

The Buffalo Film Seminars



Directed by Ang Lee
 Based on the book by Du Lu Wang
 Screenplay by Hui-Ling Wang, James Schamus and Kuo Jung Tsai
 Produced by Po Chu Chui, Li-Kong Hsu, William Kong, and Ang Lee
 Original Music by Tan Dun
 Cinematography by Peter Pau
 Film Editing by Tim Squyres
 Production Design by Timmy Yip
 Art Direction by Jian-Quo Wang and Bin Zhao
 Costume Design by Timmy Yip
 Jorge Calandrelli....composer: song "A Love Before Time"
 Percussion by David Cossin
 Conductor, electronic music programming and music producer: Tan Dun
 Cello solos; Yo-Yo Ma

Yun-Fat Chow...Master Li Mu Bai
 Michelle Yeoh...Yu Shu Lien
 Ziyi Zhang...Jen Yu (Mandarin version) / Jiao Long (English dubbed version)
 Chen Chang...Lo 'Dark Cloud' / Luo Xiao Hu
 Sihung Lung...Sir Te
 Pei-pei Cheng...Jade Fox
 Fa Zeng Li...Governor Yu
 Xian Gao...Bo
 Yan Hai...Madame Yu
 De Ming Wang...Police Inspector Tsai / Prefect Cai Qiu
 Li Li...May
 Su Ying Huang...Auntie Wu
 Jin Ting Zhang...De Lu
 Rei Yang...Maid
 Kai Li...Gou Jun Pei
 Jian Hua Feng...Gou Jun Sinung
 Zhen Xi Du...Shop Owner
 Cheng Lin Xu...Captain
 Feng Lin...Captain
 Wen Sheng Wang...Gangster A
 Dong Song...Gangster B
 Zhong Xuan Ma...Mi Biao
 Bao Cheng Li...Fung Machete Chang
 Yong De Yang...Monk Jing
 Shao Jun Zhang...Male Performer
 Ning Ma...Female Performer
 Jian Min Zhu...Waiter
 Chang Cheng Don...Homeless Man
 Yi Shih...Waitress

December 4, 2007 (XV:15)
 Ang Lee **Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon** 2000
 120 minutes



Bin Chen...Servant
 Sao Chen Chang...Nightman

ACADEMY AWARDS for Best Art Direction-Set Decoration (Timmy Yip), Best Cinematography (Peter Pau), Best Foreign Language Film; Best Music Original Score (Tan Dun); nominations for Best Costume Design (Timmy Yip), Best Director (Ang Lee), Best

Editing (Tim Squyres), Best Music Original Song, Best Picture and Best Writing Screenplay Based on Material Previously Produced or Published.

Ang Lee (23 October 1954, Pingtung, Taiwan) has directed 11 films: *Se, jie/Lust, Caution* (2007), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005, Best Director Academy Award), *Hulk* (2003), *The Hire: Chosen* (2001), *Wo hu cang long/Ngo foo chong lung/Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Ride with the Devil* (1999), *The Ice Storm* (1997), *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Yin shi nan nu/Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), *Hsi yen/The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and *Tui shou/Pushing Hands* (1992). He was assistant director on Spike Lee's first film *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads* (1983).

Peter Pau (1952, Hong Kong) has shot 35 films. Some of them are *The Forbidden Kingdom* (2008, in post-production), *Shoot 'Em Up* (2007), *Wu ji/The Promise* (2005), *Tian mai chuan qi/The Touch* (2002), *Dracula 2000* (2000), *Bride of Chucky* (1998), *Ye ban ge sheng/The Phantom Lover* (1995), *Chik loh go yeung/Naked Killer* (1992), *Jing gu jyun ga/The Ultimate Trickster* (1991), *Dip huet seung hung/The Killer* (1989) and *Wai Si-Lei chuen kei/Legend of the Golden Pearl* (1987).

Chow Yun-Fat (18 May 1955, Lamma Island, Hong Kong) has acted in 98 films and is one of the world's best-known movie stars. He is perhaps best known for his many films with director John Woo. His most recent film is *The Bitter Sea* (2008, in post-production). Some of the others are *Stranglehold* (2007), *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (2007), *Yi ma de hou xian dai sheng huo/The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* (2006), *Bulletproof Monk* (2003), *Anna and the King* (1999), *The Replacement Killers* (1998), *Hua qi Shao Lin/American Shaolin* (1994), *Lat sau san taam/Hard Boiled* (1992), *Dip huet seung hung/The Killer* (1989) and *Tou tai ren/The Reincarnation* (1976).



Michelle Yeoh (6 August 1962, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia) has acted in 31 films, the most recent of which is *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (2008), which is now filming). Some of the others are *Far North* (2007), *Sunshine* (2007), *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), *Tian mai chuan qi/The Touch* (2002), *Sing yuet tung wa/Moonlight Express* (1999), *A Jin de gu shi/The Stunt Woman* (1996), *Xian dai hao xia zhuan/Executioners* (1993), *Xin liu xing hu die jian/Butterfly and Sword* (1993), *Huang gu shi jie/Police Assassins* (1985), and *Mao tou ying yu xiao fei xiang/The Owl vs. Bumbo* (1984).

Ziyi Zhang (9 February 1979, Beijing, China) has appeared in 18 films. She was the voice of Karai in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (2007), and also appeared in *Ye yan/The Banquet* (2006), *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), *Shi mian mai fu/House of Flying Daggers* (2004), *Jopog manura 2: Dolaon jeonseol/My Wife Is a Gangster 2* (2003), *Ying xiong/The Hero* (2002), *Musa/The Warriors* (2001), and *Wo de fu qin mu qin/The Road Home* (1999).

from *The Cinema of ANG LEE: The Other Side of the Screen.* Whitney Crothers Dillev. Wallflower Press. London & New York, 2007.

“Repression is a main element of my movies. It’s easier to work against something than to go along with something.

The auteur

Ang Lee has been referred to as an auteur and it is not difficult to see why—he is an artist with his actors, and seems to draw amazing work out of his cast, from the smallest to the greatest. Keeping in mind that he has made films in Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, British English from the time of Jane Austen, high-school drop-out cowboy English, American English from the Civil War era, and 1970s slang, this is no small feat. He has drawn performances of the highest quality out of actors as diverse as Kevin Kline, Joan Allen, Michelle Yeoh and Chow Yun-fat, as well as defining and prodigious early work from a young Tobey Maguire, Christina Ricci, Katie Holmes and, at nineteen, Kate Winslet and Zhang Ziyi. As Jake Gyllenhaal reflected after the making of *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), Lee is also ‘fluent in the



language of silence'. This has been proven by his films from his earliest 15-minute dialogue-free scene between Deb Snyder and Sihung Lung (Lang Xiong) in *Pushing Hands* (*Tuishou*, 1991), to the paean to non-communication and 1970s angst, *The Ice Storm* (1997), and, finally, to the tortured secrets of repressed souls in *Brokeback Mountain*. Indeed, the use of silence is so effective for this director; the last 15 minutes of *The Ice Storm* were virtually a silent movie. Lee tells his stories through language, but he also narrates them through physical posture and facial expression. Thus, he brought out such memorable performances as Heath Ledger's clenched-jaw repression, Sigourney Weaver's languid and vampish physicality, Joan Allen's erasing of her own identity, Michelle Yeoh's fathomless loyalty, Hugh Grant's internalised awkwardness and Tobey Maguire's passage from boyhood to maturity. The nuanced performances in *Brokeback Mountain* were widely recognised as three of the young actors in the film, all just in their twenties, were each nominated for Academy Awards, one of the youngest casts in history to receive such recognition.

Ang Lee's talent for drawing out the best from his actors is mixed with his flawless incorporation of the natural environment, utilising breathtaking vistas and frames. In *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) animals, hedges and the natural effects of wind create subtleties in mood; in *Ride With the Devil* (1999), sun-dappled woods filmed on location in Missouri coupled with peaceful scenes of farmstead domesticity contrast markedly with the bloody and violent battles that take place in that setting. In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wohu canglong*, 2000), he utilises the startling green bamboo grove and the grid of old Beijing; in *Brokeback Mountain*, the hundreds of sheep stumbling up a mountainside, the headlights of a lone truck moving at a distance down a country road; in *The Ice Storm*, the cool metallic look of ice-encased branches and snow-slicked streets. All are extremely evocative and unforgettable, almost haunting, images. It is the style of Ang Lee: emotionally resonant (in human relationships) and visually splendid (in the natural world).

After the critical and commercial failure of *Hulk* in 2003, Lee faced a gruelling depression. During an introductory speech at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2005, where *Brokeback Mountain* was previewed, Lee said that after *Hulk* he was not sure if he wanted to continue to be a filmmaker. He considered stepping away from directing entirely. Ironically it was his father, a conservative high school principal and teacher who had always longed for his son to follow in his footsteps and settle into a more stable career, who pushed Lee back into the game. His father, who had never encouraged him to be a filmmaker, stunned his son by telling him: 'you need to go and make a movie.'

Ang Lee took his father's advice. The film that he went on to make was *Brokeback Mountain*. Regarding this film, Lee says, 'In some ways it was a movie I didn't dare to make for both economic and subject-matter reasons.'...

The entire island of Taiwan was held in thrall on the morning of Monday 6 March 2006, during the live presentation of the Academy Awards (broadcast live at 9am in Taiwan), while waiting to see if Ang Lee would be named Best Director, thereby becoming the first Asian in history to win the award. At the ceremony in 2001, when *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* had been nominated in the Best Film and Best Foreign Language Film categories, Lee's disappointment was palpable when *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* won the latter award. The film had taken America by storm in 2001 and arguably was more deserving of the Academy Award that ultimately went to *Gladiator* (2000).

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon had dominated the headlines that year, and all who saw it were claiming it was something really special: not only was it the most popular subtitled Mandarin film ever to be received in the West, but it spawned imitators that are still battling it out in the martial arts genre (*Hero* (2002), and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) are just two examples). Within a year of its release, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* became the highest-grossing foreign-language film ever released in the United States, and it triggered a cultural phenomenon, much the way *Brokeback Mountain* did following its release in 2005. There was hardly a movie-goer in America that year who did not see the film, or make a joke about 'Crouching Something, Hidden Something-else'. While the film took home four Academy Awards, Lee's disappointment was evident as his movie won for Best Foreign Language Film; he was clearly upset that the top award, Best Film, was going to elude him. Even while delivering his acceptance speech on the Academy stage, the bittersweet look on his face revealed his true feelings. The filmmaker who had unstintingly championed the cause of the outsider, the alienated and the foreigner was still considered a foreigner/outsider himself, and it clearly irked him.

Ang Lee was 37 years old when he began his career as a professional filmmaker. He had lived in America since he was 23. Ironically, although Lee had to overcome numerous obstacles due to his 'outsider' status in America, he initially did not find himself quite 'fitting in' with Asian society, either. Born on 23 October 1954 in Pingtung County, Taiwan, and growing up in both in Hualien and later in Tainan City, he faced increasing difficulty conforming to his own culture's expectations, particularly that of the model Chinese son. His father, Lee Sheng, a traditionalist in his Confucian emphasis on education as well as subjection to authority and conformity, was disappointed by his son's failure in the important national university entrance exams (Lee twice failed this exam that every Taiwanese youth spends his middle and high school years preparing for—both times he developed a mental block after panicking on the mathematics section). He had attended his father's own high school, Tainan First Senior High School, the best in the city. Lee Sheng was frequently disappointed by his son's lack of attention to books and poor performance at school; in the summer, during the school holiday, he would have both his sons practise calligraphy and study Chinese classics. Tainan First Senior High School was a strictly-regimented place where students wore the standard school uniform—identical khaki trousers and short-sleeved shirts embroidered with their student number—and studied in crowded classrooms in sweltering tropical heat. Lee frequently escaped to the Chin Men Theatre to watch movies, the only thing he was 'good at'.

After his repeated failure at the university entrance exam, Lee finally enrolled in the Theatre and Film programme at the Taiwan Academy of Arts (now the National Taiwan University of the Arts) which, when he attended in 1973, was a three-year vocational school rather than a prestigious university, a real step down in status in the eyes of his father. Worse, he was majoring in Theatre and Film, a field not considered gentlemanly or respectable, and in the conservative 1970s environment of Taiwan, one viewed with a jaundiced eye. People in the entertainment business in Taiwan at that time were considered somewhat akin to vaudeville entertainers in early American theatrical history—one step above prostitution and debauchery. Lee's proper, highly-educated father was appalled and shamed by this career choice; friends of his parents would deliberately not ask about him—and instead ask

about his younger brother, Khan—to avoid embarrassing Lee Sheng. It was almost unthinkable in Chinese culture for the son of a high school principal to go into acting.

Nevertheless, Lee was delighted with his experience at the Taiwan Academy of Arts and felt immediately at home acting onstage. In his own words, ‘My spirit was liberated for the first time.’ ...His father allowed him to stay at the Academy, with the appended promise that after graduation he would go abroad for further study. Lee was clearly a gifted performer; he acted in numerous roles, and in his second year at the Academy he won a top acting prize in a national competition. In his third year, he made a Super-8 film as a graduation project—the film was called *Laziness on a Saturday Afternoon* (*Xingqiliu xiawu de lansan*, 1976), an 18-minute black-and-white silent film about a kite. This film would later be included in the application materials that would gain him acceptance into New York University’s film school.



In 1978 Ang Lee went to the United States, and, with financial support from his family, entered the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as a theatre major. Within a few months of beginning his studies there, he turned 24; thus he was considerably older than his fellow students since he had been obligated to complete his two years of government-required military service in Taiwan following his time at the Academy. In addition to the drawback of being older, his English was heavily accented and far from fluent. Therefore, he inevitably faced difficulties with his drama performance and courses because it took him longer to read scripts and memorize his lines than it did his American classmates. However, during his time at the University of Illinois, he began experimenting with directing rather than acting and discovered a way to use his artistic vision that rendered his accented and grammatically imperfect English less of a problem. Although he had enjoyed acting and performing, he now threw himself into this new medium. He directed a production of Eugene Ionesco’s *The Chairs*, and studied the plays of Bertolt Brecht, Harold Pinter, Tennessee Williams and Eugene O’Neill. Describing his experience from that period, he says: ‘the look of Western theatre struck me in a big way...I got very good at it.’

Lee graduated from Illinois with a B.F.A. (Bachelor of Fine Arts) in Theatre/Theatre Direction in 1980. After graduation, he went on to the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University to complete a master’s degree in Film Production. At NYU, Lee enjoyed a very prolific early period producing student shorts. These films included *The Runner* (1980), *Beat the Artist* (1981), *I Love Chinese Food* (1981) and *Shades of the Lake* (1982). *Shades of the Lake*, also known as *I Wish I Was By That Dim Lake*, won Best Short Film in Taiwan’s Golden Harvest Film Festival. This second-year film project also won a full scholarship for Lee to continue his studies at NYU. In addition, during this early period in New York,

Lee had the opportunity to work with fellow NYU classmate Spike Lee. The two worked together on the latter’s student film *Joe’s Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads* (1984), with Ang Lee acting as assistant cameraman.

In 1983, Lee married Jan Lin, a fellow Taiwanese student at the University of Illinois who was majoring in microbiology. The two had met for the first time in August 1974 (a week after he had arrived in the US) on an international student outing to a Little League game in Gary, Indiana—they happened to sit next to each other in a car full of Taiwanese students. They continued to get to know each other during their time together at the university. Lin, interviewed by John Lahr in *The New Yorker* in 2003, described their courtship: ‘He just talks—about everything. I fall asleep, I wake up, he’s still talking.’ The year they married was also the year Lee’s father retired. Lin’s mother questioned the match. According to Lin, her mother said, ‘Why did you pick this one, with all the other nice boys around—engineering and regular people?’ Married in New York City, the two said their vows in a civil ceremony reminiscent of the famous courthouse marriage in *The Wedding Banquet* (*Xiyan*, 1993), which so embarrassed Lee’s mother just as it had the mother in the film. In addition, again echoing *The Wedding Banquet*, Lin became pregnant on their wedding night, but she would not permanently join her husband in New York until January 1986, when she finally graduated with her PhD. From the University of Illinois.

During his time at NYU, Lee spent two years making the lengthier film *A Fine Line* (1985) as a master’s thesis. This film, which is the story of a young Chinese girl, Piu Piu (Ching-Ming Liu) and a rough-neck Italian boy, Mario (Pat Cupo), was an earlier, more rudimentary version of the East-meets-West formula for which he later became known in his first trilogy of feature-length films, especially *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet*. Made over a period of two years, this film displayed Lee’s nascent talent for the East/West cultural dialectic, and also his eye for location (the film was largely shot in New York’s Chinatown and Little Italy, as well as in New Jersey, and on and around the Jersey River). He also worked with the then-unknown actor Chazz Palminteri on this film. The 43-minute *A Fine Line* won the New York University Film Festival’s top two awards for Best Director and Best Film—a great honour for the new Master of Fine Arts in Film Production—and was later aired on PBS. In addition to garnering the praises of both the NYU community and the larger film community in New York, Lee’s film attracted the attention of the top US film agency William Morris. As Lee related in Stephen Lowenstein’s *My First Movie*:

I decided to go back to Taiwan...But before I went I wanted...at least to show the film at the school’s film festival. I realised later that it was a big deal because a lot of people were from outside film school and a lot of Asians were watching. Anyway, I was packing up all my stuff...I got a phone call and they said, ‘This guy from William Morris is looking for you.’ And I said, ‘William who?’

Although he had not heard of the agency, the William Morris agent tried to convince him to stay in America and pursue whatever opportunities he could to develop screenplays and work on films. Lee relates how, having decided the prospects for a Chinese filmmaker in the US were slim, he was intending to head back to Taiwan to make a name for himself in his native country. At the time he received the phone call from William Morris, he had already packed everything he owned into eight cardboard boxes to be shipped to Taiwan the following day. As a result of the last-

minute offer from the William Morris agency, Lee decided to take the gamble of staying another half-year in New York while waiting for Jane to finish the final term of her doctoral program. It was a fateful decision.

Ang Lee has described the next six years of his life as ‘development hell’. His eldest son Haan had been born in 1984, and his son Mason followed in 1990. Lee spent the six years between *A Fine Line* and *Pushing Hands* being a househusband of sorts, cooking and looking for filmmaking opportunities. He wrote screenplays, and his agent occasionally found him work as a production assistant on other films while he tried unsuccessfully to pitch his own. It was a lonely and difficult time for Lee, living in the New York suburbs with sometimes very little to do: much the same way Sihung Lung does in the film *Pushing Hands*. John Lahr details how at one point Lee in desperation would go nearly daily to hit a tennis ball around at the local tennis court. When he became overly distraught, his wife would take him to his favourite restaurant, Kentucky Fried Chicken. Lee has often praised his wife and family publicly for not giving up on him and his dream during this period, saying he would not have become a filmmaker if it had not been for Jane’s support. During the years Lee was not working, she brought home the salary from her job as a microbiology researcher while Lee stayed at home taking care of their children. While somewhat more common in the US, this situation (a wife supporting the family as the main breadwinner) is considered an embarrassment in Chinese culture, Neil Peng, screenwriter on *The Wedding Banquet* and close friend of Lee from these early days, observed that ‘the artist has a tempo of his own’, implying that the six-year break gave Lee a chance to prepare himself for his directing career. ‘During those six years, Ang Lee never gave up his film dreams. He kept a huge movie database in his brain and would work on dozens of scripts at the same time.’

In 1990, with the birth of his second son, Lee was 36 and had little to show for his years of effort. It is difficult to imagine how the now world-famous director languishing through his thirties as year by year he grew no closer to his goal. With his poor English, no one was interested in financing his movies. James Shamus and Ted Hope at Good Machine had seen Lee’s graduate thesis film *A Fine Line*; in 1991, when they began to organise Good Machine as a firm to help worthy directors finance good projects with less-than-Hollywood budgets, they connected with Lee. According to Shamus, who met him just as his luck was changing,

It was clear when Ang left the room why he had not made a movie in six years...The idea of flying this guy to Los Angeles for a story meeting—forget it. When he left the office, I turned to Ted and said two things. One was ‘Boy, this guy can’t pitch his way out of a paper bag.’ And two: ‘he wasn’t pitching a movie; he was describing a movie he’d already made. He just needs somebody to realise it.’

In the meantime, Lee had entered a screenwriting contest held by the Taiwan government in order to strengthen the fledgling Taiwanese film industry. As the principal submission, he sent the screenplay ‘Pushing Hands’, and, almost as an afterthought, he included in his submission a three-year-old screenplay that had never excited any producer’s interest entitled ‘The Wedding Banquet’. Unbelievably, the breakthrough for Lee occurred as a result of this contest. In late 1990, these two screenplays won the top two prizes in the contest, and as a result, Lee was given US\$16,000 in prize money to make the winning script, ‘Pushing Hands’, into a film. The new head of Taiwan’s Central Motion

Picture Corporation threw his support behind the new film and gave Lee an additional US\$400,000 to make it. *Pushing Hands* was filmed entirely in New York; apart from the main actors, most of the crew was American. The culture-straddling experience of this early ‘international’ production foreshadowed Lee’s future career trajectory. *Pushing Hands* was hugely successful in Taiwan; it was the third-highest-grossing Mandarin-language film of 1991, and won two major Golden Horse awards (Taiwan’s version of the Academy Awards) as well as the Asian-Pacific Film Festival’s Best Film award. Nevertheless, despite the popularity of *Pushing Hands* in Taiwan, the film is little known in the West. This is due to the fact that since Lee wrote the screenplay with a Taiwanese audience in mind (in order to win the contest), the film enters deeply into Chinese cultural psychology and, due to its centralised theme of filial piety, sits more comfortably in the Taiwanese film aesthetic. However, because of the huge success of *Pushing Hands* in Taiwan, Central Motion Picture Corporation offered Lee a small budget to make the second film, *The Wedding Banquet*, with the stipulation that the movie be made in under six weeks. The newly formed film company Good Machine stepped in to help with the financing for both films, and James Shamus began what would be a decades-long collaboration with the director.

All three of Ang Lee’s early films continued his fascination with the East/West dialectic. *Pushing Hands*, completed in 1991, tells the story of an aging tai chi master forced to adjust to living in America with his son, who is married to a Caucasian woman. *The Wedding Banquet*, released in 1993, is a comedy drama about a young Taiwanese-American in New York who tries to hide his homosexuality from his tradition-bound parents by agreeing to marry a Chinese woman who wants to obtain US citizenship. This screenplay, written with Neil Peng, was based on the similar experience of a Taiwanese friend. The low-budget (US \$750,000) *The Wedding Banquet* was a huge hit, bringing in a worldwide profit of US\$32 million—thus becoming the most proportionately profitable film of 1993, surpassing even *Jurassic Park*. This film also garnered Lee his first Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film.

In 1994, Lee followed the success of *The Wedding Banquet* with the globalisation and feminist treatise *Eat Drink Man Woman*, set, for the first time, in Tapei.... ‘I felt a desperate need to establish myself as a Chinese filmmaker, so I needed to go back home...*Eat Drink Man Woman* was actually the first movie—and so far the only movie—I have made in my [birthplace], Taiwan.’ Lee discusses how during his six years as a house husband cooking for his family, he dreamed of making a film that would use food to make people’s mouths water—a sumptuous feast that would tempt and arouse the audience with food in the same way movies often use sex...

The success of Lee’s early trilogy attracted the attention of major studios in Hollywood. His next three films would be English-language films made with access to international funding and audiences. Producer and director Sydney Pollack of the Mirage production company was among those who admired how *The Wedding Banquet* and *Eat Drink Man Woman* managed to be touching and romantic without being maudlin or sentimental. When he was seeking a director to bring the Jane Austen novel *Sense and Sensibility* to the screen, he and colleague Geoff Stier turned their attention to Ang Lee....For his part, Lee was surprised to be asked to direct this British classic...but he agreed to do it....The success of *Sense and Sensibility* in 1995, with its seven Academy Award

nominations and a win for Emma Thompson (Best Adapted Screenplay), moved Ang Lee from the marginalised category of ‘foreign-language film director’ to a leading force in Hollywood. His next film, *The Ice Storm*, explored another culture and period of time—suburban America during the post-Watergate era of the 1970s. The critical success of *The Ice Storm*, which starred A-list Hollywood actors, followed by *Ride With the Devil*, a US Civil War film sympathetic to the plight of Southerners, further demonstrated Lee’s ability to penetrate the essence of whatever subject he tackled, no matter how unique or remote.

While Chinese audiences lamented the lack of public recognition for his English-language films’ achievements, Ang Lee was about to pull his biggest coup yet—the film he had been dreaming about making since childhood. At the beginning of his career almost ten years earlier, when making *Pushing Hands* on a shoestring budget in 1991, Lee was quoted in an interview published by the Taipei International Film Festival: ‘The thing I’d most like to do is make a classical Qing-dynasty-style martial arts film—I already have my eye on a novel I’d really like [to base it on]. In a later interview, Lee admits he had wanted to work with the Chinese martial arts genre since boyhood, and a friend of his, knowing his fondness for the work of Wang Dulu, recommended this particular series in 1994. When he read *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, with its strong central protagonist, Jen, he was convinced that there was a movie in the material. In 2000, his hopes were realised (he jokingly describes this movie as the result of a midlife crisis): he was able to assemble an astounding group of Chinese cast, crew and musical talents, drawing top performers and artists from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong (from Asian A-list actors Chow Yun-fat and Michelle Yeoh to Hong Kong-American pop singer Coco Lee and world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma) and filming in China, in places as diverse as the Gobi Desert and Taklamakan plateau north of Tibet, near the Kyrgyzstan border. Lee has mentioned in an interview that his fight choreographer, Yuen Wo Ping, had doubts about the Western audience’s ability to accept physical flight in a martial arts film:

I had long talks—no, *debates*—with Mr Yuen [Wo Ping] about whether to do the *qinggong* [a martial arts skill which enables practitioners to defy gravity] flying thing. For his experience, he [didn’t] think the West would take to it, but to me it’s a metaphor, and it’s visually very interesting. [So] I worked his team to death.

Lee decided to gamble on the flight sequences, with actors suspended from wires so they could appear to fly up walls and over rooftops, with a particularly challenging and hard-to-film scene in the treetops of a bamboo forest. It was a difficult shoot, as Michelle Yeoh, a female lead, broke her knee in the first fight sequence and had to be sidelined for three months out of the five-month shoot. Also, during filming, the cast and crew experienced difficulties like poor weather (in the driest place on earth—the Gobi Desert—it rained for days) and freezing cold. The film cost US\$12 million to make, a record-breaking cost for a Chinese film; Lee contributed his own salary to get the film finished. The film, advertised in a trailer that did not include spoken dialogue so that audiences would not necessarily be aware that it was a subtitled film in Mandarin, became an international sensation....

In May 2001, Lee was awarded an honorary doctorate from NYU which thrilled him and, above all, thrilled his father. The son that had once brought academic shame now had a PhD....

Taiwan has produced an ‘autobiography’ of Ang Lee in Chinese, entitled ‘A Ten-year Dream of Cinema’. This book, edited by Zhang Jingpei in 2002, was put together from interview notes and written as a first-person account. By Zhang’s indication, Lee does not like to sit for interviews and rarely grants them, suggesting that ‘If you want to understand me, it’s all in my films.’ John Lahr echoes this in his interview where Lee describes himself as ‘lacklustre’ in real life, a man who only comes to life when working. ‘I don’t have a hobby,’ he says, ‘I don’t have a life.’ Ang Lee thus asserts that he cannot be fully known or understood apart from his films—that the films he has made are the most articulate record of who he is and what his motivations are.

His films have always been full of risk, both topically and stylistically. His willingness to walk the line between the known and the unknown, and his humility in making his art with a seeming detachment from the outcome, is what makes his work so extraordinary. A quotation from Lee sums up the Taoist-inflected thought behind his filmmaking:

“Nothing stands still. That’s important in my movies. People want to believe in something, want to hang on to something to get security and want to trust each other. But things change. Given enough time, nothing stands still. I think seeking for security and lack of security is another [important theme] in my movies.”

Wuxia Narrative and Transnational Chinese Identity in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

“[In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*] my team and I chose the most populist, if not popular, genre in film history—the Hong Kong martial arts film—to tell our story, and we used this pop genre almost as a kind of instrument to explore the legacy of classical Chinese culture. We embraced the most mass of art forms and mixed it with the highest—the secret martial arts as passed down over time in the great Taoist school of training and thought.”

In 2001, Ang Lee’s astonishing film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the prototype of the new global swordfighting martial arts genre, gained major success in awards ceremonies in the US, including, most notably, the Academy Awards. Best Music (Score) winner Tan Dun described *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as crossing boundaries—of film genres, musical traditions and national cultures. This description of the film succinctly suggests the exciting trend towards globalisation reflected by the mainstream acceptance of a subtitled motion picture in Mandarin. This conception of globalisation is not only realised as the synthesis and transcendence of opposites, but also as the representation of geographic localities and notions of territory—including nationalism, identity, narrative and ethnicity. Lee’s films represent not only the international crossing of boundaries, but the repackaging and reappropriation of Chinese cultural identity. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, as well as three of Lee’s earlier works, *Eat Drink Man Woman*, *The Wedding Banquet* and *Pushing Hands*, are particularly clear examples of this phenomenon.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon proved to be his most globally recognised work yet. It was the highest-grossing foreign-language film ever to open in Britain, and the first Chinese-language film in history to become a mainstream American hit. Although Ang Lee had anticipated a fairly limited art-house response to the film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was widely acclaimed by critics, as well as receiving overwhelmingly positive word-of-mouth reviews. By March 2001, a few months after its release, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* had become the highest-grossing foreign-language film in American history. Its earnings

stand at close to US\$127 million....At Cannes, it garnered four of the top awards, while at the British Academy Awards (BAFTA) 2001, it won the David Lean Award for Best Director, Best Score, Best Costume Design and Best Film in a Foreign Language. At the Golden Globes, the film won Best Foreign Film and Ang Lee won Best Director. The film received ten Academy Award nominations, the greatest number of any foreign-language film in history. ...

The director adapted the screenplay from a five-part martial arts series written by Wang Dulu in the early twentieth century. The movie is mostly from the fourth book, set in Qing-dynasty China, about the *wuxia* expert Li Mu Bai who plans to retire and spend the rest of his life with the widowed warrior Yu Shu Lien, when the theft of his sword 'Green Destiny' interrupts his plans. Mu Bai and Shu Lien, track the theft to the young daughter of an aristocrat, Jen, a wonderfully complex character who hides both her martial arts expertise and a secret lover. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is a story of repression in the face of the Chinese virtues of loyalty and chastity—repression represented by the unspoken love between Mu Bai and Shu Lien, as well as the young Jen's repressed desire to break free from the social constrictions of family and conventions. Again, the timeless, universal qualities that are the larger themes of Lee's works are present in full force. On the surface is daily life, the structured social codes and conventions that dictate people's behaviour. Underneath the restrictive social mores are found the repressed desires—the hidden dragon. The social restrictions common to Chinese culture are at times inverted in the film—loyalty is opposed by betrayal, and chastity is supplanted by sexual transgression.

Wang Dulu, Qing China and China of the imagination

The story presented by Ang Lee is condensed and adapted from Wang Dulu's original narrative in the five-part series. Some of the major changes include the following: Li Mu Bai does not die in the fourth book. Instead, he outlives the three other principal characters and is still alive 21 years later at the conclusion of the five-part saga. Jennifer Jay (2003) notes that Li Mu Bai's screen death is a much more stirring depiction of the lovers' tragedy: that the unspoken love between Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien can never be consummated. Jade Fox is killed earlier in the series, not by Mu Bai but by Shu Lien. In addition, while the ending remains ambiguous in the movie, Jen's leap in Wang Dulu's book clearly does not end in death: she survives and has a final encounter with her lover Lo before disappearing to Xinjiang, where she gives birth to their baby. Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell W. Davis quote Wang Dulu's expository coda for the novel, which explains that Jen, out of duty to her parents and in keeping with her high-born status, could never marry the bandit, Lo. After returning to him for a single night of sexual intimacy (as in the film), Jen leaves Lo the following day. The novel reads: 'She left him the next day, without hesitation, like the tail of a celestial dragon slipping away, always "hidden", never to be found. This prose hints through writing at the "hiddenness" of Jen expressed visually by Lee in the breathtaking ending of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

This film represents Qing dynasty (1644-1911) Chinese society, but does not specify an exact time period—and with good reason. Lee did not seek to present a historically accurate vision of China, but instead, the 'China of the imagination', an image of China that is felt deeply in the heart. Thus, the film's most stunning scenes—an airborne battle among wispy bamboo plants; a final, suicidal leap to earth in reference to an ancient legend—are images

displaying uncommon artistry for the average martial arts film. While making the film, Ang Lee had to shoot for a balance between Eastern and Western aesthetics, and a balance between drama and action. For example, the pacing of the film broke away from traditional *wuxia* martial arts films because the first fight did not occur until nearly 15 minutes into the movie—an eternity for Lee's Chinese audience. In addition, actors in traditional martial arts films are not expected to perform both stunts and, simultaneously, produce real dramatic emotion; in this film, the actors had to do both at the same time. Because *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* garnered greater public acclaim in the West than in Chinese-speaking markets, some of Lee's critics have accused him of making a Hollywood version of a Chinese martial arts film—an orientalist version of kung fu, set adrift from its Chinese roots. However, it must be kept in mind that Lee fought to retain the Mandarin dialogue for the film's release in the United States, a choice which would normally restrict the marketability of the film to a limited art-house audience. Lee has memorably said, '[Making] a martial arts film in English to me is the same as...John Wayne speaking Chinese in a western.'



Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon mixes romance, feminism, martial arts and high-art aesthetics....The sexuality in this film is unsurpassed because it is eroticism with both Western and Chinese sensibilities. Chinese films, on the whole, are not normally so frank and explicit...

China in Ang Lee's imagination also has a deep emotional resonance. The China mainland, where this film was made, is the homeland of his parents, from which they were forced to flee during the Communist takeover of China. Both of his parents were from the mainland and moved to Taiwan following the Nationalists' defeat in the Chinese Civil War in 1949. His grandparents and the rest of his father's family were slaughtered during the struggle for Communist/Nationalist dominance of China. Lee's father, a native of Jiangxi Province of southern China, escaped to Taiwan as the family's sole survivor. Some of the ineffable longing and sadness in this film is surely attributable to the depth of loss experience by Lee's parents when they had to leave China. Although Lee grew up in Taiwan, the nostalgia for old China and the glories of its past is still a strong pull among the older generation of Chinese in Taiwan, especially the generation of Nationalist soldiers who retreated to Taiwan in 1949. It is important to realise that the film was not intended to be faithful to a historically-accurate China as much as it was intended to be faithful to the image of China in Ang Lee's mind....

Ang Lee adds: "I grew up in Taiwan and this was the kind of film that captured public fantasy back then—the storytelling, the melodrama and the morality. That was what I was aiming at, the nostalgic feeling."

One of the criticisms of this film is that it is ‘not Chinese enough’, or that it presents a hybridised version of Chinese culture. The cast is transnational and represents all the ‘Chinas’....Chinese audiences heard distinct differences in the Chinese accents of the four leads: only Zhang Ziyi spoke with a standard Beijing accent; Chang Chen spoke with a Taiwanese accent; Chow Yun-fat, a Cantonese accent, and Michelle Yeoh, a Malaysian-English accent. Ang Lee defends his choice against the Shaw Brothers/Golden Harvest practice of dubbing actors with standard Mandarin voices:

From the start...I made up my mind to make an all-Mandarin-speaking film, knowing full well that Chow and Yeoh can speak only Cantonese Mandarin. Honestly speaking, the Mandarin spoken by Chow in the film is better than that of Chen Shui-bia...,and even Jiang Zemin. I think ninety per cent of it is no problem at all. There are problems though, with Michelle Yeoh’s pronunciation and intonation. But I think the quality of the voice which is capable of carrying emotions is more touching than listening to dubbed standard Mandarin. Therefore I kept their voices....

The title *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* has multi-layered meanings. On the most obvious level, the Chinese characters in the title connect to the narrative since Jen’s Chinese name contains the character for ‘dragon’ and her lover Lo’s given name in Chinese means ‘tiger’. Thus the film’s title, to those familiar with Chinese characters, is as obvious a reference as *Romeo and Juliet*, or, in a related example, the famous Chinese lovers that Ang Lee admits inspired this film, Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai. On another level, the Chinese idiomatic phrase ‘wohu canglong’ (crouching tiger hidden dragon) is a common expression referring to the undercurrents of emotion, passion, and secret desires that lie beneath the surface of polite society and civil behaviour. These subverted desires, although hidden, are very potent and mysterious, and can emerge unexpectedly, or powerfully change the course of people’s lives. For example, Jen and Lo express their desires in sudden and unpredictable ways—as they do in the desert cave—because they are young, wild and headstrong....

As the director himself has pointed out, this film’s use of *wuxia* is not simply to provide gratuitous action sequences—the *wuxia* displays also serve a narrative function. Because the martial arts form externalises the hidden passions and emotions, these scenes also help tell the story. Thus, the violence, restraint and exhilaration in the fighting sequences are, in Ang Lee’s mind, equivalent to verbal altercations in domestic dramas. Thus, when Jen and Shu Lien clash in a fight, the fight’s root source is indicated by Shu Lien’s furious and possessive remark: ‘Don’t touch it. That’s Li Mu Bai’s sword.’ This remark displays the hidden passion of Shu Lien in a subtext that is almost Freudian.

The ambiguous ending of the film is a challenge to the viewer. There are two ways to view Jen’s death-defying leap from the mountain bridge and flight through the air, which goes into glorious slow-motion as Jen flies downwards. The first way is to view it as Jen’s wish coming true, that indeed she will fly and land safely because of her ‘leap of faith’. This is the ending steeped in magical realism—not too far-fetched, since Jen already displayed capabilities of flight at different points throughout the movie. Further developing this allegory, Fran Martin (2005) reads Jen’s flight as signifying the ‘rebel girl’ of global pop-feminism, much in the same tradition as the final death-defying drive off the cliff at the

conclusion of Ridley Scott’s *Thelma and Louise* (1991)—that film also ‘refuses visually to imply the deaths of its heroines, who seem to remain forever suspended in their ultimate trajectory.

The second way to view the ending is with the finality of tragedy. As in a Shakespearean tragedy when the principal characters corpses litter the stage at the drama’s dénouement....

When *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was released in 2000, critics began to consider Ang Lee as a director with a unique vision. Not only had he done a marvellous job recreating an ancient and now non-existent China—‘the China that is fading away in our heads’, as Lee has called it—but he was bringing a breath of fresh air into a cynical, inbred and inward-looking Hollywood. In recent years, Hollywood films, especially comedies, have sunk to a new level of tired self-referencing and referencing of other recent, unfunny comedies; at the same time, the topics of mainstream dramas and serious films are often formulaic and dictated by box-office receipts. The answer, at least for the *New Yorker*’s film critic Anthony Lane, is the freshness brought in by foreign filmmakers like Ang Lee. ...Lane poses this question:

Is it too fanciful to suggest that the generation of [Ang] Lee, Chen Kaige, Wong Kar-wai, Zhang Yimou and Hou Hsiao-hsien, or perhaps the generation that follows them, might ride to the rescue—or, at any rate, resuscitation—of American movies with some of the panache that marked the great Mitteleuropa immigration of the 1930s and 1940s, itself an escape from a world of threat? Would Ernst Lubitsch, watching *The Wedding Banquet*, not have recognised the stirrings of a kindred spirit?

These observations about the power of foreign and international influences to ‘resuscitate’ American film are prescient and anticipate Ang Lee’s dominance of awards ceremonies in 2005 and 2006. The point that Lee makes ‘uncowed’ cinema seems to anticipate the daring social commentary in *Brokeback Mountain*. With the making of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Lee not only dares to refashion a classic Chinese genre with his own expanded vision, he also successfully brings the *wuxia* world to global popularity to enliven international cinema....

Looking back at the father theme in each of his films in 2005 while making *Brokeback Mountain*, Lee said: ‘I never really stopped dealing with [the theme of the father]....Making a movie can really hurt. But unless it hurts, you don’t usually get anything fresh.’

The films of Ang Lee as a whole are characterised by silence, which emphasises emotional repression with a spare and severe beauty. This is what gives his films—such as *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Ice Storm* and *Ride With the Devil*—a lyrical, meandering quality....

One of the challenges that Ang Lee presents is his categorisation within national or transnational cinema. Chinese or Hollywood cinema, independent art-house or big-budget blockbuster. Lee resists any easy categorisation; his position in world cinema underscores the slippery terrain of modern academic terminology, as well as the shifting conceptualisation of national identity in a globalised society. One thing is certain, however: he brings a Chinese sensibility to his films which makes them transcendent. Lee’s films do not aim for a standard Hollywood ‘happy ending’. On the whole, Chinese dramas do not reach a state of ‘closure—there is a much greater tolerance of unresolved sadness and pain. This is why his films, with this Chinese aesthetic, have such an appeal to the Hollywood-saturated English-speaking world. He brings the tension of unresolved tragedy to his work in, for

example, the ending of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in which the viewer is not informed whether the female lead lives or dies, or the ending of *Brokeback Mountain* which leaves the main character with unresolved heartache in a dilapidated trailer home. Lee carries this unresolved tension, which is an element of Chinese sensibility, into his films and makes it accessible and appealing to the non-Chinese viewer. The phrase 'huai jui' or 'nostalgia for the past' is a big part of the melancholic element in Chinese culture. The Chinese sense of the word 'nostalgia' is not quite the same as the Western meaning; the word 'nostalgia' in Chinese carries with it an almost unbearable yearning, a sense of unfulfilled desire—in other words, a longing for things to be not as they are. This nostalgic yearning characterises Chinese art and literature, especially poetry....

Ang Lee ends his 2002 Chinese-language autobiography, 'A Ten-Year Dream of Cinema', with the text of an English poem entitled 'The Dreame' by seventeenth-century poet Ben Jonson, a

contemporary of Shakespeare.... Like the desire that 'dares not come within my sight' in this poem, Lee's films express the unknown and unrealised desires of the heart. He uses the example of Marianne, who loved not Willoughby but the fascination of her own romantic interest in him; and Jen, who leapt into the clouds into an unknown state, caught in an endless reverie, preferring this to her real-life lover, Lo. Lee uses this poem as a metaphor to express his own experience of living in the 'world of film', the 'world within the screen'. For Ang Lee, film is like a 'subtile Dreame disguis'd', the elusive and fleeting sense captured by Jonson's poem.

Lee closes his autobiography with these words: 'I would like to live inside the film and observe the world from the other side of the screen—perhaps it is even more beautiful.'

SPRING 2008 SCREENING SCHEDULE:

Jan 15 Mervyn LeRoy GOLD DIGGERS OF 1933 (1933)*
 Jan 22 Jacques Tournier CAT PEOPLE (1942)*
 Jan 29 Irving Rapper NOW, VOYAGER (1942)
 Feb 5 Billy Wilder ACE IN THE HOLE (1951)
 Feb 12 Billy Wilder WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION (1957)
 Feb 19 François Truffaut 400 BLOWS (1959)
 Feb 26 Masaki Kobayashi HARA KIRI (1962)
 Mar 4 Robert Altman MCCABE & MRS. MILLER (1971)*
 Mar 18 Hal Ashby BEING THERE (1982)*
 Mar 25 Sydney Pollack TOOTSIE (1982)
 Apr 1 Krzysztof Kieslowski The Double Life of Veronique (1991)
 Apr 8 Jane Campion THE PIANO (1993)
 Apr 15 Clint Eastwood UNFORGIVEN (1992)
 Apr 22 Ingmar Bergman THE SEVENTH SEAL (1957)



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