan-born Canadian Sally Yeh (b. 1961) is a well-known singer of the Mandarin/Cantonese pop music scene and acts as Pat Neil, an aspiring Peking Opera performer. Prior to this, she worked with Tsui Hark in *Shanghai Blues* (1984).

Brigitte Lin (b. 1954), born and raised in Taiwan, is a veteran actress, especially well known for playing the romantic lead in Qiong Yao's tearjerkers—a staple of the 1970s Taiwanese movie scene. In the early 1980s, she went to Hong Kong where she successfully rebuilt her career. Prior to *Peking Opera Blues*, she collaborated with Tsui Hark in Golden Harvest's production of *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983), playing the female lead role, Jasper Lake Countess, for which she was nominated for the Best Actress Award at the 1984 Hong Kong Film Awards. In 1991, she won the Best Actress Award (Golden Horse) for her performance of Shen Shaohua (a writer) in Yim Ho's *Red Dust*. Her other memorable roles include playing a transsexual warrior called Dongfang Bubai in *Swords II: The East is Red* (1993), produced by Tsui's Film Workshop (which also made *Peking Opera Blues*). In *Peking Opera Blues*, she is Cao Yun, a gynecologist, also a general's daughter, who enjoys cross-dressing and revolutionary work.

Hong Kong-born Cherie Chung (b. 1960), the third runner-up in the 1979 Miss Hong Kong Beauty Pageant, was a model before becoming an actress in 1980. In *Peking Opera Blues*, she plays a greedy and opportunist musician called Sheung Hung. Prior to this she had appeared in no less than twenty movies. In 1983 she received her first Best Actress nomination at the second Hong Kong Film Awards for playing Fu Min (a young and aggressive career woman in an advertising company) in Stephen Shin Gei-Yin's *Eclipse* (Sil-Metropole, 1982). She was a Best Actress nominee again at the Hong Kong Film Awards the following year, this time for her role as an illegal mainland Chinese immigrant in Clifford

Tsai Gai-Gwong's *Hong Kong, Hong Kong* (Shaw Brothers, 1983), for which she also received the Best Actress Award nomination at Taiwan's twentieth Golden Horse Film Awards (1984). In 1988, both the Hong Kong Film Awards and the Golden Horse Awards nominated her as a contender for the Best Actress Award for her role as an overseas student in New York in Mabel Cheung Yuen-Ting's *An Autumn's Tale* (D & B Films, 1987).

Other Hongkongers in the film, Cheng Ho-Nam (b. 1964) and Cheung Kwok Keung (b. 1956), by contrast, were relative newcomers. They have since carved out their respective niches in the Hong Kong film and TV scene. China-born actors, Ku Feng (b. 1930), Kenneth Tsang (b. 1938), and Paul Chun Pui (b. 1945), are veteran actors, as were the late Wo Ma (1942–2014) and Tien Ching (1935–1993), who were also born in China. All five started their professional life in postwar Hong Kong, where they established their careers in acting, appearing in numerous films. In one way or another, these highly versatile actors remain well-respected personalities in the industry. Some have received professional recognition at the prestigious Golden Horse (Taiwan) and Hong Kong Film Awards Ceremony. In 1982, Ku collected the Golden Horse Best Supporting Actor Award for his role as Wu Dalang in *Tiger Killer* (dir. Lee Han-hsiang, Shaw Brothers, 1982). Five years later, Wo accepted the Golden Horse award for his supporting role as Taoist monk Yan Chixia in *A Chinese Ghost Story* (Film Workshop, 1987). This horror fantasy was produced by Vietnam-born Tsui Hark and directed by Hong Kong-born Ching Siu Tung (b. 1953); he and Paul Chun were *Peking Opera Blues*' respective Martial Arts Director and Best Supporting Actor nominees at the 1987 Hong Kong Film Awards. Chun, the youngest of the veteran actors, first made his name as a child actor in Hong Kong's postwar Mandarin screen. As a young man, he had a more checkered career as an actor. For a time he tried his luck at Lee Han-Hsiang's Guolian (Grand) Studio in Taiwan, even appearing as a bit-actor in a non-Chinese language

film, Robert Wise's controversial *The Sand Pebbles* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1966). He returned to Hong Kong in the early 1970s, finding some success in television work. He also accepted some film roles. In 1987, he played a madman called Tsuen in Derek Yee Tung-Sing's *The Lunatics* (Media Asia, 1986), which earned him a Golden Horse award (1987) and a Hong Kong Film Award (1987) in the category of Best Supporting Actor, collecting a third at the thirteenth Hong Kong Film Awards (1994) for his supporting role as Uncle Cheung in *C'est La Vie, Mon Cherie* (Film Unlimited, 1993), also directed by Derek Yee, who walked away with the Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Screenplay awards.⁵¹ Kenneth Tsang's good looks made him a heartthrob in postwar Hong Kong cinema—at first in 1950s Mandarin cinema and then of the 1960s Cantonese screen. In the 1970s the aging actor turned to television to extend his acting career, while keeping an eye out for film work. Tsang is also fluent in English and, in more recent years, has appeared in Rob Marshall's blockbuster *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Columbia Pictures, 2005) and other non-Chinese language small budget films such as Adam Kane's *Formosa Betrayed* (Formosa Films, USA, 2009), Roseanne Liang's *My Wedding and Other Secrets* (South Pacific Pictures, New Zealand, 2011), and Luca Barbareschi's *Something Good* (Casanova Multimedia, Italy, 2013).

Structure of the Book

Peking Opera Blues was popular, successful, and star-studded, and this monograph is about the way in which this film might be read and understood through a number of different, though intertextually related, lenses: plot and story; historical background; a companion film *Shanghai Blues*; Peking opera; Canto-pop and

51. This film garnered two more awards: Best Actress (Anita Yuen) and Best Supporting Actress (Fung Bo-Bo).

Mandarin songs; mandarin ducks and butterfly fiction; and the “three-women” film in the Chinese-language cinema. Through these multiple lens, I seek not only to more fully open up the depths and riches of one single film, but also to show the possibilities of the critical value of intertextual readings of films. This begins in “Act 1” which takes up the more traditional, formalist, approaches to film studies.

In this chapter, I give some detail about *Peking Opera Blues* itself, reading it through the lens of formalism. Through that lens I explore the cinematic codes that give the film its form, including Tsui’s *auterist* signatures such as cluttered mise en scène and rapid editing style. The formalist approach focuses on the film’s story, style, structure, tone, and imagery; it deploys the methodologies of singular shot, shot-by-shot, and mise-en-scène analyses with respect to compositional and editing matter. This yields a close detailing of the forms of the film, drawing attention to specific cinematic effects and affects.

In film studies, formalism generally treats films as autonomous art-objects, and so studies them in isolation from social, cultural, and historical influences. Both historical and postmodern film critics are critical of formalism’s exclusion of subject matter, context, and social values. Traditional historical film criticism emphasizes the historical processes in cultural production and reproduction. This approach has resulted in linear accounts that imagine temporality in progressive terms, periodization in continuous terms, and canonization in eugenic terms. Postmodern studies of topographies of film forms and histories, on the other hand, would challenge these concepts and assumptions as such, arguing, as postmodernist critics do, that historical processes, their very materiality and materialism, would be infinitely more complex, since film form and content can articulate historical ruptures characterized by ambiguity, hybridization, and deterritorialization.

Rather than engaging with these debates extensively, this book places its multiple readings of *Peking Opera Blues* on a formalist-historical-postmodernist continuum. In so doing it sees merits in all three approaches to film studies. Formalism, for example, has the inherent advantage of teaching film researchers, professionals, and students a “grammar” of filmmaking that highlights the formal logic of shot compositions and shot assemblages (that integrates imagery and sound), or the lack thereof. The historical approach sheds light on a different paradigm of narrative logic—that, for instance, pertaining to the filmmaker’s historical situatedness in terms of intentions and choices. Finally, the postmodern approach helps uncover the logic of illogicality that refuses linear temporality and continuous spatialization, highlighting unwieldy contradictions that color ambiguous and parodic scenarios of narration and performance. Wielding a formalist-historical-postmodernist continuum as a reading strategy, then (however theoretically contentious such a continuum may be), positions *Peking Opera Blues* for the opportunities of multiple readings, through multiple lenses of intertextuality, which can reveal the film’s richness in terms of formal textures, textual affects, and ideological influences.

In summary then, this monograph contains five acts of reading *Peking Opera Blues*. Different yet connected, these acts of reading variously and collectively simultaneously deconstruct the film’s textual contours as well as its playful intertextual and hypertextual configurations. The first reading act explores story and form through the lens of structuralist narratology. This gives textualized contours to the film’s compositional and narrative techniques and unpacks Tsui’s signatory style in the area of storytelling and editing. Building on this, the subsequent chapters mobilize intertextuality and self-reflexivity as reading strategies that foreground relationality, interconnectedness, and interdependence in textual formations, in order to bring into sharp focus certain narrative and performative elements in this particular film as it relates to modern

Chinese history and literature, traditional Peking opera, and Hong Kong's Mandarin Canto-pop songs, and also, contextually, to contemporary Hong Kong cinema in general, and to 1980s Chinese/Hong Kong cultural politics in particular.

At the heart of this book, then, is not simply a very popular and well-crafted film, made by a particularly successful and gifted director and featuring famous stars, but a film which, because of its many layers, complexities and intertextual practices, opens up the possibilities of a wide range of critical and intertextual insights. These are not just about the film itself (though they can reveal much about that film); nor are they simply examples of traditional film analysis pertaining to structures and techniques. Rather, they can yield understandings, and sometimes alternative readings, of society, history, culture, and politics, then and now, engendered by the film and its self-reflexive, and often very self-conscious, intertextualities. In the light of the Umbrella Movement, this book claims *Peking Opera Blues* for China's "other long march."

One final, but still an opening comment. At the heart of this book, too, is an exploration of the maxim that in matters of intertextuality and generic citation, "No film is an island."⁵²

52. Tan See Kam, "From *South Pacific* to *Shanghai Blues*: No film Is an Island," in *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood and the New Global Cinema*, eds. Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 13–34.

Credits

Peking Opera Blues assembles a star-studded cast drawn widely from the Chinese diaspora:

Lin Ching-Hsia, Brigitte 林青霞

Chung Cho-Hung, Cherie 鍾楚紅

Yeh Chian-Wen, Sally 葉蒨文

Cheng Ho-Nam, Mark 鄭浩南

Tsang Kong, Kenneth 曾江

Chun Pui, Paul 秦沛

Wo Ma 午馬

Tien Ching 田青

Cheung Kwok Keung 張國強

Ku Feng 谷峰

Tsao Wan 曹雲

Sheung Hung 湘紅

Pat Neil 白妞

Ling Pak-Hoi 寧北海

General Tsao 曹督軍, a warlord,
also Tsao Wan's father

Fa Gum-Sao 花錦繡

Boss Wong 王老板, or Pat Neil's
father, also Manager of Chun He
Ban opera troupe

Manager Sung 宋經理 of Minsheng
Press 民聲出版社

Tung Man 董民

Commander Lei 雷組長

Wong Ha 黃哈	Warlord Tun 段軍閥
Lee Hoi-Sang 李海生	Warlord Tun's soldier (with "Dali" moustache)
Poon Hang-Sang 潘恆生	Theater doorman
Leung Po-Chick 梁普智	Mr. Kam 金老板, theater owner
Wu Dai-Wai, David 胡大為	Warlord Tsao's interpreter
Leung Chi-Ming, Willian 梁智明	Warlord Tun's soldier (with a "dot" moustache)
Lai Wing-Keung, James 黎永強	Warlord Tun's officer
Ng Kwun-Yu, Sandra 吳君如	Warlord Tun's wife
Wong Hoi-Yan 黃愷欣	Warlord Tun's wife
Si-Ma Yin 司馬燕	Warlord Tsao's female companion (unnamed)
Fung Ging-Man 馮敬文	Warlord Tsao's officer
Tin Kai-Man, Tenky 田啟文	Cart-pusher
Chang Kwok-Tse 曾國賜	Commander Lei's man
Fung Yuen-Chi 馮元熾	Overseas Chinese arrested in the street.

Poon Hang-Sang and David Wu, who play cameo roles as the theater doorman and Warlord Tsao's interpreter, are in turn the film's cinematographer, and film and music editor respectively. Other credited behind-the-scene talents are:

Executive Producer	Chung Chun, Claudie 鍾珍
Director and Co-producer	Tsui Hark 徐克
Scriptwriter	To Kwok Wai 杜國威
Art Direction	Wai Kai-San, Vincent 韋啟新, Ho Kim Sing 何劍聲 and Leung Chi Hing 梁志興

Martial Arts Director

Ching Siu Tung 程小東

Costume Designer

Ng Bo-Ling, Bobo 吳寶玲

Cheung Siu-Ping, Peggy 張少萍

Props

Lee Kuen-Long 李坤龍

Cheung Foo-Wing 張富榮

Hair Stylist

Lee Kin-Tai 李檢娣

Makeup

Fung Cho-tak 馮祖德

Consultant (Peking opera)

Lau Shun 劉洵

Special Effects

Cinefex Workshop Co. Ltd.

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Filmography

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