

# MAFFARA

APRIL  
1994

Damon  
Foster



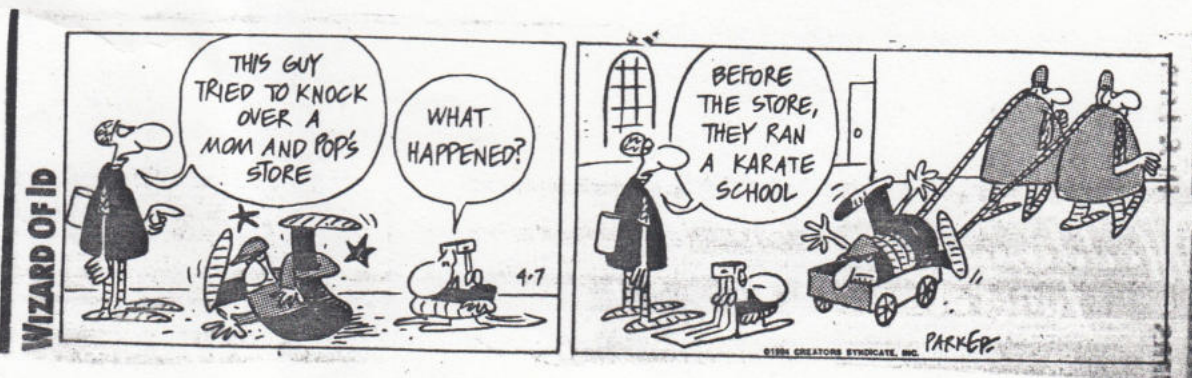


Welcome to the 47th issue of MAFFAPA, Martial Arts Film Fan (and Asian Culture) APA, for April 1994. Contributions were sent by the following people:

Patricia Gonzalez, 3595 Bainbridge Ave, Apt. 2B, Bronx, NY 10467  
Susan Moyers Porter, 7324 Welton Dr. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109  
new contributor: Clyde Gentry, Hong Kong Film Connection,  
PO Box 867225, Plano, TX 75086-7225  
Amy Harlib, 212 W22 St. #2N, New York, NY 10011  
Howard Walsdorff, PO Box 247, Greenbrier, TN 37073-0247  
Robert Walsdorff, same address  
Mark Jackson, 2043 SE Isabell Road, Port St. Lucie, FL 34952  
Damon Foster, PO Box 576, Fremont, CA 94537-0576  
Nikki White, 15 Duffus Place, Wanniasa, ACT 2903, Australia  
Robert Mallory, 129 Watauga Rd., Franklin, NC 28734  
Laurine White, 5422 Colusa Way, Sacramento, CA 95841-2304  
Ron Lim, cover artist  
*Jackie Sims*

The deadline for Maffapa 48 is July 31, 1994. If your name is not listed above as a contributor, you must contribute to the next issue to receive it. Your contribution, at least one page, must reach Laurine White by the end of July. Minimum contribution is one page per issue, or 2 pages every other issue. Please send 16 copies of each page plus \$1.50 to cover return postage. If you don't send 16 copies, send your original pages, plus \$1 per page to cover copy costs. I prefer checks or stamps (\$1.50 minimum in stamps) instead of cash, which is dangerous to send through the mail. Don't forget a 9x12" self-addressed envelope, so I can send Maffapa #48 to you.

Apologies for the lateness of this issue, If you don't know it, I run the local anime club, and am one of the busiest tape traders around. Anime club activities have consumed a lot of my time the past few weeks, and with all the new SF episodes, I've been taping shows for people in Australia, Japan (at least 4 people), Brazil and Scotland. So please be patient. Those heavy into fanac know what I'm talking about.





# "KWOONOSCOPE PRESENTS AN APRIL FOOLS DAY SPECIAL" BY ROBERT MALLORY

Please remember that no matter how logically I argue the point and how utterly convincing this article is, I'm just kidding! Really. Sort of. Kinda. You know!

Also the samples of the Thimble Theater/Popeye newspaper strip are used here only for review purposes and are all copyrighted by King Features Inc. Enough of these disclaimers already. It's time for our feature presentation!

## ♪ HE'S POPEYE THE MARTIAL ARTIST MAN! ♪

First off let me dispel (as opposed to "mispell") some of your misconceptions. I am not referring to the animated imposter of the cartoons wherein one called "Punch And Judo" merely dealt with Boxing. Nor am I referring to the somewhat closer to the mark live action imposter seen in the movie. No, I am referring to the true, original Popeye, the one in the newspaper strips. All the other media ignored (with the typical disdain of the Western World) Popeye's mastery of the Eastern Fighting Arts. Even the comic books (usually as high brow an entertainment as is possible) messed up.

The comic strip Thimble Theater had begun in 1919 and Olive Oyl and her brother Castor Oyl were among the feature's regular characters. For ten years the newspaper feature ran with no special acclaim until that day in 1929 a new character was introduced. His name was Popeye, a one eyed sailor with one eye and large forearms. E.C. Segar, the creator of the strip, based the character on an actual sailor he knew, who did have well developed forearms and a reputation for never losing a fight. Back then Sailors had quite a reputation for being good fighters. In



fact it was the sailors who were exposed to the Oriental Self Defense skills, and bringing back what they could imitate to the streets of France that later led to the development of Savate (the real Savate is mostly replaced by "French Boxing" in these less lethal sport oriented days)! So it was taken for granted that the only Westerners at the time apt to be exotic fighters were the sailors. Eventually this reputation disappeared through the years, although it is interesting to note that it has been restored to the special forces section of the Navy, namely the Seals! These sailors are said to be more proficient than the Army's Green Berets etc. in unarmed combat.

Be that as it may, you say, what unarmed skills has Popeye ever shown apart from Boxing (and let us not forget that Bruce Lee himself knew how to Box!)? I'm glad you asked that! Arf! Arf! Actually, the Sailor has displayed skills of probable Chinese origin in three of the four fighting ranges described in Jeet Kune Do. Popeye is indeed versed in long range (kicking), medium range (punches and strikes) and short range (grappling, throws etc.). It is only in the "trapping hands range" that we have seen no evidence of skills learned. Evidently whatever skills Popeye picked up in his travels to the Far East; Wing Chun was not among them! Of course when you consider that he (in the early newspaper strip) rubbed a "magic Whiffle Hen" for enough luck to survive various onslaughts and has been around long enough for his whole body to harden (today the bullets merely bounce off - talk about your "Iron Vest" technique!), and the fact that his unique metabolism lets him instantly recharge his strength with Spinach (perhaps it works for him like those ointments that bring one's Chi to the surface?) he seems to have managed to get along without the trapping hands methods!



First lets see if the Sailor has shown any degree of the flexibility one would expect of the Kicking martial artists. As you can see in the below strip, he sure has! ↓

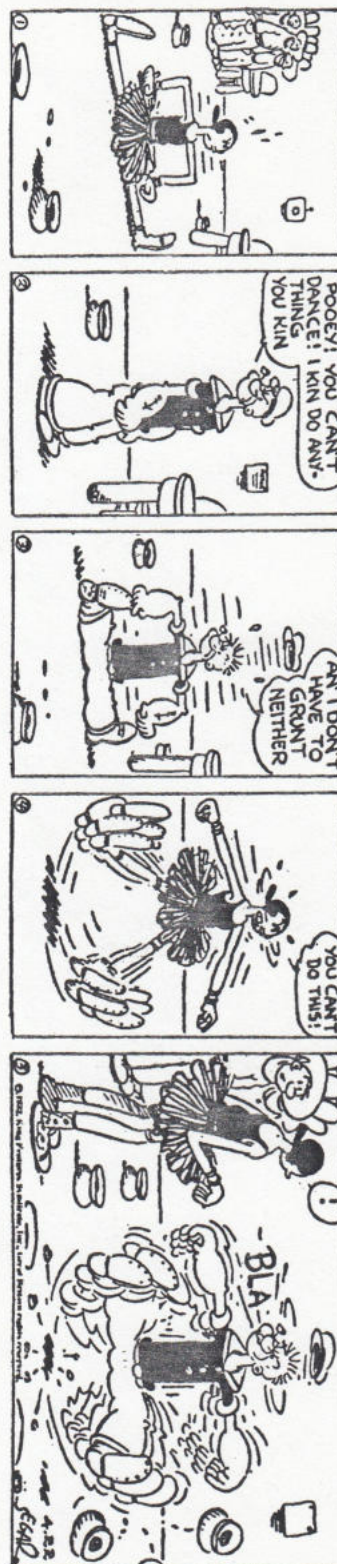
And to think people say I make this stuff up! I am prepared to prove everything I'm saying here, so stay with me on this.

Does Popeye have any knowledge of Dim Mak or at least Atemi-Waza (the Japanese

name for striking the vital points of the body?

Wonder no further, my friends. Check out the dialogue in the next to last panel of the strip at the left. Also notice that in this strip Popeye himself says he's been to Singapore. In my study of this strip I have found

THIMBLE THEATER  
NOW SHOWING—THE WORM TURNS.  
Monday—The Weaker Sex



Stealing Her Stuff

ALL I CAN SAY IS JEAN CLAUDE VAN DAMME, EAT YOUR HEART OUT!



references to a number of brawls in Singapore. According to the current writer/artist of the strip, Bud Sagendorf, Popeye lost his eye in one of the battles (I wonder what they used to call him?) there. Perhaps the only way our Sailor could get the Chinese to teach him their Kung Fu was to force them to demonstrate their techniques? After all, the Chinese would not teach "White Round Eyed Foreign Devils" at that early time. It would seem the price the Sailor payed to see a one finger spear jab (probably from the Snake system) was pretty high!

Popeye undoubtedly learned that more than sheer muscle is needed in a fight. One must be able to think on his feet, or to put it another way, he has to be able to use his head! Proof of this can be seen in the strip at the right. → I told you I could prove all this stuff. People who know me (if they admit to it) will tell you that I am usually serious only about the unimportant things, and take the other things lightly. It works for me; people have thought I'm ten years younger than I really am! But enough about me, we're here to discuss Popeye's prowess! So let's get back to this "serious"

THIMBLE THEATER  
NOW SHOWING—NOW IT'S SKAG'S TURN  
Tomorrow—A Dilemma for Popeye



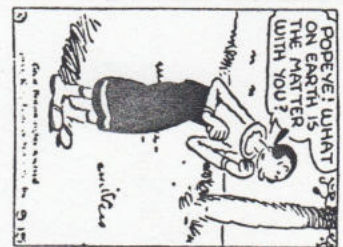
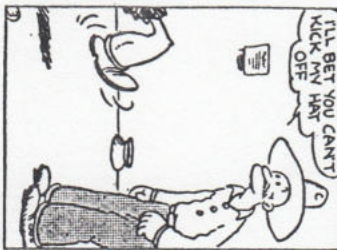
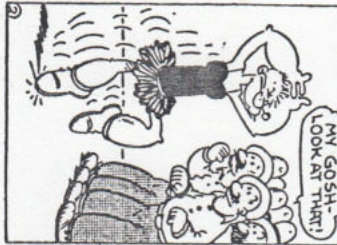


topic! Can Popeye Kick? Check out these two strips. What do you think of that (there I go quoting Dan Inosanto from Game Of Death again!)?

Don't ask me why Popeye is wearing a dress in one of these strips. It's a looong story! Suffice it to say that he is wearing a disguise even as Bruce Lee's character did a few times in The Chinese Connection. Come to think of it, Jackie Chan even dressed as a girl in his movie The Fearless Hyena! It's amazing how much all these great fighters have in common!

Anyway, I've proved my point; Popeye can kick!

What's that, you



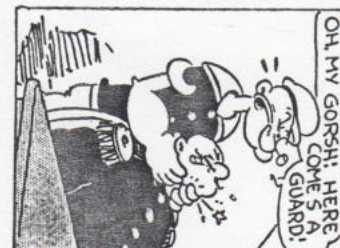
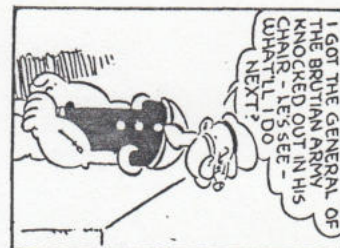
POPEYE, THE SAILORMAN—Woodman Spare That Tree

POPEYE, THE SAILORMAN—Heard But Not Seen

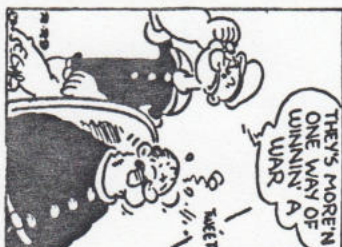
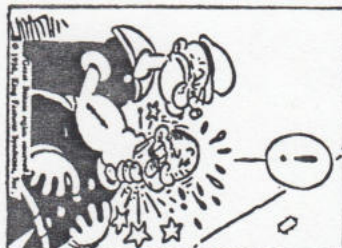


ask me (why am I hearing voices?)? When has Popeye ever grappled with people as opposed to just hitting them? Observe you now (I love talking weird) the choking techniques of Popeye which are possibly derived from Chin-Na, and a grasping Tiger Claw to the face! Remember, it can be used as a grab as well as a raking, ~~tearing~~ movement! What an expert he is!

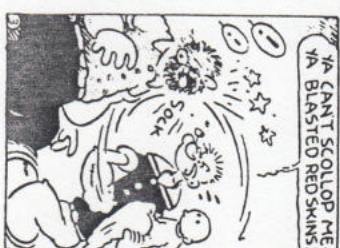
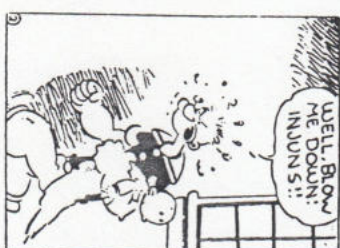
THIMBLE THEATER Starring POPEYE—By E. C. Segar



THIMBLE THEATER Starring POPEYE—By E. C. Segar



POPEYE, THE SAILORMAN—Bows and Arrows





7.



really have large muscles apart from his forearms and calf muscles. The forearms play a larger part in the mechanics of blocking and striking then people think, and of course play an important part in his Chin-Na and Shuai Chiao. Popeye's calves were not large in the early days (something his bell bottoms hid) but he obviously worked on them for his kicks and explosive movements (even American Boxers do this) as they soon became very powerful looking. But how did the rest of him get so strong without bulking up? The obvious theories are some form of dynamic tension combined with Chi-Kung Breathing exercises like in the "Iron Warrior" external sets and the "Iron Vest" internal sets. At the very least some form of Sanchin like they use in Goju Karate (a soft very Chinese influenced style!)

As stated earlier,

Popeye is a Martial Artist and does not "Box" when in a streetfight by the rules. As you can see at the left, the Sailor will do whatever is necessary to protect himself, and he does have the knowledge to do so, as is so poignantly portrayed in this incident.

THIMBLE THEATER  
NOW SHOWING—  
NOTHING'S TOO LOW FOR SNORK  
Tomorrow—Popeye's Last Spark?



THIMBLE THEATER  
NOW SHOWING—POPEYE'S LAST SPARK?  
Tomorrow—Not a Game Hunter

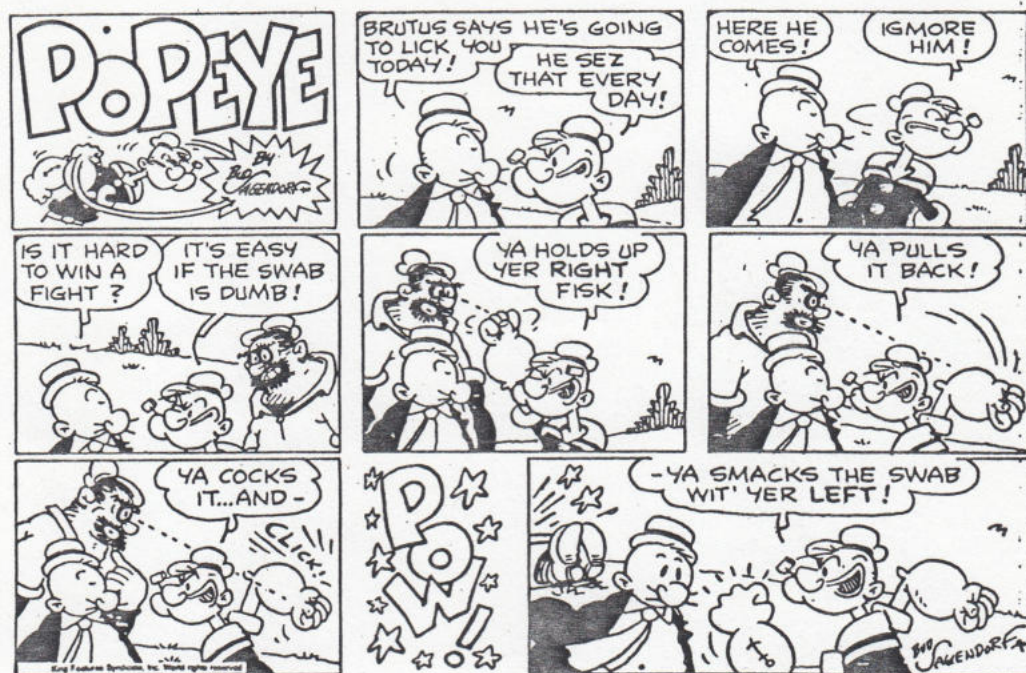








Of course the true martial artist relies on more than just technique, strength etc. He must also learn to know his opponent as himself, and to use strategy as well! Observe his masterful feint of a right Hammerfist only to score on his opponent with a left Reverse punch! Also notice his punch used a vertical fist, the method favored in the Chinese styles and the Chinese based Kempo/Kenpo styles! Remember that for later, it is important!



By the way, those of you who were worried about Bluto's fate on the previous page can relax. He did survive (and was used as the model for the villain of all those Popeye cartoons because he was the heavy in the comic strip at the time. In fact Bluto did not reappear after that storyline till after E.C. Segar's death) and later had his name legally changed to Brutus (Et Tu?). In fact he is the same fellow in the above strip who ends up in a reclining position.



Speaking of Chinese based styles, Kempo/Kenpo (which it is called depends on what school of it you go to - we are talking the style Jeff Speakman uses in the movies) uses what it calls the "sandwich effect" that it took from Kung Fu. Apparently this refers to, for example, when you increase the effect of a strike to the head by holding the head with your other hand. No one "rolls" with this punch! And looky, looky, see what Popeye does at right. Do you discern a pattern here of the Chinese influence on a certain Sailor's fighting style?

So, let's say that I've proved my point about Popeye's fighting style. If the Sailor is indeed well versed (even if only unofficially) in the Chinese fighting methods (and after sixty five years well practised) what would he be doing wearing a Black Belt?

What, Popeye wearing a Gi and a Black Belt? When did this occur? Only a couple of years ago the cartoonist Bobby London of "Dirty Duck" fame was doing the daily continuity for the newspaper strip



THIMBLE THEATER Starring POPEYE—By E. C. Segar



(as opposed to the Sunday done by Bud Sagendorf. Bud was taking it easy by not doing the dailies for awhile) and in my estimation was the only one who could successfully update E.C. Segars strip. The below is not part of a long story (most of Bobby London's dailies were) but it does clearly show Popeye in a Gi (short pants and short sleeves like Joe Lewis wore to intimidate his opponents!). So what is a Chinese Stylist doing wearing a Black Belt? A good question! After all, he must have already had the Black Belt prior to taking this



self defense course (even rip-off schools don't give you a first Dan till the course is over and this is no rip-off school. Popeye wouldn't go to a phoney Dojo, he's been around! The man is old!). What style would he have been apt to get a Black Belt in that would not compromise his long Chinese styled background? Why Kempo/Kenpo of course! Remember page eleven? As to what Popeye is doing in this course, he has the open mind all world travelers develop and wants to see if the other guy has anything worth learning! Just like Bruce Lee! I rest my case!

Next Time: A More Serious Kwoonscope - Honest!

Till Then: Bye-yaah!



KAMA #

Laurine White, 5422 Colusa Way, Sacramento, CA 95841  
(916) 332 7461

Forget one of those trends I mentioned last time. There's always someone writing another book with evil Japanese corporate types. The latest is BLACK BLADE by Eric Von Lustbader, copyright 1993, published by Fawcett Crest in pb in March 1994. This time the villains belong to the Toshin Kuro Kosai, or Black Blade Society, which laid its plans well before WW II, and now has its spies all over Japan and other parts of the world. The Society wants the United States to get in a crippling trade war/embargo with Japan, so that the American military and defense industries would lose access to Japanese computer micro-chips, and then we'd be helpless. Japan would become the premier world economic power. To ensure the trade war, Black Blade assassins are killing American Senators opposed to a hardline trade bill on Japanese products. (Lest you think the author is on top of current trends, he had the Senate pushing the hardline bill, and the President opposed.) This plot'd be fine, but Von Lustbader always loads his novels with an excess of mystical crap. The members of the Society have some weird psychic power, "makura no hiruma". Somehow they've altered their DNA (it isn't explained how) to have these powers, which allows them to live very long lives (some of them are already nearly a century old and still look very young), heal themselves quickly, levitate things, generate intense heat, and of course be unbeatable in martial arts. But they're losing their ability to have children. The hero, Wolf Matheson, is the son of a Texas Ranger and a Wind River Shoshone woman whose father was the most powerful Native American shaman on the Great Plains. The shaman had his own natural makura no hiruma, and had lived a very long life before he even had a child. Then he helped his grandson learn partial use of the power when the boy was about 14, but the boy didn't realize what he had. At the start of the book, the grandson is 46 years old and looks 35. He is an elite New York cop, hunting down serial killers through the mental images he picks up of them (using his makura no hiruma, which he still knows little about). Then he meets a young beautiful Japanese artist, one of the Black Blade Society, who teaches him how to become more psychically attuned to his power. She wants to lure him to Japan where he can eliminate the more extremist Society members, so that more moderate policies will be put into effect. (That's what he thinks, but the the plot is a lot more complex, wheels within wheels, and things are not what they appear.) As usual, the women are gorgeous and sexy (including the old, old ones), and the men must need to keep taking showers, or they'd smell like rutting bulls, with all the testosterone exuded by the sex and macho action in the story. Von Lustbader is into the gritty style of writing: "Swirling precipitation littered the sky. In another, less inimical clime it might have been snow, but here it had picked up so many kinds of noxious hydrocarbons on its way down that the waxy flakes disintegrated on contact with the ancient iron and the potholed macadam."

On a soggy February weekend, friends and I stopped at a music/video store in Chinatown, but no new soundtrack CDs were in



stock. A kid was arranging CDs on a table under an outside awning, so I started going through the CDs. No soundtracks, but I found a CD with a "1993" on it and pictures of various actors, including Adam Cheung as a swordsman. I asked the kid (who may not have understood English very well) "Fong Sai Yuk?" and he answered "Huang Fei Hung". He had a CD player set up, and, sure enough, he started playing the theme song to ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA. He sang along, obviously knew the song well. Three kids came up, also started looking through the CDs. One kid looked at us; did we "foreign devils" know what was playing? I confidently answered "Huang Fei Hung", impressing him. I bought the CD for \$10. (It was a Taiwan bootleg but still sounds very good on my CD player.) The CD has theme songs from different movies, not all of them martial arts, not all of them from 1993, but a good selection.

I'd hoped to get some Hong Kong CD imports through a retailer in San Francisco where I've shopped before (for anime CDs). That fell through, so I'll give you the address of someone in New York who imports Hong Kong movie CDs. If I have it before Maffapa goes out, it'll be on the last page of my contribution here. I'm interested in the CDs for CHINESE GHOST STORY, FONG SAI YUK, THE HEROIC TRIO, BAREFOOT KID. I've also heard that Varonese Sarabande, that outfit in Hollywood, is working on putting together a second volume CD of "best of Chinese film music".

We went to a Chinese CD/LD/bootleg garage kit shop on Noriega Street, where I bought the CD soundtrack for Jackie Chan's latest, DRUNKEN MASTER II (which started playing in Chinatown for Chinese New Year). The music is absolutely beautiful! Jackie sings the theme, a lady sings another song, and the rest is instrumental, with music sort of like CHINESE GHOST STORY and ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA. The package also includes a little picture book with photos of Jackie in the movie. The store had some posters that I couldn't resist, with paintings of a fantasy swordsman, Chinese comicbook style. He's wielding his strange sword with a huge red skull behind him; in a dark landscape littered with swords, he's sitting by a firepit, from which his strange sword is emerging or being forged; with sword in a scabbard over his back, he is destroying a large menacing spider-legged machine.

Two weeks later we went to the Great Star Theater to see TREASURE HUNT, Chow Yun Fat's new movie. On the door outside was a poster for a new Jet Li Shaolin Temple movie (don't remember the name). The TREASURE HUNT poster didn't look like action/martial arts, so the number of non-Asians in the crowded theater was miniscule. TREASURE HUNT starts in an American city. (Since I didn't recognize any of the few landmarks, I have no idea which city.) Chow Yun Fat is a teacher. (A blonde student wants him to come over some evening while her mother is out, so they can study the Chinese classic, "The Golden Lotus".) He has girlfriends, but is too smart to mess around with students. Uncle (Roy Chiao) gives him advice on how to know when he finds the perfect woman to marry, the one who'll say "Bon Appetit" to everyone else there when they start a meal. He also has a small ring, and he wants a woman with a finger small enough to fit that ring. His current girlfriend doesn't qualify on either count. Actually, teaching is only a cover; he's a C.I.A. operative. He and 2 others have to rescue an



informant who's been kidnapped by gangsters, so there's a big shootout, where they wipe out a whole gang and rescue the guy. His next assignment is to go to China to steal some unspecified Chinese national treasure. (As a Chinese, he wonders if he'd doing the right thing, stealing a Chinese treasure for the Americans.) He flies into Beijing, where his contact hides him out at (surprise!) the Shaolin Temple where (surprise!) the abbot is Liu Chia-hui. He also encounters a belligerent cabbie (Kuo Chui) in exile from the Temple. Yes, it's the same Shaolin Temple building as in the Jet Li movies, but this time it's located somewhere outside Beijing with a landscape of barren mountains (the kind around the Great Wall). It's winter, with snow all around the temple (but not on the barren mountains). When the actors speak, you can actually see their breath. Chow Yun Fat makes friends at the temple, an American monk, a chubby little kid with thick glasses, a mysterious woman locked up behind a barred window. She has supernatural powers and keeps escaping. She fills the the snow-covered garden with blooming flowers, and flies through the trees with Chow when they are sought by the monks. Soon they're falling in love, Chow is preparing vegetarian sushi, teaching the monks baseball, and everyone is drinking Cokes. And the woman says Bon Appetit to all the monks, when they're snacking while playing baseball (where did they get all those baseball outfits?). His contact tells Chow it's time to get on with the mission, though the monks would prefer him to stay. He learns that gangsters are plotting to steal China's treasure from him (once he has it, which he doesn't yet), and kill him. Kuo Chui is outraged to discover the abbot cooperating with the gangsters (only because they've kidnaped and threatened the Shaolin elder). Kuo Chui and Liu Chia-hui have a hilarious duel with poles, that includes climbing between 2 nearby walls. Chow has another shootout, this time with the gangsters, involving mass breaking of windows and Molotov cocktails. The movie alternates between tender romance, John Woo-type shootouts, and Shaolin parody (as when Chow insists on being obnoxiously noisy during meditation day; an old geezer hits him in the sinus, freezing him for 4 hours, but he manages to grab some of the greybeard's chin hair). Chow Yun Fat is versatile enough to carry all this off, and the audience loves it.

Contrast that with a certain popular American actor who, in his latest movie, never changes expression, not when singlehandedly fighting a dangerous oil fire (I guess he's the new Red Adair), gazing stonefaced at a naked Inuit temptress ("lust" must not be in his vocabulary), or finding out he is the chosen spirit warrior of the Inuit people. Of course, it's Steven Seagal in ON DEADLY GROUND. As in UNDER SIEGE, there is more to him than indicated in the incomplete dossier the villains see. In UNDER SIEGE, a topless entertainer hauled his arsenal around. Joan Chen is the beast of burden in ON DEADLY GROUND. Tacked at the end is an environmental lecture, with footage of traffic jams, smoggy sunsets, oil-coated wildlife, etc. Seagal burdened his movie with as much Pretentious Message as Tom Loughlin did in the 3rd Billy Jack movie. ON DEADLY GROUND is plagued with inconsistencies. A Native American barfly lives in a nice house with a computer I'd love to have. Michael Caine, the evil oil company executive, hires mercs to track



Seagal down. According to the background info given to the mercs, Seagal's past before 1987 is completely unknown, yet Caine obviously knows a lot more about him. So why didn't Caine tell the mercs his background? Some of the mercs are supposed to be very experienced, yet all of them were too easily wiped out. Why did Seagal leave weapon caches in several hideouts before the movie even started, before he supposedly knew he'd have to oppose Caine? Seagal's old movies were a lot more fun, with opponents who could give him a good one-on-one fight, where he could be human at times, instead of the some Mythic (Stonefaced) Hero.

The co-feature to TREASURE HUNT was ALWAYS ON MY MIND, a late 1993 Michael Hui comedy, in which Michael is a Hong Kong tv news reporter, married to the actress who was the unforgettable "mom" in FONG SAI YUK I and II. She is essentially the same somewhat screwball character in this, but doesn't know any martial arts. Their older daughter wants to marry a guitarist. Their son is about to leave for school in Toronto. And Michael is in danger of losing his job, due to poor health. The doctor says he may die of colon cancer in 3 months. In a shootout between police and robbers, he takes a videocamera into a horror fun house, where he knocks out the leader of the gang. It's all caught on video, and he becomes an instant celebrity. An obvious "otaku" wants his autograph (when everyone else is chasing after celebrity Andy Lau). (Well, heck, if he'd drop his drawers, I'd be chasing him too.) The otaku isn't wearing a propellor beanie, but his headgear is weird enough, a bit like Rick Moranis' in HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS. This movie was a lot of fun.

A friend in Tokyo asked for movies starring Michael Nouri. (Nouri played Dracula in a late 70s series called CLIFFHANGER, was the L.A. cop in the sci-fi thriller, THE HIDDEN, and now appears regularly in LOVE AND WAR.) I taped for her a March '94 tv movie starring Barbara Eden ("Through a Dead Man's Eyes?"), with Nouri as a San Francisco cop whose partner had been gunned down. Eden, a psychiatrist, starts receiving psychic impressions of the crime, and tries to counsel Nouri. But he is a corrupt cop, and murdered his own partner to keep his crimes hidden. He menaces Eden and her 15-year old daughter, who's been studying tai kwon do at school. The daughter kicks him off a cliff near the Golden Gate. The other movie with Nouri that I taped was AMERICAN YAKUZA, off HBO. This is a Toei co-production. They must be tired of the popularity in Japan of THE PUNISHER and SHOWDOWN IN LITTLE TOKYO, with incredibly vicious Japanese yakuza muscling in on criminal activities in America, such that the American gangsters become sympathetic by comparison. In AMERICAN YAKUZA, a Japanese gang is, again, trying to move onto the American crime scene, but they and the Mafia about are equally ruthless in disposing of each other. Nouri is the cigar-smoking Mafia boss. The yakuza are played both by actors from Japan and by Japanese-Americans (John Fujioka as Tendo, the head of the yakuza, and Fritz Mashimo (Fritz??) as Okazaki). The hero, Nick (played by Viggo Mortensen), an FBI agent posing as an ex-con, rescues yakuza captain Shuji Sawamoto (played by Japanese actor Ryo Ishibashi) during a Mafia ambush. The FBI told him to use whatever means necessary to be accepted into the yakuza, which he does, even when it means wounding fellow agents in a shootout.



That's when the FBI realizes it may have goofed, and begins to doubt his loyalty. Upon hearing that Nouri plans to wipe out the yakuza, the FBI gives Nick a plane ticket to Hawaii. Of course he doesn't leave, but is too late to warn the yakuza of the massacre; Shuji and his girlfriend are the only survivors, and she needs rescuing. The gangsters are celebrating their victory at yakuza headquarters, as Shuji is about to avenge his comrades with a samurai sword. Nick gives him handguns. Nick and Shuji enter, 4 guns blazing. Nick scoops up Shuji's girlfriend, throws her over his shoulder. He shoots gangsters coming from the front, she shoots those behind him. Nouri shoots Shuji, Nouri shoots Nick, Shuji throws a dagger into Nouri then dies in Nick's arms. It was suddenly obvious that AMERICAN YAKUZA is heavily influenced by HARDBOILED and THE KILLER. The gun battles aren't as well choreographed as they'd be by John Woo, nor is the buddy death scene as poignant, but it isn't a bad effort.

I finally got to see Kevin Costner and Whitney Houston in THE BODYGUARD. The bodyguard and the rock star go out on a date, where he takes her to a Japanese theater to see his favorite film, YOJIMBO (footage is included in THE BODYGUARD), which he has seen many times. As a bodyguard, he very much identifies with the Toshiro Mifune character. He also has a samurai sword at home.

At that Chinese store on Noriega Street, more recently, I found the official CD soundtrack music release for GREEN SNAKE, very nicely packaged, \$17.

If I have it, here's the address for the Hong Kong CD importer in New York: *Sorry, contact Hong Kong Film Connection for the address*

Darn, I missed a gathering of H.K. movie fans at 7 pm in front of the Great Star Theater (San Francisco Chinatown) on April 23. A carful of us went to Wondercon, the comicbook convention in Oakland, but by evening we were worn out from wandering around the dealers room, and already fat from a delicious Szechuan cuisine lunch, so we skipped the Great Star meeting, started the 2-hour drive home instead. One of the people at WonderCon and at the Great Star was Gere Ledue, who reviews Hong Kong movies for CineRaider and Asian Trash Cinema. Also at WonderCon, I ran into Victor Lim, and Ron Lim gave me the art on this issue's cover. During a short conversation with Victor, Ron, Gere, and others, Victor made a comment about Andy Lau dropping his drawers in all his movies. (In her review of LOVE OF MANY SWORDS in CineRaider, Gere had mentioned that the hero displayed a cute bare butt.)

Next issue: lots more book coverage (heh-heh), including RIVER OF LANTERNS, the Emma Lathen mystery EAST IS EAST, FLOOD (really hardboiled detective), SNOW CRASH (SF, virtual reality action novel), and the latest Inspector Otani mystery in pb.



Patricia Gonzalez  
3595 Bainbridge Avenue, Apt. 2B  
Bronx, New York 10467

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### CHINESE FILM REVIEWS

The films reviewed in this months 'trib I've seen either in Chinatown or Greenwich Village Theaters. Some of the actors in these films are mentioned in the latest **Film Threat Magazine**. I've also included a **Daily News** article on Chinatown Theaters as well as one on the **Superwomen of Hong Kong**. Enjoy!

**DRUNKEN MASTER 2** - WHAT A MOVIE!! This film has Jackie at his best. Far superior to **Police Story 3: Supercop** (as much as I loved that film) this movie had everybody at Chinatown's Music Palace Theater in stitches. Jackie plays the son of an apothecary who stumbles on to a scheme (by greedy foreigners of course) to sell one of China's royal treasures (an ancient royal seal) when he sneaks a ginseng root past customs before boarding a train. The chaos begins when he grabs the treasure thinking it's the ginseng and takes it home with him. Memorable scenes include the "**I Hate Daddy Song**" performed by a drunken Jackie at a local tavern after his father kicks him out of the house for accidentally poisoning one of his customers; Jackie's Mom (Anita Mui) running like lightning to snatch a Mah Jong gamepiece out of Jackie's hand before his dad notices; and a spectacular fight scene where Jackie drinks industrial alcohol and blows fire towards the villains. **Drunken Master 2** has everything you could want out of a Jackie Chan film, incredible Kung-Fu choreography, loads of comedy and a spectacular ending. My only complaint: the sub-titles that seemed to be moving as fast as some of the fight scenes.

**HEROIC TRIO** - This was one of four films (and also my favorite of the four) playing at the Cinema Village theater during their **Superwomen of Hong Kong** month. This movie takes place in the future and has studio sets that are a combination of Batman and Blade Runner giving the film a dark, moody feel. It stars three of Hong Kong's finest: Maggie Cheung as Thief Catcher, Anita Mui as Wonder Woman and Michelle Yeoh as Invisible Woman. They play vigilante type characters that eventually team up to rescue a group of babies kidnapped by an evil sorcerer who believes that one of them is the future emperor of China. The fight scenes are top notch including a wild scene which has all three fighting a burnt and bloody skeleton (shades of the Terminator). May there be a Heroic Trio 2!

**SWORDSMAN 3: THE EAST IS RED** - The last film to play at the Cinema Village during Superwomen of Hong Kong month. I missed this movie but got to see it on video. Although I never saw Swordsman 1 or 2, that didn't make watching this film any less enjoyable. Brigitte Lin stars as Asia the Invincible once a great warrior (as well as a man), now a wanderer. (She fell off a cliff in Swordsman 2) A cult worshipping her has emerged with her ex-lover Snow (Joey Wang), leading one sect. Asia, now a bitter woman who relishes killing and feeding off the hatred directed towards her, takes on anyone in her way including the invading Spanish army and a group of armored Samurai "Ninja". Strange but interesting film.



CHINESE FILM REVIEWS (CONT.)

THE GREEN SNAKE - This gorgeously shot Tsui Hark fantasy starring Joey Wang and Maggie Cheung has now become one of my favorite all-time Hong Kong films. The opening scene is striking. Filmed in "Harkesque" style (low camera angle turned up, in your face close ups,) a Buddhist monk is observing the townspeople at an open market. To him they appear in their true forms; evil, deformed creatures. "Humans" he sighs to himself. Later while walking through the forrest, he sees two gigantic snakes perched on the treetops. He intends to strike them down with a bolt of flame when he notices a pregnant woman giving birth on the ground. The two snakes position themselves above her to provide shelter from the rain. The priest upon seeing this act of kindness spares their lives. The two snakes later transform into women. They want to experience human emotions. Wang's character is just a bit more into becoming human. Cheung's character still prefers to slither across the floor and eat bugs, but is learning to behave nonetheless. The story concentrates a great deal on Wang's romantic involvement with a local Doctor.

The two women are destined to meet up with the self-righteous monk who is hell-bent on transforming them back to their reptilian forms. The sets, costumes, lavish cinematography and \* music makes this one of Tsui Hark's finest films to date.

\* I loved the soundtrack so much that after the film I purchased the cd at the music shop next door to the theater. The cd comes with mini-lobby cards and a beautiful booklet.

\* \* \* \* \*

ORIENTAL CINEMA #1 - I picked up issue #1 at the last Trek convention. It's still the same great book, but now in a cooler magazine form. Although smaller than past issues, its glossy cover, sharper photos, clearer newsprint and of course, interesting articles make this new format quite enjoyable.

SENTAI MAGAZINE #1 - What a terrific little magazine! Although not as large or in-depth as Markalite (R.I.P.) this comic book sized magazine is packed with articles on Japanese sci-fi/fantasy. The premiere issue has an in-depth synopsis on GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA and the more recent GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA as well as articles on the upcoming ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO tv show and the classic series SPACE GIANTS. (if anyone out there has episodes of this program please write to me, I'll trade for them.)

JAPANESE DEMON DRUMMERS (ONDEKOZA) - I got to see this incredible troupe for the second time at Carnegie Hall. This time I got better seats (eighth row as opposed to the nosebleed area back in 1991). Audio tape and cd simply cannot capture their music. They have to be seen live in order to be appreciated. The drums are so loud and so powerful, you can literally feel the music going through you. It was quite an experience. I've enclosed articles and show information.



Patricia Gonzalez  
3595 Bainbridge Avenue  
Apt. 2B  
Bronx, New York 10467





*Patricia Gonzalez  
3595 Bainbridge Avenue  
Apt. 2B  
Bronx, New York 10467*





Patricia Gonzalez  
3595 Bainbridge Avenue  
Apt. 2B  
Bronx, New York 10467



THE GREEN SNAKE



*Patricia Gonzalez  
3595 Bainbridge Avenue  
Apt. 2B  
Bronx, New York 10467*



THE GREEN SNAKE

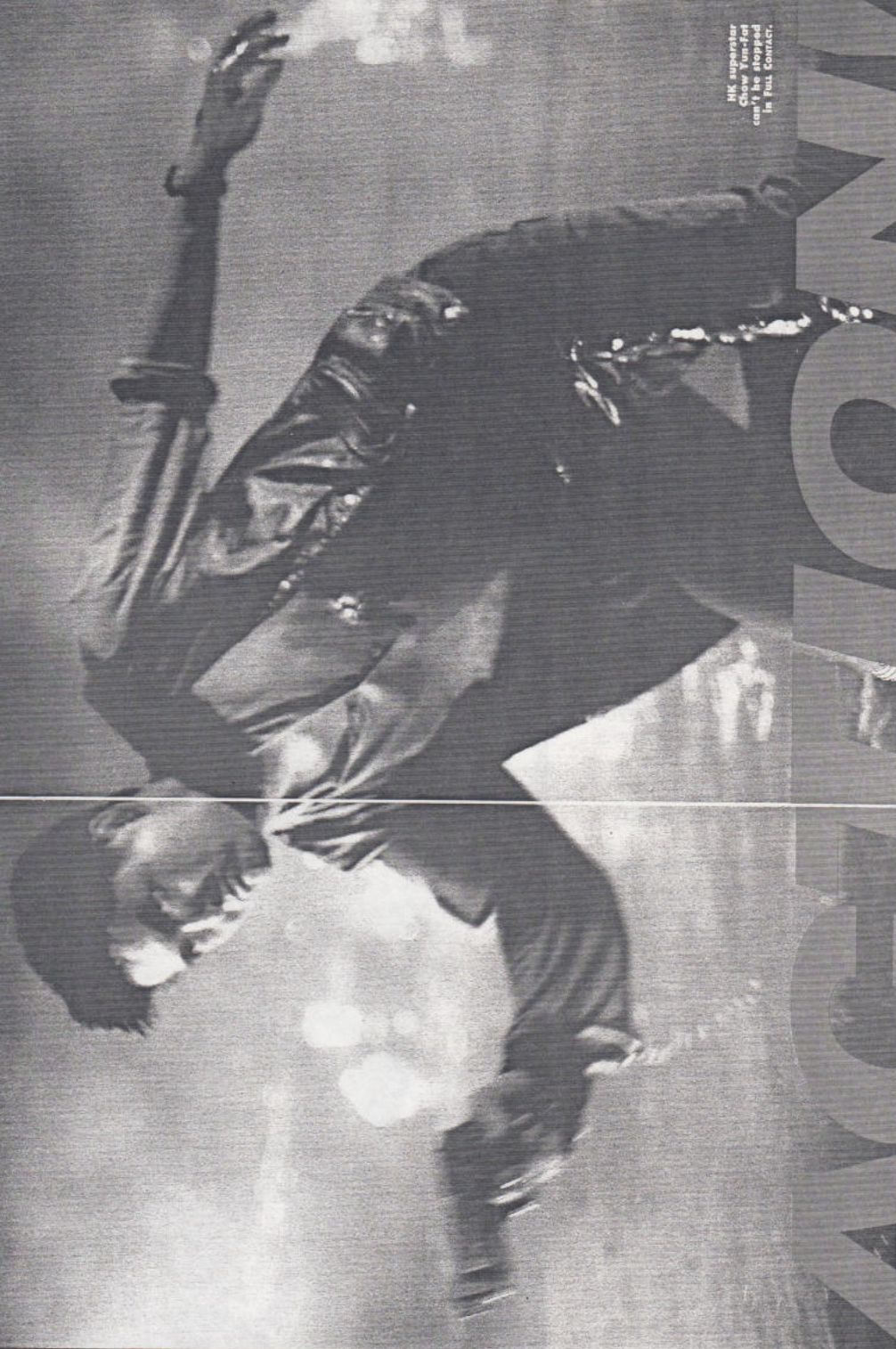


PATRICIA GONZALEZ  
3595 Bainbridge Ave. #2B  
Bronx, NY 10467

While most foreign films tend to stupefy your senses with snail-paced, elaborately costumed melodrama, these imports from the capitalist jewel on the edge of China will simply blow you away.

BY  
**CRAIG  
LEDBETTER**

# HONG KONG MEANS



HK superstar Chow Yun-fat can't be stopped in Full Contact.

# ACTION



It's ironic to see the Hong Kong movie industry gain a higher and higher profile here in the U.S. as Hollywood's big-budget films have raped and pillaged practically every foreign market save that one. In Hong Kong, the weekly top 10 films are home-grown affairs. The likes of *The Fugitive* and *Jurassic Park* do well there, but the latest Tsui Hark, Jackie Chan or Stephen Chow films quickly overcome even those well-known blockbusters and leave them choking on their dust. With Hong Kong superstar director John Woo making his American debut film (*Hard Target*), the Criterion Company releasing a deluxe edition of Woo's *The Killer* on laser disc and actor Chow Yun-Fat set to make his U.S. debut in the near future, the HK film invasion is official.

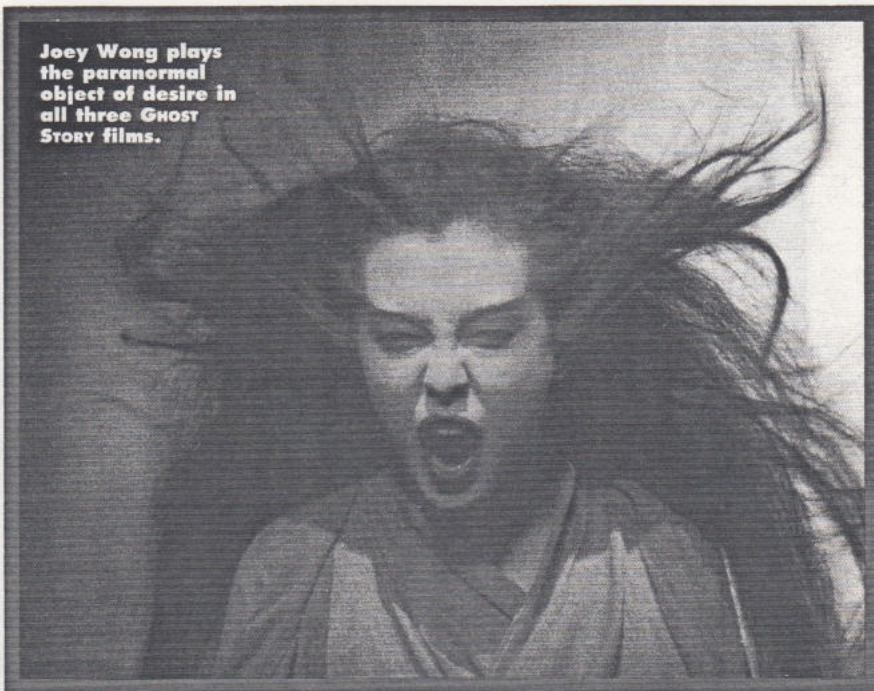
## HARK-O-MANIC

It hasn't happened overnight, however; the buzz has been brewing among hardcore aficionados since the mid-'80s. Director/producer/actor Tsui Hark is the person most responsible for HK films evolving beyond the endless kung fu fight-fests that were ground out during the late '60s and early '70s. His directorial debut was the stylish *The Butterfly Murders* in 1979, but it was the all-out epic fantasy extravaganza *Zu, Warriors From Magic Mountain* in 1983 that established Hark's manic approach to filmmaking.

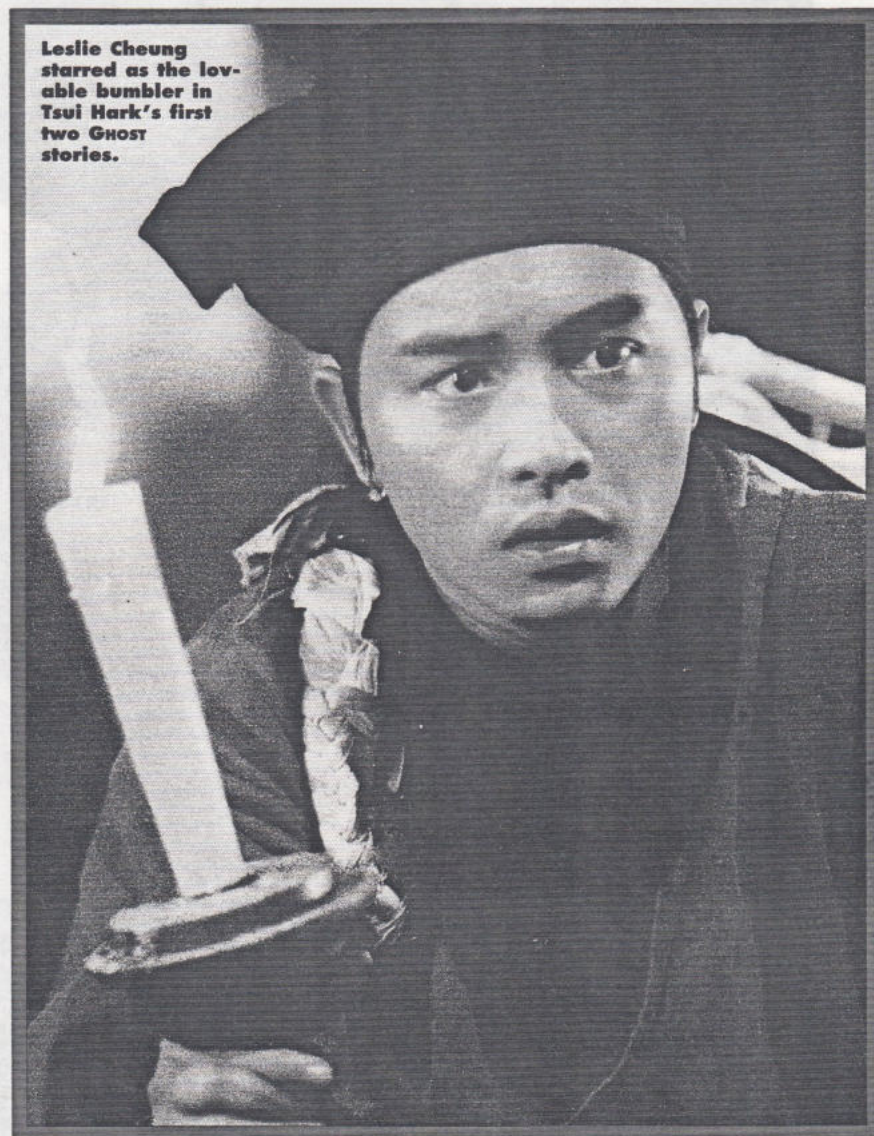
This experience was invaluable when Hark later produced one of the most popular film series of the '80s, the *Chinese Ghost Story* films. Three have appeared so far, with the first, made in 1987, setting the tone for the rest. A bumbling monk (played by Leslie Cheung in the first two films and Tony Leung in the third) falls in love with a beautiful ghost (Joey Wong) and must battle all manner of creatures to win her favor—including such diverse beasts as a giant centipede and a soul-snatching tree devil.

In recent years, Hark has directed three of the four films in the *Once Upon a Time in China* (1991-93) series. As the Sergio Leone-esque title suggests, these are sprawling epics, centered on the legendary martial arts character Wong Fei Hung. Yet while these films use the latest special effects trickery to help upgrade the stunts performed by lead actor Jet Li (as Hung) and his costars, a background in early-20th-century Chinese history would help prospective audiences get through the plot. Fortunately the stunts and action more than compensate for one's lack of knowledge. The

Joey Wong plays the paranormal object of desire in all three *Ghost Story* films.



Leslie Cheung starred as the lovable bumbler in Tsui Hark's first two *Ghost Story* films.

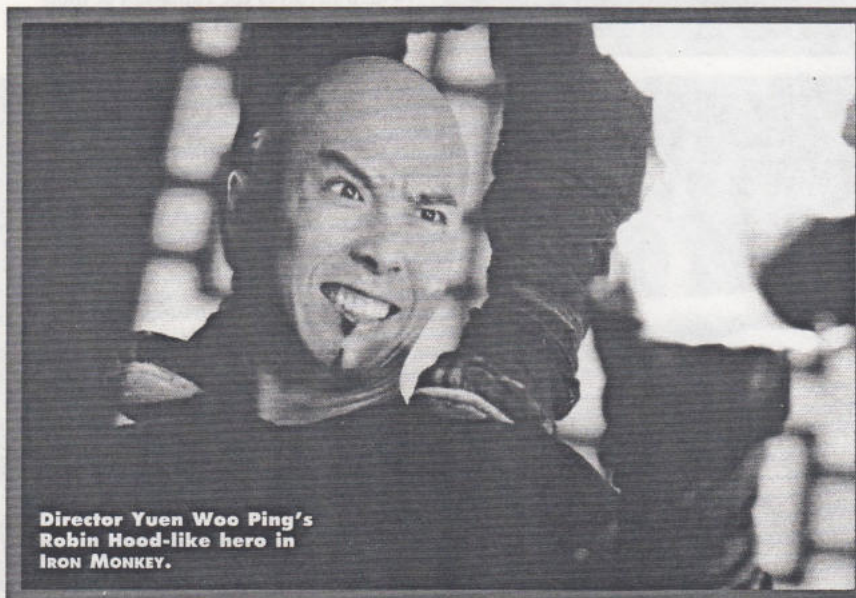




popularity of these films has spawned many imitators, including the Hark-produced *Iron Monkey* (1993), which chronicles the adventures of the Robin Hood-like title character. The film was directed by Yuen Woo Ping (who also helmed *Drunken Master*, starring a young Jackie Chan) and features an appearance by Wong Fei Hung as a child. Hung's father must capture the Iron Monkey if he is to ever see his son again. The ending is a martial artist's wet dream as the action takes place while the combatants try to balance themselves on burning poles. The other prominent member of Hark's *Once Upon a Time* films, Jet Li, left to star in his own series, *The Legend of Fong Sai-Yuk I&II* (both 1993). Here he is able to portray a more humorous character while at the same time demonstrate his awesome athletic skills. The first film centers on Sai-Yuk's family, with his mother (also a superior martial artist) rescuing both



Elaborate swordplay highlights the period actioner THE LEGEND OF FONG SAI-YUK II.



Director Yuen Woo Ping's Robin Hood-like hero in IRON MONKEY.

him and his father at various points in the film. The sequel, which was one of HK's top 10 box office hits last year, unfortunately upped the comedy quotient—which seriously detracts from the skill on display in the action and swordplay scenes. Jet Li has since moved on to portray yet another legendary Chinese hero, San Cheung Chang, in *Tai Chi Fists*, due out this year.

## HAVE GUN, WILL DIRECT

If Tsui Hark is remembered for nothing else, it will be for producing crime films directed by John Woo. Beginning with *A Better Tomorrow 1 & 2* (1986, 1987) and culminating with *The Killer*

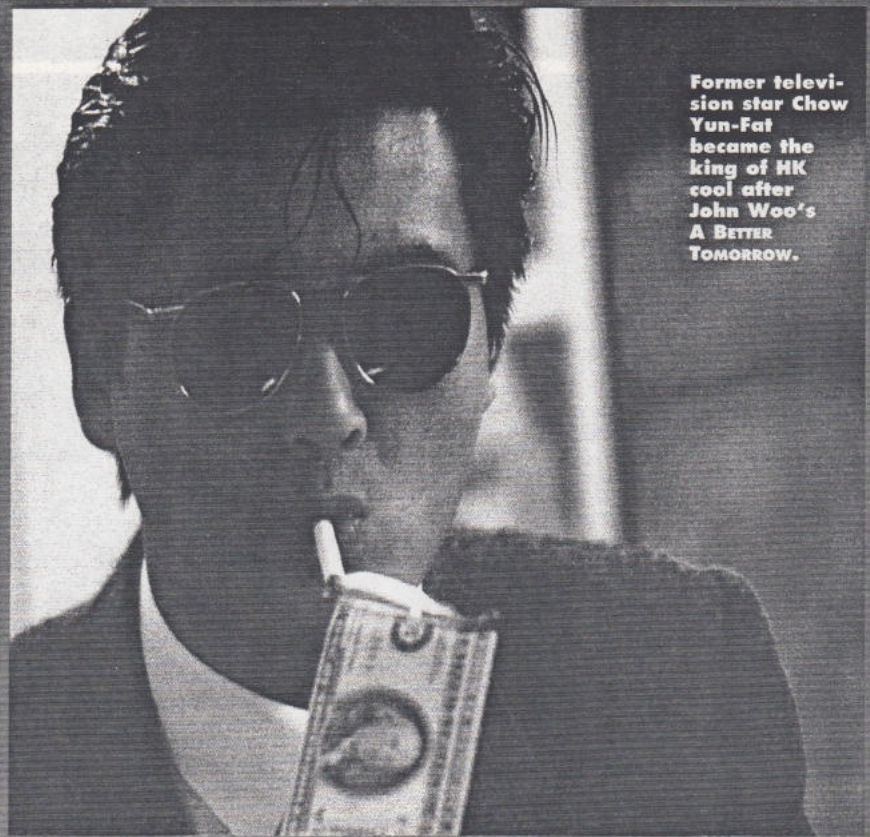
(1989), these are the films usually mentioned as the ones that converted HK film novices to raving aficionados. If, after watching these films, you're not convinced there's something to all the hype, forget it—you're dead from the neck up! *A Better Tomorrow* rescued John Woo's career, heretofore a rather undistinguished one as he ventured from kung fu quickies (including *Hands of Death*, 1976, which starred Jackie Chan) to slapstick comedy (*Plain Jane to the Rescue*, 1984). It also established actor Chow Yun-Fat as a superstar (second only to Chan) in HK cinema.

Not since Peckinpah have gun battles and slow-motion cinematography looked so good on the big screen. When Hark

refused to allow Woo to make *A Better Tomorrow 3* his way, the director created his own company and made it under the title *Bullet in the Head* (1990). It's interesting to compare it with Hark's own version, *Love and Death in Saigon* (1988). The films featured different directions for both as Hark slows his manic camerawork and overplotted situation for a slower pace and much more emotional story. It's actually a prologue to the first two films in the series because it established how Mark (played by Chow Yun-Fat in all three films) became a hardened, suave Triad member who's "give a shit" attitude resulted in tragedy. Like *Love and Death in Saigon*, Woo's *Bullet in the Head* revolves around three characters whose lives are shattered by their experiences in Vietnam circa 1967. Ben (Tony Leung), Frank (Jacky Cheung) and Paul (Waise Lee) find the HK streets too violent for them so they head to Saigon. Unfortunately, things are even worse there, and before long, they become involved with a Eurasian hit man, Luke (Simon Yam). Between attacks by the Vietcong and their own criminal activities, the trio breaks up, and they turn against each other. Woo really cranks up the emotional tension and, while extremely violent in parts, the film is not dependent on violence for its power.

Because the film was not a commercial success, Woo changed direction with his next film, *Once a Thief* (1991). Released during the Chinese New Year (a lucrative time, box office-wise), the film was lighter in tone and displayed a degree of

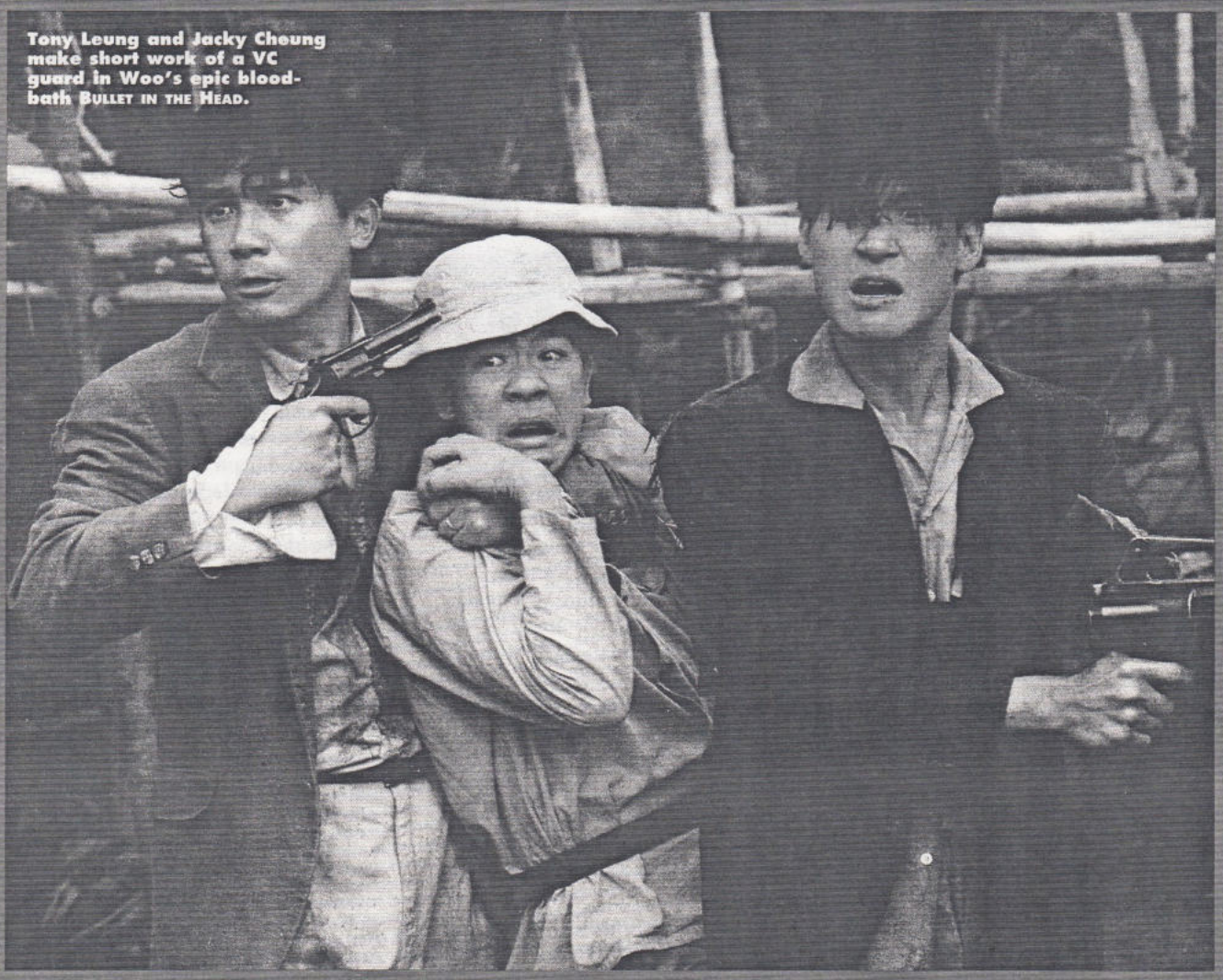




Former television star Chow Yun-Fat became the king of HK cool after John Woo's **A BETTER TOMORROW.**

romance (hitherto unseen in a Woo film) to try to capture a wider audience. The film centers around a trio (Woo's favorite grouping) of art thieves (played by Chow Yun-Fat, Cherie Chung and Leslie Cheung) based in France. There are still plenty of gun battles, but they are considerably toned down graphically compared to Woo's usual propensity for bloodshed. If the film succeeds at all, it's because of Chow Yun-Fat. His likeable smile and ease at blowing away the opposition is a potent combination.

Woo's final HK production (so far) was *Hard-Boiled* (1992). For those fans who had been waiting since *The Killer* for the type of picture that, in their eyes, would be the ultimate Woo film, this was it. The film centers on two cops: Chow Yun-Fat's Tequila is used to shooting first, no questions asked, while Tony Leung's Tony is an undercover detective willing to commit murder to ensure the completion of his mission (which involves the ruination of mob boss Johnny Wong). There are numerous shootouts, car stunts and slow-motion



Tony Leung and Jackie Cheung make short work of a VC guard in Woo's epic blood-bath **BULLET IN THE HEAD.**



It's almost lights out for Tony Loung until Chow Yun-Fat pries Mad Dog off with his AK in **HARD-BOILED**.



splatter, but it's the all-out assault on a huge hospital at the film's climax that shows Woo's directional prowess at its zenith. *Hard-Boiled* is a fitting coda to Woo's former HK-based career.

## CHAMPION CHAN

Jackie Chan learned kung fu at the age of seven when he entered the Peking Opera School. For the next ten years Chan had a love/hate relationship with the strenuous curriculum and grim living conditions. It certainly benefitted a film career that saw his debut in martial arts movies of the '70s (*New Fists of Fury*, 1976; *The Fearless Hyena*,

# JACKIE CHAN STUNTFEST SPECTACULAR

Here are three of Jackie Chan's most amazing stunts—some of which went as planned. It's no wonder this guy can't get insured (and has a plastic plate in his head)!

BY DON E. MAY JR.

## Police Story

Directed by Jackie Chan

This actioner, hailed by many fans as one of Jackie's best, contains one of the most obviously painful "stunt-gone-wrong" scenes

ever committed to celluloid. Even though Jackie himself wasn't subjected to the stunt's consequences, it still ranks as one of the coolest scenes in any of his movies.

While trying to stop a hijacked bus, Jackie parks a car in the middle of the road to block its path. As the oncoming bus gets closer, Jackie loads his pistol and takes aim at one of the hijackers, who holds a knife to the throat of the bus driver. The hijacker panics and the driver slams on the brakes, sending the criminals crashing through the front windows of the bus and onto the hard pavement just short of Jackie's car.

According to Chan, the stunt people were supposed to land on the specially prepared automobile to cushion their fall. The bus stopped too far away however, and the poor guys instead ate the pavement. Jackie, not one to ruin an opportunity, stayed in character and finished the scene while they squirmed in pain on the blacktop. Way to go!

True Chan-fans know that this stunt was ripped off, almost shot for shot, by Andrei Konchalovsky for his 1989 film *Tango and Cash*. Hey, Andrei, who ya fooling?

## Project A

Directed by Jackie Chan

Chan, while trying to elude authorities, escapes by scaling a flagpole and entering the top of a clock tower. He exits the tower to avoid a gunman and hangs on (shades of Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last!*) to the hands of the clock. His strength finally gives out and he plummets four stories through two cloth canopies and slams headfirst into the ground.



Again, this is a stunt that went horribly wrong but was captured forever on film. Jackie's fall was supposed to be cushioned by the two canopies, but after hitting the first, his body was thrown awkwardly and he instead ended up dampening the impact with his skull. *Ouch!* After getting treatment at a local hospital, Jackie, being the good sport that he is, gave the stunt another try. This second take finally ended up in the film while the first is in the bloopers reel during the final credits.

## Twin Dragons

Directed by Tsui Hark

This film, while not really well-liked by his fans, contains one of

the best stunt-filled finales of any of Jackie's previous efforts. Playing twin brothers, Jackie battles thugs in the car-testing facility of a Mitsubishi plant.

At one point in the fight, Jackie falls to the ground and, in order to avoid being jumped on by a bad guy, rolls underneath a car being held up by two hydraulic lifts. The thugs release the car and it falls to the floor, barely missing Jackie as he rolls underneath it. Just as he's getting to his feet, another car is released from a ramp. As it rolls toward him, Jackie jumps on the moving car and runs over the top of it as it rolls beneath him. This sequence always warrants a rewind! If either one of those gags had gone wrong, Jackie could have easily been killed.







Jackie bamboozles his opponents in the comic *CITY HUNTER*.

allows Chan to mug continuously while performing endless jaw-dropping stunts. The film's comic-like style even allows for an outrageous live-action sequence based on the *Streetfighter II* videogame. Making an 180-degree change of direction is Chan's current film, *Crime Story*. Deadly serious in tone and light on martial arts, it appears to be Chan's take on the films of John Woo. He plays a no-nonsense cop on the trail of a kidnapped industrialist. What he doesn't know is that his partner on the case (Kent Cheng, an overweight actor who seems to be in almost 90% of all HK films!) is in on the kidnapping. While there is a small amount of flying fists and feet, it's gun-play that matters here. Perhaps the fact that it was based on a true story forced Chan and director Kirk Wong to keep things grim.

1979). Teaming up with Robert Clouse (the director of Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon*) for two attempts at breaking into the U.S. market (*The Big Brawl*, 1980; *The Protector*, 1985), Chan's American success was not meant to be (both films flopped). Chan returned to HK and made his most expensive and popular films during that same decade. With the explosion of interest here in his and other HK films, the time may be right for Chan to try again.

Meanwhile, his two most recent films, *City Hunter* (1992) and *Crime Story* (1993), reveal completely different sides to Jackie Chan's talent. *City Hunter* is a silly, tongue-in-cheek adaptation of a Japanese comic book character. Chan plays a womanizing detective hired to retrieve a millionaire's daughter. He traces her to a cruise ship that just happens to be invaded by murderous bandits posing as terrorists (*Die Hard* mixed with *Under Siege*). The film's light tone



Chan, on the verge of one of his accidental victories, in *DRUNKEN MASTER*.



Caught in a wind tunnel, Chan hangs on for dear life in his INDIANA JONES-like adventure *ARMOR OF GOD II*.



Chan couldn't stay away from slapstick completely. His other 1993 appearance was an unbilled cameo in Stanley Tong's *Once a Cop*. This Michelle Khan vehicle is a routine (for Hong Kong cinema) action flick that features her as Mainland China police officer sent to HK to discover the perpetrators of a spectacular planned heist. Chan has a five-minute scene where he's dressed in drag to apprehend a scam artist trying to rip off jewelry stores. He's allowed to ham it up (which stops the film, dead in its tracks) and still get in a few acrobatic stunts before the film moves on to resolve the main storyline.

## FATAL FEMMES

Beyond these important movers and shakers of the current HK film industry, there are dozens of others (both actors and directors) I could spotlight. However, before I end this cursory overview, I'd like to single out a few of the many talented (and beautiful) actresses who are fully capable of kicking butt as well as their testosterone-fueled male counterparts. *Heroic Trio* (1993) gathers three of the best (Michelle Khan, Maggie Cheung and Anita Mui) as superheroines out to thwart the monstrous leader of a cult involved in kidnapping babies. Dressed to kill and exhibiting such powers as invisibility, super strength and sharpshooting, these women take no prisoners! Filled with graphic cannibalism and (faked) scenes of baby abuse that would curl the hair of any self-respecting PTA member, *Heroic Trio* could never be made here in the States. The ending is pure *Terminator* as the evil cult leader loses his flesh yet keeps on coming, endoskeleton and all.

Without question, one of the most talented actresses in HK cinema during the '80s was Brigitte Lin (a.k.a. Lin Ching-Hsia) and nowhere is she more impressive than in *The Bride With White Hair* (1993). This classic action-fantasy-adventure film directed by Ronnie Yu takes elements from the *Chinese Ghost Story* films and repackages them with adult themes and emotions. Yu adds to the surrealistic atmosphere by shooting all the daytime exteriors at night—using artificial light to reflect an aura of otherworldliness. A beautiful witch (Lin) saves a young warrior (played by Leslie Cheung) from an attack by



Maggie Cheung, a frequent costar of Chan's, is dressed to kill in *Heroic Trio*.

wolves (she was raised by them—hence her powers). He ends up joining a revolutionary group out to overthrow an evil governor (a bisexual who can become male or female depending upon his/her mood) for whom Lin works. It all ends tragically, but not before such violent phenomena as heads being decapitated, torsos torn in half and limbs severed like snapping twigs.

For those individuals who moan that HK cinema was even better in the '70s, when practically every film contained a kung fu battle revolving around the "You insulted my school's technique" plot, *get a grip!* The film's are popular today because they are better made, more inventive plotwise and can take advantage of today's more sophisticated effects and artists.

This brief glance can't begin to catalogue all the wonders of HK cinema, however; for those who have grown tired of Hollywood's predictable pap, a world of wonders await you. 🎬

Craig is also the editor of *Asian Trash Cinema*, a must-have digest dedicated to the HK film invasion and other Eastern cinema. Single copies are \$6.95 from P.O. Box 5367, Kingwood, TX 77325.



Anita Mui, Michelle Kahn and Maggie Cheung are the leather-clad *Heroic Trio*.



# HOMETOWN HONG KONG

Chinatown theaters have the Asian action before it reels out into the mainstream

By NATHANIEL WICE

The box office at the Sun Sing movie theater in Chinatown isn't the first tipoff that you're far from Multiplexland — that distinction belongs to the theater's location: Under the Manhattan Bridge. But buying a ticket at the Sun Sing does let you know that this isn't going to be the usual moviegoing experience. You approach a one-way mirror, push your money through a change hole at the bottom, wait until a hand snatches the cash away and pushes any change back out of the slot.

Once inside the theater, you can tarry at a concession stand that offers strawberry-yogurt pretzels, cuttlefish and shrimp chips, in addition to the more usual fare. Or you can head straight into the Sun Sing's cavernous auditorium, which accommodates 800 — on hard, red, molded-plastic seats.

The Sun Sing and a handful of other Chinatown movie houses, after long service as neighborhood theaters, have begun attracting more and more action-picture enthusiasts. Like jazz fans who trekked uptown decades ago to experience their favorite art form firsthand, action-movie cognoscenti in increasing numbers are heading for Chinatown to catch Hong Kong's latest high-adrenaline exports.

Those who make the trip encounter a rich movie culture that spans genres from razor-sharp crime thrillers to sweeping historic epics, from soft-core porn to slapstick comedies, kitschy pop romances to extended in-joke parodies. But it's the Hong Kong film industry's expertise in pulling off jaw-dropping action sequences that exerts an irresistible pull on Hong Kong movie fans.

Recent publicity about director John Woo's American debut with "Hard Target," starring Jean-Claude Van Damme, only hinted at what a fertile movie-making culture exists in Hong Kong. It is one of the few places left in the world where the home-grown product outdraws Hollywood imports at the box office. It's a place where action stars Jackie Chan, Jet Li and Chow Yun-Fat are easily as celebrated as Stallone, Schwarzenegger and Van Damme. But Hong Kong movies hardly need to remain an exotic mystery to filmgoers here: They're just a subway ride away. "Once Upon a Time in China, Part II," now showing at the Film Forum, appeared last summer at the Sun Sing



**HONG KARRRRONG!** "Once Upon a Time in China, Part II" showed at Sun Sing last year.

(which just finished showing part four in the series); you could have seen plenty of John Woo movies in Chinatown long before the first glossy profile appeared in an American magazine (the director's "Hard Boiled," just at the Cinema Village on E. 12th St., was at the Music Palace on the Bowery a year ago).

Forget any lingering memories of the often ridiculous

*Poorly synched  
soundtracks and  
ham-handed  
editing  
are a thing  
of the past.*

chop-socky Hong Kong imports shown in this country in the 1970s. Poorly synched soundtracks and ham-fisted editing are a thing of the past. Current special effects and stunts may lack Hollywood's expensive polish, but they are more innovative and punishing-looking.

And forget about the movie-going experience of a trip to the octoplex down at the mall. The movies at the Sun Sing and the other Chinatown action-movie centers — the Music Palace, the Rosemary and the Essex — reflect the hothouse atmosphere of Hong Kong film making, and the waves of shared references create a sense of community in audiences. This has been especially true of the "Once Upon a Time" series, which has spawned doz-



**BRIDGE OVER DOUBLED FEATURES:** The Sun Sing theater, 75 E. Broadway, offers shrimp chips, cuttlefish — oh, and Kit Kats — at the concession stand, and Hong Kong's late-station flicks onscreen.

ens of imitations that have blazed through the Chinatown theaters just in the last 18 months.

One frustration is the realization that as mainstream American audiences begin to claim Jackie Chan and John Woo, they are tempted to take absurdist delight in scenes that Chinese audiences find genuinely affecting. Passion becomes camp melodrama, comedy becomes cuteness, culture becomes caricature. These dangers also exist for interlopers at the Chinatown theaters: One person's local color is another person's refuge from racism.

Music Palace, 91 Bowery (212-925-4971), specializes in perky pop comedies — albeit ones with lot of violent action. If you become intrigued by a particular star, chances are you can see him or her in a new movie just a few weeks later. With its cushioned seats and large balcony, the Music Palace is the spiffiest of the four main Chinatown

theaters (although its air-conditioning, like that at the others, is unreliable).

■ The Rosemary, 133 Canal

## ✓ CHECK IT OUT THE 'TRUE' CREW

It has the kind of over-the-top violence audiences have come to expect from Quentin Tarantino, the writer-director of "Reservoir Dogs." But campy dialogue — courtesy of Tarantino's screenplay — and offbeat performances save "True Romance" from ultra-violent overkill. With a supporting cast that includes Dennis Hopper, Christopher Walken, Gary Oldman, Brad Pitt, Chris Penn and Bronson Pinchot, director Tony Scott ("Top Gun") keeps the plot twisting and the laughs coming. Jack Nicholson knockoff Christian Slater and Patricia Arquette play ill-fated lovers on the run. Opens Friday.

— Robert Dominguez

(212-431-1185), faces the dented traffic cones and perpetually snarled traffic where the Manhattan bridge meets the Bowery and Canal. The ticket window here is a slot in the box office wall. The Rosemary shows a variety of Hong Kong movie genres, but lately the movie posters out front have tended to specialize in naked people: the roman numeral "III" within a triangle signals racy softcore material.

■ The Essex, 375 Grand (212-982-4455), currently showing "Hard Target," often teams Hong Kong action movies with Hollywood features on its double bills.

■ At the Sun Sing, 75 East Broadway (212-619-0493), don't get caught lingering in the lobby during double-bill intermissions: They last only long enough to change reels. Most of the movies shown at the Sun Sing and the other theaters mentioned here have English subtitles — and Chinese subtitles for different dialects.

DAILY NEWS

• Sunday, September 5, 1993

**NATHANIEL WICE**  
3595 Bainbridge Ave. #2B  
Bronx, NY 10467



# Hong Kong's Killer Cuties

These flicks are real kicks

By JAMI BERNARD

Daily News Movie Critic

**C**ATWOMAN LOOKS LIKE A WAN FUR ball next to some of the action heroines featured in "Superwomen of Hong Kong Cinema," a four-part series beginning today at Cinema Village.

Fans of the burgeoning Hong Kong action cult will be happy to see all the quick-cutting gymnastics and delirious martial arts choreography germane to the genre, starring superhero women who throw nails instead of filing them.

It's interesting that the Asian cinema, known for its mousy, meek females, should come up with so many leading ladies of unyielding strength. They hurl the Killing Hooks and adopt the Energy Absorbing Stance with great aplomb, without ever mussing their not inconsiderable makeup.

Each of the four movies in the series offers a great deal of humor as well, even if it is occasionally unintentional. Tsui Hark's pace-setting 1986 "Peking Opera Blues," about three women who join forces behind the scenes at a theater, has been overtaken both in frenzy and gender-bending by "Swordsman 3: The East Is Red," in which the gorgeous Asia the Invincible presides over any number of mass kick-outs and lesbian erotica.

Even "The Legend of Fong Sai-Yuk," about a martial arts matron (Josephine Siao) and her son (the famous Jet Li), mixes the sexes for comedy with a sentimental sheen. When the mother saves her son's reputation by disguising herself as a man to fight the empress for the hand of the princess — catch your breath — the battling dowagers wind up falling in love. And there are more masks and disguises than in Shakespeare.

Unlike American movies, which occasionally feature one strong female but then surround her with men, these four movies produce scads of heroines, none of whom are afraid to close off those all-important "valves" until their opponents drop dead of the insidious valve closure.

Both "Peking Opera Blues" and "The Heroic Trio" (Anita Mui's Wonder Woman, Michelle Yeoh's Invisible Woman and Maggie Cheung's Thief-Catcher) feature female triumvirates.

And in "Swordsman 3," produced by Tsui Hark and betraying his hand, there are so many female pretenders to the title of Asia the Invincible that it's hard to keep track of them — that is, if you're busy studying the mystifying English subtitles at the bottom of the screen.

(Those maladroitness translations add to the genre's charm, but please don't ask me about the convoluted plots that they manage to mask.)

All the movies are in Cantonese, with Chinese and English subtitles. Cinema Village is located at 22 E. 12th St., off University Place. For more information, call the box office at (212) 924-3363.

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# **SUPERWOMEN** *OF HONG KONG CINEMA*

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## **PEKING OPERA BLUES**

The madcap adventure classic set in Shanghai of the 1900's that combines comedy, romance, action, and political intrigue in a whirlwind of action that has become director Tsui Hark's trademark.

## **EAST IS RED**

This sequel of Swordsman genre features the continuing adventures of Brigitte Lin as Asia the Invincible, Hong Kong's first genderbending, sword-wielding, spellcasting superheroine.

## **THE LEGEND OF FONG SAI-YUK**

A rollicking kung fu adventure with Josephine Siao as a martial arts matriarch training her son ( Jet Li ) to be the kung fu champion of Canton.

## **THE HEROIC TRIO**

A sci-fi adventure starring Maggie Cheung, Michelle Yeoh and Anita Mui as three female superheroes fighting supernatural criminals.

**Starts Friday, December 17**  
**Cinema Village, 22 East 12th Street, New York City**  
**For Playdates & Showtimes: Please call (212) 924-3363**

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Rim Film Distributors, Inc. presents

# SUPERWOMEN OF HONG KONG CINEMA

## PEKING OPERA BLUES

(Hong Kong, 1986, 104 min., in Cantonese w/ English & Chinese subtitles) Dir. Tsui Hark. Starring Brigitte Lin, Sally Yeh, Cherie Chung, Mark Cheng, Cheung Kwok-Keung, Kenneth Tseng

One of the most celebrated films of director Tsui Hark's career, *Peking Opera Blues* bursts across the screen in a dazzling array of wildly imaginative action, lush period settings and giddy comedy, in this uproarious political farce set in the wake of China's first democratic revolution. An unlikely trio of women are inadvertently thrown together in the chaos of pre-revolution Shanghai -- a greedy gold digger (Cherie Chung), a hapless Peking Opera novice (Sally Yeh), and the general's western-educated daughter (Brigitte Lin). Suddenly, in a upheaval of escapes, disguises, petty pilfering and political intrigue, the three women become embroiled in a series of mishaps and mistaken identities that send them in a rollicking adventure up, about, over and all around Shanghai, as they each embark on a wild chase for their heart's desire.



## THE LEGEND OF FONG SAI-YUK

(Hong Kong, 1993, 112 min., in Cantonese w/ English & Chinese subtitles) Dir. Corey Yuen Kwai. Starring Josephine Siao, Jet Li, Michele Reis, Sibelle Hu. Legendary actress Josephine Siao (*The Spooky Bunch*) teams up with martial arts superstar Jet Li (*Once Upon A Time in China I & II*) in this deliciously high-octane comic adventure, involving cross-dressing martial arts matrons, a plot to overthrow an evil emperor, and giddily uproarious action. Siao and Li star as the local mother-and son team of martial arts masters, Mrs. Fong and her son, Fong Sai-Yuk, who's trained by the Fong family matriarch to be the Kung Fu Champion of Canton. When he deliberately loses a kung fu competition to avoid marriage to a homely princess, Mama Fong steps in to restore the family honor, resulting in a hilarious mix-up of mistaken identities and genders. Suddenly the Fongs must muster all their fighting family members, as an army of deadly assassins arrive to wipe out the village heroes!



## THE HEROIC TRIO

(Hong Kong, 1993, 98 min., in Cantonese w/ English & Chinese subtitles) Dir. Johnny To. Starring Maggie Cheung, Anita Mui & Michelle Yeoh, Anthony Wong. In the tradition of Tim Burton's *Batman*, this dark, urban comic book transforms Hong Kong into a sinister futureworld where anything (including leather-clad flying superheroines in motorcycle gear) is possible. Something evil is stirring through all the hospitals in Hong Kong, stealing baby boys from their cribs to make them slaves of an ancient eunuch. The only hope to save the city is in the hands of the Heroic Trio - Wonder Woman (Anita Mui), Invisible Woman (Michelle Yeoh), and The Thief-Catcher (Maggie Cheung). Together these three extraordinary crimefighters track down the minions of evil with an arsenal of invisible cloaks, flying darts, and instant explosives at their disposal coolly dispatching the bad guys without putting a hair out of place.



## THE EAST IS RED

(Hong Kong, 1993, 103 min., in Cantonese w/ English & Chinese subtitles) Dir. Tsui Hark. Starring Brigitte Lin, Joey Wang, Yu Rong-Guang. An absolutely mesmerizing genderbending action adventure, *The East Is Red* the segment to *Swordsman II*, marks Brigitte Lin's unparalleled return to the screen as the androgynously sensual martial arts wizard, Asia the Invincible. Born as a man, but slowly transformed into a woman by the powers of a magic scroll, Asia has cursed the human world and retreated to the solitude of the Black Cliff. But when Spanish invaders threaten to plunder China, and usurpers of her name try to take power, Asia returns to destroy her enemies with a ferocious energy not known to mortal beings. Now completely female, she encounters her beloved concubine, Snow (Joey Wang), who is still leading Asia's Sun Moon Sect followers in her memory. The former lovers now find themselves at odds with one another, in a super-charged battle for domination, and the power to lead China out of dark feudal times.



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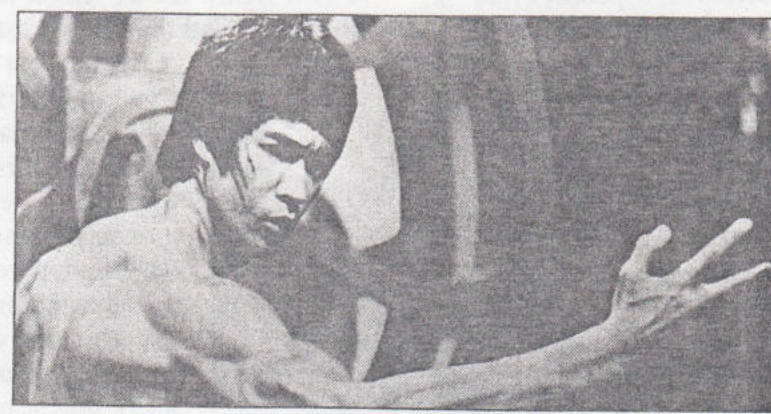




Video Guide's Smart Chopper's List:

# The Ten Best and Ten Worst Martial Arts Movies

BY DR. CRAIG REID



Bruce Lee in *Enter The Dragon*

## BEST

1. *Enter the Dragon* (Bruce Lee)
2. *Big Brawl* (Jackie Chan)
3. *Game of Death* (Bruce Lee)
4. *No, Retreat, No Surrender III* (Loren Avedon)
5. *No Retreat, No Surrender II* (Loren Avedon)
6. *King of the Kickboxers* (Loren Avedon)
7. *Hard Target* (Van Damme)
8. *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* (Jason Scott Lee)
9. *Rapid Fire* (Brandon Lee)
10. *China O'Brian* (Rothrock)

## WORST

1. *Blind Rage* (Leo Fong)
2. *Ninja Nightmares* (Leo Fong)
3. *Night of the Kickfighter* (Andy Bauman)
4. *Low Blow* (Leo Fong)
5. *Kill Line* (Bobby Kim)
6. *Pushed to the Limit* (Mimi Lessee)
7. *24 Hours to Midnight* (Rothrock)
8. *Night of the Warrior* (Lamas)
9. *Under Siege* (Seagal)
10. *Lion Heart* (Van Damme)

**N**ot since the popular Bruce Lee movies of the early 70s has there been such an onslaught of American made martial arts films. Technological advances in editing and camera work, the use of hidden wires and harnesses to prolong flight, skilled stunt doubles and an arsenal of special choreographical methods have made film fight the "art of fighting without fighting." It is difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. Even using a current or former champion doesn't guarantee that a fight scene will be good. These normally fluid fighters often become stiff robots with lead feet when trying not to fight for real.

A fight must look as good as it sounds. *Batman Returns* is a great example of sound effects and close-ups disguising extremely poor technique. The 10 best and 10 worst American made martial art movies listed above are selections based solely upon their fight choreography. Neither plot nor acting performances are considered. Two criteria were used in determining the selections. One, that an American production company was involved and American actors had the primary roles and two, there had to be at least 60 seconds worth of actual fight scenes. This eliminates the cult classic, *Billy Jack* and others, such as Brandon Lee's *Laser*

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Point, from consideration.

Let's start with the baddies. In *Lionheart*, a choreography technique called the MSSQUE (Many Shot, one Strike, QUick Edit and pronounced "miscue") method is used, and used and used. A single strike is simultaneously shot using three or four different cameras set at different angles. Therefore, the three kicks that

Van Damme whacks across his opponent's face are really one kick shot from three different angles, then edited together in rapid succession to give the appearance of speed. Several separate punch-block routines are similarly filmed and edited into a loop, giving the impression of an extended exchange of techniques. MSQUES can create choppy, illogical fight scenes as evidenced by the fight scene in the swimming pool where Van

Damme, in slow motion no less, kicks water while missing his opponent by two feet.

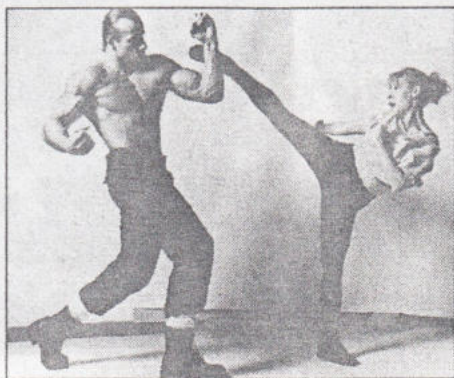
Stephen Seagal in *Under Siege*, apart from his poor, off-balanced kicks and failed aikido moves, uses an old Chinese choreography trick known as the RAM method (Rapid Arm Movement) during the final knife fight. Holding knives, actors proceed to flail their arms about in small figure eights in a manner similar to punching a speed bag. The distinctive, loud "ching ching" sound effect gives the impression that the knives are contacting each other, while intermittently editing in clips of slashed body parts. The knives rarely connect and if they do it is by accident and not by design.

Lorenzo Lamas is a reputable stuntman and fight choreographer. However in *Night of the Warrior* his experience is sadly under used. The kicks have poor extension and are delivered too slowly, producing an uncomfortable, hunched effect for the fighters. His foot is literally rested upon an opponent at the point of contact and the magic of editing does the rest. He ducks a punch before it is thrown and when hit, his reaction is delayed in response to the strike. Ditto for Cynthia Rothrock in *24 Hours*,

whose poor hand and body postures were a mockery of skills so ably demonstrated in previous Hong Kong films. Her fights are considerably slowed by lengthy pauses between each set of technique combinations. In one fight, two opponents wrestled for 43 seconds while still holding on to the same gun and without striking each other.

"Pillow fights" are the reason you will find the 6th through 2nd films on the list. These are

guilty of most of the following: Painfully slow fights, off-balanced kicks obviously missing their opponents, lead-footed kickers, excessive wind-ups before punch delivery, mismatched hit reactions (hit by a left cross, face moves right) and poor timing of stuntmen. The worst worst movie honor goes to Leo Fong's *Blind Rage*.



Cynthia Rothrock in *No Retreat, No Surrender II*

Suffice it to say that it is the ultimate "pillow fight"—where body and facial expressions are over emphasized and punches are like feathers in the wind, slow and soft. The classic reference to a fighter "who couldn't punch his way out of a paper bag" comes to mind.

Ranking the top 10 films is more difficult and requires an understanding of complex techniques. The most difficult sequences to choreograph are the group fights. Group fights are either MAM's (Many Against Many) or OHM's (One Hits Many). When filming MAM's, movie extras perform basic routines and often move around heedlessly throwing their fists and legs at each other. Without trained extras, MAM's are doomed to be of very poor quality.

OHM's require the individual actor to be well trained and the attackers to be either impervious to pain or to have impeccable timing. Most American film actors use a simplified OHM, where each attacker is faced one at a time. How many times have you watched a Chuck Norris film and wondered why his opponents don't attack all at once? The reason is that he can't react quickly enough without



looking sloppy. Bruce Lee in *The Chinese Connection* was the first action film star to kick nine different attackers in one uncut sequence - and still look good. Expert OHM's require the attackers to attack simultaneously and within the same camera shot. You will have to look very closely however, since advances in editing techniques can give many ordinary films the effect of a successful OHM.

The ten spot goes to *China O'Brian* with Cynthia Rothrock in which she attempts to incorporate Jackie Chan's trademark Perpetual Motion Technique—the illusion of perpetual action achieved by constant body motion. Although there are flashes of her expertise with the staff toward the end of the film, weak stances and poor transitions from fancy twirling into fighting movements lessen its effectiveness.

Brandon Lee's battles in *Rapid Fire* (9th) have excellent fight continuity and flow smoothly. His kicks and body language are reminiscent of his father, and although the fights were not breathtaking in their creativity, Brandon did emerge from Bruce Lee's shadow. The tragic accidents that claimed both father and son have left a noticeable void in the genre.

*Hard Target* nails down the 7th rung and stars Van Damme in his best martial arts performance to date. Although the choreography was simple, director John Woo's unique camera work and liberal use of slow motion highlighted Van Damme's highly visual jumping kicks to create an aura of complexity. *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*, number eight, is impressive because Jason Scott Lee had never practiced martial arts before his role in the film, yet still manages a surprisingly good performance. It broke no new ground, but it is convincing nonetheless.

Loren Avedon gets the nod for the 4th, 5th and 6th best. Smart choreography and editing produced good OHM's. Rothrock's appearance in *No Retreat, No Surrender II* is her only American film that showcases the spunk and intensity she exhibited in Hong Kong. The use of Chinese choreographers and stunt doubles for the American actors, spectacular spins and elaborate wire and harness set-ups guarantees the success of these films based on their originality.

Although a flop in America, number two is Jackie Chan's *Big Brawl* (re-released as *Battle Creek Brawl*). It is laced with Chan's typical comedic and athletic style of choreography. The American stuntmen used in the *Big Brawl* couldn't keep up with Chan's movements, so many of the fights look a bit awkward, but the movie is easily redeemed by the star's originality and creativeness.

The only American actor to successfully perfect both weapon and non-weapon OHM's was Bruce Lee. His film, *Enter the Dragon*, is not only the best American martial arts movie ever made, it is the best bar none. Its only two weaknesses are the MAM fight at the end of the film where some extras are seen laughing and peeking at the cameras, and the use of the same shot, repetitively edited into the action, to stretch the scene. In light of his skills, it is not surprising that Bruce Lee's *Game of Death* also finds its way to the third spot on the all-time list. This 1979 film features footage of Lee shot in 1973 shortly before his death. Although Lee committed several nanchaku errors in his fight against Dan Inosanto, it was the first time such a sequence had been filmed. Lee's fight sequence with Kareem Abdul Jabbar is wonderfully original, and it was his genius that even made a 7 foot Jabbar appear highly skilled. One weakness was that Lee uses too many straight-line, back and forth exchanges and paused too long between technique flurries. Still, his techniques are delivered with such unbelievable speed that no camera tricks are necessary to enhance it.

In 1997, when Hong Kong becomes Communist a "title" wave of pugilistic mayhem will flood into Hollywood, leaving on its shores a fertile layer of Hong Kong's best choreographers. Understanding the dynamics of fight choreography will be more important than ever if American audiences are to fully appreciate the talent borne by this new wave.

Craig Reid has been involved in martial arts for over 20 years as a participant and as a fight choreographer. Currently he is in Hong Kong as a guest choreographer for Tsui Hark, Hong Kong's hottest producer/director of martial arts films.



# Can You Beat This Band?

## Japanese Demon Drummers roll into Carnegie Hall

MARY TALBOT

Daily News Staff Writer

**H**OW DO YOU GET TO CARNEGIE HALL? As the punch line to the old joke would have it, "practice." But for Ondekoza, a Japanese musical troupe that plays immense, wooden drums and delicate Shakuhachi flutes, mere practice was too easy. Hard training was in order: So for the last three years, they have run around the perimeter of the United States to get there.

The 11-member group, trailing a camper carting an orchestra of drums (including one 700-pounder), a rice cooker and cartons of Ben-Gay, began a 13,000-mile odyssey around the country, on the heels of completing the 1990 New York City Marathon.

### PREVIEW

Twenty-eight states and 125 pairs of shoes later, they arrived last month in time for yet another marathon and a celebratory concert tomorrow night at Carnegie Hall.

The group, also known as the Demon Drummers, was founded in 1969 to play an earthy version of Japanese folk and Buddhist melodies. Its members began running to increase their endurance and energy for handling the immense drums. "But it turned into something more," says Marco Lienhard, 31, a Swiss performer who moved to Japan as an exchange student 12 years ago and is the group's oldest and only English-speaking member. "It's like a form of meditation for us."

But running around the U.S. on back roads and small highways, clocking 15 to 40 miles a day, wasn't so much a lengthy meditation as a means of seeing America from the pavement up and bringing "Taiko" or "big drum" music to the people they met on the way.

When their tour began, at the onset of the Gulf War, the group jogged through a landscape laced with yellow ribbons and anti-foreigner sentiments. But apart from a couple of hurled bottles, the runners were greeted warmly.

"By the time we reached Florida, we were meeting people and, hours later, staying at their houses," says Lienhard. "We humanized the Japanese image for a lot of people who hadn't been exposed to the culture or the people."

The new friends helped them arrange impromptu concerts in town squares and elementary schools.

Of course, the marathon wasn't trouble-free. Each runner suffered at least one injury, and the group's camper was crushed by an 18-wheeler on the border between the Carolinas two months into the trip. Mosquitoes devoured them in Florida, and 110-degree heat cooked them in Arizona.

One runner lost his way in the tangle of L.A. free-



**DOING A BANGUP JOB:** When not hitting the skins, Ondekoza drummers hit the road for serious running.

ways and was rescued after he called someone in Japan, who called someone in New York, who called the runners' beeper. Lienhard vividly recalls washing his hands in a roadside stream in the Everglades and coming face to face with an alligator.

Tomorrow night's concert promises to be a jubilant cap to the odyssey and a bit of rest before Ondekoza begins a brief jog around Europe.

(Ondekoza is at Carnegie Hall tomorrow at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15 to \$30; to order, call 212-247-7800.)

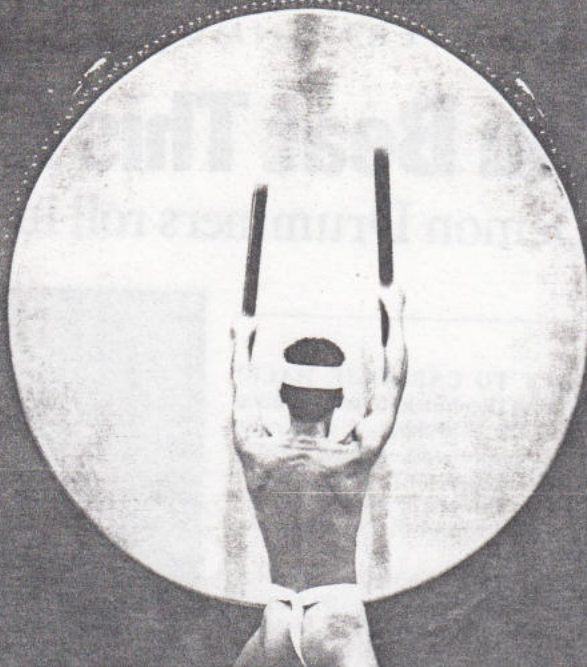
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-the Boston Herald

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Guest: San Jose Taiko Group

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Tickets: \$30, \$25, \$20, \$15

# ondekoza

In its twenty-three years of existence, *Ondekoza* (Japanese Demon Drummers) has offered its thrilling performances to audiences the world over. This unique group of ten young people have just concluded a 3-year tour of the United States, on foot. The group has literally run 13 000 miles of the perimeter of the USA.

This Guinness Book of Records style feat began in New York city in November 1990, after a successful concert at Carnegie Hall. Running, initially used as a form of training to give the performers the necessary energy to handle the drums, turned into an enormous challenge of a type never thought of or achieved before. The members of *Ondekoza* have recently marked the end of their extraordinary tour, running back into New York city in time to participate in the New York marathon. In all they have given over 200 performances and demonstrations across the United States.

The music of *Ondekoza* originates from traditional drum routines and classical Kabuki and Bunraku (Japanese puppet theatre) plays. In seeking to create new dimensions from traditional Japanese folk music, *Ondekoza* finds inspiration in the sounds of nature -- the whispering and sighing of the wind, the cracking thunder and pounding surf of the ocean waves -- as well as the sounds of daily life in the old and the modern Japan.



"Ondekoza belongs in the rarefied company of the Mummenschanz Mime Theatre and Pilobolus Dance Theatre. It offers a transcendent theatrical experience..."  
Lewis Segal, LOS ANGELES TIMES

"You can hear the pulse of circulating blood in the body of their performance. There is nothing superficial here; they've got real rhythm."

SEIJI OZAWA

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#### Part I — San Jose Taiko

Kisha

Rumbako

Spirit of Adventure

Gendai Ni Ikiru

#### Ondekoza

Sogaku Improvisation—Joy of Running Improvisation

Solo Shakuhachi

Ondekobayashi

Hachijo

#### Intermission

#### Part II

Yonjushichi Gen Duo

Jusangen Solo

Eisa

Shamisen

Odaiko

Yataibayashi

Sakaya-uta, Song

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## Notes on the Program



**Kisha (Train) (1993)**

JANET KOIKE and TONI YAGAMI

Imagine the distant sounds of an approaching train. Its arrival is a joyful journey's end, and the beginning of new adventures. The mesmerizing rhythms bring passengers together in daydreams of far-off destinations. Does the journey end? What destiny will be reached? Was it all a dream?

**Rumbako (1993)**

JANET KOIKE and TONI YAGAMI

Cuba and Japan, two very different island cultures, each have their own traditional drum patterns. These island rhythms wash upon our shores; crashing, splashing, and flowing together to create "Rumbako." The Okedo/Uchiwa movement is choreographed by Anna Lin and P.J. Hirabayashi.

**Spirit of Adventure (1993)**

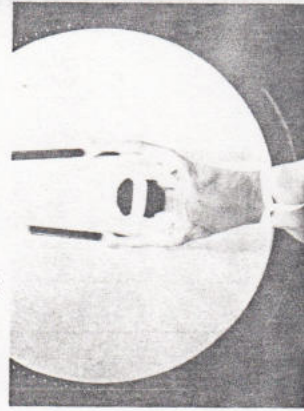
ROY HIRABAYASHI

Traditional patterns from "Taiko" in Japan, East Indian percussion patterns, and contemporary music are the elements of the old and the new, creating the "Spirit of Adventure."

**Gendai Ni Ikiru (1978)**

GARY TSUJIMOTO

"Living in the present" reflects the blending of traditional and modern rhythms to



create a sound that combines a simple Taiko beat with rhythm patterns that grew out of the composer's enjoyment of jazz.

### Sogaku

Sogaku literally means "the joy of running." The idea behind sogaku is that the audience may become inspired to try running through watching. Music and running are expressions of the mind's inner thoughts. Understanding the music is the energy which propels the runner forward.

### Shakuhachi

The shakuhachi is an end-blown vertical bamboo flute with five holes (four holes in front and one in back). It was used by komuso or wandering priests to reach the state of Buddhahood. Only one or two songs were played over and over again. The uniqueness of the shakuhachi is its mouthpiece which is cut obliquely and has a small ivory or water buffalo horn piece inserted on the playing edge for better wear. The shakuhachi of the standard length of 54.5 cm or 1 ft. 8 in. is used for solos, but instruments of different lengths are used according to the pitches of the other instruments in ensemble playing. The plaintive but alluring sound produced by various combinations of fingering and blowing techniques is the most outstanding characteristic of this instrument. The instrument was used for popular songs and today it is used in many different kinds of music.

### Ondekobayashi

In this song, the word "hayashi" means festival orchestra. The six male drummers are cheering the female drummer through the drumming. The song is a variation on a rhythm pattern called "tama-ire" (from the Chichibu festival), which means "to put one's soul into..."

In this song, different sounds of the old and modern Japan is incorporated. Little by little, the six drummers unite with the center lead-drum to become one soul. In this piece, the 20-pound *shime-daiko* drums are used. These are tightened for tuning before each performance.

### Hachijo

Hachijo is the name of an island south of Tokyo. Four hundred years ago, after a war which divided Japan into two warring parts, a samurai of the losing faction—Ukita Hidei—was exiled to this remote island. There, he would play the drums and sing longing for his home country:

The sound does not die/My sound does not die/Beat the drum, gather the people/I have to say/With heartfelt feelings carry my sound away.

### Jusangen

Jusangen, which means 13 strings, is also commonly called koto. It is a 13-stringed plucked zither made of paulownia wood. It has movable bridges for each string (allowing different tunings), and is played with small picks on the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand (the left meanwhile may raise the pitch of strings or modify the tone by pressing on the strings).

The earliest koto (yamagoto or wagon) had only five strings and was about three feet long. A sixth was added during the Nara Period (710-794). The 13-stringed koto, modeled on the Chinese zheng (cheng), which is about six feet long and also dates from the 8th century, was used in the court music ensemble. Starting in the late 15th century, there developed a number of new schools of solo koto.

### Eisa

Eisa expresses the fishermen's gratitude for having an abundance of fish with which to feed their families and community. From the northern most Japanese islands to the southern most tip of Okinawa, there is a distance of over 1000 miles. Among its inhabitants there have been many fishermen for hundreds of years. It is said that a small boat once went as far as Rome and brought back a load of fish.

### Shamisen

The shamisen is the three-stringed instrument that best expresses Japanese sensitivity and feelings. The shamisen, which evokes images of serenity and tranquility, was played during the Edo period, when Japan enjoyed three hundred years of peace, a rare state for a country at that time. The instrument is played by hitting or plucking the strings with a "bachi" or plectrum. The "bachi" is made of ivory and tortoise shell; the shamisen is made of wood covered with animal hide.

### Odaiko

Odaiko literally means "big drum." It weighs 700 lbs., is made of one tree trunk, and is four or five feet in diameter. This is the story of two villages that struggle for the control of their river, the sole source of water in a year of severe drought. The battle was fought by drummers of both groups who attempted to out-do each other's performances. Since the survival of their village was at stake, their determination to survive was reflected in the sound produced by their drum. It is said that the drummers who lost took responsibility for their defeat and committed suicide.

### Yataibayashi

Yataibayashi originates from the "chichibu festival," north of Tokyo. It is believed that the ancestors of the Japanese people crossed from the mainland to the Japanese island chain and vanquished the people from the north and the south. As they sailed across the stormy seas, the drum-



mers beat their drums in the face of rough waves in order to drive away fear and encourage the oarsmen to continue their hard journey.

The tradition of sustaining hard work by drumming has evolved over time into a form of musical accompaniment for festivals, which in Japan, comprise various competitions and feats such as carrying portable shrines on the shoulders, symbolizing the hardship experienced at sea by those Japanese ancestors. Presented here are "o-nami" (big wave) and "ko-nami" (little wave). The drum, called "tama-ire" (which means to be a god with spirit) is beaten at the end of each piece. Ondekoza's yataibayashi was choreographed by Mr. Den in memory of his youth and as a requiem for the 40 classmates lost in the bombings of World War II.

#### Sakaya-uta

This is a song of sake making.

#### About Taiko

Roughly translated, the word "taiko" means "big drum." It is generally used to describe a particular kind of Japanese drum that is hollowed out from a solid piece of keyaki (zelkova) wood and skinned by stretching and tacking a rawhide over each end of the body. However the word can also be used for other types of drums and to describe the art of Japanese drumming itself. The exact origin of "taiko" is unknown, but it has been associated with many aspects of Japanese culture since ancient times. It is said that "taiko" was used to drive away the plague and evil spirits. In Shinto religion, "taiko" was used to summon and entertain the "kami" (gods). In Japanese Buddhism, the sound of the taiko represented the voice of the Buddha. "Taiko" was used and listened to by both the noblemen and the commoners. It was found in imperial court orchestras, in kabuki, and noh ensembles; on the battlefield and in the rice fields. Fifth-century clay pottery holding drum dolls and seventh-century poems and paintings confirm that "taiko" has been an integral part of Japanese life for the past

1600 years. It originated in China, where it is still found in the same form as in Japan, the difference nowadays is the music played on it.

#### San Jose Taiko

San Jose Taiko was founded in 1973 by young Asian Americans searching for a musical expression of their cultural heritage. They settled on the "taiko" drum for its power and its unique capacity to reflect the Japanese and Japanese-American experiences and culture. In San Jose Taiko's 20-year history, the group has performed in Japan with Ondekoza in 1987, and traveled to North American cities for concert and festival performances.

#### Ondekoza

Ondekoza—"demon drummers"—was founded in 1969 by Mr. Den on Sado Island. The members have just completed their three-year long tour on November 9, 1993, running on foot close to 10,000 miles. The U.S. Marathon Odyssey Tour began in November of 1990, when they ran the 1990 New York City Marathon and then performed at Carnegie Hall. A few days later, the ten members—seven men and three women—began their 10,000 mile run around the perimeter of the United States, running city to city, going to Miami, New Orleans, Houston, Phoenix, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis, Chicago, and Cleveland. They ran an average of 20 miles a day, giving over 300 performances along the way.

The music of Ondekoza originates from Japanese traditional music and festival drum routines. The music is played on bamboo flutes, various percussions, and stringed instruments, and "taiko" drums ranging from tom-tom like drums to a 700 lb. drum. In seeking to create new dimensions from traditional Japanese folk music, Ondekoza finds inspiration from the sounds of nature—the whispering and sighing of the wind, the cracking thunder, the pounding surf of the ocean waves, and the falling rain. All are interpreted by the members as expressions of nature's emotions of joy, love, anger, and sorrow. Their

music is an aural and emotional as well as a visual experience for the audience, who will literally "see the sound" emanating from Ondekoza's performance.

The Ondekoza members live a communal lifestyle, where both physical and mental training combined with a specialized diet are integral parts of their daily

life. Long distance running provides the drummers with the physical stamina needed for their performances as well as an inspiration for their music and life. The purpose of their three-year-long tour of the U.S. was to expose the American public to taiko music to produce cultural awareness and, in turn, friendship between people.

#### MEMBERS

Yasuko Takakubo	Taiko drum, fue, dance
Marco Lienhard	Taiko drum, shakuhachi, fue
Shigeru Yamamoto	Taiko drum, running
Un Ryohei Inoue	Taiko drum, shamisen
A Kouhei Inoue	Taiko drum, shamisen, fue
Ringtarō Kammura	Taiko drum
Q-taro Nakashima	Taiko drum
Yutaro Anri	Taiko drum
Matthew Hayes	Taiko drum
Lynda Yoshikawa	Taiko drum
Indy Gilbertson	Taiko drum
Kelvin Underwood	Drums
Tagayasu Den	Director

#### GUESTS

Mami Kawaguchi	Jusangen
Miya Otake	Yonjushichi Gen
Kaori Otake	Yonjushichi Gen
Kazuko Hosokawa	

#### SAN JOSE TAIKO

Alison Hirabayashi, Roy Hirabayashi, P.J. Hirabayashi, Janet Koike, Anna Lin, Irene Matsumoto, Meri Mitsuyoshi, Karen Morita, Keith Morita, Kevin Mukai, Jeremy Nishihara, Keith Okabe, Colleen Standal, and Toni Yagami.

**PATRICIA GONZALEZ**  
**3595 Bainbridge Ave. #2B**  
**Bronx, NY 10467**



Susan Moyers Porter ♦ 7324 Welton Dr. NE ♦ Albuquerque, NM 87109

"Going To See The Dragon" (see next page) is a long read, but I found it far more interesting (and sinister) than the usual canned travelogue of China so often written.

## *The secret eye in China*

*(banned films)*

**Chinese films which do not directly criticize the government are nevertheless being banned. London's Institute of Contemporary Arts has obtained and screened 5 banned films in video form. Several, including 'Bloody Dawn' and 'In Their Prime,' are outstanding.**

Full Text COPYRIGHT Economist Newspaper Ltd. (UK) 1992

**A** village teacher has been murdered. Everybody knew he would be, because the killers had made no secret of their plan, but for various reasons nobody tried to stop them. "Chronicle of a Death Foretold"? Wrong. This is the plot of a Chinese film, "Bloody Dawn", which takes Gabriel Garcia Marquez's story and reinterprets it in terms of the legacy of puritanism, and of the Chinese concept of gaining and losing face.

It is a tour de force. And yet this picture, and almost every other film of quality made in China since the Tiananmen Square killings in 1989, remains unseen by the audience for which it was intended. Most of them cannot officially be shown abroad. Five of the banned films, however, were seen last weekend on video at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts in circumstances best left unexplained. They were a revelation.

Films are banned now in China not because they are critical of communism but because somebody fears that some day someone might take exception to them.

This makes for extreme caution. "In Their Prime", now five years old, is still unseen in China because it deals frankly with the Chinese-Vietnamese border war of 1979, in which, in the space of a few weeks, China is believed to have lost a third as many men as America lost in the whole of its own part of the Vietnam war. "In Their Prime" rams home the humiliation this brought to China. Its picture of an ill-equipped, badly trained army was anathema to the army's generals, who made sure the film was never released. So into limbo went maybe the most moving account of war since "All Quiet on the Western Front".

"In Their Prime" was made by the generation of film-makers who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982.





# Going to see the dragon.

*(A journey through south China, land of capitalist miracles, where yesterday's rice paddy becomes tomorrow's metropolis, and a thousand factories bloom)*

By Paul Theroux

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## ONE: SETTING OUT

THERE IS NO better place for the traveler than a land outside the scope of guidebooks, beyond the reach of maps, where only local knowledge matters and word of mouth is everything. China is just a place now. You have to go there to find out what is happening. In my travels around China's southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian in April of this year, I discovered that roads are being built so fast, in so many new directions, that no maps are accurate. The guidebooks cannot keep up with the hotels and restaurants that have opened—every one is out of date. So are phone directories and company listings. These explosive changes make China terra incognita.

I first visited China in 1980.

These were the men and women who, in the years before Tiananmen, put Chinese cinema on the world map with films such as "Yellow Earth" and "Red Sorghum". Yet those films, set mostly in the past and dealing with remote rural communities, are regarded as irrelevant to contemporary life by their successors.

One of the most instructive of the films shown in London comes from one of these successors. Zhang Yuan's "Mama", the story of a retarded child, was detested by officialdom, probably because it points to holes in the Chinese welfare state. Yet the film escaped the central censors. In China the state is the sole supplier of film stock. Zhang Yuan got round that by buying up film in job lots from various film studios. And because his film by-passes the normal state distribution system he is free, at the moment, to sell it abroad. It is a genuinely independent production.

Other ways in which Chinese film makers can express themselves include co-productions (responsible for "Raise the Red Lantern", which is in line for an Oscar this month) and the use of the cheaper and widely available video form. China has no formal distribution system for independent videos, but neither has it an apparatus for banning them.

So a work such as "The Last Dreamers", which was shot on video, slips through the net and has been shown both in London and at the Hong Kong film festival. A documentary about artists who have opted out of the system and become illegal squatters in Beijing, this could be the most subversive movie yet made in China. It says that people have managed to live and work in the capital without a resident's permit and without belonging to a "work unit". If that is so, even China's powerful system of control is cracking up.

**Industrial development in the five Special Economic Zones of southern China is completely transforming the area, changing rice paddies into cityscapes. A visit to China to observe the effect of capitalism on the landscape and the society is described.**

Since the death of Mao in 1976 a power struggle had been going on between the Maoists, led by Hua Guofeng, Mao's hand-picked inheritor, and the reformers, led by Deng Xiaoping, now the ruling patriarch. Hua's portrait was displayed everywhere with that of his benefactor, Hua's cheek next to Mao's jowl. Deng's face was nowhere, and yet from the shadows of the Chinese hierarchy he was sketching his master plan to revitalize China. This was not yet obvious. I sailed down the Yangtze and visited ten cities.

China then was all struggle, people in blue suits and cloth slippers riding bicycles down muddy streets, workers going blind in poorly lighted factories, waiters refusing tips and chanting, "Serve the people!" The only bright colors were the ribbons the more daring women and girls wore in their hair. Guangzhou (Canton) I visited a



wage rates. In the twenty-first century, corporations may take the jobs to the coolies, as it were, rather than bringing the coolies to the jobs."

The Chinese dragon, scorned in the Maoist era as a superstitious symbol, is China's favorite creature, one of its friendliest and most enduring guardian figures—a good omen representing power and prosperity. Now the dragon had risen again. It was breathing fire. I wanted to see it.

## TWO: ON THE ROAD TO SHANTOU

SUDDENLY, ON a road in eastern Guangdong—all bulldozers and buffaloes—my driver, Li Zhong Ming, veered left and began driving on the wrong side of the road. Was it the freshly dismembered human corpse, all is separate parts splashed Chinese red, scattered widely like a load of fresh pork off the truck on our side of the highway—and the ensuing traffic jam—that made him do it? No. Mr. Li liked spinning the steering wheel and whipping over to face the oncoming traffic. He had hardly glanced at the mutilated body. "This is quicker," he said. Of course, the risks were enormous—trucks and buses bore down on us head-on—but he got in front of everyone with an eat-my-dust expression on his face, his teeth ajar in aggression.

Mr. Li was persistent I began to think of his driving on the wrong side (and the carnage on the right, of the numerous auto accidents I saw in an average day) as a metaphor for modernized China. He booted our assembled-in-China Audi down the main road to Shantou (old Swatow), past the red hills being shoveled apart and bulldozed to use for filling rice fields and making room for tenements and factories. The entire landscape was being leveled for hundreds of miles, and when it began to rain, water coursed down the clawed, eroded hills, washing silt into the sewers and flooding the roads, causing another traffic jam.

Into the wrong lane Mr. Li went again, playing chicken

with oncoming dump trucks and tractors and bikes. He did not dodge them. He just blew his horn and surged forward against the flow of cockeyed headlights. Bolstering Mr. Li in his luck was a portrait of Mao Zedong on his dashboard. This gesture, wholly nonpolitical, was a recent fetish for drivers in China. Just a year before, a taxi driver in Beijing claimed in the People's Daily that he had been spared in a car crash, in which there had been many fatalities, because he had kept a picture of the old man on his dashboard. Many Chinese drivers began using the picture for spiritual protection. This remind me of the images of St. Christopher that I saw in cars when I was growing up in Massachusetts in the 1950s.

Mao kitsch is popular in China again. You can buy Mao badges and Mao portraits, and embroidered knickknacks of the great man in baggy pants. His speeches are back in print. I often thought of them, of one in particular, his "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," written in 1927, after he had traveled around the countryside, noting abuses, jotting down wisdom, and making suggestions. That was what I told myself I was doing now—simply looking around, gathering impressions for my "Report on the Factory Workers of Guangdong and Fujian in this Era by Chinese Prosperity." And, in fact, I was traveling to the music of Mao. In a dusty shop in a small town in rural Guangdong I had bought some Mao playing card and some Mao cassettes. Memories of Mao was playing on Mr. Li's tape deck, the tuneless "Dong Fang Hong".

The East is Red! The Sun rises! China produces Mao Zedong!

WE PASSED TWO men on a big red 350-cc joint-venture Wuyang-Honda motorcycle, and the man on the rear seat was talking wildly into a cellular phone—making a deal without a helmet at seventy miles an hour. Gunning his engine, Mr. Li was happy. And everywhere I looked I saw ruined hills and abandoned paddy fields and bamboo scaffolding where just months before

there had been bamboo groves. These were the only landscape features apart from the freshly robbed graves, one of the more recent growth industries in rural China (ancient artifacts such as pots and clay animal figures are unearthed to smuggle and sell for good prices in Hong Kong), and the odd forlorn pagoda, almost certainly doomed. But nothing ancient, nothing notable, nothing but new brown, crumbly notable, factories and tenements—rising from the filled-in rice fields.

I penetrated farther east into Guangdong, beyond the red hills and paddy fields and stands of bamboos, the muddy ditches and hot boulders, the haunts of snakes and eels and lizards and frogs, popular in the restaurants in these parts. In spite of all the new wealth, some things in China never change: the small side roads made by hand, squatting people pounding the asphalt flat with mallets; the rice-growing process—women scooping water into the terraces using large wooden ladles, others bent double planting the rice shoots, the men plowing with buffaloes, up to their knees in water. We passed cyclists transporting rods on their bike racks, and edge-of-town dump pickers, usually a man and a boy studiously sorting junk into piles—glass, metal, rags, paper. There were barefoot men kneeling by the side of the road welding metal without masks or eye protection, sparks flying; on the highest and most ambitious buildings, men erecting scaffolding of poles and tying them together with string or spilt cane stands instead of using metal clips; watering their beautiful vegetable gardens; men fishing for tiddlers in canals. "The principle of diligence and frugality should be observed in everything," Mao said, though it hardly needed saying.

Although I have a basic grasp of Putonghua—Mandarin—I was traveling with a translator in case the conversion became abstract or contentious. We came to a town. What was its name?

"I don't know," my driver answered.



Maoist model commune called Da Li. It was like a good-natured prison of reluctant sloganeers and suppressed ambitions—71,000 people working 6,000 acres of rice fields and making Whistling Cicada brand firecrackers. It seemed at once appalling and wonderful for its unity and its innocence. Every job was carried out with crude tools and great spirit. It was a society of intimidating and ingenious frugality in which everything was mended—shoes, clothes, vehicles. The Chinese were poor, but their ingenuity made them seem indestructible.



five Special Economic Zones. From what I'd read, it sounded as though China had embarked on its own version of the type of industrial revolution that transformed England and America.

Viewed from a distance, such changes seem wondrous, but up close the story turns out to be messier and more complicated. Like the dark, satanic mills of William Blake's "Jerusalem," the Chinese economic miracle has been a degrading process and an ecological disaster, as demonstrated by the chemical blast in Shenzhen last August that killed an estimated seventy people and destroyed eight warehouses. In some places air quality is the worst to be found on earth. To make way for cities erected in a matter of months, mountains are being moved, rice paddies filled in, forests cleared—a process that has caused devastating floods in south China. The dynamo of capitalism has been closed, and the "creative destruction" that economist Joseph Schumpeter called the defining feature of nineteenth-century American capitalism is on display in the China of 1993. It is a sight the likes of which few people alive today have seen.

This past spring I returned to China for third time, to have a look at what the newspapers were calling the "Chinese miracle." What I had read did indeed suggest that something miraculous was afoot. Almost overnight, while few people were paying attention, China had emerged as the world's third-largest economy, according to the International Monetary Fund, and as America's largest trading partner after Japan. In the first quarter of 1993, China's GNP grew at an annual rate of 14 percent, outstripping every county in the world; in contrast, America grew, in the first quarter of this year, less than 1 percent. Most of China's growth is centered in the southern provinces, a region of 290 million people, where the government has established

now empty and the machines have stopped. Not just Boston and Chicago, but Bradford and Manchester in England, and Derry in Northern Ireland, and so many others. They have shut down.

China is succeeding because China is at work. The world has put the county to work and has invested in it, and the world has received a return on its investment. Most people reading this article are wearing a Chinese shirt, or sweater, or trouser, or pair of shoes. "Traditional" English baskets are Chinese. Carved Christian decorations are Chinese. Our do-it-yourself tools, hammers and screwdrivers and socket wrenches, are Chinese. Our children's toys are Chinese. Our bikes. High-fashion beaded dresses are Chinese. Ninja Turtles are Chinese. The tires on our cars are Chinese. Many of the Japanese electronic goods we buy are actually assembled in China. The Chinese sell AK-47 semiautomatic rifles to wholesale buyers for \$200 per unit, making war all over the world cheap, deadly, and endless. In recent years China has sold Silkworm missiles to Iraq, and last August was suspected by the Clinton Administration to be shipping the chemicals used to produce mustard and nerve gas to Iran. The Chinese sell tin pots in African countries and baseball caps in America and, ever since the pit closures in Britain, might well be shipping coals to Newcastle. There is hardly a gift shop in America that is not stocked from top to bottom with candles and carvings from the many kitch-producing provinces in China. Those pretty masks and doormats and mailboxes and Santa Clauses and almost-Hummers and porcelain dragons and classic cars that are so sensibly priced in any Old World Gyfte Shoppe? They're from China. And so too are high-tech air-craft parts now being made in Fujian Province, a place that fox six thousand years was known only for its cork paintings and oolong tea.

There was once a time when all American cityscapes looked like south China's new industrial zones—most of us in the West live at the relatively tranquil terminus of a very messy economic process that had its start in a raw cityspace like Shenzhen or Guangzhou. Here is street after street of large, new factory buildings—structures similar to the factories I grew up with in Massachusetts, factories that fell into dereliction after World War II. Fall River had them, and so did New Bedford, Lawrence, and Brockton, they still have them, but the structures have been revived now as "factory outlets," selling designer-label Chinese-made goods. The cities of south China are functioning versions of the towns that are familiar to anyone who has lived in an urban area in Europe or America where the factories are

"In the nineteenth century," Michael Lind recently wrote in *The National Interest*, "corporations in European lands of settlement would actually import coolie labor from China and India by the thousands to ; compete with home-country nationals for jobs, driving down



We asked. It was Bou Lou. "It was just a small place last year." It would be a city next year. We then passed what appeared to be a movie set, all bamboo scaffolding and rising buildings, another city being created in the middle of nowhere, with an archway lettered WELCOME TO ZHANG MOU TOU.

"So this is Zhang Mou Tou," I said as we drove through the flying dust. "It's not on the map."

"It is new."

Last year it existed as a mud-and-buffalo rice-growing village of ten huts. The buildings are rising, and to fill in the rice fields they have had to pull down all the surrounding hills, and amazing sight, just like the Maoist fable, quoted in the Little Red Book, of "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains."

IT WAS ON the road that I had a vision of the new strangeness of China. Perhaps it was the twilight, perhaps it was the dust. Whatever, it was the apparition of a city-in-the-making. For days I had been seeing additions, enlargements, new subdivisions, and district, but this was something else—skeletal, unfinished, all of it brown with blown dust and dried mud. Everything was being built at once—the roads, the pedestrian bridges, the apartment houses, the factories, the stores. The buildings were thirty or forty stories high and still clad in spindly scaffolding. Because of the time of day, twilight, no one was working, and only workers were involved in this.

No one lived here. Except for detour arrows, there were no signs. There was no color, nothing alert or alive. I had never seen anything like it in China, or the world, a whole city under construction, and what made it strangest of all was that no heavy machinery was in evidence—no bulldozers, no cranes, just the odd wheelbarrow or ladder and the stitched-together scaffolding covering every structure and making the city seem fragile. We drove through, looking for someone to ask about it—perhaps its name. But there was not one

around. Then it was behind us.

But this was south China. In a short time—months maybe—the town would be inhabited and brightly lit.

### THREE: GUANGZHOU

AS SOON AS you get to China you hear the success stories. Everyone tells them, affirming the Chinese miracle. The \$8-a-week driver for the company in Shanghai who spent his nights at the free market flogging defective shirts with designer labels, used the profit to get involved in a joint venture, and is now making \$60,000 a year and is the owner of a house in Australia, having paid for it in cash by sending his cousin to Sydney with the purchase price in a brown paper bag. Or the man who recognized a need for cycle helmets. His were very cheap, because his were very unsafe—just a plastic shell, but never mind, you could have one for ten yuan. This entrepreneur became a multimillionaire and prospered until he died in what was described to me as "a bizarre fishing accident." Foreigners tell these stories even more than the a tone of admiration and amazement, because anyone who was in China ten or more years ago knows that this bountiful place exploded from a monochrome country of faded clothes and gruel, a scrimping, saving, mend-and-make-do society of toiling comrades. These days, however, the stories are of decadence and wealth: "Last year ten new Rolls-Royces were imported into Guangdong by Chinese businessmen—"

"The most popular dish in Canton these days is lobster sashimi—"

"There's massage parlor in Shenzhen staffed entirely by Russian girls—"

"There is a Chinese businessman in Zhuhai who buys ten bottles at a time of Louis XIII

brandy, and it costs thousands of dollars a bottle—"

"It's a feeding frenzy—"

Some of the new fortunes are now made at the China Export Commodities Fair in Guangzhou, often, called the Canton Trade Fair. The first official fair was held in 1957. A frenetic bazaar, the fair fills one of the largest buildings in Guangzhou. The trade fair was once the only way foreign businessmen could do business in China, since they were forbidden to pass beyond the Guangzhou threshold into China. These days foreigners travel to factories around China to place their orders, and yet the trade fair remains the main focus of Chinese commerce. Here, buyers for Western corporations, middlemen, suppliers, and even individuals converge, buying goods by the containerload. In past years the fair's areas have been demarcated by varieties of merchandise—carpets here, electrical appliances there, hairpieces and bikes over here, and so forth. But this year, for the first time, the fair's stalls and stands were divided by provinces: Jiangxi here, Shandong there, Inner Mongolia right down the stairs. It costs about ten dollars to register as a delegate and have your picture inserted into an I.D. badge, and the rest is easy, like a long vulgar trek browsing through the biggest market on earth, a gift shop almost without end.

In the lobby is a musical fountain, with lights flashing to the piano of Richard Clayderman playing "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina." The buyers are bused in from their hotels; they are mainly huge sweating men and feverish-looking women from all over the world, squinting and poker-faced, like most bargain hunters.

"Zis bench grinder—tell him I want two sousand pieces," a Frenchman is saying to his interpreter.





"When these shirts arrive Lebanon?" a Levantine woman is saying.

A man is buying an orange lifeboat, another haggling over cotton baseball caps made in Shanghai, which cost \$7 a dozen, at 1,000 dozen per color, minimum order.

A German is ordering sleeping bags, made in Tianjin in a factory that employs 2,400 workers. Two million are exported annually, a great number of Germany. The wholesale price for these well-designed ones—warm, light, easily compressible—is \$11.80 a bag.

I drifted over to a stall where a sign read FOSHON HARDWARE & PLASTIC FACTORY, and in this one small space I saw fishing rods (eight sizes), mortise door locks, hammocks, pipe joints, cups, plastic flow-ers, brake shoes, welding electrodes, hinges, washers, faucets, windshield wipers, spoons, small toy dogs that jumped and yapped, and an array of lighters—fifty or more—one of which was a panther whose eyes lit up as its mouth expelled a jet of fire.

In other stalls you could get a floor-length raccoon coat for \$418 (including delivery to California); a "Chinalight New Magnetic Massage Cushion" (\$14); Black Dragon brand rollerblades made in the remote northern province of Heilongjiang (\$13.60 a pair, delivered); a wig made of Chinese human hair, dyed blonde, Shirley Temple-style, for \$10.25. a mountain bike was \$50, cashmere scarves were \$8, herbal remedies and surgical tools were all reasonably priced and a Xing Fu 250-cc motorcycle was \$663. The WuYang I had seen on the road with the passenger riding and talking on a cellular phone was \$2,000 wholesale. There was every machine tool known to man. There were inflatable toys. There were more Virgin Marys and plaster saints and crucifixes than you would see in ten years pilgrimage in Italy.

I spent two days at the fair. My most productive time was spent at the tea stalls, where all the varieties of tea in China are displayed. My preferred type of tea is Long

Ching (Dragon Well), from Hangzhou. It is green tea, and its flat smooth leaves resembles the needles of a fir tree. "Why is this tea so expensive?" I asked the tea company's representative, Mr. Jin.

"This tea is picked in a small area," Mr. Jin said. "The best is found on just one hill. There are not many trees, the season is short, only two tons a month of the best quality are picked in the harvest season." I discovered it on my first visit to China in 1980 and have drunk it ever since, buying it in Friendship Stores or else in New York, where the best quality sells for \$50 for a box of two cans. But "expensive" is an impression you get only if you buy it outside China. This same tea at the trade fair can be bought for 3 roughly \$2 a box from the China Tuhsu Zhejiang Tea Import-Export Corporation.

Walking through the exhibition hall, I came across a provincial stall selling herbal remedies, which included ginseng, royal jelly, anti-cancer pills (made of "myrrh, muschus, mastix, and calculus bovis"), and my eye was caught by something called "Love Solution." It had something to do with health and sex, and the box claimed that with it "100% of AIDS virus and chlamydia can be killed within two minutes." There was a spray version for men, a plunger for women.

Many of the products at the fair are lovely and finely made—the carpets, the embroideries, the lace, the silks. The tools are among the finest and cheapest in the world, and have put many American tool companies out of business. But if there is one business that the Chinese now monopolize worldwide it is Christmas decorations. Hardly a Santa or a hanging ball on earth is not produced in the People's Republic, and even the Christmas lights that were formerly made in Taiwan are now made in China, many of them in joint ventures with Taiwanese partners who are looking to find cheaper labor as wages have risen in Taiwan.

"Are they any good?" I asked an Italian, Mario from Modena, who was in Guangzhou for no other reason than to buy Christmas lights to sell in Italy.

"They are very good," he said. "They conform to Italian standards. They are cheap. It's perfect."

And he smiled. "But this place"—and he made an Italianate gesture, his hands and face simultaneously expressive, to take in not only the fair but Guangzhou and perhaps the whole of China—"is 'orrible, eh?"

Yet Mario knew better than to dismiss what was before us. We were talking about how China made everything and shipped it everywhere. "China," he said, "is the manufacturer for the world."

Browsing through items at the fair, I understood why the Chinese are considered to be masters of the art of copyright infringement and have found it an effective way to generate business, make enormous profits, and earn hard currency. Despite being closely monitored in Hong Kong by people representing the brands and labels that are assiduously pirated, the infringers get away with murder. "Take running shoes," a Hong Kong lawyer told me. "It is a I say a billion. They make the shoes and label then NIKE or PUMA, they put them in boxes printed MADE IN KOREA, and they ship them all over the world."

The Chinese purloin trade-marks and labels and logos willy-nilly. You don't have to be in China very long to recognize the tip-offs. Mickey Mouse is gallivanting all over China without a license—one every conceivable consumer items—and sometimes Mickey wears a curiously almond-eyed expression. The Playboy bunny appears on any number of products without the approval of Hugh Hefner. Knockoff Swiss Army knives are fairly common. Lux soap has been popular in China for so long that there are a dozen pirate versions, with the same colored wrapper and often the same name or a similar one—"Lid," "Lix," "Lud," "Lus." These items are exported to Africa and Southeast Asia, where they may be found stacked near "Goldgate" toothpaste and "Rodigate" toothpaste (the same Colgate colors, no relation), "Pepsi-Cola" biscuits, or fake and almost



unchewable Chiclets.

False labeling—especially regarding the label of origin—extends to clothing exported worldwide but especially to the United States, which last year purchased \$4.5 billion in clothes and textiles from China, this despite certain quotas that are reached by negotiation between the two countries.

China's production far exceeds its quotas, so many Chinese products are given labels such as MADE IN HAITI or MADE IN MONGOLIA and transshipped through those places, the third-county connection, where a fax machine in a dusty office may be the only apparent chinoiserie. MADE IN MONGOLIA has been very popular on Chinese labels because little is manufactured in that country of grasslands and yaks and nomads.

WHY IS THE MADE IN CHINA label now so commonplace? There are many reasons: the collapse of Eastern Europe and the fragmentation of the Soviet Union created new markets and diverted investment to China. The world recession inspired manufacturers to look for cheaper labor and more consumers—China, these businessmen discovered, not only can make electronics and Ninja Turtles at a fraction of the cost of making them elsewhere, for even less than in traditional cheap labor centers such as Taiwan and Korea and Hong Kong, but also can supply an immense new domestic market. That 70 percent of urban households in China now have color televisions and 81 percent have washing machines suggests a growing middle-class market; that there are 750 million people in China under the age of thirty-five foretells a twenty-first-century economic juggernaut. Last year the government approved 48,000 new foreign investment projects, and foreigners invested \$11.2 billion in the country, up from \$4.4 billion the year before. So suddenly China is no longer a sprawling, monolithic gerontocracy of enigmatic ideologists but rather an enormous if somewhat clumsily businesslike place that inspires confidence among the world's venture capitalists.

Perhaps it is this simple: Foreign investment was invited. Factories got built. The Chinese workers accepted the lowest wages in the world. They didn't argue. They were not religious. Because of their peculiar political indoctrination, they were totally materialistic. And they showed up on time.

#### FOUR: SHENZHEN

AS RECENTLY AS 1971, shenzhen was no more than a railway platform lettered SHUMCHUN twenty miles north of Hong Kong in the province of Guangdong. In 1980, I described it in my diary as a wilderness of barbed wire; it had just been designated a Special Economic Zone. Now an ancient-seeming metropolis, Shenzhen is vast, with a railroad station almost as large as New York's Grand Central and scores of hotels. It is a city of 2.5 million, nearly the population of Hong Kong, and sprawling in all directions. Looking older than its years, the city is as famous for its prosperity and buoyant stock market as it is notorious for its message parlors and prostitutes, its organized (and approved) gambling, its bustling streets and busy factories brilliantly lit by blinking signs. On a visit to Shenzhen in 1992 Deng had said, famously, "I like this."

Mao's legacy is all those communes and collective farms that have been reconstituted as manufacturing villages or else plowed under, their people dispersed to find their niche in the labor market. Deng's creation is Shenzhen, for he set into play the forces that allowed its seemingly spontaneous birth. At eight-nine years old, Deng is often rumored to be near death. His face appeared on a billboard in Shenzhen looking ghostly and cadaverous. A lifelong chain smoker who has carried an oxygen bottle for the past eight years, he has emphysema, which was evident in this sucked-in checks and popping eyes. On the billboard he was making an admonishing gesture with his fingers:

If you don't adhere to the Socialist Road If you don't follow the Reforms If you don't develop the economy If you don't improve your livelihood Then the only way for you is death.

IN A SIMPLIFIED history, China's prosperity may be charted by the rise of Deng, whom from an early stage Mao had sniffed out as a "capitalist roader." Later, Deng was described with more elaborate contempt as "an arch unrepentant capitalist roader and harbinger of the right deviationist wind." Yet this comrade in arms turned pariah is someone who, politically speaking, came back from the dead—and not once but three times.

One of the many goals of the Cultural Revolution was to rusticate the bureaucrats and "class traitors," to sweep aside such bourgeois notions as modernization, and take the starch out of the people who had become known as revisionists. Deng, the son of well-to-do landlords, was put under house arrest. One of his sons, Deng Pufang, is said to have been thrown or dropped out of a fourth-story window (he is still in a wheelchair).

After the death of Zhou Enlai in 1976, an event that provoked greater grief and more intense emotion in China than the death of Mao later that same year, the Maoist Gang of Four were arrested for conspiracy. They were blamed for (among many other things) the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, and Deng was reinstated to the party and to all his posts by the Eleventh Party Congress in 1977. In 1979 and 1980, Deng consolidated his power and put his friends and like-minded associates and bridge partners and hatchet men in key posts.

Any illusion that Deng was a high-minded Jeffersonian at odds with the forces of Marxist-Leninist darkness was shattered in 1980, when, for political convenience, he proposed deleting the four freedoms from the 1978 constitution: speaking out freely, airing views fully, holding debates, and writing big-character posters, the traditional form of political protest. Deng's proposal was endorsed in the fifth plenum in 1980.



In the same year, Deng established the Statute of Joint Venture and the new Commission for Foreign Investment. Although business with the outside world had been going on since the visit by Richard Nixon in 1972, these two policy changes marked the beginning of contemporary China's prosperity. They meant that foreign companies could start factories in China with Chinese partners, that capital and technology could be easily transferred, and, perhaps most important, that foreign loans (both government and private) were permitted. Just as crucial, it meant that business affairs were decentralized. Now foreign businessmen could negotiate directly with factories, bypassing the bureaucracy (and bribery) entailed when every deal had once had to be routed through the ministries in Beijing.

With this start of China's Open Door Policy came some practical steps to develop China. One was the concept of Special Economic Zones—sealed zones where foreigners could transact business without stinking up the rest of the country with their decadent or subversive notions. Special money also was created, not ren-minbi (people's money) but Foreign Exchange Certificates. So, just over the Hong Kong border station of Lowu, in a village on the railway line fringed by bamboo groves, at a place then known in its cantonese form as Shumchun, a new city was planned.

Stung by the ferocity of the Cultural Revolution, and receiving mixed signals from the right and the left of the party, the Chinese people were at the tentative in carrying out Deng's exhortations. His cry "To get rich is glorious!" remained little more than a yearning. What I saw in China in 1986 and 1987 was mainly confusion, tentative movement toward a free market, and severe official punishment for crime (10,000 people were executed for various crimes between 1983 and 1986). After

the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, it appeared that China was in the economic doldrums. This was an illusion. As we now know, a serious businessman is unlikely to be deterred by a little thing like a massacre.

Deng himself was unrepentant about the killings. "Kill a chicken to scare the monkeys," he said, quoting a Chinese proverb to justify the massacre he had ordered. It is a standard military tactic in Sun Tzu's The Art of War to hack a soldier to pieces in front of his regiment in order to make a vivid and memorable point about discipline.

The feebler the pretext, the sterner the lesson. Deng is often described as "pragmatic." His desire to host the Summer olympics in the year 2000 was strictly to give China an aura of international respectability and had nothing to do with the Olympic ideals of fair play and brotherhood. Mao, by contrast had a sort of monstrous style. He was a romantic, a poet, almost Byronic, and yet someone who rather enjoyed his reputation as a demonic manipulator. He was happy to hand power to the Red Guards and turn the country upside down for ten years just to see what would happen. Deng is without charisma—doesn't have it, doesn't want it. No cult of personality have grown up around him, nor will it in what remaining time he has left. His briskness and frankness are a reaction to the time-wasting and secrecy of the past. Mao—arrogant, ruthless, serene—was an emperor whose image was iconic. graphic. Deng is a sort of blandly non-ideological CEO and is almost faceless. One of his main dictums of reform is "Tight on the inside, loose on the outside."

I WENT TO THE market in Shenzhen with a friend of a friend, Mr. Lu, who told me, "I would much rather live here than in Hong Kong. I have a larger apartment here than I would have in Hong Kong. Shenzhen is cleaner and better organized."

When I asked Mr. Lu about his family he said, "They were very red," meaning they'd had power but no money, had never been landowners, and were party members. I took this to indicate that their credentials were perfect during the Cultural Revolution. Mr. Lu said this was so. I asked him whether he had been active himself—he was forty-eight, just the right age. He said yes. Had he been a Red Guard? He said yes.

"What was your unit?" I asked.

"Revolutionary Revolt—the reddest," he said, and smiled, as though having been a member of this fanatical ultra-leftist unit had been a youthful indiscretion. Mr. Lu had been teaching English in 1966, but after being subjected to intense self-criticism (essays, confessions, recitations), he had become a Red Guard. His unit fought regularly with other units, mostly throwing chairs at one another, over which unit was the truest guardian of Mao's thought. In 1969, Mr. Lu was chosen as a model Red Guard, having worked for a year at a lathe, making parts for machine tools, in a factory in the countryside. Machine tools during the day, Marxist-Leninist study at night. He was selected to be a propagandist, traveling the country, galvanizing Red Guard units, and leading political pep rallies from Mongolia to Shanghai. In his spare time he studied revolutions around the world. Then, when foreign visitors began arriving, Mr. Lu, whose English was now an asset, was appointed to take them around. Many were well known. John Kenneth Galbraith was one.

Just after Deng took control, Mr. Lu was sent to study in the United States and Canada, and that experience, the sight of prosperity, transformed him. "It was the way people lived," he said. "I wanted that for us." Mr. Lu became a passionate reformer. In June 1989 he was at the barricades in Tiananmen Square. "It was too bad that some studies died," he said, obviously chastened by the violence. "But that is the past. WE have to be optimistic."





I asked him about the man whose speeches had incited the students, Professor Fang Lizhi, now in the United States.

"The great number of Chinese people don't care about his ideas. He is better off in America, anyway—he is more American than Chinese."

Mr. Lu seemed the perfect person to walk around Shenzhen with. He was small and slight of build but he said that, having been through the Cultural Revolution, he was not daunted by any adversity, whether it was walking a long distance or carrying a heavy load. As we passed the railway station, I mentioned that we could nip through the turnstiles, hop on a train at Lowu, and be drinking a beer in Hong Kong in less than an hour. I had made the trip myself from the other direction one rainy morning—caught the subway train outside the Shearton Hong Kong, changed trains in Kowloon Tong, and was at the border before I had finished reading the South China Morning Post. I had gotten back to Hong Kong Central Post. I had gotten back to Hong Kong Central in time for lunch. ("I wouldn't Larkin had said, 'if I could come back the same day.' That was now possible.)

"I don't like Hong Kong," Mr. Lu said. "It's too crowded."

"Is it too full of gweilos?" I asked, meaning foreigners.

Mr. Lu laughed politely, so I asked him about something that had been on my mind for a while. Some that had been on my mind for a while. If he happened to be with another Chinese person and one of them called attention to an American in the distance, would they normally use the term "foreign devil"? ("That foreign devil is very tall," for example.)

"Yes. If he was a man. If it was a woman we would say gweibo."

"So to speak." There were, however, no gweilos here, no tourists at all. Why would they come here? I had

seen no tourists in Guangzhou. None in the provincial towns. There was a park in Shenzhen, but it was not for foreigners, it was for the Chinese, a China theme park, Splendid China, with replicas of every "sight" in China: a Great Wall section, a temple, a pagoda, a group of terra-cotta warriors, and so forth. Tourists, I realize, are an irrelevance in these economic zones; there is no place for them, everything moves too quickly for them, and really, there is nothing to see.

THE SHENZHEN MARKET covered six acres or more. At the butchers' stalls the cheapest meat was chicken at \$1.20 a catty (500 grams), beef was \$1.20, pork was \$1.40, dog was \$1.75, and snake was \$18.75. The dog-meat section of the market was no different from any of the others—a series of long stone slabs smeared with blood, with blood-flecked Chinese working their cleavers through stringy bone joints. The creatures themselves were either gutted and stung up on hooks or else piled in cuts, and even headless they were recognizable as dogs, from their long narrow muscles and their lean haunches.

As I drifted around the city with him, it was clear that Mr. Lu had put his Red Guard past behind him. He was proud of this proliferation of factories and housing blocks. Shenzhen was undoubtedly the best-organized city in China. The authorities tried to keep crime to a minimum—although this had become a major challenge. Eighty-two men in Shenzhen had recently been stripped of their party membership for being "prostitution patrons" (and a "half-year re-education" was also part of their punishment). But young women still quietly solicited in many bars—they were the current Chinese hooker fashion of very short shorts, once known in America by the evocative name "hot pants." The women were pretty. There were brothels too, many of them using the cover of barbershops ("I got suspicious when my husband needed a haircut every day," a wife says in a current Shenzhen joke). The women did not bother Mr. Lu. He called them "flies."

"If you open a window, you get some flies," he said, and he might have been quoting one of Deng's speeches. Whenever we saw something decadent or jarring in Shenzhen, Mr. Lu said, with the Chinese gift for euphemism, "More flies."

ONE NIGHT IN Shenzhen Mr. Lu and I were in a restaurant that at ten o'clock was abruptly turned into a disco, the sort of place that would have been unthinkable in Maoist times, when one could be sent to a pig farm in Mongolia for listening to Western music. There we were, talking about the future of Hong Kong over our shrimp and bamboo shoots, and the lights dimmed and young men began setting out sound equipment and tuning their guitars.

"Hong Kong will be handed over. China will give no assurances. These people in Hong Kong who are asking for elections and referendums are wasting their time," Mr. Lu was saying.

Then the lights were dimmed, the youths appeared, and the music started; and it was so loud we could not hear each other. The guitarists wore silver jogging suits, the lead singer was in blue. I recognized one or two of the songs—Michael Jackson was obviously popular here. Then the singer started hectoring the audience and waving green slips of paper.

What's he saying?"

"He's asking for requests."

The idea was that you would write down your request and hand it over to him. I took a slip of paper.

"I have a request. I want him to sing 'Dong Fang Hong.'"

Mr. Lu, delighted, copied down the Chinese characters and we passed it to the singer, who glanced at it and called out to his musicians. And without batting an eyelash, he began marching in step and singing "Dong fang



hong! Tai yang shang."

The East is Red!

The sun rises!

China produces Mao Zedong!

He works for the happiness of the people

He is the savor of the Chinese people

The East is Red!

When the musician was finished, he went back to singing rock songs.

## FIVE: HUIZHOU

HAVING TAKEN IN the cornucopia of bargains at the trade fair, I was curious to see where these products were made. I had heard of a well-run factory in Huizhou, and so I went by road through east-central Guangdong to this once sleepy town and met Mel Dickinson, the Welsh manager of a factory run by the Austrian family firm of Swarovski, purveyors of crystal to every duty-free shop on the planet. Four years ago, Dickinson arrived in Huizhou, the only expatriate in town. His orders were to sort out an almost bankrupt jewelry factory. It was like being sent to an outpost in old China, the gweilo struck in a factory in a riverbank town in rural Guangdong, hating its snakes, consoling himself with his print of Tsingtao beer at night while he labored with his workers to produce costume jewelry by the ton. The heat, the rubble, the stink, the terrible town, the melancholy—it could almost have been a portrait out of Somerset Maugham's *On a Chinese Screen* or the much earlier narratives of American or European expatriates in China. Dickinson considered my comparison and then said, "People like me came in the nineteenth century, and they lived the way I do. But they exploited the natives. We don't."

American department stores (\$40 ear-rings, \$60 pendants), the sorts of things that make women say, "These are fun." But the jewelry had caught on locally and was now being snapped up all over China. Soon the orders would be coming in and 350 people would be working to turn out bracelets, pins, necklaces, and pendants. His employees earned between [£]350 and [£]400 a month (\$60-\$70), and their hours were 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., with an hour off for lunch.

The factory, which looked like a gray-brick Victorian high school, seemed a happy place, most of it air-conditioned, all of it well lighted. Yet what impressed me about the operation was the amount of technical training the employees were being sent to Thailand to study another Swarovski operation. Everything—the wooden models, the rubber molds—was made on the spot. Even the tin alloy was bought in China.

Dickinson and I passed through a room where men and women were polishing earnings and pins.

"Polishing is the expensive part of the operation. See that?" It was a gold mushroom, curvaceous and gleaming, about two inches high. "A polisher can do only five an hour. That's why you cannot afford to polish in Europe." He told me that a worker in Ireland would get 15 Irish puts an hour, perhaps \$25. A polisher in China was paid 50 cents and did the job just as well. Anyone wondering why world manufacturing had moved to China might consider this simple example.

"This is the heart of the factory," Dickinson said in the electroplating shop. "This is where we make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." The alloy was plated with a layer of copper and then nickel, then was glided in a solution of potassium gold cyanide, which Dickinson bought in large quantities (about \$10,000 a kilo) from Hong Kong.

Being in a well-run, happy factory made me wonder about all the sweatshops that existed in this part of China. They were mostly in villages and damnably hard to find. I had tried to visit one, but the owners kept them

This proud to be true in Dickinson's case. He was a kind and hardworking man, clearly liked by his workers. His factory, Huisi Fashion Jewelry and Crafts Company Ltd., had won a top award in the province, Number One for Light Industry in Guangdong, for being the best-run, the most productive. Dickinson and his wife, Freda, had come to Huizhou in January 1989, "and almost walked straight out. The factory was filthy and silent. All I saw were workers having naps amidst orange peels and peanut shells. But I decided to stay. I liked the town. It was quiet and very safe."

Four months later, production was in full swing. Soon after that, the students occupied Tiananmen Square in Beijing. "Not a peep here in Huizhou," Dickinson said. "It was business as usual. There were some tanks in Guangzhou." The Chinese no longer need permits to travel around the country. This fact now allows for the movement of labor and keeps wages low. Within four years things changed in Huizhou. Prices tripled. The small town became a very large town of 2.3 million—a city, by American standards. More factories opened. Rice growers whose fields had been filled in and built on by developers flocked from the surrounding countryside; unable to find jobs, they slept rough and made the place unsafe with their murders, burglaries, muggings, and fights. Highway robbers frequently went through a hijacked bus emptying passengers' pockets. The day before payday, when the Huisi safe was full of cash, one of the factory workers broke in. Dickinson and some other men caught him before he opened the safe. The man received a four-year sentence for the break-in. If he had managed to get the safe open, he would have been executed. "This is the Wild West now," Dickinson said. "The authorities try hard, but it's not enough. Go downtown and you'll see masses of policemen. But after five o'clock there won't be any. They'll all have gone home."

Dickinson was modest and humorous in his self-effacing Welsh way, but he was pleased with its awards and its profits. The enterprise had been intended as an export effort, making gold-plated jewelry to be sold in



hidden and off-limits, not wanting their exploitation to be observed, particularly by a foreigner. I knew from various informants that the classic sweatshop was a textile- or umbrella-making or simple electronics operation owned by a Taiwanese or Hong Kong businessman, and typically it was an anonymous building in a rural village to which all the employees had been brought from one of the poorer provinces five or six hundred miles to the west, Sichuan or Gansu.

Back in the courtyard after our tour, I asked Dickinson if he had seen places with very bad working conditions.

"Oh, yes. I've seen many. Even joint ventures. They were so awful they would have made Charles Dickens throw up."

"What about sweatshops?"

"They're all over the place, but you'll never get in. My secretary's brother worked in one, though."

I asked to talk to Dickinson's secretary about sweatshops. Her name was Linda and she was in her late twenties, formerly a schoolteacher. Her English was excellent. "My brother works in one of those places. At first he was making ovens; now he is making telephones. He works until ten or eleven at night. Most weeks he works seven days, but now and then he gets a day off. His boss is from Taiwan. "For this he was paid [£] 200, or \$35, a month. Such pay was not exceptional; in fact, many of the rural people who had come to Huizhou would have settled for that sort of job.

"See that man?" Dickinson said to me as I was leaving. A dapper Chinese man in a well-cut suit, his hair fashionably permed, was picking his way across the cobbles of the courtyard with his narrow shiny shoes. He was in his thirties, the new executive—little man, big Rolex. I had seen enough of such people to realize I had lost interest in them, because they were the exception. I was more interested in daily life as it was being borne by the majority of people—workers, gardeners, market traders—and in the changing configurations of the landscape.

Still, this man was unavoidable. He was a client from Shanghai and had come to sign a contract for an order. When the man was out of earshot, on his tour of the factory, Dickinson whispered to me, "He has a check in his pocket for me, made out for 1 million renminbi. That's the down payment. His order is two and a half million."

There was another man in the courtyard, a cripple, and his body was so twisted and mis-shapen he could move only by occasionally touching the ground with his free hand, straining with his serious face. But he was tidy, his clothes were clean. He made his way crabwise through the gate to the porcelain factory next door.

"I've been looking at him for four years," Dickinson said. "I have never heard him complain."

MEL DICKINSON WAS kindly and solicitous of his employees; he was also atypical. Most factory bosses are more like the man I met who ran a large, wholly owned American enterprise in a city forty miles outside Huizhou. I promised my informant I would be circumspect. I was met by a fresh-faced American manager, who asked me why I happened to be interested in his company's product.

"I'm planning to write an article," I said, "about change in south China. And your part in it."

"Wait a minute," he said, becoming officious. "I don't want to be in your article. I don't want to be quoted. I don't want my name on it. Everything I say has to be off the record. If you want information, you can talk to our P.R. people in Hong Kong."

"It won't be much of an article if I use public-relations brochures," I said, thinking that it was precisely the sort of unhelpful attitude I had met among old Commies and hacks in the old Marxist-Leninist China.

"I'm sorry, I can't help you."

"I was just curious about your experience in China. I

promise to respect your wish to be anonymous."

The Nameless American Factory Manager in the Nameless American Factory considered this and finally said, "We're doing very well. We're on schedule."

Everything's going ahead. We have a great team." He set his face at me as though defying me to find anything wrong with what he had just said. I found a great deal wrong. He was unhelpful and probably untruthful. It was the sort of thing you would have heard from the cadre of the Revolutionary Red Star Work Unit during the height of the Cultural Revolution.

"How many people do you employ?"

"Eighty-five."

"What do you pay people?"

"See?" he fumed. "That's the wrong question! Why don't you ask whether they get transportation? What about cafeteria privileges, holidays, overtime, all the rest of the benefits?"

"I was coming to that," I said (and he might have added haircuts and showers, two other perks Chinese workers receive in joint-venture factories). But, seeing that I had stung him, I persisted with my wage question.

"About [£]500 a month, maybe less," he guessed.

"Call it [£]450. That is \$80 a month at the official rate of exchange. It was slightly above the going rate by Chinese standards. The clothing factories, run mainly by Taiwanese and Hong Kong businessmen, pay [£]200 or less a month.

"That's a very good salary here," the man said. It is very likely that he wants that amount.

"What if your workers didn't think it was adequate and decided to go on strike?"



"They'd have a problem. We're a non-union operation in the States. We don't deal with unions, we deal with individuals. My door is always open to anyone who's got a complaint."

I doubted that anyone would risk it. Even in our brief conversation this Nameless American seemed to me to be a rather forbidding person. He told me that he had been living in a hotel in the nearby city for almost seven months. A manager of a plant in one of the western states of America, he had never lived in China before.

"How do you like it here?"

"It's an incredible place."

"I think [I named the city] is horrendous."

"I've seen fewer beggars here than in [his hometown in the United States]."

"Have you been to the railway station? Every third person is bumming money."

"Maybe you're right. I wasn't counting that. But there's no hippies. In [his hometown] you find hippies everywhere. Guys with long hair, just living off the government. I've got a personal pet peeve against graffiti. [His hometown] is full of it. You don't see that here. And even if a person lives in a humble house, they're still neat and clean. I like that."

Very soon after that, he signaled that the interview was at an end and that it was time for me to leave the building. He did not offer to show me the plant. He repeated that he did not wish to be quoted or identified. I said I would respect his privacy, and I believe I have.

The man's identity does not really matter. What was notable was that in the course of the conversation he had, without realizing it, more or less parroted Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung. He believed in obedience, cleanliness, thrift, learning by doing, and

hard work; he wanted each worker to be the "rustless screw" of Maoist ideology.

I had the distinct sense that most American businessmen in China were Maoists in the same sense, not dreamers like the old man, but resembling the monolithic-minded bureaucrats who followed him, the Hard Lines (Qiang ying pai) or Extreme Leftists (ji zhou pai). But a "leftist" in China is actually very repressive and right-wing, and, to their delight, many foreign businessmen find the leftists have a great deal in common with their own enthusiasms, prejudices, and obsessions.

A kind of moral blindness afflicts many people who do business with the Chinese, since, along with everything else, China is still a dictatorship of pitiful wages, fairly miserable living conditions, and a brutal legal system, and still practicing such quaint customs as convict labor, child labor, and mass (and often public) executions. Most people engaged in trade with the Chinese are so besotted by their profits that they could not care less about these things. Even where the public health is concerned, business is business. When the British pharmaceutical firm Glaxo estimated that there were 30 million asthmatics in China, they set up a \$10 million factory to make an anti-asthma medicine in a joint venture, choosing an appropriate city, Chongqing, where the air quality is reportedly eight times worse than normal.

ONE OF MAO'S most interesting essays is called "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People." It deals with unity and harmony. He writes, "As for the imperialistic countries, we should unite with their peoples and strive to coexist peacefully with those countries, do business with them and prevent any possible war, but under no circumstances should we harbor any unrealistic notions about them." Elsewhere in the essay he writes, "We must learn to look at problems all-sidedly, seeing the reverse as well as the obverse side of things. In given conditions, a bad thing can lead to good results, and a good thing to bad results." Mao had been prophetic. Many of the cities and towns I saw in Fujian and Guangdong, with the exception of the

Special Economic Zone of Xiamen, looked much worse than they ever had, more crowded and chaotic and far less comfortable than ten or fifteen years ago. The gardens and parks were a mess, people's manners generally were aggressive and their attitudes insufferable. The physical and social fabric of China, in what one presumes is a transitional stage, is in tatters. Strangely, this is considered progress.

THE ANCIENT PLACES and the new places in developing China seem interchangeable now. This is an effect of the building boom—frugal, hastily erected structures did not age well and looked elderly and in need of renovation as soon as they were finished. So far, the Chinese miracle has not encompassed graceful or even sturdy architecture. The Chinese have a genius for putting up buildings that are instantly seedy and almost ruinous. As soon as the ribbon is cut, the dust clings and the cracks appear.

Zhuhai, a one-hour ferry ride from Shekou across the wide, tea-colored river mouth of the Pearl, was a Special Economic Zone. The ferry, the Hai Shan, had 400 seats, and, this being China, every seat was taken. Each one was numbered and reserved. You would have thought that since everyone had his or her own seat, boarding the ferry would be a relaxed business. This was not the case. It was a physical struggle to get up the gangway. Whenever a signal is given in China, people jump. It is as though there is a deep memory of individuals having gone hungry or gotten lost or been left behind because they hesitated or weren't aggressive enough. The habit learned from periods of extreme poverty has now become a Chinese reflex, the instinct to push toward any door, any vehicle, any ticket window, showing is the only way forward. And so China is an experience of elbows, now more than ever. This get-it-now instinct has been officially sanctioned, and some of the features of society that old gweilios and older Chinese lament are the absence of politeness and the presence of a new reckless assertiveness. I was on half a dozen airplane flights, and each time the plane began to descend people threw off their seat belts and jumped



up and staggered down the aisle, to be first off the plane. Flight attendants howl and the passengers retreat, but when the flight attendants' backs are turned the people are up again, gathering their bags, moving unsteadily in the landing of taxi-ing plane. Even traffic in Chinese cities or on congested roads seems to push and compete in the same way, cars and trucks beeping and the same way, cars and trucks beeping and queuing, jumping, moving quickly into any available space.

Just a few years ago Zhuhai was a village resort, yet now it looked as old and citified as Macau, founded in 1557. Walking from the Gong Bei district of Zhuhai to Macau—it took me an hour, including passing through two sets of immigration officers—is like a stroll from one side to the other of the same decrepit city. Yet Zhuhai, on its breezy bay, was one of the more pleasant places I saw. It had beaches and parks and a main drag. In every restaurant and lobby bar there were Chinese talking on cellular phones; and on one occasion at each of six tables around me there was someone talking on a phone. Five years ago it was almost impossible to make a call from the best hotel. The boom in telecommunications in part of the Chinese miracle, and even prostitutes wear beepers.

"The yellow Trade"—the euphemism for vice in China—was brisk in Zhuhai. The city's fairly steamy reputation no doubt derived from its proximity to Macau, as Shenzhen's derived from Hong Kong. But the present concern with manufacturing and the downplaying of tourism has meant that the Yellow Trade is mainly for locals or visiting provincials. A foreign tourist industry would have produced much larger numbers of massage parlors and call girls, more vicious practices, much higher prices. The narrow lanes in Gong Bei were the haunt of skinny hookers in shorts and high heels, and they circulated among the outdoor restaurants and sidewalk cafes and the men selling live snakes—xiao long, little dragons—out of baskets (£[500 each, for the thick ones they called Cross Mountain Blacks). Fengboshan Park, in the center of the city, was popular among transients and seniors, and in a vice raid while I

was in Zhuhai ten men were arrested there, the eldest seventy-two. After their pimp, a woman, blabbed, her rates was published. Full sexual intercourse cost up to £[60, or about \$10.50; bosom-touching was £[10; and "nude peeks" were £[5. As in other parts of China, barbershops and hairdressers were the cover for "relaxation services" (masturbation at £[50).

The city is notable not just for adventures in the skin trade but for violent crime too. I asked various people about the crime rate. They all said yes, it's terrible, it's these outsiders, young boys mostly, no respect. No one cared to elaborate. No one liked discussing this subject with da bidzi ("Big Nose"), and who could blame them? Two interesting facts emerged, though. The people said many of the thieves carried weapons. That was alarming. The second fact was that armed robbery was always a capital offense in China. And everyone I spoke to was in favor of the death penalty—for murder, for robbery, for arson, for pimping, you name it. This was not just a topic for idle conversation. With the growth in prosperity and reform, there were more executions than ever, and in some cities crime was out of control.

I'd had death-penalty conversations many times before in China. The Chinese response was still unanimous. Give the criminal a bullet in the head. Let the victim's family watch the death throes, and make the criminal's family pay for the bullet.

One argument for the death penalty is that it deters crime. I happen to think this is a specious argument, and it is manifestly not the case in China, where the crime rate has risen right along with the number of executions. Amnesty International reported in May 1992 that "estimates from unofficial sources for the number of executions in 1991 range from 5,000 to 20,000." The escalating use of the death penalty in China since 1989 is apparently continuing: in the month of January 1993, Amnesty International recorded 1,891 death sentences, including more than 1,000 executions.

When I challenged a more forthcoming Chinese nam

named Liu, he told me that people stole—and murdered—in spite of the death penalty, "because they don't know the law."

"But the government publicizes the executions," I argued. "They drive the condemned men around town in the back of a truck, with signs around their neck. They put the dead people's pictures up at the railway station. How could they not know?"

"They are ignorant."

"But everyone in China knows that they will be executed for committing certain crimes," I said.

Mr. Liu said, "Some people feel it won't apply to them, that they will get off with a prison sentence."

Sometime later a woman said to me, "Many people in China do not value their lives. They don't regard their lives as precious, and therefore they're willing to take risks."

IT WAS IN Zhuhai that I was able to verify the rumor about expensive brandy. I found some likely bottle at the Zhuhai Merchandise Fair and asked to examine them. They were crystal decanters of Remy Martin Louis XIII Grande Champagne Cognac, selling for £[8,580—that was almost \$1,500 a bottle.

"Do you sell many of these?" I asked.

"About four a month."

"Any to gweilos?"

"No. All to Chinese."

Later that day I was marveling about this to a Chinese woman, who said to me, "When American first came to China, we thought they were rich. Now it is we who are rich."

This remark led to a discussion about envy among a



number of Chinese around me. Several of them maintained that there was very little envy in the new China.

"If a persons get rich, the attitude is "Good luck to him," one Chinese said, "If I work hard I'll get rich, too."

"You don't burn a man's house down because he has a better one than you," another Chinese said. "There is even a sense that the rich man might help you."

Just as confidently, this view was contradicted by a man who described hing yen bing, or "red eye disease," a chronic condition in China wherein the envious person stared greedily at anyone who had more than he had.

Most of the speakers agreed that the wealthiest people in China were hidden. They were not the people one saw on the streets, talking on cellular phones, buying expensive brandy, or wearing Rolexes. They were per-haps living as they always had, except that they were squirreling their money away, preferably in hard cur-rency (the currency dealers thronged every sidewalk in these economic zones, pestering and offering twice the bank rate for Hong Kong dollars). People with dispos-able income bought gold, TVs, appliances. Some bought land. Many believed that the best way to pos-ition themselves was to buy stocks of newly listed com-panies on the Shenzhen stock market.

Inflation, which was running at around 16 %, was the cause of some of this behavior. It was also the cause of a labor dispute at a Canon camera factory in Zhuhai. There had been eighteen strikes Guangdong in 1993, but they had been small affairs. This strike was different because the workers and reasonably well paid, the company was immensely profitable, and some of the strikers were administrative staffers. After a three-day stoppage, the 800 striking workers were back on the job while talks, continued. The workers (who were earning from \$85 to \$175 a month) wanted a 30 % to 50 % raise in pay to keep pace with inflation. They were concerned not only about rising rents and house prices but also about the recent increase in bus fares and the cost of cigarettes. Canon's Japanese owners had offered 7 %. There was a stalemate. There may still be a stale-

mate, both sides refusing to budge. But for the workers it is a losing battle, because there will always be Chinese lining up for jobs at low wages, and the Chinese government has made it very nearly a duty for its nationals to work uncomplainingly.

Despite such obvious signs of capitalism, there were official posters and radio lectures listing The Four Adheres:

—Adhere to Marxism-Leninism — Adhere to the Socialist Road — Adhere to Proletarian Dictatorship — Adhere to Party Leadership

"Do people repeat these things?" I asked.

The answer: "Yes. Like the Bible.

I thought, Exactly, because that clearly reminded me of all the cant and hypocrisy that goes under the name of Christianity. And it was no different for the Chinese, who were able to parrot party slogans while at the same time hustling on the black market or trying (as one man did) to run me down in his BMW while he talked on his cellular phone.

#### SEVEN: AT THE FERRY IN SHEKOU

I WAS STANDING AT the ferry terminal in Shekou, the old merchants' quarter on the east bank of the Pearl, and was approached by half dozen young men, who began jeering at me, flicking cigarette lighters in my face and nagging me with the Chinese locution for "Are you buying or not buying?" They fol-lowed me, heckling and poking fun. This wasn't the first time since my return to the People's Republic that I'd had the sense that this prosper-ous, overcrowded, and in-your-face China was much more like the pre-revolutionary old China than like the period dominated by Mao's selfless mottoes of anti-capitalism. Old China in my

mental image was an ugly landscape of factories and farms, expatriates and competing crowds, back lanes ringing with the hammer of tinsmiths, and vast cities to tycoons, prostitutes, beggars, hawkers, hustlers, and peasants—furious activity, everything for sale, crowded streets, markets piled high with produce, an intensely competitive commercial life, factories turning out crystal goblets, and sweatshops making shirts. Except for the occasional intrusion of police, life went on, and politics was a novelty and a nuisance that no one liked but everyone tol-erated. Old China had not been a tourist destination either.

Last April I thought of this in many places in south China, the ones that had grown in four or five years from being landing stages on tributaries of the Pearl River to the size of proper towns. These settlements looked much like ones in the old China. But behind their appearance was something new and crucial: the memory of the intervening Maoist years. Why be senti-mental? seemed to be the Chinese attitude now. Because of the hardships and unpredictable events of the Maoist years, people had developed sharp elbow and an instinct to snatch what they could while the time was right.

Mao, of course, had wanted to create a population of revolutionaries. But in the end his campaigns and purges turned out to be an elaborate form of aver-sion therapy. For what seems to have emerged from the Age of Mao was a vast army of reac-tionaries and opportunists. Mao's greatest success—though he may not have realize it—was in turning his people into sin-gle-minded materialists. Ideologically speaking, the Long March has taken a sharp right turn, down the capitalist road.

WHEN COUNTRIES modernize these days, they become Americanized, and often lose their cul-tural identity. China is the exception. The more China develops, the more it seems to be turning back into old China, just as regional and unequal, ambitious, busily self-sufficient, and





hard to read as China in the Tang dynasty. As it modernizes, it reveals a greater complexity and a deeper Chineseness. And yet there are differences. Whereas the old China was informed by Confucianism and, in some places, Christianity, China now seems totally materialistic, canner, wiser, even selfish. The provinces of Guangdong and Fujian may have the oily, muddy look of old China, but except for filial piety they have few of China's old reverences, the Confucian virtues of refinement, gentleness, decency, and good order. And there are the throwbacks that show in something as simple as tipping. In Maoist times it was not done. Then, with the tourists and businessmen of the 1980s, some tips were given. Now in the 1990s a tip is expected when a transaction takes place or services is given. There can be a real ugliness when a tip is not offered, and there is a new permutation—for many services the tip comes before any act is performed. In a very short time in China tipping has turned into bribery. Or is it bribery? After all, this is the East. Perhaps a tip has turned back into what it has been in this hemisphere for thousands of years—baksheesh, not a reward, but merely the cost of doing business.

The pressure to get things done quickly has bred crime. With bad roads and slow services and backed-up deliveries, grease helps. Many people I spoke to in China, foreign and Chinese alike, said that grease was an absolute necessity for a smooth business operation. Their view was that prosperity without crime is almost unthinkable. Corruption is not new in China, single social problem will continue to be crime. The triads, crime syndicates, and secret societies that flourished in China for centuries and seemed to be stamped out have returned, many from Hong Kong and Taiwan, where the ritualistic brotherhoods and protection rackets were reconstituted. And the highwaymen and cat burglars are back. As recently as seven or eight years ago, you could with confidence have sent your seventeen-year-old daughter traipsing all over China alone. No longer China has become unsafe; I feel it is likely to become even less safe. But then, it was for thousands of years a country famous for its defensive perimeters—behind the Great Wall were more walls, walled compounds and fortified cities. These days, look at any new housing development of condominiums or apartments or single-

family dwellings and you will see high perimeter walls. Outside these walls there are the poor, some of them predatory, most of them simply pathetic. They are the rural poor of subsistence farmers in neglected provinces that have never known prosperity in the whole of Chinese history. It is doubtful that life will go on, but such extreme class divisions will re-create even more of the old China, more conspicuous wealth and ownership and a deeper oppression, of which the client and his prostitute are just one version, and the factory owner and his sweatshop are another. No one owned gold in Maoist China—there was none to buy—but before Liberation, the Chinese had always been great buyers of gold and jewelry. The habit is back and was one of the factors in the spectacular worldwide rise in the price of gold in the first half of this year. It is not greed; it is another technique of survival, a Chinese way of concentrating wealth, protecting against inflation, and hoarding against the inevitable hard times ahead. Deng, they know, is not long for this world. His chosen successors are, like him, believers in economic progress, not political change. But it remains to be seen whether they prevail.

In the past, whenever times were bad, in periods of famine or war or repression, the Chinese—the most portable of people—picked up a small bundle of their belongings and fled for their safety and well-being. Not all Chinese have gold in their little bundles, but some do. The others pay it in advance to me who smuggle them out of China and into other countries. As recent events have shown, even in a time of Chinese prosperity, people wish to leave China, many of them for the United States. China's growth and destabilization may come to have important consequences here. American immigration officials estimate that 80,000 undocumented Chinese are arriving each year on

America's shores,



and the number is rising.

UNTIL RECENTLY, CHINESE life was not so much enigmatic as unknown. We did not have a clear perception of Chinese stubbornness, tenacity, or materialism; the Chinese lack of illusions; their strong sense of family; their powerful survival instinct; their hatred of complainers; their passion for secrecy. More than any people I have ever come across, the Chinese are obsessive about living in the present. They don't look back, because in the strange interplay of light and shadow, splendor and misery, of their history, there is too much to look back upon. Chinese life is both active and hesitant, like a creature being pursued, now in motion now stopped and tremulous, never at rest, always alert.

The Chinese clock has a tick unlike any other on earth, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, contracting, expanding, with an alarm that might go off at any moment. We Americans expect tomorrow to be pretty much like today, and perhaps a little better. We find it strange that a people should perpetually anticipate disasters. But then, six thousand years of disasters have made the Chinese skeptical and somewhat untrusting. These days everyone speak of the Chinese miracle, but when has the world taken much notice of Chinese catastrophes, of which the Japanese rape and plunder of China before and during the World War II and the earthquake that instantly killed a quarter of a million Chinese in 1976 are but two instances? The Chinese people know they cannot count on the future, since "future" in Chinese terms might mean a brutal decree or sudden reversal enacted in the dark hours of tomorrow morning. What they are doing now was illegal yesterday, and might be proscribed once again. Under-standing the uniqueness of the Chinese clock, you begin to get an inkling of Chinese hope and the attentiveness of Chinese labor. Their sense of survival is not a racial but a political imperative, for Chinese life is full of instances of people who lingered and looked back and were lost, overwhelmed and buried by one avalanche or another in their country's long, unpredictable history.

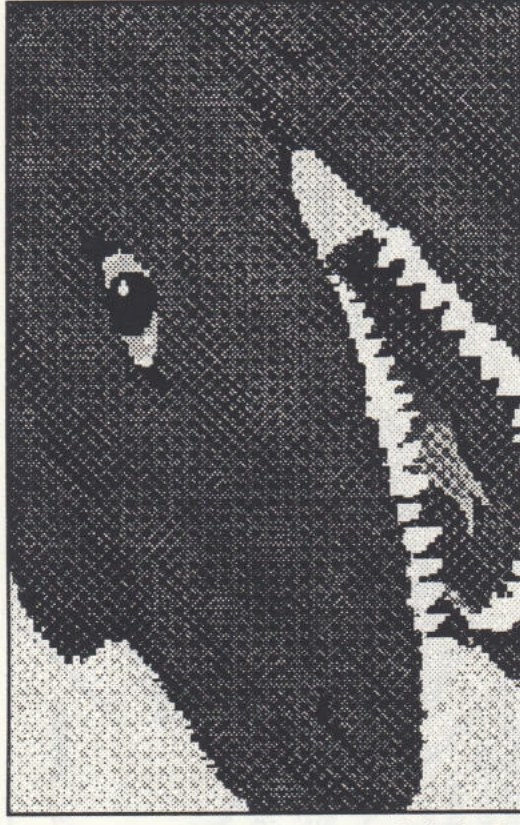


# Down, Rex.

## (Japanese film industry)

**Japan's motion picture studios are losing money because their films do not appeal to modern Japanese saturated with US culture, and they rarely make movies which appeal to foreign audiences. Nikkatsu, a Japanese film company, declared bankruptcy in July 1993.**

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IT IS hard to imagine a place more prone to dinomania than fad-following, Spielberg-infatuated Japan, home of Godzilla and other B-movie monsters. "Jurassic Park", which opened on July 17th, has raked in ¥1.7 billion (\$16m). Yet, around Tokyo, its ads are outnumbered by those for "Rex", a familiar-sounding tale of a tiny tyrannosaurus preserved by the wonders of nature and brought to life by the wonders of science.

Unfortunately, industry types think that among teenagers hardened by video-game violence, Mr Spielberg's cranky carnivores will eat "Rex" and its prehistoric Muppet (which one critic called "a baby E.T. in dino drag") for lunch. If so, "Rex" will be a perfect symbol of the troubled Japanese film industry.

With box-office receipts last year of ¥152 billion, Japan is the world's second-biggest movie market. But the golden age of Japanese cinema is long gone—killed by television and video games. In the 1950s a billion people went to the pictures each year; last year fewer than 200m did. And whereas two-thirds of the movies released there in 1960 were made in Japan, now two-thirds come from overseas, mostly Hollywood.

As local film makers' fortunes have faded, they have been forced to diversify into property development, soft-porn film production and more. On July 1st Nikkatsu, once the country's leading producer and distributor, said it was in effect bust, and filed for the Japanese equivalent of chapter 11 with debts of ¥49.7 billion. Nikkatsu's cash crunch was partly caused by problems at a unit which traded golf membership.

The deeper problem with Japan's film industry is its "uncommercial" culture—a legacy of its once thriving domestic market. Compared with Hong Kong, where the minute domestic market forces moguls to make movies that appeal throughout Asia, Japan's producers are hopelessly insular. The previous film from the director of "Rex" was a 16th-century story featuring thousands of Canadian college students dressed as samurai warriors; it cost a whopping ¥5 billion to make. Though it was a hit in Japan, it pulled in a meagre \$200,000 overseas, and barely broke even. "Rex" should be so lucky.



Hello, my name is Clyde Gentry and I am currently editor-in-chief of the Hong Kong Film Connection, a serious publication that covers all facets of the HK film industry. We are located in Dallas, Texas, and we are slowly gaining subscribers from all over the world including Australia and Japan. Our chief goal is to promote the films of Hong Kong to the normal moviegoer. All of our reviews and any major names have the Chinese characters next to them to aid the reader in his or her search at the Chinese video stores. Much of the attitude that typifies the normal "zine" has been traded in for hard research and information even if that information pertains to our competitors (last issue we had a few paragraphs on Asian Trash Cinema's book with an address). We have theater listings of Hong Kong films when available, filmographies of directors and stars, and articles that cover the varying areas.

At present, we are working on our sixth issue with over twenty pages in newspaper style format. Our aim is to go for national advertising so that we can lower our subscription rate (just covers the cost) and add more pages. This issue will have five large reviews and close to fifty capsules plus a complete Chow Yun-Fat filmography and a definitive guide to finding the best of what Hong Kong has to offer. This includes over seventy names of stars and directors with the American names, most commonly used Chinese names, and the universal Chinese characters. Credits will also be listed with the Chinese characters for the avid fan. The inventive vigor that once inhabited the American cinema has been replaced by star power and money. There are many people looking for an alternative and Hong Kong provides the answer. A larger portion of our publication is spent on the action films, but we review the comedies and dramas just the same. Hong Kong stars possess a diversity that few American counterparts can match. Tony Leung Kar Fei for instance, can play in romantic roles, dramas, comedies, action films, and can hold his own in English speaking parts as in Jean Jacques Annaud's *The Lover*. I know it seems like I am rambling on, but this is my first time, so bear with me.

What's new on the Hong Kong film scene? Well, the new Jackie Chan film, *Drunken Master II* is amazing of course, but what about the new Chow Yun-Fat or Stephen Chiu. Yun-Fat's *Treasure Hunt* is a mixed bag that fails to develop any of the ideals it presents. The funny parts and Yun-Fat's mere presence however, make this film mildly entertaining. The new Stephen Chiu, *Love on Delivery*, was not well excepted by the Chinese, but I thought that it was very funny in spots and had a healthy dose of action. The big director on the rise is most likely Yuen Woo-Ping, who became famous for the original *Drunken Master*. His comeback film was *Iron Monkey* which was so good, that Industrial Light and Magic even tried to get the film's producer, Tsui Hark to come stateside and do an American version. His next film, *Tai-Chi Master*, is probably one of Jet Lee's best films away from his *Once Upon a Time in China* days. His latest effort, *Wing Chun*, takes the kung fu films to a whole new direction making the first "female kung fu comedy" starring Michelle Yeoh. Woo Ping has a new film that was actually a lesser product from the Chinese New Year called *Fiery Romance* starring Brigitte Lin and Benny Kwok. Out of all the kung fu directors working in Hong Kong, Woo Ping is probably the best with the wire stuff which has seemed to become the mainstay of films of this type. Michelle Yeoh also has a new film on the horizon called *Wonder Seven*, a contemporary piece much like her own *Project S*. Jade Leung, whose only real claim to fame is *Black Cat*, has a new film coming out called *Satin Steel*, a sexy gunplay actioner with a fairly sizeable budget.



Has anyone ever heard of Clarence Ford? The following is an excerpt from the HKFC about this exciting new director.

### Clarence Ford: Is Anyone Ready for Him?

Hong Kong directors may have their influences, but for the most part, they have unique styles that are indicative to their productions. When John Woo left Hong Kong for the states, it was unsure as to who would take his place as the new hot property on the film horizon. Tsui Hark had always been a reigning contender, but his films were thought to be too unaccessible for American audiences to undertake. Corey Yuen Kwai, Ching Siu-Tung, and Ringo Lam were all competent directors turning in some great films to liven up the action film genre, but who would have thought that Clarence Fok Yiu Leung (Clarence Ford) would take everyone by surprise. With his latest film, *The Black Panther Warriors*, Ford is getting bigger stars, more money, and crazier ideas that took six cinematographers to get across.

Ford is like John Woo in many ways, but in the complete opposite direction. His films are action comedies that use completely unintelligent characterizations to hold them together. Woo's action sequences use a balletic flow of slow motion and realism while Ford creates what can only be described as "subliminal action". While Woo spends time editing a scene to make it more realistic, Ford slices and dices to achieve unimaginable goofiness. At first glance, this unorthodox technique could almost be denounced as amateurish fluff, but Ford's vision demands such lunacy. No other director working in Hong Kong or anywhere else for that matter can edit a scene faster than Clarence Ford. He doesn't necessarily want the viewer to comprehend what is happening, but merely tries to create a surreal effect of what could be happening. Thus, every Ford action scene requires several viewings and a few possible freeze frames to possibly ascertain the lunacy involved. This is not the same two fist ed gunplay or high flying kung fu, but something entirely different.

In *Naked Killer* for example, the opening scene has a female assassin kicking a dumbbell across the floor tripping up her male prey. She then does a back flip upside down on a curl bar holding two dumbbells in which she crushes his head. She flips over, back kicking him across the room onto a chest machine. She drops the two dumbbells, pulls out a gun, and shoots him in the chest. From the time she kicks the dumbbell, the scene took only ten seconds with fifteen cuts. Moments like this have defined Ford's action scenes as idiotic concoctions that can never be second guessed or thought of as routine.

Cartoons seem to be the only influence for Clarence Ford because his characters can never be trusted or taken for being predictable. In the scope of a Ford film, one of his characters is capable of doing anything. In *They Came To Rob Hong Kong*, which is a forerunner for *The Black Panther Warriors*, one male character clings to his baby daughter throughout the entire film, even during the action scenes. To keep the baby quiet, he breast feeds the baby ending in a hilarious moment where he must prove his love for the baby revealing four inch bruise marks on both nipples. In *Naked Killer*, Simon Yam plays a cop with a past that when faced with even seeing a gun, vomits uncontrollably. Tony Leung, from Jean Jacques Annaud's *The Lover*, goes insane and backflips out of every scene when he hears even one word spoken in English in *The Black Panther Warriors*.

Ford's characters are perfect complements to the bizarre worlds he puts them in, although they would be outcasts in any other kind of film. John Woo stays close to similar themes of friendship, loyalty, and trust, using his masterful constructions to carry any particular mood or action. With Ford, there are no themes or depth to worry about. His characters can simply act freely exhibiting slightly perverse, hokey personas that lead to some very funny results.

Ford's editing style and ludicrous characters are placed in what looks like present day Hong Kong. His set pieces are filled with lots of color, especially blue and red, which reemphasizes the cartoon motif so ever present in all his films. *The Dragon from Russia* is even based off of a Japanese anime called *Crying Freeman* starring Sam Hui and Maggie Cheung. As far as the action is concerned, this film is pure Ford, but Sam Hui is badly miscast and shows little eccentricity of a Ford regular.

Ford began his career in film as an actor in films such as *Naughty Boys* and *Enchanted Night*. *Naughty Boys* is a Jackie Chan produced vehicle that has plenty of incredible stuntwork, but Ford plays for the laughs only.



In 1989, Ford made two films: *They Came from Hong Kong* and *Ice Man Cometh*. *They Came from Hong Kong* has a linear story involving a double crossing criminal who gathers a diverse group of characters to achieve some muffled goal. The film stars 70's kung fu actor Dean Shek, who produced this film and *Naked Killer*, Mr. Vampire's Chin Siu Ho, and a then newcomer, Yau Shuk Ching. With very little money to work with, the film lacks the colorful look of Ford's last three films, but is extremely funny at times and has some incredible action scenes. Chin Siu Ho, brother of Chin Kar Lok, is given the chance to do some very impressive martial art acrobatics without the Ford touch. Ford can use a pan or wide shot, but after his first two films, his "subliminal action" technique is the driving force behind his filmmaking.

*Ice Man Cometh* is a departure from usual Ford fare because it uses very little of the technique and actually has a very good story with believable characterizations. The film is a cross between the American productions, *Ice Man* and *Highlander*, and uses film brothers, Yuen Biao and Yuen Wah, who play two arch rival warriors that must continue their heated battle in present day Hong Kong after being thawed out from the ice that had kept them alive. Biao stays very close to the fantasy genre, and this film may be one of his best outside of Tsui Hark's *Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain*. The film has some warmth and light comedy showing that Ford can handle scenes that require a gentler hand. One fight between Biao and Wah on a jeep suspended in air is the only memorable Ford moment. The climax shows the talents of both action stars using the normal textbook pans and wide shots, but this film is the only exception.

In 1992, Clarence Ford fully developed his art to maturity with two films: *Gun n' Rose* and *Naked Killer*. *Gun n' Rose* has a few good dramatic scenes, but Ford is parodying the gangster trend of late 80's with Alan Tang playing a very poor Chow Yun-Fat imitation. Ford even uses the still frame end to a gun fight, a technique associated with Woo's filmmaking. The film also stars Simon Yam, Andy Lau, and Leon Lai. The plot stems from a crime boss who appoints his adopted son to take over the family business over his two biological sons. Hired hitmen, police informants, and brother versus brother carry this stylish, gangster flick along with plenty of Ford moments. In one scene, Tang is confronted by two motorcycle thugs where he jumps up in mid air and decapitates one and kicks the other. He then does a forward flip over the top of another motorcycle knocking the rider to the ground jabbing him in the face with a sword. *Gun n' Rose* is the first film that utilizes Ford's complete style involving the unpredictable characters, colorful costumes and backgrounds, quick paced editing, and top notch actors.

Produced the same year, *Naked Killer* is the film that Ford first gained popularity in the states and created controversy in Hong Kong. Scripted by Wong Jing, Yau Shuk Ching returns in her second Ford film shedding her clothes and her prim and proper look for this level III violent, sexploitation that combines two commercial successes, *Basic Instinct* and *Le Femme Nikita*. The film concerns a troubled young woman who is taken in by a professional female assassin and is taught the tricks of the trade. This film has a very sexy, sleek vision that presents the best example of Ford's fascination with color. The action scenes are wicked skirmishes inflicted by women that use the Ford "subliminal action" technique to the max. The film may be misconstrued as a drama, but by all accounts, it is a perverse, action film that has many original comedic attributes. After viewing this film, a peculiar question comes to mind: Is Loraine Bobbitt a Hong Kong film fan? *Naked Killer* shows that Ford is not afraid to go into the sexploitation arena, but this film as well as the ones before, are just primers for the incredible *Black Panther Warriors*.

If you would like more information on the Hong Kong Film Connection and a complimentary issue, please send a stamp to:

Hong Kong Film Connection  
P.O. Box 867225  
Plano, TX 75086-7225

I look forward to seeing what everyone else is doing and I will see you next issue!

-Clyde Gentry III



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(212) 989-8217. THIS IS THE ONLY INTERESTING AND RELEVANT TO MAFFAPA THING I WOULD  
SHARE THIS TIME; A PERFORMANCE WHICH WAS PROFOUNDLY, EXQUISITELY BEAUTIFUL AND  
MOVING IN THAT IT WAS A REAL CEREMONY OF DEEP SPIRITUAL MEANING.

FEB. 25, 26, 27  
The Asia Society's  
FESTIVAL OF KOREA  
presents

## CHINDO SIKKIM KUT: Korean Shaman Ritual

performed by the  
CHINDO SIKKIM KUT PRESERVATION GROUP

Park Pyong-Chon, Director

Park Pyon-chon; Kim Tae-rye  
Park Pyong-won;

Chong Suk-cha; Kim Ki-bong; Lee Wan-soon; Kim Pang-  
hyon;

Lee Jong-dae; Hong Ok-mee;

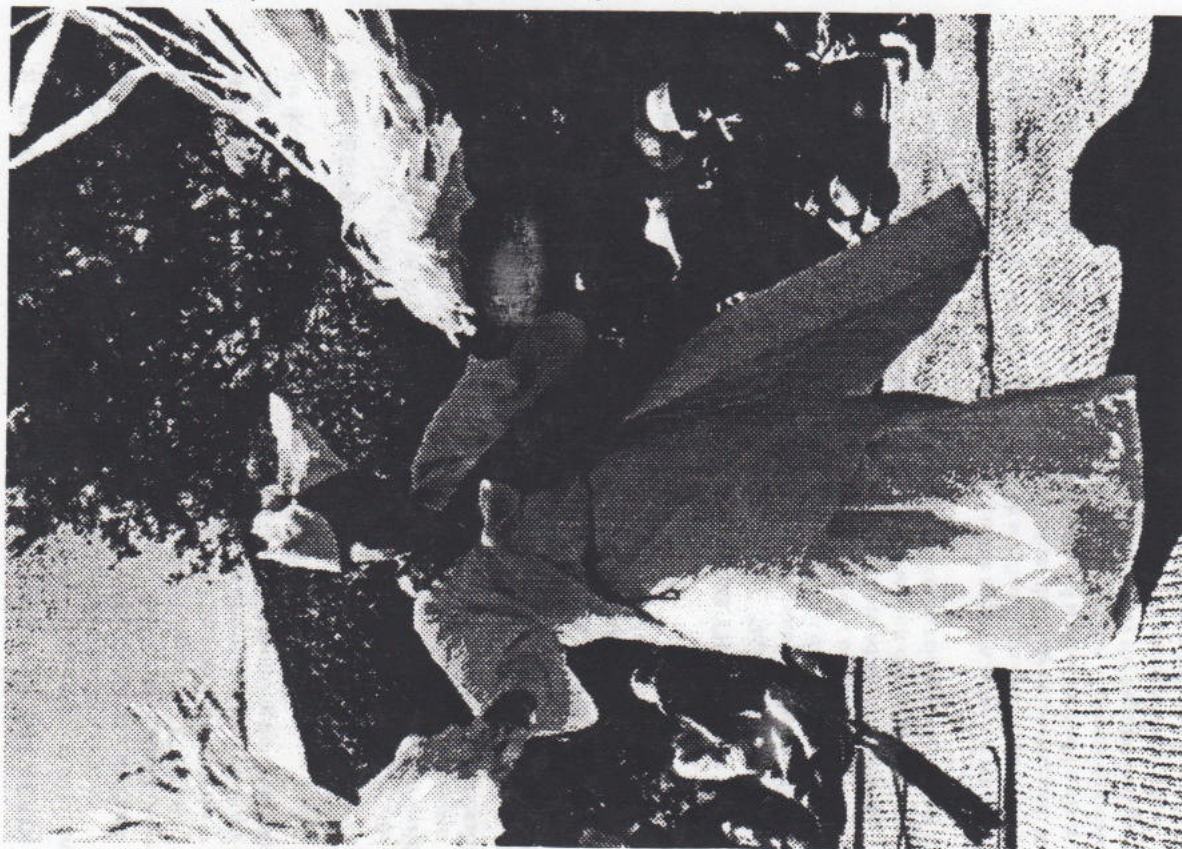
Lee Tae-baek; Park Hwan-young; Lim Soo-jung;

Program introduced by  
Theresa Ki-ja Kim, PhD

The Chindo Sikkim Kut Performances are funded, in part by Hyundai  
The Asia Society's Festival of Korea is sponsored by  
Philip Morris Companies Inc..  
Also supported by grants from the Korea Foundation, The Federation of  
Korean Industries, the Korea Foreign Trade Association and The Korea  
Chamber of Commerce

Korean artists are listed family name first as is customary in Korea

THIS KOREAN CULTURAL EVENT WAS ALSO ODDLY PROPHETIC, FOR EXACTLY ONE MONTH  
LATER, ON MAR. 26, MY FATHER "JINED THE ANCESTORS" AFTER SUFFERING  
FROM CANCER. I REPEAT THIS FUNERAL RITUAL IN MY MIND TO HELP ME WITH  
MY GRIEF & MOURNING. DAD IS AT PEACE BUT I MISS HIM - NATURALLY,



PROFESSIONALLY; 3 PERFORMANCES IN FEB, 4 IN MARCH & 3 IN APRIL (SO FAR) - NOT  
ADEQUATE BUT BETTER THAN THE PRECEDING MONTHS,



## CHINDO SIKKIM KUT

Chindo *sikkim kut* is a ritual of song and dance performed by shamans on Chindo Island, which is located at the tip of the southwestern coast of Korea. The shamans are women; the accompanying musicians are usually men.

In the traditional belief-system of the Korean peninsula, shamans are ritual specialists who serve as intermediaries between the world of the living and the world of the spirits. Korean shamans, known in Chindo as *tangul*, perform a variety of rituals, each with a specific purpose. The longest and most complex rituals, combining song, dance, offerings and symbolic action, are called *kut*.

Some *kut* are commissioned for the welfare of the living; these include ceremonies asking for a safe journey, success in love and marriage, or good fortune in business; other *kut* are performed on behalf of the spirits of the dead. The *sikkim kut* is a funeral ritual. Usually performed on the night preceding burial, the purpose of the *sikkim kut* is to cleanse the spirit of the deceased and guide it safely to the other world. It is believed that a person who dies with a burden of unfulfilled desires, an accumulation of sorrows, conflicts and resentments, can trouble both the dead and the living. The *sikkim kut* is designed to resolve these burdens through the intercession of a shaman.

Before the ceremony begins, candles, incense and sheets of rice paper are burned to purify the space. The shamans set out a variety of ritual objects symbolizing ancestral spirits while the musicians play a prescribed accompaniment.

Music and dance are essential components of Chindo *sikkim kut*. The musical ensemble consists of seven traditional instruments: *changgo*, an hourglass drum; *p'iri*, a double reed oboe; *ajiang*, a bowed seven-string zither; *ching*, a gong; *taegum*, a transverse bamboo flute; *haegum*, a two-stringed fiddle; and *chung - ju*, a pair of small brass cymbals. The style of music is known as *sinawi*. Specific rhythmic patterns signal changes in the ceremony; for example, the 18-beat pattern that opens the *kut* is considered emotionally expressive and pleasing to the spirits, while the function of the 12-beat rhythm known as *sulp-uri* sets the meter of the dance of the shaman. In addition to playing their instruments, the musicians sing and interject comments at key moments during the ceremony.

The *sikkim kut* is a complex funeral ritual comprised of ten to twelve discreet elements, four of which are being presented in tonight's performance. In contemporary Korea shamans are valued not only for their ceremonial skills, but also for the sheer artistry of their music and dance. Many contemporary scholars of Korean performing arts feel that the chants, music and dance of the shaman tradition have greatly influenced all of the arts in Korea and contribute to those aesthetic elements that are considered uniquely Korean. Presented as a performance, this program offers a glimpse into the complex world of shaman ritual as it exists today in Korea.

## THE PROGRAM

### I: CH'ONG HON (INVOCATION OF THE SPIRIT OF THE DEAD)

Two shamans invoke the spirit of the deceased and of his or her ancestors and friends through a combination of song, dance and ritual action. White paper streamers, called *chijon*, are used to communicate with the spirits. The shamans wave the *chijon* through the air in a variety of shapes. Each of these shapes conveys a specific message: an "S" shape encourages the spirits to dance; an "X" asks the spirits to keep their distance from the shaman. When a shaman bows with the streamers in front of her, she is thanking the spirits in advance for their participation. The streamers have a secondary meaning as well, symbolizing the money that the deceased will need on the journey to the other world.

### II: CHESOK KUT (RITE OF TUTELARY DEITY)

This *kut*, performed in conjunction with the *sikkim kut*, honors Chesok, one of the tutelary deities of Korean Buddhism, who is responsible for fertility and wealth. While the rest of the funeral ceremony seeks to ease the dead person's separation from life, the *Chesok kut* is addressed to the living. In it the shaman asks for health and good fortune of all in attendance.

Since Chesok is traditionally pictured as a monk, the shaman wears the white robe and red sash of a Buddhist monk. As she sings and dances, she bangs together two rice-bowl lids as cymbals. A second shaman dances, then sits and asks the spirits to shower good luck on all present. The first shaman returns, carrying a bowl of uncooked rice and singing a ritual song; at the end of her song, she throws rice in all direction, symbolically blessing the audience.

### III: HON SIKKIM KUT (RITE OF CLEANSING THE SPIRIT)

The word *sikkim* comes from the verb "to cleanse." This is the core of the ritual, in which the ill-feelings that the deceased has accumulated during life are swept away as the spirit is cleansed. The *Hon Sikkim Kut* is divided into three parts. The ritual action in each section centers around a symbolic object.

In the first section, a long cloth is tied with slip knots, which symbolize the sorrows, grudges and resentments that still burden the spirit of the deceased. As the shamans sing, they shake the cloth, undoing the knots, relieving the spirit of the woes of this world.

The second section is the actual cleansing of the spirit. A complete set of new clothes are placed on a woven straw mat which is rolled into a cylinder, called a *haegol*, which literally means "bone"; this symbolizes the body of the deceased. A covered rice bowl is placed on the mat. Inside the bowl is placed the white paper spirit cut in the shape of a person. Using three kinds of water -- wormwood water, perfumed water and pure water -- the shaman washes away the negative feelings obstructing the spirit's departure for the other world. She then places the paper spirit on the head of the closest surviving relative of the deceased. In a theatrical





presentation, one of the other shamans stands in for the family member. With a touch of the paper streamers, the shaman picks up the paper spirit, indicating that the spirit of the deceased is ready to leave for the other world.

#### IV: KIL TAKKUM (RITE OF PREPARING THE PATH)

In this section of the ritual, the shamans clear the way between this world and the world of the spirits. A length of cotton cloth symbolizes the road that the deceased must travel. After placing a rice bowl containing the paper spirit on the cloth, the shaman slides a symbolic boat, filled with articles of the dead person's clothing, along the length of the cloth. This cloth symbolically bridges the two worlds. Relatives of the deceased place money on the cloth to provide money needed in the spirit world. The *chijon* streamers are placed over the rice bowl and the shamans sing a song of farewell while dancing back and forth along the cloth with the ritual objects. When the spirit of the deceased has departed, the cloth is carefully folded up to prevent an unwanted return to the world of the living.

#### V: TUIT P'IRI (RITE OF CELEBRATION)

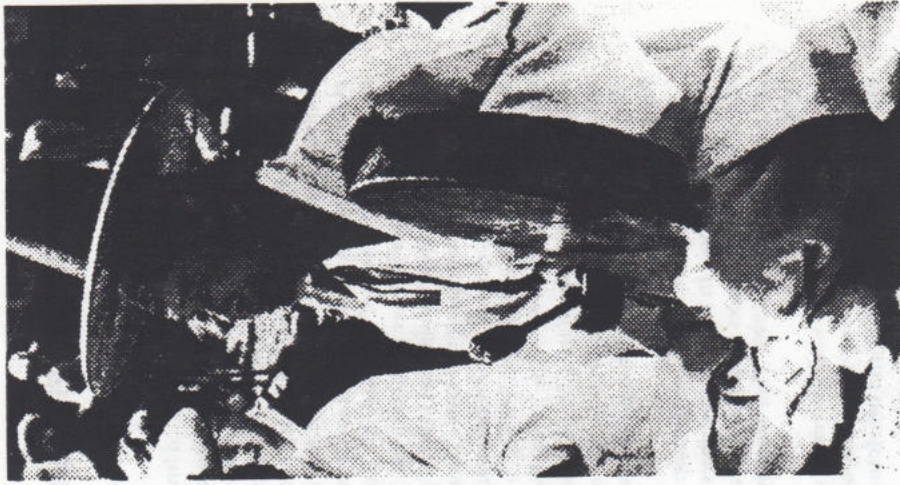
Tonight's performance concludes with a *tuit p'iri* which celebrates the successful ushering off of the spirit of the deceased, and features the Chindo drum dance. At the end of a *sikkim kut*, when it is performed as a funeral ceremony, the shamans burn all of the ritual objects thereby consigning them to the spirit world. The food from the offering table is shared with the mourners.

## KOREAN PERFORMING ARTS AND THE SHAMAN TRADITION

While scholars argue about the precise definition of the term shaman, the tradition is found in a wide range of societies around the world. Shamans are ritual specialists who mediate between the tangible world of the living and the invisible world of spirits, ancestors and deities.

Although Buddhism, Christianity and Confucianism are the dominant belief-systems in today's Korea, shaman practice is still a strong aspect of Korean culture. It has influenced Korean folk music, dance, drama and painting over the centuries; and shaman rituals, infused with elements of other traditions, are still practiced in urban as well as rural settings. Korean shamans are almost always women.

On the island of Chindo, and elsewhere in the southern part of the Korean peninsula, the role of shaman is passed down from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law; the accompanying musicians are usually men and almost invariably include the husbands of the shamans. By contrast, in North and Central Korea, shamans may come from any family; candidates are chosen by a deity or group of deities by an experience of possession, often associated with an episode of illness.





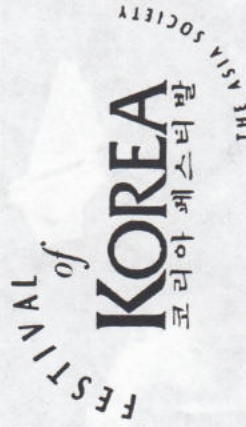
## CHINDO SIKKIM KUT PRESERVATION GROUP

In 1964, the government of South Korea instituted a program to preserve certain traditional performing arts as part of the country's rich cultural heritage. Chindo *sikkim kut* has been designated Important Intangible Cultural Property #72. With government support, the Chindo Sikkim Kut Preservation Group offers public presentations of the kut to audiences in Korea and abroad and teaches the tradition to younger generations to ensure its survival.

Park Pyon-chon (Director/Head musician) comes from a long family line of shamans and musicians. Born in Chindo in 1933, he began to perform ritual music at the age of seven. He studied the tradition with his father, Park Bum-jun and was appointed a Preserver of the Intangible Cultural Property, Chindo *sikkim kut* in 1980. He is also a lecturer at Sunwha Art School and Chungang University, concert master of the Traditional Music Ensemble of the Korea Preservation Society, and artistic director of Korea House a cultural center in Seoul. Kim Tae-rye (Head Shaman) was born in Chindo in 1935. She showed talent in Korean vocal music at an early age and first began studying singing with her mother. She was appointed a Preserver of the Intangible Cultural Property, Chindo *sikkim kut*, in 1980. Five members of the Chindo Sikkim Kut Preservation Group have been appointed as candidates for the designation "National Preserver of the Tradition." They are Park Pyong-won, Chong Suk-cha, Kim Ki-bong, Lee Wan-soon and Kim Pang-hyon.

The Chindo Sikkim Kut Preservation Group continues to perform kut in traditional settings. In addition, members of the group have given theatrical and educational performances throughout Korea, toured Europe, and appeared at the Los Angeles Festival in 1990. They recently released a compact disc on the JVC label.

While the *sikkim kut* was not created as a stage performance, according to the group's director, Park Pyong-Chon "through such appearances, the group can introduce Korean traditions and beliefs to diverse audiences and promote peace and understanding on a global scale."



## FESTIVAL OF KOREA

The Asia Society is presenting a yearlong, nationwide Festival of Korea which began in the fall of 1993. It constitutes the largest single program of Korean events ever seen in the United States. Stemming from the Society's long-standing commitment to public education on Korea, the Festival highlights the richness and vitality of Korean culture and contemporary life and includes a major art exhibition, a series of performing arts events, a film festival, lectures and symposia, and programs for families and schools.

The Festival of Korea is a major component of the Robert A. Scalapino Program for Education on Korea, a five-year effort (1991-1995) named after a leading scholar of Korean and Asian affairs and trustee of the Society.

The Asia Society's Festival of Korea is sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc. Major additional funding for the Festival of Korea is provided by Korea Foundation, The Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry, The Federation of Korean Industries, and Korean Foreign Trade Association.



THE ASIA SOCIETY  
← THIS IS AN ORGANIZATION THAT IGNORES MY WORK BECAUSE IT IS NOT PURE

## THE ASIA SOCIETY

NOT IS IT "CONFERT" DANCE, A TRADITIONAL ENOUGH

The Asia Society is America's leading institution dedicated to fostering understanding of Asia and communication between Americans and the peoples of Asia and the Pacific. The Asia Society is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan education organization. Its headquarters are in New York at 725 Park Avenue New York, NY 10021. For information about membership, current programs, and events, please call (212) 517-NEWS.



HOWARD WALSDORFF P O BOX 247 GREENBRIER TN 37073-0247

## BOOK REVIEW

### DYNAMIC TENSION by HARRY WONG

The book by Mr. Wong is an exercise program in which the muscles gain strength by working against other muscles in the body instead of using weights to accomplish the same results.

Mr. Wong discusses body awareness for the martial artist. By becoming conscious of each muscle & separately increasing its strength, the person practicing dynamic tension will gain more control & power until he/she is capable of focusing his/her strength to achieve success.

Your physical well-being affects how you feel about yourself and how well you are able to perform in all the aspects of your life. It also affects how others react to you. Think about it. If you are always fatigued, how can you reach your goals? This exercise program may help. It offers the benefits of weight training without weights, thus avoiding the danger of strains, torn ligaments or tendons, back injuries, etc. May I say here that I got my back injury from improper weight lifting without proper instruction at a fitness center. I blame myself. I had to go to a hospital for physical therapy as an out patient and miss karate school until I fully recovered. I am not saying that weight lifting is bad for you, but I am saying you can exercise without it. Mr. Wong also points out that you can avoid the weight lifter's problems of "cheating", not moving the weight along the full range of motion from the complete extension of a joint to complete contraction of a muscle. You can avoid the problem of incomplete development of strength and loss of flexibility since this program does not use weights.

## VIDEO REVIEW

### DYNAMIC STRENGTH starring HARRY WONG

This video is a complete program designed to tone and strengthen your muscles, increase your power and speed. It is good for martial artists and anyone interested in exercising for self improvement. Who says you must pay a lot of money and go to a gym to exercise? You do not have to lift weights or be a slave to exercise machines because there are alternatives. You can burn fat as well as tone and condition your body to increase strength, speed and power.

I found the video to very informative. I have played the video while exercising with Mr. Wong and you may do that also. The video running time is almost an hour.

You may order this video and book from Unique Publications. Order 24 hours a day 1-800-332-3330 and foreign orders please call 818-845-2656. The address is 4201 Vanowen Place, Burbank CA 91505 USA



HOWARD WALSDORFF P O BOX 247 GREENBRIER, TN 37073 0247

#### BOOK REVIEW

THE ART OF KICKING & STRENGTH by JAMES LEW

This book is in two parts: STRETCHING EXERCISES in the first part and KICKING EXERCISES in the second. The great many stretching exercises all of which have value. It loosens tight, tense muscles & tendons so that your blood may circulate and you may relax. These exercises are intended for improving one's kicking ability, height and speed. It is great for martial artists but even non-martial artist can benefit from stretching. Keys to success are relaxation and perseverance. Daily exercising builds energy.

Kicking techniques aren't easy so one must work at it. For a martial artist, kicking well improves his/her effectiveness in general, but for any healthy person, flexibility is essential for well-rounded health.

Although this book has its merits, the video is much better and there is more information and additional training not in the book.

#### VIDEO REVIEW

THE ART OF STRETCHING & KICKING starring JAMES LEW

JAMES LEW teaches kicking fundamentals and he is very good at. I was impressed by his video. Stretching exercises are taught by Mr. Lew and some are the same taught in Harry Wong's video and book, and some are different. Many of these stretching exercises I do at the karate dojo, but I have an open mind for learning new exercises and new ideas. Mr. Lew teaches both a pre-kicking warm up and post-kicking warmup stretching routines. Basic kicks are covered (including the ones I am still having trouble with at the dojo): front kick, sidekicks, round kicks, hook, back, crescent, etc. Concepts for power and focus are covered.

This is an excellent video on the subject of stretching & kicking.

Available from UNIQUE PUBLICATIONS 4201 Vanowen Place, Burbank CA 91505



## Who's Who in Japanese Historical Dramas

by Robert Walsdorff

### PART TWO

#### Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358 - 1408)

He was the third shogun of the Muromachi Shogunate. He ended the confrontation between the Northern and Southern Imperial courts and united the entire nation. He built the famous Kinkaku-ji Temple (The Golden Pavilion) in Kyoto. He started trade with the Ming Dynasty in China.

#### Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1436 - 1490)

He was the eighth shogun of the Muromachi Shogunate. He built Ginkaku-ji Temple. He stayed there temporarily, showing no interest whatsoever anymore to politics or to what was happening outside - The Battle of Onin. This was an eleven year civil war between two military commanders of the Muromachi Shogunate. It reduced Kyoto to ruins and the shogunate lost most of its power. This led to the Sengoku Period - the age of rivalry of local war lords, each who possessed his own army and political system and administered his own domain independently of the shogunate. Each daimyo (local lord) aimed to rule the entire country (or area of the country) individually.

#### Mori Motonari (1487 - 1571)

His story of "The Three Arrows" is quoted in the introduction of Akira Kurosawa's motion picture Ran. Each son is given an arrow to break, which they do easily. However, when given three together to break, they can't do it. This was to teach them that they could not go up against an enemy separately but could win if united as one. Mori was a military commander who went on to rule the entire Chugoku district by his resourcefulness.

#### Takeda Shingen (1521 - 1573)

He is considered the strongest warrior of the Sengoku period. He fought many fierce battles against Uesugi Kenshin. He ruled the land of Kai, the area around Mount Fuji, today known as Kofu. He was considered to be infamous in his day for putting his father in exile and taking over power, even though his father proved to be going mad and no longer competent. He attempted when 50 to take a large <sup>army</sup> to Kyoto and take over the entire country. He defeated the combined armies of Oda Nobunaga and Tokugawa Ieyasu and seemed invincible. But fate stepped in, proving he wasn't invulnerable. He contracted an illness and died on his way to the capital. His army returned, unable to go on without him. His son proved less capable. Years later his son attempted to seize the nation's power but was defeated.



## Who's Who in Japanese Historical Dramas - Part Two

### Uesugi Kenshin (1530 - 1578)

He was a military commander and Takeda Shingen's most notable rival. It has been said that he was very principled. When the people of Takeda Shingen's domain were suffering because of a lack of salt, he sent salt to his rival. It is said that he was very religious and never allowed women to come near during his entire life.

### Oda Nobunaga (1534 - 1582)

There's a famous haiku poem said to describe Nobunaga's character: "The cuckoo doesn't sing? All right, kill it at once." Nobunaga gained control by force and liquidated his antagonists. Tokugawa Ieyasu even killed his own wife and son just to appease Nobunaga and show his loyalty. He unified a large part of the country (a job finished by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu), but would not accept the official title of shogun. Nobunaga was considered to be eccentric in his dress, manners, and interests. He erected a temple for people to worship him and to pray to him, declaring himself a god. He set fire to a fortress of the Buddhist sect of Ikko-shu and burned to death 20,000 men, women, and children. He feigned illness and when his brother came to visit him, he murdered him, afraid the brother was a threat to his power. Yet it was Nobunaga who allowed Christianity in the country and protected Christians. He also promoted trade with Portugal and the Dutch, bringing a flow of Western art, scholarship, tools, and culture into Japan. He was betrayed by one of his own generals and realizing there was no escape, committed suicide in Honno-ji Temple.

### Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536 - 1598)

Toyotomi Hideyoshi stands apart from all of the other major Sengoku leaders in that he was not born into a daimyo family. He was the son of a poor farmer and worked his way up the ladder of success through his cheerful personality, hard work, and resourcefulness. He was one of Nobunaga's generals and upon Nobunaga's death took the reigns of power from Nobunaga's betrayer, Mitsuhide, and unified the country. Because he was from a family of commoners, he could not take the official title of shogun, but was one in everything but name. His power waned some towards the end of his life as he tried unsuccessfully to invade Korea (who was helped by China.) He built Osaka Castle, where his son Hideyori was to live for many years. Hideyori was only 6 when Hideyoshi died. Full of anxiety about his son's future, he entrusted Tokugawa Ieyasu and Ishida Mitsunari to protect his son until he was old enough to take power. Tokugawa Ieyasu later betrayed his trust, took over the nation, and set fire to Osaka Castle, killing Hideyori.



Mark Jackson/2043 SE Isabell Road/Port St. Lucie, Florida, 34952/ (407-337-2303)

Hello, Everyone,

The Arts & Entertainment Network has recognized the significance of Bruce Lee by making him the subject of one of their "Biography" series. I taped the premiere telecast but I am having to rely on my memory to review it since the tape is packed away with most of my books and other reference material. We are remodeling the house: wallpapering, painting, replacing carpet, and other tasks that will leave us with a new house.

The documentary had interviews with people such as his widow, Linda Lee Caldwell, and other martial artists and film personalities who had the good fortune to have worked with him. I know Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and James Coburn were interviewed and I am 94.5 % certain that Dan Inosanto was interviewed as well. While the filmography was comprehensive, featuring segments of "Green Hornet" and "Longstreet" (it even included a promotional spot for "Hornet"), along with his major films and the fight scene with Abdul-Jabbar. This particular episode is of extraordinary value to fans of the late Mr. Lee since it features historically valuable footage.

Bruce Lee first came to national prominence through a demonstration of his One Inch Power Punch at a martial arts tournament in Long Beach, California in 1964. While I have read of a film of this event I had never seen it until it was shown during this TV show. The black-and-white footage was filmed in long shot (with Bruce and the man who served as the "target" in the foreground while a good portion of the audience was framed in the background) and, initially, I wondered if one could use it to analyze Bruce's technique since it was not a structured documentary with close ups spliced in with medium and long shots. Then, I realized that, through the magic of videotape, we can use it to enhance any printed work on the Power Punch through repeated viewings of Bruce actually using it (to the best of my knowledge, the only such text is a book published by Unique Publications).

This documentary also includes a screen test Bruce shot for an American producer where he demonstrates skill with the Crane form of Gung-Fu (applying the spelling he used for his book). The significance of this screen test lies in the fact that it proves Bruce was proficient in other forms of the martial arts besides those discussed in the aforementioned Chinese Gung-Fu, The Tao of Jeet Kuan Do, and the "Fighting Methods" texts (all published by Ohara Books).

Finally, there was a "home movie" of Bruce interacting with some of his students, like James Coburn. It may have questionable value for studying the martial arts but, like a segment of an interview for Hong Kong television, we do see our friend Bruce "backstage" if you will. If you have any access to cable, by all means see this segment on Arts & Entertainment.



Nothing new to report on the writing front. I've sent an article query to LOUIS L'AMOUR WESTERN MAGAZINE but I haven't heard anything as of yet. I keep plugging away. Oh, I've been taking a computer course and, while I'd probably have a little difficulty producing a CD ROM, I can now read through a copy of PC Magazine without having to stop every five minutes (Time will go by faster in the doctor's waiting room now -- not to mention Newsweek, ha-ha-ha).

I must sign off. Oh, before I go (and speaking of computers), I was photocopying some documents Saturday, April 9, 1994 and they allowed me to examine the virtues of the Prodigy computer network, to which ~~he~~ subscribes. I examined both the encyclopedia and stock market analysis before I pulled down their list of bestselling books. The first category was "Trade Paperback -- Non Fiction" and the 2nd bestselling book on that list was THE TAO OF JEET KUNE DO BY Bruce Lee. Their source was Ingram Distribution, the largest book distributor in the United States.

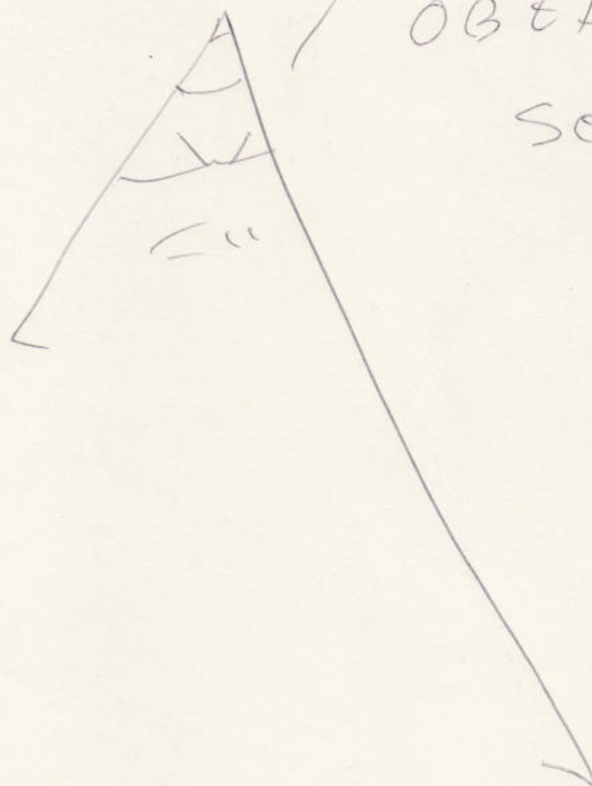
The Legend Lives On!

Good luck to all!

YOUR

OBEDIENT

SERVANT





JACQUELINE D. SIMS  
309 16TH AVENUE NORTH  
BIRMINGHAM ALABAMA 35204-2163

I recently had another reminder of the closed minds I work with.

I was reading a shojo manga (japanese "girls" comic book) when someone asked to see it. She couldn't get into it because the two stories in this book asked a little more from her than she was willing to give to understand the stories.

The two stories in this book (called "PROMISE") do not lead to obvious conclusions; the stories make you think about what's going on so that you can draw your own conclusions.

I have managed to get my hands on several graphic novels (Promise included) based on Japanese movies/and or television programs. These graphic novels are in black and white and not in color which turned some people off right away but that is okay with me because I did not buy these books for these people; I bought them for me.

I have two "CRYING FREEMAN" graphic novels and eight "FIST OF THE NORTH STAR" graphic novels (the english translated versions of course).

Both stories had interesting plots along with a lot of unnecessary nudity.

I liked the fact that the stories in these books are not what I would usually find in Harlequin, Silhouette, and other such books that people I know prefer to read.

Two characters in the "FIST OF THE NORTH STAR" novels reminded me of two other characters in one of my favorite classic books; they remind me of the Christine and the Phantom of the Opera characters from the book of the same name.

"CRYING FREEMAN" was a story about an organization of assassins known as the 108 dragons. The writer of these books somehow made some of these assassins likable characters.

I plan to buy more graphic novels in this vein from Viz Communications which is based in California (which is where I bought my other graphic novels).

The only company I knew of here that even come close to these novels were made here by a company called "INNOVATION" which was based in Wheeling West Virginia. I got by "INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE" and "BEAUTY AND THE BEAST" (based on the CBS television show) graphic novels from this company. Unfortunately this company has gone out of business since then. The graphic



novels I got from this company were handpainted with beautiful artwork in beautiful colors of the finest quality.

One company to beware of is:  
"SCIENCE FICTION CONTINUUM"  
A DIVISION OF S & J PRODUCTIONS, INC.  
P. O. BOX 154  
COLONIA, NJ 07067.

They sent me a defective CD. Four months and several phone call later I have still not received a replacement for this defective CD. They do not issue refunds; all they will do is replace an item which they have not done for me yet. I had ordered from them in the past and they were very slow about filling that order. I guess something should have gone off in my head then. They were the only company I knew of that the "ROBOT CARNIVAL" CD I wanted so I took a second chance on this company and got burned. If I can prevent someone else from being burned by this company I will feel a little better about this situation.

Anyway when I go on vacation this year I hope I can find a lot of interesting things to read and watch. I will keep my fellow Maffapans posted.



DAMON FOSTER, PO BOX 576, FREMONT, CA 94537-0576

### FIRST, AN APOLOGY:

If there was something wrong or nasty about my question & comments last issue, I was blind to it- blinder than a cyclops with an eyepatch. It wasn't until I read Laurine's disclaimer about my statements that it occurred to me that my smart-ass comments MIGHT hurt somebody's feelings. The intention, as always, was to amuse, while basically asking about other people's tastes. I'm sorry if anyone was offended, I won't let it happen again. I normally deal with sarcastic individuals of the horror/exploitation fandom, and we all routinely trade insults, all in the cause of humor. So we're all immune to critical attack, very little offends us. Yet I realize MAFAPPA is a different class of people, and that perhaps my clowning around is out-of-place in this deverse publication. Again, I humbly apologize.

Otherwise, not much new to report. Though I'm still working on OC (a free sample copy is included here for you), the odds of me working on another action video are as likely as finding a bottle of Nair at a feminists meeting in San Francisco. Just when I was ready to make another 'acclaimed' amateur film, my landlord suddenly decided to sell the house I'd called home. The guy had me sign a six month lease, and never gave me any indication he'd sell the damn place! Had I known, I never would have moved in. Regardless, I'm in a new house now, and as I struggle to get all moved in & settled, I've little or no time for making videos, one of my labors of love.

But again, thanks to my publisher (Draculina Publishing), my other main hobby, OC continues to appear at more stores than there are fascists at a Rush Limbaugh rally. Hell, I hear even FANGORIA is selling it now! So here's a free sample copy of OC. By now you know that if I'm involved, use discretion. My writing style is anything but safe, family entertainment. With OC's increasing volume in stores all over, there are even more immitators than ever. By now, you've probably seen a lot of its older clones, like ASIAN EYE, PAGODA, ASIAN TRASH CINEMA, SKAM/CINERAIDER, and the long gone RAVE SENSATION newsletter. What all these immitations have in common is that they focus 95% on trendy HK films. But in more recent years, the art of OC immitating has seen an upsurge in coverage of Japanese superheroes and monsters, the likes of which we haven't seen since the 1970s, when fanzines like JFFJ and JAPANESE GIANTS reigned supreme. Today, we now have MONSTER ATTACK TEAM, ASIAN INVASION, SENTAI, and HENSHIN (not out yet, but is actually the second volume of the late, lamented MARKALITE).



**MIRROR OF THE FUMA #36: Nikki White, 15 Duffus Place, Wanniasa, ACT 2903, Australia**

**Recent reading**

Cleary, Thomas, *The Japanese art of war*, Boston : Shambhala, 1992. Cleary's thesis is that because of Japan's long history of civil wars, the Japanese have ingrained in them a tendency to think in terms of military strategy, to see things in terms of gaining the upper hand or assessing everyone as if they were a potential opponent.. This is reinforced by the wide-spread reading of various treatises on martial arts/strategy by Musashi, Takuan, Yagyu Munenori, Suzuki Shosan and others', and also the sort of Zen practised by samurai.

In expounding this, Cleary explains how Zen has been misconstrued not only in the West but in Japan itself by such popularisers as D.T. Suzuki. In other words it has become the sort of incomprehensible gobbledegook such as a lot of koan of the 'one hand clapping' variety ( the sort that would have sent your average Roman gibbering up the curtains). This is not what it's all about at all.

This sort of misunderstanding, along with the 'Japan cannot be understood by Westerners' type of misinformation or disinformation is often part of a deliberate Japanese attempt at obfuscation directly traceable to the above-mentioned martial classics, practised in order to gain an advantage over the opposition. All this is very interesting, particularly the demystifying of Zen and above all the generous slabs of translations of Musashi, et al., especially, as in the case of Musashi, he has been mistranslated in earlier English version so as to give almost the opposite meaning to what he said.

Hoyt, Edwin P. *Three military leaders*. Tokyo : Kodansha International, 1993. Very useful biographies of Admirals Togo and Yamamoto, and General Yamashita, presenting them in a sympathetic and understanding light, particularly the much maligned general, about whom I knew little more than his name and that he'd been done for a war criminal. Yamamoto I am most familiar with, having been interested in him since the mid-60s. It was good to have them together to draw comparisons.

Leigh, Stephen and Miller, John J. *Dinosaur samurai*. New York : Avon, 1993. This is the third in a series of books based on the Ray Bradbury short story where someone, on a time safari into prehistoric times, accidentally kills a butterfly and in doing so alters his own present. I haven't read the first two but couldn't resist this one because of its title which manages to combine two currently megatrendy things. Actually, though aimed at teenagers, it isn't a bad read. The premise is that one Eckels (not to be confused with anyone from *The Goon Show*), a psychotic not only killed a butterfly but shot a dinosaur, thus messing history up and creating a series of alternate realities by his actions.

The books opens on a world where humans never evolved and dinosaurs are the intelligent species. Most of the action takes place in yet another alternate reality where Japan colonised America in the 16th century and is set in what would have been Illinios with samurai warring with Mound Builders and Iriquois, using arquebuses (this now being the 17th century) as well as swords. Apart from the usual glitches over names (Akira being used as a family rather than a given name and the odd masculine given name such as 'Tomiko') it was fun.

Lowell, Percival *Occult Japan*, Rochester, Vermont : Inner Traditions, no date. Reprint of the 1894 edition. This discusses esoteric Shinto, particularly such rites as Firewalking and also trance possession, which the author witnessed and so describes in detail and objectively.



Extremely interesting because of this and also the picture of Japan at a transitional stage of being Westernised. Some of the theory in the later part of the book is a tad questionable by modern standards, particularly in the importance given to sexual or racial stereotypes (Japanese as lacking individualism, intellect, etc. though not meant unkindly or to be racist, but a bit suss for our times).

Morris, Ivan *The world of the Shining Prince*, Middlesex : Penguin, 1986 (originally published in 1964). An oldie but a goodie I finally got hold of. I've read a lot of Heian period court diaries and *monogatari*, though ironically, given the book's chief source, not the *Genji* (at least not all of it). Again, useful and interesting to have all the social, political and religious background of Japan's 10th century in the one place, and written in an elegant, witty style. I always had a soft spot for that elegant era.

Moulder, Ross, ed. *Japanese images of Australia : a collection of Japanese writings on Australia 1991*, Clayton, Victoria : Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 1992. This has some interesting articles in it. The first ones present the usual Japanese businessmen's views of Australians as lazy workers, prone to strikes ( a number of Japanese businessmen give advice to Australia how to get out of its economic mess as part of a questionnaire. This sort of thing always reminds me of a book by an Australian written just after the War after a visit to Japan in which he advises the Japanese to take out their rice-paddies and graze sheep instead - after all, it worked for Australia!)

The latter half of the book shows another strand of thought amongst the Japanese in which Australia could be a model for Japan with its lifestyle (and despite its poor economy) as the Japanese lifestyle is not very inspiring. The editor concludes there are many levels and varieties of attitudes to Australia in Japan.

Noguchi, Sachiko and Davidson, Alan *The Mikado's navy and Australia: visits of His Imperial Japanese Majesty's training ships 1878-1912*, Melbourne : Japanese Studies Centre, 1993. A very interesting look at early encounters between Australia and Japan, especially the good relationships and mutual curiosity between the two groups in the 19th century. Nice stories about hospitality extended to Japanese officers and sailors that lasted (via correspondence) for years until the deaths of the Japanese (who were admirals by then). Some familiar names figured such as Togo and Yamamoto (then still called Takano).

Tyler, Royall, ed. & trans. *Japanese tales*, New York : Pantheon Books, 1987. This is a wonderful collection of tales from a whole variety of 12th and 13th century collections like the *Konjaku monogatari*, *Uji shui*, *Jikkinsho*, *Kokonchomon*, etc., most not available in English (some of the *Konjaku* has been translated by Ury in 1979 and Kelsey in 1982). These are different from the various collections of Japanese fairy-tales, legends, etc. usually available as they were collected and written for courtiers, not derived from the *Kojiki* or from peasant sources, though some themes are common to both. Tyler, who is now teaching at the Australian National University, has translated them elegantly and wittily and they read well. They are highly entertaining. Recommended.

## Films

The following were screened recently on SBS. As usual, all had subtitles and were not dubbed.

*The Yen family* (*Kimura-ke no hitobito*, 1989), directed by Takata Yujiro with Kaga Takeshi, Momoi Kaori and Iwasaki Hiromi. This was an absolute hoot. It concerned a middle-class family of four who were obsessed with making money by getting into all the scams and



schemes they could think up. Their antics were viewed, partially, through the rather straight-laced eyes of the wife's, Noriko's Christian brother and sister-in-law.

Up at 6, Noriko does wake-up calls and erotic telephone conversations while making breakfast. Her husband collects the newspapers for the old-age pensioners to distribute. Then the whole family makes lunch-boxes for delivery by the husband and two kids. On his way to work, the husband uses his car as a taxi and in the office he's organised his colleagues into more money-making ventures - photocopying for students, charging hush-money over an office romance, etc. At home, Noriko supervises a parcel-delivery service using the old-age pensioners (because they travel on the busses free, keeping costs way down). At school Term has organised her classmates into a profit-making co-operative - they even charge out of a maths class to chase of a used-paper collector who's invaded their patch. Only the little boy, Taro, has his doubts about all this money-making. The Kimuras even charge their in-laws for staying with them!

The humour is in the extraordinary schemes they get up to and the reactions of their in-laws and one neighbour who is always reading Mr Kimura little lectures. Still, it isn't all bad - Noriko's senile old mother gets a new lease of life by being put to work to help with the lunch-boxes and with the old-age pensioners (most of whom develop a crush on her). On the other hand, she did go out and spend all their savings on noodles, so she obviously still wasn't the full quid. This puts a bit of a damper on things and the request of the in-laws to adopt Taro causes Kimura to reconsider. He gives up his money-making schemes and, instead, collects tokens off packets in the same obsessive fashion. It doesn't work and soon he's back to his old ways. No easy moralising here.

*Bridge of Resurrection (Modoribashi, NHK, 1993)* with Higuchi Kanoko, Nezu Jinpachi and directed by Saegusa Kenki.

This was a rather lyrical if weird film. Basically it was a fantasy about a young boy's attempts to cope with losing his father, tied to a legend about a bridge near his home and with the theme of cranes, particularly the folk-tale of the grateful crane.

Jun, the son of a weaver, Miyoshi Yoichi, lives in the Nishijin district of Kyoto, accidentally causes the death of his father, Yoichi, a keen bird-watcher, while walking across Modoribashi, the old wooden bridge near their home. Jun's mother, Sayuri, has run off leaving him alone. The only one who takes an interest in him is Chiharu, his school-teacher. All this is conveyed at the funeral which opens the film either through Jun's flashbacks or the gossip of the guests (one of whom is played by Maki Fuyukichi, "Tonbei" from *The Samurai*).

Chiharu tells Jun of the legend attached to Modoribashi, that 1000 years ago a noble (coincidentally also named Miyoshi) prayed for his dead father to come back to life while taking his coffin across the bridge and the gods granted his request. Jun feels unable to do this but instead asks his father's spirit to make him an adult. He does this because of his schoolboy crush on Chiharu and his desire to help her. He falls from the bridge and is reborn as an adult but only for the night.

In his adult form he is able to rescue her from a loan shark and the two become close over the next few nights, planning marriage, but that final night Jun finds the bridge demolished by workmen and the water drained and cannot make the change into an adult.

The crane theme is drawn from the play the children are rehearsing about the crane who is rescued by an old couple and in gratitude it takes on human form to help them weaving, plucking her feathers to make the cloth until discovered by them. Both Jun and his mother are



likened to that crane and the image of cranes appears at intervals in slo-mo. Jun is like a crane because he is transformed into something else to help another. ; Sayuri because she was found by Yoichi in the same place as the crane in the story but with a sprained ankle instead of a broken wing, and was taken in but then left.

The end is a bit jarring as we suddenly return to the reality of the new concrete Modoribashi and a happy Jun skipping along it. I can't imagine he'd be happy with his mother and her boyfriend who came to claim him, as they are both rather hard, shady characters.

*Zu Warriors From the Magic Mountain* (Hong Kong, 1983). As I'm, sure nearly all of you must have seen this extravaganza at one time, I won't repeat the plot. I thought it was huge, a lot of fun with some gentle swipes at martial arts films conventions and some stunning visuals. The scenes in the cave temple are genuinely eerie while those by the pool are quite lyric. The countess who heals - or attempts to - is reminiscent in her costume and gestures of the 'flying angels' in the painting on the walls of the cave temple of Tun-huang. And of course, we had all those impossibly flying warriors and sword fights (this curious Chinese tendency must have been rather disconcerting for the Roman legion which encountered them at the Talass River, no doubt).

Also full of spectacular battle scenes, like Inagaki on speed, was that Romanian epic, *Vlad the Impaler (Vlad Tepes)* which probably bankrupted the country make I think in the early 80s. Talk about casts of thousands. The odd thing I noticed afterwards (apart from the fact the lead actor looked *awfully* like old Vlad) was there were no women in it. No wives, no female courtiers, nothing. The films dealt with his middle reign, starting with his taking the throne in battle and ending with him arriving at Hunyadi's castle and being captured.

*The Loyal 47 Ronin (Genroku Chushingura)*, Koa-Shochiku, 1941, directed by Mizoguchi Kenji) was on one afternoon, at least part one was. Aaargh! Left us high and dry as Oishi and Co. were about to set out for Edo, all hope of having the Asano family restored gone and so free to move against Kira (a personage Barnabas Collins probably would have bricked up alive in a cellar somewhere, talk about Charisma Two).

What made this film rather special, despite the vintage and consequent ratty soundtrack that sounded like it had been recorded with a nail on a sheet of galvanised iron, was the attention to the human side of this old warhorse, the little details that make so many Japanese films so engaging. In this case, we saw the women of the piece - Lady Asano and Mrs Oishi, their activities, feelings and thoughts, thus rounding out the story. Then there was Tokubei, Oishi's hot-headed friend who'd been expelled from the castle years before and who made a pathetic end with his son when denied a role in the proceedings.

For the rest, the b/w photography was striking - long travelling shots with lots of people, especially in the opening sequences in Edo Castle with streams of courtiers in formal dress, dashing back and forth. Asano's attack on Kira was quite frenzied and quite alarming. I just loved watching them manoeuvre in the nagabakama (long trousers).

Now can we see part two? Please?