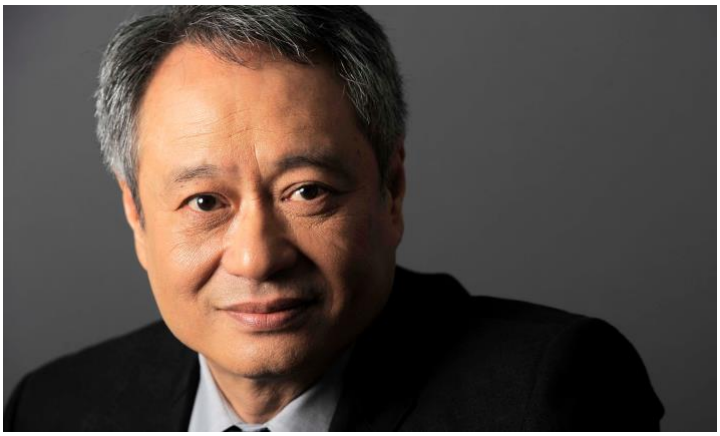
December 6, 2022 (XVIII:15)
Ang Lee **CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON** (2000, 120 min)
URL for this week's film introduction: https://vimeo.com/777703720
URL for 7:00 Tuesday discussion zoom

DIRECTOR Ang Lee
WRITING Screenplay by Wang Hui Ling, James Schamus, and Tsai Kuo Jung; based on the book by Wang Du Lu
PRODUCERS And Lee, Hsu Li Kong, Bill Kong, Dong Ping (co-producer), Zheng Quan Gang (co-producer), Chui Po Chu (associate producer), Phillip Lee (associate producer), David Linde (executive producer), James Schamus (executive producer), Shia Wai Sum (line producer) and Lie Er Dong (line producer)
CINEMATOGRAPHY Peter Pau
MUSIC Dun Tan
COSTUME DESIGN Tim Yip
PRODUCTION DESIGN Tim Yip
EDITING Tim Squyres

The film received widespread international acclaim. At the 2001 Academy Awards, it won in four categories: Best Cinematography (Peter Pau), Best Music, Original Score (Dun Tan), Best Art Direction - Set Decoration (Tim Yip), and Best Foriegn Language Film. It was nominated for Best Picture (Ang Lee, William Kong, and Li-Konh Hsu), Best Director (Ang Lee), Best Writing, Screenplay Based on Material Previously Produced or Published (Hui-Ling Wang, James Schamus, and Kuo Jung Tsai), Best Costume Design (Tim Yip), Best Film Editing (Tim Squyres), and Best Music, Original Song (Jorge Calandrelli, Dun Tan, and James Schamus for the song "A Love Before Time").

CAST
Chow Yun-Fat...Master Li Mu Bai
Michelle Yeoh...Yu Shu Lien
Ziyi Zhang...Jen Yu Jen
Chang Chen...Lo
Sihung Lung...Sir Te
Pei-Pei Cheng...Jade Fox
Fazeng Li...Governor Yu
Xian Gao...Bo
Yan Hai...Madame Yu
Deming Wang...Tsai
Li Li...May
Suying Huang...Auntie Wu
Jinting Zhang...De Lu
Rui Yang...Maid
Kai Li...Gou Jun Pei
Jianhua Feng...Gou Jun Sinung
Zhenxi Du...Shop Owner
Cheng Lin Xu...Captain
Feng Lin...Captain

Wensheng Wang...Gangster A
Dong Song...Gangster B
Zhongxuan Ma...Mi Biao
Bao Cheng Li...Fung Machete Chang
Yongde Yang...Monk Jing
Shaojun Zhang...Male Performer
Ning Ma...Female Performer
Jianmin Zhu...Waiter
Changsheng Dong...Homeless Man
Yi Shih...Waitress
Bin Chen...Servant
Shaocheng Zhang...Nightman



ANG LEE (b. October 23rd, 1954) is a Taiwanese filmmaker. Five years before his birth, his parents moved to Taiwan from Mainland China as a result of the Chinese Civil War. After studying at the National Taiwan University of the Arts and finishing his mandatory military service, he traveled to the US in 1979 to study acting at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, though he would soon switch his focus to directing. He continued his studies at NYU, where he was a classmate of Spike Lee and served as assistant director for that Lee's thesis film, *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads* (1983). His own thesis, *Fine Line* (1984), won NYU's Wasserman Award for Outstanding Direction and was also chosen for broadcast by PBS. However, his career would not take off until the early 1990s, when two of his scripts attracted the attention of Hsu Li-kong, a recently-promoted senior manager at a major Taiwanese studio who produced the resulting films with Lee directing. The first, *Pushing Hands,* was released in 1991 with both box office and critical success in Taiwan, receiving eight nominations in the Golden Horse Film Festival. The second, 1993's *The Wedding Banquet,* garnered overseas attention, earning a nomination for Best Foriegn Film at the Academy Awards. Each of these films stages a confrontation between Eastern and Western lifestyles and values, depicting Chinese and Taiwanese characters living in New York City, like Lee at the time of writing. Lee and Li-kong would once again collaborate for 1994's *Eat Drink Man Woman*, set in Taiwan. These first three films are informally known as his "Father Knows Best" trilogy. He directed 1995's *Sense and Sensibility*, based on the Austen novel of the same name, to widespread international success; the film was nominated for seven Academy Awards and won Best Adapted Screenplay for screenwriter and star Emma Thompson. After directing a few other blockbusters, proving his skill in both commercial and art-house filmmaking, he directed the wuxia film for which he is best known, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000); the film was nominated for 10 Academy Awards in 2001, including Best Picture, and won Best Foreign Language Film, Best Art Direction, Best Original Score, and Best Cinematography. He has continued to direct films of varying commercial and critical success; some of his other films include *Gemini Man* (2019), *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2016), *Life of Pi* (2012), *Taking Woodstock* (2009), *Lust, Caution* (2007), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *Hulk* (2003), *The Hire: Chosen* (2001), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Ride with the Devil* (1999), and *The Ice Storm* (1997). Lee has been nominated for nine Academy Awards and won three: Best Foreign Language Film for *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* and Best Director for *Brokeback Mountain* and *Life of Pi*, becoming the first non-white director to win the latter.

WANG HUI LING (b. unknown) is a Taiwanese screenwriter best known for her collaborations with Ang Lee: *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), *Lust, Caution* (2007), and tonight's film. She has 13 total writing credits, including *The Myth* (2005), *Fleeing by Night* (2000), *Ren jian siyue tian* (TV Miniseries, 2000), *Hou niao* (2001), *The Legend of Eileen Chang* (2004), *Thanks for Having Loved Me* (TV Series, 2007), *The Crossing* (2014), *The Crossing 2* (2015), and *Legend of the Demon Cat* (2017).

JAMES SCHAMUS (b. September 7th, 1959) is an American screenwriter, producer, businessman, and director. After earning his BA, MA and PhD from UC Berkeley, all in English, he began working in film. With Ang Lee, he has co-written *Pushing Hands* (1991), *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), *The Ice Storm* (1997), *Eat, Drink,*

Man, Woman (1994), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Hulk* (2003), and *Taking Woodstock* (2009); he also produced *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). He is the co-founder of the production company Good Machine and the former CEO of the film financing and distribution company Focus Features, a subsidiary of NBCUniversal. He currently teaches film theory and history at Columbia, and he has previously taught at Yale and Rutgers. He is the author of *Carl Theodor Dreyer's Gertrud: The Moving Word*, published by the University of Washington Press in 2008. In 2016, he directed an adaptation of Philip Roth's *Indignation.* In addition to his 59 producer credits, he has 14 total writing credits; some of these include *The King's Daughter* (2022), *Somos* (TV Miniseries, 2021), and *Ride With The Devil* (1999).

TSAI JUO JUNG (b. unknown) is a Taiwanese screenwriter and film critic. As a critic, he is the chief entertainment editor of the *China Times* and has written multiple books on Chinese-language film. As a screenwriter, he has six credits, including tonight's film, *Ren she da zhan* (1982), *Water's Origin* (TV Movie, 2014), *The King of Drama* (TV Series, 2016), *The Mouse Serves a Guest Tea* (TV Miniseries, 2019), and *A Thousand Goodnights* (TV Series, 2019).

WANG DU LU (b. Wang Boaxiang, also known as Xiaoyu, 1909—d. February 12th, 1977) was a Chinese novelist who worked primarily in mystery, science fiction, and wuxia romance genres. Born in Beijing, he worked as a clerk, editor, and teacher before becoming a writer in 1931. His early novels are primarily detective mysteries, though he started to write wuxia novels after moving to Qingdao around 1938. His most popular works are referred to as the *Crane-Iron Series,* which chronicles four generations of *youxia*, or wandering heroes. Though there are adaptations, no official English translations exist. Following the Chinese Civil War, he was deemed an "old literari," banned from producing new works, and assigned to work as a school teacher. However, he was subsequently labeled a "reactionary literati" and sentenced to farm labor following his retirement in the mid-60s. He died of an unknown illness in 1977. In addition to tonight's film, his *Crane-Iron* series has been adapted into *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny,* a 2016 American-Chinese film that was released on Netflix outside of China.

CHOW YUN-FAT (b. May 18th, 1955) is an actor from Hong Kong. After attending a casting call in 1973, he began his career as a popular and charismatic actor in a number of films and television shows, eventually culminating in a breakout role in the popular TV series *Shanghai Beach* (1980). Further success attracted the attention of John Woo, who subsequently cast him in crime and gangster films such as *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), *A Better Tomorrow 2* (1987), *The Killer* (1989), and *Hard Boiled* (1992). Following this success, he appeared in US films such as *The Replacement Killers* (1998), *The Corruptor* (1999), *and Anna and the King* (1999). He has a total of 117 acting credits, and some others include *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), *Dragonball Evolution* (2009), *Stranglehold* (2007), *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (2007), *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* (2006), *Bulletproof Monk* (2003), *Anna and the King* (1999), *The Replacement Killers* (1998), *American Shaolin* (1994), and *The Reincarnation*

(1976).

MICHELLE YEOH (b. August 6th, 1962) is a Hong Kong Malaysian actress who has 58 acting credits. At the age of 15, she moved to the United Kingdom from Ipoh, Perak with her parents, eventually studying at the Royal Academy of Dance in London and majoring in ballet, which she had studied since the age of four; however, following a spinal injury that prevented her from becoming a professional ballet dancer, she redirected her focus to other arts, earning a BA in creative arts with a minor in drama. She won the Miss Malaysia World contest in 1983, later serving as Malaysia's representative at London's Miss World 1983. After appearing in a commercial with Jackie Chan, she began to be cast in martial arts films, for which she performed most of her own stunts. During this period, she was known as Michelle Khan. She took a break from acting from 1987 to 1992, appearing in

Police Story 3: Super Cop (1992) for her return role. She would not change her stage name to Michelle Yeoh until 1997, corresponding with her starring role in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies,* opposite Pierce Brosnan. She of her films since include *The Touch* (2002), *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (2008), *The*

Lady (2011), *Crazy Rich Asians* (2015), Marvel's *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (2021), and this year's wildly successful *Everything Everywhere All at Once.* She has 11 projects currently in post-production, including a *Transformers* sequel and three entries in the *Avatar* franchise.

ZIYI ZHANG (b. 9 February 1979) is a Chinese actress and model, regarded as one of the Four Dan Actresses of China alongside Zho Wei, Zho Xun, and Xu Jinglei. Like Yeoh, she first studied dance, entering the Beijing Dance Academy at age 11 and winning a national youth dance championship at 15, leading to acting roles in Hong Kong television commercials. In 1996, she entered the Central Academy of Drama, marking the proper start of her acting career. The same year, she made her debut with the TV movie *Touching Starlight* at the age of 16. However, it was her 1998 role in Zhang Yimou's film *The Road Home* that served as her breakout, winning her critical acclaim internationally. Following her role in tonight's film, she began to appear in American films, starting with 2001's *Rush Hour 2* and followed with 2002's *Hero*. She has since worked across genres and national contexts, appearing in both high-octane blockbusters and art-house dramas. Some of her other films include *Purple Butterfly* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), *2046* (2004), *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), *Princess Raccoon* (2005), *TMNT* (2007), *The Horsemen* (2009), *Dangerous Liaisons* (2012), *The Grandmaster* (2013), *The Crossing* (2014), *The Cloverfield Paradox* (2018), and *Godzilla: King of Monsters* (2019).

CHANG CHEN (b. October 14th 1976) is a Taiwanese actor whose breakout role at the age of 14 in Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer's Day* (1991) won him a Special Jury Prize at the Tokyo International Film Festival. Other early roles were similarly prestigious, including screen time in Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together* (1997) and tonight's film. Later, he would also appear in Wong Kar-wai's *2046* (2004), *The Hand* (part of *Eros,* 2004), and *The Grandmaster* (2013), Hou Hsaio-hsien's *Three Times* (2005), and *The Assassin* (2015), Kim Ki-duk's *Breath* (2007), as well as *Red Cliff* (2008-2009), *Brotherhood of Blades* (2014), *Mr. Long* (2017), and Denis Vileneuve's *Dune* (2021). He also works as a voice actor for Taiwanese dubs. For tonight's film, he learned Uygher and horse riding.

SIHUNG LUNG (b. 1930 – May 2, 2002) was a Taiwanese actor best known for playing paternal roles as well as for his collaborations with Ang Lee. After fighting mainland China in the Chinese Civil War and eventually escaping to Taiwan, he began acting, joining an army-sponsored troupe and appearing in numerous Chinese-language films and soap operas. By the time he was cast in Ang Lee's *Pushing Hands* (1991), he had retired from acting, but the director, having watched Lung's work as a child, was able to convince him to return to his vocation and play a father. He subsequently appeared in Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), as well as tonight's film. Some of his other appearances include *Eight Hundred Heroes* (1976), *Tonight Nobody Goes Home* (1996), *The Opium War* (1997), *Fuwajo* (1998), *Double Vision* (2002), and *The Touch* (2002).

PEI-PEI CHENG (b. January 6th, 1946) is a Chinese actress known as the "Queen of Swords" due to her roles as skilled sword-handlers in 1960s wuxia films. Moving to Hong Kong in 1962, she soon began studying the performing arts, making her film debut in *Lover's Rock,* a 1964 Taiwanese drama film. One of her best-known films is *Come Drink With Me,* the 1966 Hong Kong wuxia. In the 1970s, she moved to southern California to raise her children; while there, she attended business school at the University of California, Irvine, taught Chinese dance, and even hosted a Mandarin talk show, *Pei Pei's Time,* on LA's KSCI television station, where she met Ang Lee, who subsequently cast her in tonight's film. She has 112 acting credits, including *Mulan* (2020), *Bell Chamber*

(2019), *In a New York Minute* (2019), *Love of Hope* (2017), *Cooking for Two* (2016), *The Sleeping Beauty* (TV Series, 2016), *Lost in Wrestling* (2015), *The Guardsman* (2011), *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li* (2009), *They Wait* (2007), *Sex and the Beauties* (2004), *Naked Weapon* (2002), *Shadow Mask* (2001), , *The Spirit of the Dragon* (1998), *Lover's Lover* (1994), *Painted Faces* (1988), and *All The King's Men* (1982).

David Minnihan: "Lee, Ang" (*Senses of Cinema* 2008)

Ang Lee's Fine Line Between East and West

Taiwan-born Ang Lee is that most unlikely of filmmakers: a man equally at home with Jane Austen or Marvel Comics, the American West or Qing Dynasty China, the family drama or myths of unrequited love. His appeal is broad, crossing high and low culture, East and West. Lee is the epitome of globalization and its effect on the film world. He is an outsider to his native Taiwan, having spent most of his adult life in the US, and an outsider to America, being foreign-born and raised in a far different culture. His films not only capture the essence of Chinese culture and family dynamics as skilfully as they do American life and iconography, but also express the commonalities and conflicts between the Eastern and Western traditions.

Lee is known mostly for his chameleon-like diversity whereby each film is an entirely different genre and subject from the previous one. However, every choice he makes further refines his singular exploration of the relationship between society and the individual, or outsider. When viewed in sequence, his work is remarkably consistent, just as are the films of Howard Hawks or Billy Wilder or the other great auteurs of the past. Despite such diverse subject matter, Lee always manages to find common themes in whatever material he chooses. He defines better than any other director the concept of globalization in cinema.

Since the first wave of German immigration into Hollywood in the 1930s, many filmmakers have gone from one country to another to live and work. Few, however, have explored the idea of multiculturalism as deeply or inherently as Lee, able to negotiate consistently back and forth between the two countries and two audiences. Though some films appeal more to the Chinese market, and others to the Western, Lee's constant emphasis on bridging the gap and offering something for everyone is admirable. It has allowed him to create three of Hollywood's unquestionable modern masterpieces, *The Ice Storm* (1997), *Ride with the Devil* (1999) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), as well as two of the greatest films in the Chinese language, *Wo hu cang long* (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, 2000) and *Se, jie* (*Lust, Caution*, 2007). Lee's diversity of audience and subject matter, contrasted with his unity of theme and technique, make him one of the most unique filmmakers in cinema today.

Early Life

Born in southern Taiwan in 1954, Ang Lee was the son of a very traditional Chinese father who encouraged academic excellence and achievement in his children, something Ang never achieved in his early life. Lee Sheng became the principal of an illustrious high school, sending his sons there to excel. The family saw movies once a week, mostly Hollywood or Hong Kong films such as Li Hanxiang's *Liang Shan Bo yu Zhu Ying Tai*(*The Love Eterne*, 1963). For Sheng, these films were mere entertainment, but for Ang they became an obsession and a goal. In college for film and theatre, he was influenced by American and European films, specifically Mike Nichols' *The Graduate* (1967) and Ingmar Bergman's *Jungfrukällan* (*The Virgin Spring*, 1960) (1), and he acted in theatre productions such as *The Glass Menagerie*, before making his first short film (2).

Lee then came to the United States to receive a Bachelor's degree before attending New York University to achieve a Master's degree in Film Production. He directed several shorts before completing his thesis film, *Fen Jiexian* (*A Fine Line*, 1985), about a Chinese-American girl and an Italian-American boy, winning the schools' awards for Best

Film and Best Director. Lee married Jane Lin, a microbiologist, and for the next six years he tried unsuccessfully to follow up on the achievement of his student film. Lee stayed home and raised his two sons, Haan and Mason, dreaming up ideas and writing screenplays for the future. He and his father were not on good terms, since Ang insisted on pursuing a disgraceful occupation in the arts. This relationship deeply informs all of his films, as each tries harder and harder to escape the shadow of 'the father', while simultaneously becoming him. In 1990, he entered two of his screenplays in the Taiwanese national screenwriting competition, and they ended up winning first and second place.

First Efforts: Dealing With 'The Father'

Lee's first-prize winning screenplay, for *Tui shou* (*Pushing Hands*, 1992), focuses on a Chinese *tai qi* master retiring to suburban New York to live with his son, grandson (played by Lee's own son Haan) and American daughter-in-law. The film prefigures many of the themes that will run throughout Lee's work – most importantly that of the outsider, Master Chu (Lung Sihung), reflecting on and highlighting the exclusivity of the society into which he has entered. The film opens with an extended sequence with little-to-no dialogue, contrasting the Eastern and Western daily routines of Master Chu and his daughter-in-law, each inhabiting a different mental space while sharing the same physical one.

Pushing Hands finds its strength when it allows Lung to dominate a scene. The sequence of his self-imposed exile as a dishwasher in New York City captures the alienating effects of American life on an outsider, while allowing the film to grow beyond the realm of the family and its few characters. Here we see the outsider entering into the established hierarchy of the Chinatown restaurant, and disrupting the social order by his 'other-ness', while the manager represents westernization in his materialistic concentration on how much monetary value each worker provides. In the end, the outsider's journey ends not by trying to fit into society – living with his son in the Chinese manner – or by rebelling against society – fighting with mafia or police who are unable to remove him from the premises of the restaurant-but by finding a compromise –getting an apartment in the city, teaching *tai qi* to Chinese and Americans, and beginning a new relationship-learning how to accept his position as an outsider and still living his own life to its fullest satisfaction.

Crucial to the making of the film was James Schamus, Lee's producing partner. The partnership has lasted throughout all ten films, with Schamus first as producer and later writing as well. Theirs is one of the most constant and fruitful collaborations in modern film, without which Lee may not have achieved the level of success he has. Having Schamus onboard also helped Lee's earlier films by enhancing the Western aspects of the characters and settings.

In second-prize winner *Xi yan* (*The Wedding Banquet*, 1993), the outsider figure and the father are put at odds. The father (again Lung Sihung) is a retired Taiwanese general who wants nothing more than a grandson to carry on his family line, while the son, Wai-Tung (Winston Chao), is made an outsider by means of his sexuality, having to keep this alternate life in America hidden from his parents. The film defines homosexuality as an aspect of Western life, with a great deal of the comedy coming from his mother's trying to find him a wife, and later, when she knows the truth, trying to find out how he was led 'astray' by his American lover Simon (Mitchell Lichtenstein) or by his time in the US.

The film centres on a sham marriage Wai-Tung organizes with his tenant, Wei-Wei (May Chin), in order to give her a green card and make his parents to leave him alone about marriage. When the parents show up in New York to attend the wedding, however, the false couple has to create a real life together. Wai-Tung is pulled in four different directions by the four people who have come to inhabit his home and his life, each expecting something different of him until he can no longer cope. It is through an act of forgiveness by the father, accepting Simon as Wai-Tung's lover that the pressure is relieved and Wai-Tung finds his compromise.

Here, the father is seen as a burden on the son, who has to deal with his presence and his wishes. In the end, having accidentally made his 'wife' Wei-Wei pregnant allows him to fulfil his father's expectations in a way he never imagined. The compromise that

Wai-Tung reaches – himself, Simon, and Wei-Wei living together to raise the baby – again allows the outsider to remain an outsider (homosexual), without ignoring or rebelling against the society in which he lives.

Mature Films: Becoming 'The Father'

In *Yin shi nan nu* (*Eat Drink Man Woman*, 1994), Lee begins a series of five films over the course of which he will both exorcise and become the father figure. In his first mature work, many plot strands are skilfully woven together, characters balanced off one another in a self-described 'cubist' filmmaking technique that he will continue to use in *The Ice Storm* and *Hulk*(2003). (3) The world-building that makes Lee's films so rich is displayed here for the first time. This time, the world is that of modern Taipei, a place that felt quite foreign to Lee upon returning there to film. The Yasujiro Ozu-like story of master chef Chu who is trying to hold on to his three daughters builds its plot in an overlapping manner with each event placed in a sequence to cause reflection upon the preceding events. This structure gives the film a very different feel when compared to the more straightforward storytelling in the first two films, and anticipates the complexities of plot in the later ones.

Each of the daughters feels, in her own way, that she is an outsider: eldest Jia-Jen (Yang Kuei-Mei), because her traditional values feel out of place in the modern world of Taipei; middle Jia-Chien (Wu Chien-Lien), since she has only ever wanted the one thing her father wouldn't let her have, a life as a chef; and youngest Jia-Ning (Wang Yu-Wen), because her modern life (working at Wendy's, becoming pregnant before marriage) doesn't fit with her father's values. The father here is a more sympathetic figure, always wanting to serve others the only way he knows how: food. He makes feasts for his daughters regularly and prefers for them to have a better life than his own. Lee is no longer simply burdened by the father, but has not yet reached the point of communication with him. The family tries to communicate through their elaborate weekly dinner rituals. The dinner table conversations are full of half statements and comments made to disguise the speakers' true feelings, and, when a family member brings any kind of important news to the table, it only makes the others unhappy.

The resolution in *Eat Drink Man Woman* again comes through compromise between tradition and modernity, only this time it is Chu who takes the biggest step, surprising his daughters by marrying a family friend many years his junior. The father finally asserts his own desires, turning out to be very modern himself. Thus he integrates each of the daughters into the family and society by being more daring in his own choices than they have in theirs. This is the last time Lee will deal directly with the dichotomy between Chinese and Western culture. In later films, it will be more subtly presented within the philosophies of the characters.

His next film, *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), applies Lee's established family dynamic to a new setting: that of Jane Austen's English countryside. Though the father is hardly seen in the film, his absence is powerful, as his death sets the narrative into motion. This is the first film adapted from an existing literary source and it remains closer to the original than his subsequent adaptations. Lee would eventually become a master at cinematic adaptation, converting a written story into its most cinematic form, and creating a separate work of art that stands alongside its source and complements it.

The film contrasts the reserved Elinor Dashwood (writer Emma Thompson) with her impulsive sister, Marianne (Kate Winslet), as they navigate British society hoping to find suitable husbands after the loss of their fortune through the Will of their father. The daughters are again outsiders, here due to their loss of status. They face the adversity brought on by the contempt of the aristocracy and the desperation of troubled love. This is enhanced by the intricate societal rules of the time that prevent experimentation of the sort practiced by the daughters in *Eat Drink Man Woman*. The contrast between these behavioural codes and the desires of the daughters who must hold their true feelings inside is similar to the tradition/modernity conflict in the previous films.

The compromise for the Dashwood sisters rests on their acceptance of men who are also societal

outsiders, though they arrive at their decisions in different ways. Marianne gives up her romantic notions of dying for love and realizes the value of what has always been in front of her, the calm kindness of Colonel Brandon (Alan Rickman), while Elinor finds that the man she loved deep in her heart would gladly join her outside of society. The outsiders find their contentment by changing the way they accept or reject their surroundings and place, or lack thereof, in the social order.

With *The Ice Storm* (1997), Lee created his first masterpiece, combining the societal analysis and period detail of *Sense and Sensibility*with the family drama of *Eat Drink Man Woman* to achieve his most subtle portrait of a family on the brink of crisis. This black-comedy-turned-tragedy follows the lives of two New England families, the Hoods and the Carvers, over Thanksgiving week in 1973. More than any of Lee's other films, *The Ice Storm* is a film of texture-clothing, wallpaper, bed sheets, iced windows, the leaf-covered forest floor-the details of the objects and period building connotative meaning. The film's visual palette is also essential to its mood, the muted greens and blues seeping from both interiors and exteriors accentuating the aimlessness of the characters.

The characters in this film are all outsiders, to both their own hearts and to the society in which they live. Many scenes are silent or have little dialogue, and when the characters do speak they are only mouthing the routine words used to conceal the true emotions underneath. Lee will return to this technique in *Brokeback Mountain* and *Lust, Caution*. The confusion of the characters is subtly related to the political, economic, and moral crises which America felt at the time, and the film illustrates very clearly how we are affected by our times and how we, in turn, affect them. Ben Hood (Kevin Kline), perhaps the most aimless of the film's self-interested parents, is the compass by which we read the other characters: catching his daughter with the neighbours' son, because he has come to the home in service of his own affair with the mother, he has no moral ground upon which to discipline his daughter, yet his carrying her home through the woods afterward shows everything that went unsaid about their familial bond.

The characters of the film are given salvation from the moral abyss into which they are slipping by the death of Mikey (Elijah Wood), the one character who truly does not belong in the world he has been given. He is the ultimate outsider, not able to fit into his society in any way, only able to resolve his quest when he reaches his perfect world – a world free of the physical and moral 'molecules' that he believes infect ours – in the ice storm. It is natural that his body is found by Ben, the father who needs more than anything an 'event' in his life to create forward momentum.

The Ice Storm takes another step in Lee's identification with the father, whose rebirth as both an individual and as a leader of his family is witnessed in intimate detail. The finale of the film brings us the first redemptive father in Lee's work – not only uniting his family, caring for them and serving them (as did the father in *Eat Drink Man Woman*), but taking their sins unto himself, compiling them with his own, and seeking forgiveness and atonement for his entire household.

Ride with the Devil (1999), Lee's Civil War film, focuses on two men made outsiders, one by the choices he makes, the other by the very nature of the times in which he lives. For Lee, war doesn't exist in a vacuum or out on some far away battlefield, but disrupts the lives of everyday people who happen to have the misfortune of living through it. Jake Roedel (Tobey Maguire) is a southern boy who joins up with the militia in Missouri taking the war town to town until all of the 'abolitionists' have seen the ends of their gun barrels. Daniel Holt (Jeffrey Wright) is a former slave serving the man who bought his freedom. The film's structure is loose, following the group as they become involved with one event after another, Roedel slowly becoming closer friends with Holt and coming to question his dedication to the southern cause.

The figure of the father is here again felt strongest through absence. It is after the death of the father of Jack Bull Chiles (Skeet Ulrich), Roedel's best

friend, that the two boys enter the fighting. Roedel has no communication with his own father after joining the militia, the lack of approval only increasing his determination, echoing Lee's own quest to make films despite his father's shame. Later, Roedel performs an act of kindness when he recognizes one of the northern hostages taken by the group as a local acquaintance, letting him free. The man repays his favour by immediately seeking out and killing Roedel's father. The death of his father, instead of hardening him, is the action that begins his path from idealism toward uncertainty, scepticism and eventually, contentment with the abandonment not just of his cause, but also of all causes.

Scenes of battle are alternated with times of rest and recovery at a sympathetic farm, during which segments the film becomes a domestic drama. Roedel allows his attraction to pregnant Sue Lee (Jewel) to flourish, while Holt becomes like a brother. These scenes feature some of the most poetic dialogue of Lee's career, showing the formation of a new family, with Roedel as the father. He accepts that his life is with Sue Lee and her baby, and faces down his rival only when it becomes necessary in order to defend her, in the end rejecting violence. Holt goes off to search for his enslaved mother, while Roedel, having done penance for his guilt over the death of his father, has now become a father himself-no longer living life for himself or his false cause, but for his family.

Lee went on to make one of his most popular and critically acclaimed films, *Wo hu cang long* (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, 2000). This *wu xia* film set during the Qing Dynasty features a blend of Chinese cultural elements that Lee included in order to introduce them to a western audience. Having grown up fascinated by this inherently Chinese genre, Lee naturally wanted to tell such a tale, making his personal mark on *wu xia* film. The film parallels two stories: one a young love, the other a repressed romance between two famous swordfighters. Structurally, the film winds around a powerful sword that passes through the hands of the various characters, with a long flashback in the centre in homage to the structure of *wu xia* novels. (4)

Three of the four major characters are outsiders by choice, taking lifestyles that don't allow them much connection to the rest of the world around them. The fourth, 'hidden dragon' Jen (Zhang Ziyi), is trying to choose her own life in a strict world that won't let her. The option of settling down is never presented as one that will satisfy her, and her controversial choice at the film's end (prefiguring the choice of *Lust, Caution*'s Wong Chia Chi (Tang Wei)) alienates her completely from all aspects of society.

There is palpable romantic tension between Li Mu Bai (Chow Yun Fat) and Yu Shu Lien (Michelle Yeoh), barred from each other by the warrior codes of Jianghu, which entail a debt of honour owed to Shu Lien's dead fiancé. The warriors don't come to realize the full force of their affection until it is threatened by the impetuous and careless Jen. She has been under the secret tutelage of Jade Fox (Cheng Pei Pei), an enemy of Mu Bai, but has gained far more skill than her master ever will. Lee once again returns to the darker emotional palate of *The Ice Storm*, as jealousy, greed and sexual repression take hold of even the noblest characters.

The film's most overt father figure is Mu Bai himself, though his true intentions toward Jen are never clear, especially given the history in his school of masters taking advantage of young women eager to learn their martial secrets. He is surely responsible, however, and wants her to learn to control her skills through proper supervision. As a father figure to Jen, he also puts pressure on her, driving her further away, and, only through his grave injury and sacrificial death, is he able to reform her. The father has become an entirely beneficent being, a true force of good leading all those around him to personal triumph. This is also the only time he speaks his true feelings for Shu Lien, freeing her to love him in death so that she can go on living without him.

Jen's leap at the film's end, ambiguous as to whether she is committing suicide (completing the tragedy) or flying away from the life she has known (attaining her heart's wish), is a daring ending for a daring film. As Lee's attitude towards the father becomes one of acceptance, identification and admiration, his outsiders no longer have hope for reconciliation with their societies. They have now learned that only the individual is important, and

remaining true to oneself outweighs any other concerns.

Hulk (2003) was a project to which Lee devoted three full years, and was his largest film, budgeted at $137 million. (5) It was here, in his most commercial film, that Lee finally dealt with the father head-on, turning a comic book superhero movie into a psychological portrait of a son cursed by his father's pride. The patterned imagery in the film-tree roots, water marked rocks and dunes signifies the patterns created by genetics, and by the physical and mental qualities passed on from one generation to the next. The radical editing style is the closest anyone has yet come to representing the medium of comics on film. Bruce Banner (Eric Bana) has been infected by the genetic manipulation experiments of his Father (Nick Nolte), so that, when one of his tests goes wrong, the radiation causes a transformation into a giant green being that feeds off of anger.

He never knew his Father, who returns and tries to restart his old work, soon becoming genetically unstable and so depending on Bruce – trying to manipulate and take his power. The father here is again of the Chinese mould: he expects his son to take care of him, even if that means he is a burden. In this case, the burden is life-threatening. As Bruce discovers more about himself and what he has been born with, his desire to break free of it increases, further powering the Hulk. The two can no longer co-exist, and the son ends up destroying his father not by denying him the power he desires, but by giving it to him and overwhelming him with it. The son returns the father's expectations of greatness by showing off the power inherent in his being from birth, in the same way Lee proved to his father that he could find true success through the artistic talent that was his birthright.

New Directions

After three exhausting years spent making a Hollywood film that underperformed at the box office, Lee almost retired. Upon seeing *Hulk*, Lee's father for the first time approved of his career as a filmmaker. "He told me to just put on my helmet and keep on going" (6), the approval powering Lee to go back to the basics of filmmaking to create *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). This film and the one that follows represent a new path for Lee, and, despite the difference in language, genre and time-period, serve as reflections of one another. Both adapted from concise short stories into near-perfect films displaying two inverse possibilities resulting from heart-wrenching attraction and love, *Brokeback Mountain* and *Lust, Caution*have been described by Lee as visions of "heaven and hell" (7), respectively: one about a love that lasts a lifetime but never finds expression, the other about a love that lasts only a moment, but destroys lives.

Brokeback Mountain explores the effects of a suppressed love on each of the lovers, as well as on their families and relationships. The bond between Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) that ties the film together is one that can never be accepted by society, casting the two participants as outsiders. Both men have other lives, yet keep returning to each other cyclically over the years. The film poetically renders the uneducated, rough language of its characters in order to express the hidden meanings in their words. Both men marry and lead 'normal' lives, yet they continually use the place of Brokeback Mountain to escape from the pressures of society and allow the truest expression of their freedom.

Having dealt the father figure its final blow in *Hulk*, the men here don't have any connection to their fathers, though their presence is still felt in the shadows. Ennis' deceased father, like David Banner, has given a curse to his son, forcing him to witness a terrible cruelty as a twisted 'lesson' about the fate of gay men. It is perhaps the scarring from this act that makes Ennis reluctant to give in to any of Jack's pleas for a more permanent relationship, forcing their love to remain suppressed. Jack's disapproving father makes a powerful appearance near the film's end and, through his reluctant acceptance of Ennis as a figure in his son's life, allows Ennis to find the hidden shirt, releasing the flood of emotions that he kept inside while Jack was alive and allowing the love to survive even after death. During the early stages of production of *Brokeback Mountain*, Lee's own father passed away.

The film is startlingly unique in its presentation of love and became even more of a cultural phenomenon than *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. A huge financial success despite its controversial subject matter, it won Lee a deserved Best Director Academy Award, making him the first Asian to receive it. It was undoubtedly *the* film event of its year (by some claims, it is the most awarded film of all time), and brought Lee recognition in the west not only as an 'Asian' director, but simply as a film director.

Lust, Caution (*Se, Jie*, 2007), Lee's most mature film to date, tells of Wong Chia Chi, who is part of a resistance cell during World War II, infiltrating the home of collaborator Mr. Yee (Tony Leung Chiu Wai) in order to seduce him into her friends' assassination plot. Based on a story by Eileen Chang, the delicate film-noir atmosphere of the film builds as Chia Chi's heart and soul become more tied up in her role as Mrs. Mak, a young businessman's bored wife. The film expands on the brief story immensely, each added detail helping to create a unique work that stands strong alongside the original, a true cinematic adaptation.

For the first time in his career, Lee has made a film in which there is no father figure. After the death of his own father, and the closure brought to the theme in *Brokeback Mountain*, Lee was free from this influence for the first time. The theme of the outsider remains, however, but is presented in a different light. Chia Chi is a willing outsider, making herself into a different person through acting her role, becoming more Mrs. Mak and less Chia Chi, eventually losing the sense of which self is the true one. The theme of acting and role-playing recurs throughout, whether it is on a stage, at home, or in bed. The film faced controversy due to its transformation of the story's undercurrent of sexuality into a series of explicit sex scenes that were cut in China and caused the MPAA to give the film an NC-17 rating. This sealed its fate in the US, but it was a sensation across Asia, confronting political and sexual issues head-on in a way not usually seen.

Lust, Caution slowly builds its power until the crucial finale, in which Chia Chi sees the truth of herself and of Mrs. Mai, and makes a decision that gives validation to her feelings even as it destroys her. This scene, set in a jewellery store, compares with the finales of *The Ice Storm* and *Brokeback Mountain* as the most powerful Lee has yet filmed, with great tension created by mere whispers and subtle changes of expression in the actors' faces. The scene is almost entirely an alternation of two close shots of the couple, Yee and Chia Chi's love finally expressed through the very words that condemn their affair forever. It is the greatest scene in Tony Leung's illustrious career, with more emotional tonality than most actors show in an entire film.

Lee's future journeys will bring us even more insight into the outsiders of our world, whether forced onto that path or having chosen it. Surely, the father will show up again, though Lee's own issues seem to have been worked out through his films. Subjects for future films may range from the organizing of Woodstock to a romantic comedy, and there will surely be more Chinese language films as well. Lee continues to tread the path between the world's superpower and its rising power, and in this century, there is no better place to be.

The Title (Wikipedia)

The title "*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*" is a literal translation of the Chinese idiom "臥虎藏龍" which describes a place or situation that is full of unnoticed masters. It is from a poem of the ancient Chinese poet Yu Xin (513–581) that reads "暗石疑藏虎，盤根似臥龍", which means "behind the rock in the dark probably hides a tiger, and the coiling giant root resembles a crouching dragon".[12] The title also has several other layers of meaning. On the most obvious level, the Chinese characters in the title connect to the narrative that the last character in Xiaohu and Jiaolong's names mean "tiger" and "dragon", respectively. On another level, the Chinese idiomatic phrase is an expression referring to the undercurrents of emotion, passion, and secret desire that lie beneath the surface of polite society and civil behavior,[13] which alludes to the film's storyline.

Rob Clough: "The End of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon explained" (*Looper*)

The 2000 movie Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, directed by Ang Lee, was a surprise international hit. Set in 19th century imperial China, the story weaves in romance and melodrama with eye-popping wirework combat scenes. Master swordsman and monk Li Mu Bai (played by Chow Yun Fat) decides to give up his weapon, the powerful and ancient Green Destiny Sword. He's had enough of the warrior's life and is in love with fellow swordfighter and businesswoman Yu Shu Lien (portrayed by Michelle Yeoh). When he donates the sword to their mutual friend Sir Te, it's stolen by a young woman in disguise. This is Jen Yu (played by Zhang Ziyi), who is the daughter of a powerful governor and slated to be in an arranged marriage.

In a film where nothing is as it seems, Jen Yu's governess has secretly been training her for years in kung fu and sword fighting. The governess is the criminal and killer Jade Fox in disguise (played by Cheng Pei-Pei), who killed Li Mu Bai's master and many others. When Jen Yu steals the sword out of boredom, it triggers a series of events that are fatal for many of the characters. While a policeman and his daughter hunt down Jade Fox, Jen Yu's bandit lover Lo Dark Cloud (played by Chang Chen) pops up to declare his love for her again. After a number of fights, what becomes of the characters when Jen Yu runs away from her family?

What happens to Jade Fox?

Jen Yu reveals to her master that she could read the kung fu manual that Jade Fox had stolen. Jade Fox could understand the diagrams, but Jen Yu's ability to understand everything meant she had secretly surpassed her teacher years earlier. Jade Fox is enraged by this betrayal, and after she saves Jen Yu from drowning after a duel with Li Mu Bai, she drugs the girl she thinks of as her own child. This is after a lifetime of betrayals and poor treatment. She hated Lu Mi Bai's master because he was willing to sleep with her but not train her. She became a bandit to finally live a free life, but her guise as Jen Yu's nanny is just another form of bondage. She justifies it because of her relationship with Jen Yu, and when that's taken away, she lashes out.

She sets poison dart traps in her cave. One manages to kill Li Mu Bai, but not before he stabs her. While she's glad that her enemy is going to die, she reveals that Jen Yu was the one she really wanted to kill — "My only enemy." Her last request is denied. It is ironic that this thief and deceiver is hurt most by the lies of someone she cares about.

What happens to Li Mu Bai?

Li Mu Bai quits his monastery because there's something he can't let go of: his love for Yu Shu Lien. Despite knowing each other for years, they never got together because she was engaged to his brother, who died before they could marry. Out of societal obligation and guilt, they never took the first step, but he's ready at the beginning of the film.

Li Mu Bai is fascinated and distracted by Jen Yu, and it's clear that it's both as a kung fu master and as a man. He wants her to submit to him and become his disciple, which is just another kind of bondage for her. When she jumps after the sword when he throws it down a waterfall, it means that she may have lost the battle but wins the war.

It's clear that he understands that he's made a mistake and tracks her to Jade Fox's lair. When he frees her from her drug-induced haze, she pulls open her outer shirt and asks, "Is it me or the sword you want?" He ignores this and saves Jen Yu from Jade Fox's poison dart trap. In a spectacular sequence, he shunts aside all but one — and that's the one that kills him.

Jen Yu tries to atone for her behavior by retrieving ingredients for an antidote, but it's too late. With his dying breath, he tells Yu She Lien that he has always loved her and that he's wasted his life.

What happens to Yu Shu Lien?

Jen Yu immediately forms a bond with Yu Shu Lien at the start of the movie, saying "Let's be like sisters!" In many respects, they are mirror images of each other. Yu Shu Lien has the appearance of total

freedom as a respected businesswoman, but she wasn't able to be trained with the monks on Wudan mountain, and she's expected to comply with the rules of society. Yu Shu Lien sees Jen Yu as a younger version of herself, one who has a chance of happiness in a conventional life.

After Jen Yu runs away and gets in trouble, she visits Yu Shu Lien for help. She receives assistance but also gets a lecture, saying that she has to return the sword and return to her family. That results in a huge showdown between the two and a lot of angry words. The selfish actions of Jen Yu result in the death of Li Mu Bai, just as he had declared his love for Yu Shu Lien. After his death, she picks up the Green Destiny sword, swings it at Jen Yu's neck, and stops short. She sends the sword back to Sir Te and tells her to go to Wudan mountain to be with Lo. She mourns her loss but ends the cycle of revenge when she spares Jen Yu's life.

What happens to Lo Dark Cloud?

Prior to the events of the movie, the notorious bandit Lo Dark Cloud attacks a caravan that happens to be carrying Jen Yu. The cheeky thief steals a valuable comb right out of her hands. Incensed, she hops on a horse and chases him across the desert, demanding the return of her comb. She grudgingly realizes that she has to rest for a moment with him, and he's clearly drawn to her immediately. She whacks him across the head and leaves, walking through the desert with no plan. He rescues her and nurses her back to health, and they fall in love.

Jen Yu is drawn to his sense of freedom and the life he leads. He tells her a legend that if anyone dares to jump from the mountain, God will grant their wish. When a young boy does it to save the lives of his parents, he knows it works the moment he jumps — he doesn't die, he just floats away, never coming back.

Lo sends Jen Yu back to her family, saying he's worried that she will get tired of being in the desert and he'll find her when he makes his mark on the world. He returns in the middle of the movie, and she rejects him. After one last try in public that nearly gets him arrested, Lo is sent to wait at Wudan and sees Jen Yu one last time.

What happens to Jen Yu?

The last scene of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon has perplexed audiences for decades. After the deaths of her master Jade Fox and would-be master Li Mu Bai, Yu Shu Lien spares Jen Yu's life, saying she knows about Lo and he's waiting for her on Wudan mountain. Jen Yu makes the trek to the top and tearfully reunites with him.

On a bridge at the top of the mountain, she recalls his story of the boy who jumped off the mountain. She tells him to make a wish, and he says that he wants to be back in the desert with her like they were before. Jen Yu then jumps off the bridge and glides blissfully through the mists. Why does she leave Lo when it seems she finally gets what she wants?

What's clear is that going to Wudan is what both Lo and Yu Shu Lien wanted for her. What Jen Yu wants is made clear from the very beginning of the film, but no one is willing to give it to her until she seizes it in that moment: freedom.

What happens in the future?

With Li Mu Bai dead, Yu Shu Lien will mourn her friend and the love of her life. She will mourn what could have been if only either had had the courage to challenge what they saw as respecting tradition. She will at least have the solace of knowing how much Li Mu Bai loved her and the knowledge that she gave Jen Yu a chance at a different life — a life bound by love.

Lo's wish does come true, but not in a literal sense. He gets the knowledge that what he had with Jen Yu in the desert was real and that she loves him. She gives him a memory that will live forever.

Jen Yu will never return. She finally finds the freedom she wants so badly. It may be a selfish impulse, but she's also gone through life with everyone around her trying to control her. Her parents want to marry her off to a powerful family in order to improve her father's reputation, but don't care about her feelings. Jade Fox trains her in kung fu, but Jen Yu isn't interested in having a master. Li Mu Bai wants to control her and Yu Shu Lien wants her to be with Lo.

Whether that jump is fatal for Jen Yu or is just a metaphor doesn't matter, because she's free.

How does this fit with other Ang Lee films?

In terms of genre, Ang Lee's filmography is truly all over the place. Ride with the Devil is a Civil War epic. Sense and Sensibility is an adaptation of the Jane Austen class-based romance. Hulk is a superhero movie. Life of Pi is a survival epic. Brokeback Mountain has a Western setting about a secret romance between two cowboys. Where does Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon fit in?

Lee's films all deal with what is below the surface. He's interested in people who have to hide their true selves or their true feelings. That's true in The Wedding Banquet, which is about a gay man getting into a marriage of convenience to please his parents. It's true in Brokeback Mountain, in which the men in question are drawn to each other despite wishing they weren't. It's true of Hulk, who has always been a metaphor for hidden anger. Sometimes these emotions are hidden because of family or class considerations.

Lee says in his films that nothing can remain secret forever, and you can only repress emotions for so long. They always emerge eventually. Every character in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon has hidden feelings or secrets, and they all wind up being harmful. Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien go years without acknowledging their feelings. Jen Yu hides her abilities from Jade Fox and yearns to find a way to be true to herself.

Chinese themes

"Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" refers to Chinese mythology and hiding your strength from others. Jade Fox and Jen Yu both obviously hide their strengths from outsiders, and Jen Yu hides her true strength from Jade Fox.

Green is a color that represents the yin, or female aspect, according to Taoism. Ang Lee named the coveted sword the Green Destiny as a way of asserting Jen Yu's own yearnings and anger to determine her own destiny. Jade Fox is so named to indicate a darker, older shade of green. Her identity as a woman is crucial to the movie, because of how poorly she was treated by men.

The film popularized the wuxia genre internationally. As opposed to the gritty crime thrillers directed by John Woo and Ringo Lam in the 1990s, wuxia mines Chinese history for its martial arts action. Some of those films have deeply political themes, like the nationalist imagery of Hero. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon instead focuses on the tension between family duty and historical misogyny that limits women's roles. The magical realist elements of the film, like the fighters walking on water and balancing on bamboo branches, serve to emphasize the emotional states of each character.

Arthouse miracle

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon made over $128 million in America ($200 million adjusted for inflation) and over $213 million worldwide, all against a roughly $15 million budget. It's among the all-time "leggiest" movies, meaning the ratio between total domestic box office gross and their largest weekend gross. This means that the movie was popular over a long period of time or even gained popularity over time.

This reflects the movie's word-of-mouth success and appeal to a number of different audiences. It was initially a film slated for small, art-house theaters because of Ang Lee's reputation for films like The Ice Storm, but also because films released with subtitles tend to automatically wind up there. The wirework special effects and the relatability of the melodramatic aspects of the story clearly resonated with a lot of different people. The excellent acting and romance component were crucial aspects of the film, separating them from the more straightforward kung fu movies of the '70s and '80s.

Where did kung fu films go in America?

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon also opened the door for a number of similar art-house action epics in America, with Zhang Yimou's Hero and House of Flying Daggers among the biggest successes. Rob Minkoff's The Forbidden Kingdom is another example. Something many of these films have in common is the

imaginative, dynamic, and sometimes whimsical fight choreography. This was engineered by Yuen Woo-ping, whose name may not be familiar to Western audiences, but whose work certainly is.

He did the fight choreography for The Matrix, Kill Bill, and Kung Fu Hustle, directed Iron Monkey (another popular wuxia epic rereleased in America) and many other films. Realism was less important to Yuen than clarity and fluidity of motion. In many of his films, the exaggerated and magical action sequences can be seen as an extreme expression of the character's emotions, just as bursting out in song acts for musical theater.

What led to the ebbing of the art-house kung fu film? The most likely answer is the premiere of Iron Man in 2008. While superhero films started to gain traction right around the same time as kung fu films, the Marvel Cinematic Universe changed the game by adapting superhero stories around different genres. Captain America: Winter Soldier is a political thriller. Spider-Man: Homecoming is a high school romance. Ant-Man is a heist film. That flexibility and appeal to a worldwide audience copied Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon's playbook and took it in a different direction.

The legacy of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon was nominated for ten Academy Awards and won four, including Best Foreign Language Film. It was even nominated for Best Film, which was nearly unheard of for a foreign language release. It's a rare example of a film being a huge box office and critical hit, as it piled up nominations and awards in a number of different countries.

More than 15 years later, a sequel arrived in the form of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword Of Destiny. Directed by Yuen Woo-ping, it picks up where the first film left off, focusing on Michelle Yeoh's Yu Shu Lien character. The film focuses much more on action than the original; unfortunately, it failed to resonate with critics and audiences the way its predecessor had.

Twenty years after Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon's release, Korean director Bong Joon Ho's Parasite won Best Film at the Oscars. Parasite's triumph marked the first time a foreign language film won the coveted trophy, but Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon paved the way, bringing mature themes and melodrama out of the arthouse and into public consciousness while making every genre film director step up their game.

Jack Coyle: "Ang Lee on 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon' 20 Years later (AP)

It's physically impossible to get to the forest fight scene that hovers atop slender bamboo trees in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and not say out loud "Whoa."

Twenty years later, the exhilarating grace of Ang Lee's martial-arts masterwork is just as breathtaking. The way figures glide across the water. The extraordinary lightness of it. Its craft and choreography are only further evidence of a mantra uttered in the film: "A sword by itself rules nothing. It only comes alive in skilled hands."

Take that scene, where Chow Yun-fat and Zhang Ziyi clash in a dance across bamboo stalks. Asked what he remembers about shooting it, Lee doesn't hesitate: The sweating. Not from heat but from the stress of suspending a few of Asia's biggest movie stars high in the air, held aloft by cranes over a valley.

"You use very heavy ways to imitate lightness," said Lee, speaking by phone from Taiwan during a recent trip from his home in New York. "Each actor hanging up there, you need 30 people down on the ground mimicking how the bamboo swings in the wind. I probably did about a third of what I wanted to do. The way you dream about a movie, it's very difficult to make real."

Tuesday marked the 20th anniversary of the release of "Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon," an occasion being celebrated with a new limited-edition 4K UHD Blu-ray. It remains a movie unlike any other. An international co-production filmed in China and shot in Mandarin, it still ranks, easily, as the most successful non-English language film ever in the U.S. The $17-million movie grossed $128.1 million in North America.

Arguably more than any other film, “Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon” opened mainstream American moviegoers not just to a new genre known predominantly in Asia — the wuxia tradition — but to subtitled films in general. It set another record with 10 Academy Awards nominations, a mark since equaled by “Roma” and “Parasite.” “Crouching Tiger” took home four Oscars.

Did Lee feel that when Bong Joon Ho’s “Parasite” became the first non-English language best-picture winner in February that he had helped pave the way?

“Yeah, I did,” says Lee, laughing. “I wouldn’t say it happened because of me. But as people paved the way for me, I paved the way for that movie. And that movie paved the way for future moviemakers and goers. We’re a community. We’re all part of a history.”

“Crouching Tiger” is poised between worlds. Its elegantly choreographed action scenes have the meter of poetry. Its conflicts between duty and freedom, master and disciple take on soulful dimensions — particularly in scenes with the film's antagonist: the rebellious Jen Yu (Zhang), a commanding figure of feminist fury and empowerment who at the time drew comparisons to Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Twenty years later, she still feels like a brilliant outlier in a male-dominated genre.

The film is a fusion of East and West, of Asian film history and Hollywood, of action movie and art house. Lee and writer-producer James Schamus — who together adapted Jane Austen in 1995 — took to referring to it as ”‘Sense and Sensibility’ with martial arts.” Over five months of prep and a five-month shoot across China, Lee agonized over the delicate balance of “Crouching Tiger.”

“Halfway through our difficulties, I remember thinking this is a B-movie, supposedly. I’m fighting the genre, trying to make a great movie,” Lee says. “I didn’t have experience in martial arts. It’s a very special skill and cinematic sense, which I learned from the Hong Kong crew — the choreographer Yuen Wo-ping and the cinematographer Peter Pau. I learned so much about moviemaking. Not just about action, but about the essence of the medium.”

Every project tends to become all-consuming for Lee, the protean director of “Life of Pi,” “Brokeback Mountain” and “The Ice Storm.” “Sometimes it feels like every movie is a lifetime,” he says, chuckling. But he considers “Crouching Tiger” his most difficult film. Not just for the technical challenges but because of the pressure he put on himself to capture the cinema of his youth.

“It was the toughest movie and the toughest part of my life. Making a film in China in 1998, 1999 was pretty impossible. Usually in martial arts films, you just focus on fighting scenes,” Lee says. “I still wanted good fighting scenes. I also wanted a good art department, historical look, acting. I was just too greedy. It was kind of my childhood fantasy. I joke that it’s a childhood fantasy and midlife crisis all clenched together.”

That’s also what Lee ascribes the film’s success to: its sense of childlike wonderment.

“What I think people respond to is the innocence,” Lee says. “Putting yourself in an unknown situation, somehow you have a better chance to find that innocence. It’s the reason we go to the theater.”

In recent years, Lee has remade himself as a digital convert, in pursuit of a new kind of cinema — “which I have not found,” he adds, laughing — that includes high frame rate, 3-D and other innovations that he believes are the future of film. While some of the results have been fascinating, his forays into digital — 2019's “Gemini Man,” 2016's “Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk” — haven’t been received well. Lee says he's still brooding, still curious.

“I don’t want to give up just yet,” Lee says. “The movie gods have been very great to me. As long as I can, I’ll do my service — whether digitally or if someday I go back to making something on a flat screen. But I think the way I view things has changed, and I have to be honest with that. At the end of the day, honesty is very important. You might get blamed for it, you might fail, but a part of you has to keep honest and fresh. I just hope the whole career is like a never-ending film school.”

December 6, 2022 (XVIII:15)
Ang Lee **CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON** (2000, 120 min)
URL for this week's film introduction: https://vimeo.com/777703720
URL for 7:00 Tuesday discussion zoom

THE FALL 2022 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XLV:

August 30 William Wellman ***Wings*** 1927
Sept 6 Jean Renoir ***Rules of the Game*** 1939
Sept 13 Michael Curtiz ***Casablanca*** 1942
Sept 20 Nicholas Ray, ***In a Lonely Place*** 1950
Sept 27 Luis Buñuel ***Viridiana*** 1961
Oct 4 Orson Welles ***Chimes at Midnight*** 1966
Oct 11 Mel Brooks ***Young Frankenstein*** 1974
Oct 18 Arthur Penn ***Night Moves*** 1975
Oct 25 Sydney Pollack ***Tootsie*** 1982
Nov 1 Akira Kurosawa ***Ran*** 1985
Nov 8 Martin Scorsese ***Goodfellas*** 1990
Nov 15 Hiayo Miyazaki ***The Wind Rises*** 2013
Nov 22 Ava Duvernay ***Selma*** 2014
Nov 29 Pedro Almodóvar ***Parallel Mothers*** 2021
Dec 6 Ang Lee ***Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*** 2000

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