

The Hero Myth in Popular Culture: The Hong Kong Action Hero in Shaolin Soccer and the Hollywood Kung Fu Champion in The Matrix

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Abstract

Cinema basically blends art and economics, and the film industry presents the hero figure in a fascinating image and action. The film visualizes a brave man or woman's physical actions in the service to mankind. The action hero in his or her physical actions with rigor and passion to serve his or her nation and community exemplifies what a man or woman should be doing irrespective of personal interests. In the Wachowski brothers –directed The Matrix (1999), Neo Anderson, featuring Keanu Reeves, uses kung fu techniques and a rigorously trained body to save humans from the invasion of machines. Similarly, Steel Leg Sing in Stephen Chow's Shaolin Soccer (2001), projecting Chow himself as an athletic champion, leads the Shaolin brothers team to a sweeping victory. The computer-generated graphic effects of the soccer hero's exceptional performance in Shaolin Soccer and that of Neo's virtual kung fu actions in The Matrix replicate a simulated body through electronically created computer graphics. Mighty Steel Leg Sing's soccer game, enhanced by his acrobatics, embodies a perfect blend of the body, mind, and spirit. During a prestigious tournament, Sing sports soccer in such a spectacular feats that blends the athletic body and the twentieth-century popular sport. Like the digitized Neo in The Matrix, the soccer hero in Shaolin Soccer exposes magnificent feats of swirling movements and swift physical actions in the soccer field. The computer-generated graphics reposes the dynamics of the hero's spiritual journey in the modern time human-computer interface brought to audiences through popular media and digital technology, shared by the Hong Kong and Hollywood action cinemas.

Keywords: *the action hero, popular culture, the Hollywood–Hong Kong connection, computer graphics, myth and archetype*

The action hero

In Chinese culture, the heroic narrative evolves from the folk tradition, and the trend of representing the hero in the Hong Kong action cinema develops from the nineteenth-century popular novels. One of the most famous Chinese folk heroes is Wong Fei Hung (1847-

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1924), whose fictionalized personal life stories fill narratives, both literary and cinematic. Also credited with introducing the Tiger-Crane form of kung fu, Hung is considered the Chinese Robin Hood. In Hong Kong cinema, the twentieth-century martial hero reworks the Chinese folk hero in a trained physique. Moreover, the Chinese martial hero, using his indigenous kung fu techniques, combats the villain in order to protect his clan and community. Like the action hero on the cinematic screen in *The Matrix* (2004), the athlete hero in *Shaolin Soccer* (2001) flashes the visual spectacle of the fast body movements in the soccer field. The dynamics of the computer-generated graphics on the screen parallels the dazzling soccer shots on the football ground, embodiments of myths and archetypes in the popular Hollywood *Matrix* and Hong Kong *Shaolin Soccer*. The action heroes, both the martial artist and the screen star, in their body transformations and spiritual connections to the celestial, bring together the West and the East, terrestrial and celestial in the spectrum of time and space.

Like the Greek tragic hero, the Chinese martial arts hero rises from his heroic death. Like the mythic Phoenix, the hero must be technically dead. The real hero rises with his or her death. Moreover, the tragic death yields revelations. The action hero takes actions to champion a greater cause of humanity, irrespective of personal interests, which might bring him or her to death. Like the Greek hero, the Hollywood and the Hong Kong action heroes rework myths and archetypes of the hero and legend in the trajectory of underlying universal patterns of the hero's action and transformation of consciousness.

Joseph Campbell (1973) reinforces the hero model of Lord Raglan and Carl Gustav Jung. Raglan's hero embarks on his heroic journey from his comfort zone of home to an unknown territory and back to his society (Raglan, 1965, p. 189). Like Raglan's hero, the Jungian hero is transformed through the ritual journey, a process of conversion shared by gods (Jung, 1981, p. 128). Similarly, Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1973), drawing insights from myths and history, retraces the universality of the hero's journey:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his common day is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). [. . .] At the return, the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world. (p. 246)

Campbell explores similar underlying patterns of the hero journey in all times and cultures. A warrior's battle field replicates a hunter's jungle for hunting for food. In the way a soldier

combats on the hill and plain, the hunter explores the jungle to collect birds and animals, and fruits and vegetables. In the jungle, the hunter kills animal, whereas the soldier shoots other soldiers in the battlefield. Soldiers in the battle and war sacrifice their lives for the sake of their countries and communities. Likewise, a young man or woman runs a grocery shop for his profession that he or she needs for living. In the same fashion, a professor teaches students in the classroom in the university, an athlete sports on the track and field, and a farmer plants crops in the farm. In addition, models promote the industrial products in the fashion market in the modern business world. Similarly, a movie star acts on the shooting spot as a part of his or her job, and the professional athletes sports in the soccer field. As a result, we have sports industry, the film industry, and the fashion industry, blending arts and economics together. Precisely, all of these heroes in diverse cultures embark on their journey to the unknown zone in the quest of something precious for the family, the community, or the entire humanity.

Modern time popular cultures reproduce the hero and journey with mythological resonance. The hero's quest journey outward invokes his or her inward journey, a transformation of conscious. Such a mythological journey shared by heroes of diverse cultures connect the humanity and divinity, terrestrial to celestial, and profane to sacred. Primitive people's pilgrimage has been replaced by the modern time trekking and hiking, excursion and expedition, and tour and mountaineering. Likewise, people in the past used to go to the holy sites, such as temple and shrine, Mecca and Medina, and Church and Jerusalem. In modern capitalist society, young people go to the marketplace for shopping and refreshment. Further, they would like to go to shopping malls in city centers, and street festivals in tourist hot spots. Moreover, youngsters would prefer concerts and street festivals, beauty pageants and fashion shows over churches and temples. The industrial exhibitions and film festivals in city centers in modern times reflect primitive fairs. Popular cultures, such as cinemas and concerts reinvent those narratives of the hero journey and human relationships in new forms, considering the audience-consumers needs and expectations. In the "Prologue" to Ray Browne's *Heroes of Popular Culture* (1972), Marshall Fishwick illustrates the changing trend in the representation of the popular culture hero:

The heroic scene is changing too rapidly, and we are too close to it, to give final answers to long-range questions. We can say that changes in media, lifestyle, priorities, and ideologies will be reflected in our heroes. Motion pictures and television confer celebrity, for example—not just on people, but on art objects, places, ways of life. (p.4)

The hero appears in film and fiction with different images. With changes in social contexts, the image of the hero undergoes a process of transformation. An image of an archetypal hero on stage and screen resembles the hero of myth and history. The mythological hero, such as Arjuna in *The Mahabharata* and Achilles in Homers' *Iliad* appear in cinemas as well as the real world in different forms. Arjuna's heroic endeavors in the Kurukshetra and

Achilles' spectacular feats in the Trojan War in the ancient Greek civilization rework the heroes of myths and archetypes. Myths come out these archetypal characters, such as the hero and villain, and mother and father figure. The mother love and the heroic grandeur in cinemas and theaters are myths themselves, reworking of archetypal actions and psychic energies. In modern time, these heroes and mother figures appear in cinemas with their archetypal actions and characters. Myths are, therefore, manifestations of archetypes while these mythological forms transform with changes in time and space. Modern cinemas and videos are based on fictions and plays, and these latter forms of verbal arts rework myths and archetypes. Between novels and myths come folklores. There are folk hero myths, such as Robin Hood and King Arthur, appearing in print and on stage, and reappearing on screen. In that sense, the cowboy hero of the Hollywood West is the folk hero who looks after lambs and cows in the American farm.

Arjuna and Karna in *The Mahabharata* of the eastern epic tradition and Achilles and Ulysses of the western Greek metaphysics resemble many of modern men with similar actions and characters. Many of the business companies in modern time exploit these hero figures of myths and archetypes, producing bags and shirts with images of the hero and superman.

Those mythological characters are archetypal in term of their actions and traits. Characters of myths vary with the cultural diversity while retaining the same psychic energies and inherent natural impulses. These archetypal heroes and villain figures first appear in folklores; then they reappear in novels; and then they reappear in cinemas. In various media, including cinema and theater, the hero and villain figures appear, representing opposing actions and worldviews. The character with the hero archetype sacrifices his or her life in order to protect his or her family and community. At the same time, there come the female characters as good mother and evil mother. Moreover, some characters in their creative ingenuity reveal their child archetypes while the others in their selfless actions expose their hero archetypes. Similarly, a woman in her selfless love for her offspring articulates the hero archetype inherent in her unconscious.

Further, these archetypal characters shared in multiple media once survived in the oral tradition, which are handed down to new generations. In the oral tradition, these characters with their specific roles and actions exist in folklores. Once they appear in folklore, people document these narratives in print forms, and eventually the culture industry recycles these narratives in forms of comics, cartoons and movies. We can take an example of the hero in the Greek Oedipus myth that transmits from the oral to print culture. First premiered in the Greek Theater of Dionysus in 429 BC, the Sophocles-written Athenian tragedy, *Oedipus the Rex* unfolds the psychic energy shared by humans of diverse cultures.

The Hong Kong connection of the Hollywood action hero

The film stars and fictional characters rework the real world hero, such as leader and statesman, and warrior and athlete. Contrary to the typical western action hero, the Hong Kong martial hero usually appears in the fighting ring without arms and weapons. Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan in martial arts action cinemas of the 1970s and 1980s use their bodies as weapons. Early in the history of the Chinese Civilization, ordinary people without access to sophisticated arms had to use bodies to protect their clan and family. In *The Martial Arts Films* (1986), Marilyn D. Minz points out that the use of bow and arrow is considered sacred since the advent of the Chinese civilization. The user needs physical strength and precision in skill to use those weapons (p.77). Representing the martial arts hero in motion picture invokes glory and nationalistic feeling on the part of the artist. In the 1970s, Bruce Lee, rising as an international superstar, popularized martial arts by demonstrating the best of the hero's performances and the body art techniques into cinematic space. Next, Jackie Chan popularized the Hong Kong action cinema during the 1980s, inserting comic shots and dangerous stunts in the modern urban setting. Afterwards, Jet Li introduced an authentic *wushu* skill in martial arts cinema, considering both the global audience, in the 1990s. Not until the 1990s did actor-director John Woo introduce the gun in the Hong Kong action cinema that resonates the representation of the Hollywood action hero. Precisely, the cinematic adaptation of gunplay, triads, and the supernatural in Hong Kong action cinema became possible with Woo and Tsui Hark.

This article explores the spectacular feats of the action hero in *Shaolin Soccer* in its affinity with and influence of the computer graphics in *The Matrix*. In addition, these action cinemas have been successful blockbuster hits in the Chinese communities in the East-Asian countries, such as Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines. These two martial arts cinemas also made a tremendous impact on Chinese Diaspora, especially China towns in the Americas, shaping the audience's response to the Chinese culture and embodiment of the body. Overall, these two action movies in their cross-cultural relationships address a larger audience across the world because of their unique characters of shared worldviews and cultural values.

In David Bordwell's conception, as stated in *Planet Hong Kong* (2000), the lone self-reliant Chinese hero, unlike his western counterpart, confronts the ruling elite in the interest of his family, friends, and community. The Hong Kong action heroes develop their fighting skills and build up their physical bodies through rigorous physical trainings (p.42). Bordwell also shows how Hong Kong action heroes as legendary swordsmen and kung-fu masters are recycled through television episodes and comics series with spectacular projection of the flying heroes. The Hong Kong martial hero, descending from the tradition of Beijing Opera, has evolved to the popular action hero in his transnational space and representation of the body in a process of defending the nation.

The Hong Kong action hero shares some of the salient features with Hollywood sci-fi action hero, such as the use of the body as weapon and trans-cultural experience. In Bordwell's (2000) analogy, the *wuxia* hero is a gifted exponent of the fighting arts, primarily for the cause of the clan and community, for justice and righteousness (*yi*). Evidently, the hero being loyal to the family and masters might turn violent in the defense of the circle he represents (p.194). In this light, *Hero* and *Shaolin Soccer* mark underlying connections with the Hollywood sci-fi films in the sense that these films, like the Hollywood productions, represent the hero's body as a weapon and relate the hero's experience with the invisible force. Audiences sport indigenous Chinese cultural values in these Hong Kong action movies: loyalty to the Authority in *Hero*, and dedication to the institution in *Shaolin Soccer*. With a rapid growth in information technology, high economic progress, and increased influx of immigrants across the Pacific, Hong Kong action cinemas invoke transnational voyage and cross-cultural connection in the backdrop of a unique Chinese tradition. The action hero, integrating the body and the mind, merges into the nation-state in *Hero* and *Shaolin Soccer*, respectively. The Hong Kong action hero in his use of the physical body to protect the Shaolin Buddhist principle, indigenous Chinese culture, resonates the Hollywood cinematic tradition with the action hero with machines as weapons. The Hollywood action hero in *The Matrix* uses automatic guns, whereas the Hong Kong action hero uses his technologized body to rescue victims from physical assaults.

In the same way that the Hollywood sci-fi action hero uses the techno-body, a combination of artificial intelligence and biological body, the Hong Kong action hero exploits the Taoist body, an integrate of the body, mind, and spirit. In *Taoist Body* (1977), Kristofer Schipper describes the term as the cosmic corporeality of heaven, earth, and humankind (p. ix), represented by spirit, matter, and mind, respectively. The Taoist body at large opposes the duality of matter and spirit, and body and soul; dualities that are often associated with the western metaphysical tradition. As opposed to this, however, the current paper stresses upon the experience of non-duality in the cosmic space and human experience. The Taoist body connotes the non-duality of mind and matter, soul and body, or spirituality and physicality, and thus, emphasizes the human body over social institution and the internal world over the external one (Schipper, 1977, p. 4). The Taoist spirituality postulates the merger of the human body as a microcosm with the universe as a macrocosm in every level of thought and practice. According to the Taoist philosophy, human body is formed through a process of coagulation of energies (*chi*), and it is followed by a transformational dynamic in time (Schipper, 1977, p. 156). Precisely, the Taoist body is the non-dual organic whole, comprising of the mind, body, and spirit, a combination that reaffirms a subject-object unity or an amalgam of the seer and seen.

When the Taoist body is totally absorbed into the action he undertakes, he gives the subject an experience of the non-duality, which is termed as the unity of action in the western metaphysical tradition. The current article amplifies the action hero's experience of oneness

-- the non-duality or the unity of action -- in Hollywood sci-fi movie and Hong Kong martial cinema. The circular structure of the Hong Kong martial hero's body movement resembles the structure of the Hollywood action hero's swirling body like that of Neo and Terminator cop. Similarly, the tiger and crane styles as embodiments of hard and soft, high and low, or male and female connote the subject's experience of wholeness, perfection, or totality. The athlete hero uses the tiger and crane styles, uniting the self with his female counterpart, Steel Leg and Mui, to score the winning goal in *Shaolin Soccer*. In this movie, Sing combines the kung fu action and gymnastic technique to enhance his soccer skills and score maximum goals for the Shaolin team. Furthermore, the kung fu action combines the soccer and gymnastics, allowing the audience to see the unity of the indigenous Chinese body art and modern soccer sport in the athlete's body. The amalgam of the sporting event and the player's performance marks the connection between the spirituality and technology.

According to the eastern mysticism, the subject transcends the physicality of the body and enters the spectrum of the unity of opposites. In *The Tao of Physics* (2000), Fritzof Capra further emphasizes the awareness of the relativity and polar relationship of all opposites not as absolute experiences of different kinds, but as merely two integrals of the same phenomenon, inseparable and interdependent, such as, light and darkness, life and death, good and evil, and victory and vanquish (p.146). In the East, Buddhism postulates a similar fundamental idea, a process of realizing the spiritual realm of non-distinction, when an individual as a microcosmic unit merges into the cosmos as the macrocosm.

Computer-generated graphic effects, whether in the maze of the matrix or the choreographic space of the soccer field, reflect achievements of digital revolutions in the Hollywood and Hong Kong film industries at the turn of the millennium. *Shaolin Soccer* presents the hero as an excellent kung fu master, an incredible gymnast and a soccer champion with capability to unify sporting technique and the spirituality of the Shaolin temple. A courageous warrior in *Hero* and an accomplished athlete in *Shaolin Soccer* in their physical actions and athletic performances high light the Hong Kong film industry's efforts to amplify a rich indigenous Chinese culture by using



Neo in bullet time scene in The Matrix

Hollywood's digital technology. The current paper emphasizes the Hollywood influence on the Hong Kong action hero in terms of a transnational journey and human-technology interface as reflected in *Shaolin Soccer* and *Hero*. The digitized images of Sing's soccer performances reflect the Hollywood connection of the 2001 Hong Kong-Chinese *Shaolin Soccer*, which was previously manifested in *The Matrix* in 1999. The action heroes in *The Matrix* and *Shaolin Soccer*, emerging from two different



Trinity in skin-tight dark latex in action in The Matrix

different cinematic traditions, crystallize connections between the two cultures represented by Hollywood and Hong Kong, respectively. In *Hero*, the warrior hero, who effectively displays his sword fight techniques and martial arts skills to empower the Qin Dynasty and serve the reigning king, ultimately sacrifices his physical body and renounces the inner self for the unification of warring kingdoms and building of the greater Chinese Empire. The hero with fighting techniques transitions into a professionally trained warrior, marking the Hollywood connection of the Hong Kong action hero in terms of the transnational journey and the body-technology interface.

Incorporation of the Chinese kung fu in the Hollywood *Matrix* reposes marked connection between the Eastern Hong Kong and the western American cinematic traditions. The action stars, including Neo and Trinity in *The Matrix* rework the indigenous Chinese kung fu. However, the Hollywood still takes the computerized kung fu program, an embodiment of the western technological advancement.

The Hong Kong-Chinese connection

Initially a place for farmers, sailors, and fishermen, Hong Kong has become a confluence of the world communities with diverse cultures. As a British colony until 1947, Hong Kong was mainly an entrepôt for much of the commerce between the West and the East. The British Empire expanded to different parts of Asia for market for its imperial mission. In *Global Hong Kong* (2005), Gary McDonogh and Cindy Wong introduce Hong Kong as a small mountainous island, including the city of Hong Kong, a Chinese peninsula of Kowloon and New Territories, and other assorted islands. Hong Kong is spread over 1100 square kilometers of land with a total population of 7.415 Million in 2018 (Trading Economics Poll of Hong Kong 2018). After the British handover of the port city to China in 1947, Hong Kong still maintains limited rights and privileges under the One China policy.

Hong Kong, with its Japanese and English colonial heritage from the mid-nineteenth to the end of the twentieth century, has been facing numerous challenges after the 1960s decolonization. It has been facing postcolonial challenges, opportunities of a global free market economy, and vibrant films and striking urban development (McDonogh & Wong, 2005, p. xi). Considering the strategic location of Hong Kong, McDonogh and Wong (2005) reaffirms Hong Kong's connections with the process of globalization:

Yet Hong Kong, in its history, people, culture, space and connections stands as a remarkably vital microcosm of globalization. Through the heritage of its colonial past (1842-1997), its postcolonial challenges, the opportunities of the world's "finest economy," its vibrant films and striking urbanism, Hong Kong and its people have emerged as iconic twenty-first century global city. After centuries of contact and conflict, the globalism of its citizens is evident in politics, commerce, mass media, and movement; Hong Kongers have participated in many process of globalization of time. In an Archimedean sense, Hong Kong provides a place to stand and to contemplate the movement of the world. (p. xi)

When the Britons defeated the Chinese in the First Opium War (1839), there were around 3000 inhabitants in the village and 2000 fishermen in the harbor of Hong Kong. Western business groups, mainly the British and Portuguese, had previously used the northern harbor of the city for an illegal opium trade into China. Since the 1940s, the British Empire-developed financial centers and manufacturing industries thrived in the island.

Archeological evidences state that the majority of the Hong Kong population descends from the Mongoloid Chinese settlers during the Qin dynasty (221-207 BC) and the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 CE). After the 1842 British takeover of the island, under the Treaty of Nanking (Nanjing) at the end of the Opium War with China, Hong Kong evolved as a center of international business and cross-continental exchange. Eventually, the British termed "Hong Kong" in a local Cantonese dialect to mean the small, rocky, hilly island.

Hong Kong's original Chinese cultural heritage blends with the British and Japanese colonial legacies ever since the nineteenth-century imperial heyday. Hong Kong had been a British colony from 1842 to 1939 followed by the Japanese imperial control over a short period, from 1939 to 1945. Before the mid-twentieth-century war, European imperial powers used it for a port of entry to Asian countries, including Singapore, Thailand, Japan and Korea. Under the control of Great Britain again since 1945, Hong Kong turned into a British colonial entrepôt until 1997. During the Cold War (1945-89), when China still remained a close world, European and American travellers and businesspersons took it for their viable tourist destination and prospective business base. In accordance with the 1984 Sino-British Declaration, signed by the Chinese President Xeng Xiaoping and the British Premier Margaret Thatcher, the principle of two systems of governance in Hong Kong for 50 years would be in effect from 1997, the year of the expiry of Britain's lease of the territories for 99 years. Currently, Hong Kong, including New Kowloon and New Territories, has become a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of People's Republic of China (PRC) under its own legislative body with a high degree of autonomy for business and administration; however, China still controls defense and foreign relations.

Hong Kong has become a potential business center and tourist hub since the British takeover of the region in the mid-nineteenth century. During the imperial regimes, Hong Kong became the transit port of European and American tourists, missionaries, and businesspersons to Asia and the Pacific Rim. Besides, immigrants from China and overseas moved to the global city-state for jobs in manufacturing and entertainment industries during the colonial period from 1842 through 1997. Even after its reunification with China in 1997, Hong Kong has been an economic power center and a vibrant market for banking and finance companies, electronic industries and textile factories. Recognized as one of the four Asian Tigers for its high economic growth and rapid industrialization from the 1960s through 1990s, Hong Kong along with Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea has consistently maintained a high rate of economic growth



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The Hong Kong Metrocomplex at night

until recent years. Hong Kong with its strategic geographic location evolved as an important center of the global market and international relations during the nineteenth century. Like other service and manufacturing companies, the Hong Kong film industry thrives mainly because of a large scale of film production in response to an increasing demand from audiences across the world. In other words, the Hong Kong film industry started hybridizing its products to meet the needs and expectations of audiences of diverse cultures in the 1990s and 2000s. Hong Kong and Hollywood entertainment industries share cinematic techniques and exchange production crews to address global audiences' expectations, supply maximum products, and maximize profits.

The popular Hong Kong-Chinese hero in actions

The Hong Kong popular action hero, going beyond the physical and technological limits, demonstrates spectacular feats with indigenous Chinese tradition and modern graphic manifestations. The kung fu master exploits the indigenous Chinese body art to rescue people and preserve their culture. The Chinese martial hero transposes the traditional body art into modern cinematic space in response to audiences' expectations in the folk culture into cinematic adaptation. In such a blend of indigenous sport and modern visual art, the action hero reworks myth and archetype of the hero and heroic adventures. Like archetypal and mythological heroes, the Hong Kong action heroes accomplish tasks larger than themselves for the greater purpose of humanity.

The Hong Kong film industry, bringing together the traditional Chinese body art and coteremporary popular culture, assimilates the East and the West into a unique global space. Numerous works on arts and popular cultures associate Hong Kong with the East and Hollywood with the West. While the Hollywood sci-fi action hero often enters the scene to fight the villain equipped with guns and weapons, the half-nude Hong Kong action hero mostly appears on the scene in the defense of his clan and community without material weapons. The action hero's rigorous physical engagements, rooted in Hong Kong's indigenous culture, evolved from its coastal geographic location and indigenous Chinese cultural heritage. Under the influence of the Taoist and Buddhist philosophies, the Hong Kong action hero integrates the body, mind, and spirit in the process of taking physical action.

For Bruce Lee, the physical body is a weapon to protect the Shaolin temple, the spiritual center of the Buddhist monks and devotees. In May Joseph's (1999) assessment, Bruce Lee's kung fu action is an expression of Chinese identity in response to the domineering western imperial regime:

Are adding of kung fu enables one to revisit the informal avenues of enjoyment under East Africans social is Bruce Lee's popularity as an *uchiva* (Chinese hero) at this particular in

interesting for many reasons, one being that he privileges what I would call a technology of frugality, or body as a weapon of frugality. Lee's technology of frugality was a philosophy of efficient and minimal action, whereby the opponent's weaknesses are utilized to fuel the self's power. For Lee, a little is enough Frugality became a voluntary technology of plenty, an articulation of agency. (p. 63)

The enactor unfolds his real identity as a martial arts hero in the quest for the unity of being. Joseph appropriates the philosophy of frugality in the action hero's use of the body as technology. The Chinese hero's physical action anticipates the greater effect with a minimum possible strength as opposed to his American counterpart's several rounds of bullets and maximum energy. Bruce Lee's use of the integrated body and T1000's massive destruction of resources dramatically reveal the difference between Chinese and American worldviews. The Shaolin Buddhists use kung fu technique and the physical body as technologies to protect the Shaolin temple as Holy Communion with the dead master, a quest for a spiritual wellbeing.

The embodiment of the physical body of the hero is central to Hong Kong action cinemas, ranging from the Bruce Lee-starred television series *Green Hornet* in 1967 followed by *Enter the Dragon* in 1973 to Chow-directed *Shaolin Soccer* in 2001 followed by Jet Li-starred *Hero* in 2002. In 1973, Robert Clouse-directed *Enter the Dragon* (2004) projects Bruce Lee as a kung fu expert at odds with the villain in protecting the Shaolin temple. In this premier Hong Kong action movie, Bruce Lee's physical body generates dazzling effects in the minds of audiences. After Lee, Jackie Chan with his *Fist of Fury* sequel during the 1980s becomes influential in Hong Kong action cinema. In the 1990s, Jet Li appears to be an influential martial arts hero through *Once Upon a Time in China* and *Last Hero in China*.

As an American born of Chinese parents, Bruce Lee was a significant link between Hong Kong and Hollywood film industries since the 1960s. Bruce Lee took the Hong Kong martial arts cinemas outside Chinatowns just as Jackie Chan later had blockbusters in both Asia and America, and Jet Li has emerged as a global action star. Since the 1970s, Hong Kong Chinese action stars have become the heroes across the Pacific. In *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema* (2009), Stephen Teo reinforces the integration of the knight and the sword in support to the Taoist revelation of the unity of the body and the mind in an action (p.185-86). In the Taoist transformation, the integrated body then merges into the action, and the hero in the action is united with the spirit, and thus, transcends the physical and the mundane. Going beyond the physicality, the hero enters the spiritual sphere with a mystical resonance of the technological miracle.

The journey from the Shaolin shrine to *Shaolin Soccer*

The Chinese kung fu, rooted in the Buddhist myths and legends, originated from the Shaolin temple founded during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534 CE). Established in 495 CE, the Shaolin temple is located in the Songshan Mountains, 80 miles from Dengfeng and 50 miles Southwest of Zhenzhou, the capital of Henan Province. Emperor Xiaowen, a devout Buddhist, had the temple built or the Indian monk Batuo to preserve Buddhist scriptures and promote Buddhism in the region. The Shaolin Buddhist monks were equipped with martial arts skills to protect the Shaolin temple and save the Shaolin fellows. Since the warrior monks did not have sophisticated arms and weapons, they needed kung fu techniques and trainings of body through rigorous physical exercise and regular meditation in the Shaolin discipline.



Spectacular feats of soccer performances at *Shaolin Soccer*

One of the most popular Hong Kong action cinemas, *Shaolin Soccer* (2001), directed by Stephen Cho, brings together Chinese Shaolin Buddhism and modern outdoor sports

embodied by kung fu and soccer, respectively. Under Tony Ching Siu-Tung's action direction, *Shaolin Soccer*, featuring the director-writer Cho himself, visualizes Steel Leg Sing's exceptional soccer performance enhanced by kung fu and gymnastic techniques. In *Chasing Dragons*, David West marks connections between soccer game and kung fu sport trained by Golden Leg Fung, featuring Man Tat Ng. Combining soccer sport and martial arts, Chow's movie presents a simulation of the mystery of the Shaolin Buddhism and the action hero's spectacular feats at the soccer field. Chow's *Shaolin Soccer*, bringing together the Buddhist philosophy and the indigenous body art, embodies the spirituality and technology, and tradition and modernity. As parts of physical engagements, the Golden Leg Fung-trained Shaolin athletes under the captainship of Mighty Steel Leg Sing, excel their soccer skills and athletic dexterity. Audiences see the Shaolin athletes as embodiments of Buddhist monks in the soccer field, and the Shaolin monks as the trained athletes in the Shaolin



Steel Leg and his Shaolin Brothers Team

Temple. *Shaolin Soccer* assimilates tradition and modernity, embodied by an indigenous Chinese body art and the Hong Kong action movie. An outdoor game rooted in the Greek and Roman culture, soccer incorporates kung fu and gymnastics in the cinematic space. In the Greco-Roman world, youngsters were trained on athletics and prepare as warriors in Holy Communion with the divine. In "The Myth Continues: Cinematic Kung Fu in Modernity," Siu Leung Li (2005) assesses the cinematic adaptation of kung fu as a blend of tradition and modernity in the Chinese Hong Kong artistic sensibility: "these films re-imagine the myth of kung fu as all powerful and yet at once self-reflective point to the usefulness of kung fu in the modern era of Western firearms" (p.55). Kung fu as a body art, with popular mass media, has become popular among audiences across the world. Similarly, movie and

television have become popular themselves with the kung fu programs, including serials and movies.

Whether in the kung fu action or the soccer shot, the athlete's body turns into a nexus of technology and spirituality, and indigenous body art and popular media. Steel Leg's physical body trained in Shaolin kung fu tradition reflects the crossing of the divide between the virtual and the real, and modernity and tradition. The nude body of the martial hero in displaying the best of the kung fu skills combines the opposites in a spectrum of transnational experience.

A large audience, with the rise of mass media in recent years, has access to the traditional Chinese body art. The Hong Kong film industry, primarily incorporating kung fu fight scenes, has increasingly drawn the western audiences over the last four decades. The kung fu action of Bruce Lee in the 1970s connects western audiences to the eastern indigenous body art. Bruce Lee first becomes popular among a larger western audience with his acting as Kato in the twenty-six episodes of *The Green Hornet* television series produced from 1966 through 1967 (Mintz, 1986, p. 141). Kato, featuring a young Asian boy, appears to western audiences, not as the main character but minor one, evoking multiple speculations.

In these lights, when the west is gradually tending the east on the quest journey, knowing their art and culture and sharing with them values. The cinematic transposition of the soccer in Shaolin Soccer is an exemplary phenomenon that reflects the unity of the two cultures, the East and the West. As one of the popular modern sports, soccer can be traced back to the goddess of Delphi in the ancient Greek Olympics in the West, and to the Buddhist tradition of Shaolin monks in the East. In the Greek tradition, the athletes in Holy Communion with the gods or goddesses invoke spiritual revelation and transcend the physical body. Similarly, the Shaolin athletes in their connection with the Shaolin temple experience the Buddhahood within them and transcend the physicality and the mundane reality. Through his soccer performance in the field, Sing shares the Buddhist monks' experience of integrating the body, mind, and spirit. Similarly, the Shaolin athletes share with the Shaolin monks the experience of transcending physical body and mundane reality through sporting actions, such as kicking and dribbling the ball on the field.

In *Shaolin Soccer*, the camera captures the simultaneous movements of the players and the soccer ball, suggestive of balance and harmony. The camera focuses on the swirling action of the athlete's body that reflects a blend of technological feats and physical actions. Audiences see the techno-body interface in the hero's physical engagement and soccer performance, the embodiment of body and transnational journey, an interface the hero and cinematic animation.

Conclusion

The Hollywood sci-fi action heroes often use their technologized bodies and automatic machines in support to humans in their battles with machines. Similarly, the Hong Kong action heroes use their trained bodies and martial arts skills in protecting their family and the clan. The Hong Kong martial hero's trained body resembles the Hollywood sci-fi action hero's technology. The martial hero reinvents his body as an automatic machine, transforming it into a fascinating visual spectacle. The Hollywood action hero handles the machine-body, a cultural construct in the nexus between an individual consciousness and popular mass media. In Hollywood sci-fi film, the physically trained body with artificial intelligence resonates the Greek athlete hero.

The action hero epitomizes a combination of mythology and religion, and technology and science, establishing a spiritual communion with the divine and the materiality of the body. Numerous debates revolve around the hard body of the male action hero at the expense of the action heroine as the lead character in the cinema in a prestigious tournament, Mighty Steel Leg Sing's soccer performance, enhanced by his athletic skills, embodies an integration of the body, mind, and spirit. At the play, Sing's sporting action visualizes the unity of the athletic body and the twentieth-century popular media.

In *Shaolin Soccer*, the athlete hero uses his trained body in the Shaolin discipline in scoring maximum goals for the team, demonstrating the best of his martial skills, using the body and sword fight techniques. Like the digitized Neo in *The Matrix*, the rigorously trained action hero demonstrates swirling movements and swift physical actions in the soccer field. The computer-generated graphics of the athlete hero's performance reflects the dynamics between the hero's spiritual journey and the technological nuance.

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