Book Reviews

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The main conceptual threads of this study, women, gender, race, transnationalism, and Chineseness, are conveyed by the title. The first three are perennially important topics, for political reasons; whereas the last two have a newer ring.

The structure of the author’s argument can best be gauged from the chapter titles: Hong Kong-Hollywood Connections; Transnational Chinese Mothers; Chinese Women and the Tropes of Modern China; Pan-Pacific Connections; Transnational Integration; The Influence of Hong Kong in Hollywood. As a scholar of this genre of film and visual culture, represented by Meaghan Morris, Kuan-Hsing Chen, Rey Chow, and others, I was keen to explore these topics further, for the work of scholars like Morris and Chow suggests that they signal an exploration of issues that might straddle and connect diverse disciplinary realms and problematics, probe questions of theory and analysis, and push the limits of our current understandings of gender, ethnicity, the national and the international.

The fundamental purpose of the book, conveyed by its title, is to explore the theme of action stars. The chapter subtitles reinforce this focus: The heroic identities of Michelle Yeoh and Pei Pei Cheng; Hong Kong Warrior Women in post-1997 Cinema; The Transnational Appeal of Gong Li and Zhang Ziyi; Chinese American Warrior Women in Post-1997 Hong Kong; Chinese Canadian Warrior Women in Post-1997 Hong Kong; The Asianization of American Warrior Women.

The two books that *Warrior Women* is closest to are Leon Hunt’s *Kung Fu Cult Masters* (Hunt 2003) and Jane Park’s compelling *Yellow Future* (Park 2010); not to mention the earlier works of scholars such as Tasker, Desser, Bordwell, Teo, and so on. One might fault *Warrior Women* for its unimaginative structure (key theory, survey of the field, case studies, and conclusions). There are other
defects, too. Like every work of academic film scholarship, the study needs theory. But although theory is not entirely lacking, the work is principally intent on discussing the *stories* of certain key female Chinese, Hong Kong and Asian-(North) American action stars in descriptive and historical terms. Accordingly, the film theory and cultural theory in terms of which it frames itself is never really explored in detail. Instead, concepts such as race, gender, culture, and globalization are merely invoked for illustrative purposes. Theory is incorporated to set the terms of what will be discussed, and what is discussed illustrates this or that point of theory.

So, “theory” is at once central to this work and yet largely excluded from it. This is because, overall, the book is descriptive rather than analytical or deconstructive; and the theory that so thoroughly permeates the work — defining the book’s vocabulary and its main concerns — seems under-employed. As such, the focus on the key figures, the stars, their stories, the films and the plotlines of the films does not lead to new interrogations of wider questions and problematics of culture and theory, gender and ethnicity, nation and narration.

However, this is by no means a bad book. It is full of interesting and important facts, figures, dates, events, agents, agencies and historical, cultural, and industry information. It explicitly claims to be organized around the structuring terms and problematics of (third wave) feminism, postcolonialism, and other elements of film and cultural theory, even though, in the event, it does not advance theory or analysis in any obvious way. To borrow a binary coined by Thomas Kuhn, this is ‘normal science’ film studies and not “revolutionary science” film studies (Kuhn 1962).

The main work of the book stays at the level of discussing film industries and the ways particular regional film industries have played with certain generic forms of representation with and around East Asian women. Ultimately, then, the work is well intentioned and well conceived but unnecessarily limited by its own structuring terms and limited focus. Readers wishing to advance theoretically from the starting points provided by this work would be best served by moving on from this to older works by the likes of Morris (Morris 2004; Morris, Li, and Chan 2005), Chow (Chow 1991, 1995, 2007), Hunt (Hunt 2003) and Park (Park 2010) — works that one would have hoped a book published in 2014 might have built upon and developed further.

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