

CHAPTER ONE

KUNG FU CULTURAL REVOLUTION
AND JAPANESE IMPERIALISM

We have no nation without a fight against those who oppress us. We have no culture but a culture born out of our resistance to oppression.

—Linda Harrison

With the power of hindsight, the proclamation of a popular cultural revolution, which swept the world from Hong Kong, can be traced back to Bruce Lee's statement on *gung fu* (Cantonese spelling of kung fu) made in 1965 when the term was virtually unknown to the rest of the world. A few years prior to the official outbreak of the revolution in Hong Kong, Lee happened to be interviewed by the Twentieth Century Fox studio as part of the screen test for an actor skilled in the "Oriental" martial arts. At this occasion, Lee in effect unleashed the power of ancient Chinese martial arts by removing the veil of hitherto kept secrecy:

Well, gung fu is originated in China. It is the ancestor of karate and jujitsu. It's more of a complete system and it's more fluid. . . . (What's the difference between a gung fu punch and a karate punch?) A karate punch is like an iron bar—"whack!" A gung fu punch is like an iron chain with an iron ball attached to the end, and it go[es] "wang!" and it hurt[s] inside.¹

This screen test, which ultimately led Lee to his debut in Hollywood as Kato in *The Green Hornet* (1966–1967), was a by-product of his first appearance at a U.S. karate tournament. Consistent with his pedagogic activities in the field

of martial arts, Lee also demonstrated various forms of kung fu from diverse schools, such as Praying Mantis and White Crane, on the screen. His demonstration also included what appeared to be quite eccentric movements to unfamiliar eyes, the theatrical movements of the warrior and scholar figures of the Cantonese opera. The effortlessness shown in Lee's demonstration of operatic figures came from the fact that his father, Li Hoi-chuen, was a noted actor of the opera both on stage and screen. In fact, it was during his troupe's overseas tour on the West Coast that Li Hoi-chuen's Eurasian wife, Grace, gave birth to Bruce Lee in San Francisco.

Another noted Cantonese opera star, a contemporary of Lee's father, Kwan Tak-hing, is considered to be one of the progenitors of the kung fu film genre. Kwan earned national recognition first as a real-life patriotic heroic figure for dedicating his talent to the war of resistance against Japan during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945).² Kwan's bent for playing righteous martial arts characters in the opera and his real-life commitment to defend the nation converged in his main role in the film series of Wong Fei-hung, a Cantonese hero, launched in 1949. Wong Fei-hung from Guangdong Province is a legendary master of martial arts as well as Chinese medicine, who taught his disciples not only to defend themselves "but to protect their communities from thugs and foreign bullies."³ The series lasted more than two decades, producing ninety-nine films of classic values and thereby establishing the foundation of kung fu movies as a genre.⁴ Its enduring legacy and popularity can be gauged by the number of remakes such as Lau Kar-Leong's *Drunken Master 2* (1994, 2000), featuring Jackie Chan, and Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* series (1991–1993), featuring Jet Li.

The Cantonese tradition of the kung fu film genre therefore provided a launching pad for Shaw Brothers' mass production of martial arts films, which catered to the Mandarin cinema circuit. From the mid-1960s, the Shaw Brothers' onslaught of kung fu movies began with swordplay action films (or *wuxia*) such as *Come Drink With Me* (1965), directed by King Hu, and *The One Armed Swordsman* (1967), directed by Chang Che, which featured Wang Yu (or Jimmy Wang Yu).⁵ Wang Yu attained Hong Kong's kung fu stardom before Bruce Lee's reentry. *The Chinese Boxer* (1970), which Wang Yu both directed and starred in, consolidated the paradigm of the kung fu cultural revolution, which embraced the theme of struggle against Japanese imperialism as a narrative staple, the image of a lone hero as a protagonist, and the fistfight as an action format.

Despite the fact that the films were made primarily for Mandarin-speaking communities, the outbreak of the kung fu cultural revolution reflected major social upheavals that were taking place in Hong Kong. In

1966, what started as a lone hunger strike against the ferry fare increase quickly developed into mass demonstrations and riots in defiance against the colonial political structure.⁶ Instigated by the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the mass movement in the following year took a more militant form, involving organized industrial strikes, confrontations with the police force, and mass demonstrations.⁷ However, it eventually degenerated into assassinations and indiscriminate bombings that claimed innocent lives.⁸ Consequently, the mass movement of 1967 ended up alienating its mass base from organized antisystemic social movements. Nevertheless, the heightened political consciousness of the Hong Kong masses continued to thrive in demands for political reforms in colonial administration.⁹ Distinct among those demands was the use of Chinese as an official language initiated by university students, which subsequently led to a surge in the student-led nationalist movement in the early 1970s. The culmination of the nationalist movement was the "Defend Diaoyutai Movement," which emerged in protest against the Japanese occupation of the Diaoyutai Islands near the northeast coast of Taiwan.¹⁰ Benjamin K. P. Leung sums up the general sentiment of the movement:

To the student activists in Hong Kong, whose nationalist sentiments had already been awakened by the 1967 riots and the ongoing Cultural Revolution in China, Japan's territorial claim signified a revival of Japanese militarism and this invoked the memories of Japan's invasion of China during World War II.¹¹

As the 1971 protest rally turned into a violent clash with the police force, the nationalist movement "developed into a campaign against the colonial establishment in Hong Kong" such as the anticorruption campaign of 1973.¹² The irrepressible decolonizing desire of the Hong Kong masses situated in a peculiar colonial condition thus gave birth to the popular cultural revolution, the kung fu cultural revolution.

What made the kung fu film boom during the late 1960s and early 1970s a popular cultural revolution instead of a mere commercial celebration of Chinese nationalism was the allegory of the imperial and colonial power and decolonization struggles. Cast in the kung fu dialectic of power relationships, in which "imperialists" or "foreigners" and the "Chinese collaborators" are designated as antagonists and the natives as protagonists, the Chinese national identity assumes a political agency in opposition to the colonial power structure, representing the people in their quest for social justice. Thus the nationalism of kung fu cinema conjured up an empowering political

agency for resisting the colonial order rather than nationhood in an abstract sense. It naturally developed into a well-spring of inspiration for the Third World masses and other oppressed people. Such progressive and universal potentials of the kung fu cultural revolution particularly came to the fore with the entry of Bruce Lee.

Lee became an actor at the age of three months and continued his career after the family settled back in Hong Kong until he was eighteen years old, appearing in twenty films.¹³ Popularly known as Li Siu Lung (Lee Little Dragon), Bruce Lee's child and juvenile actor career intersected with yet another tradition of Cantonese cinema, the family melodrama with socially didactic themes (i.e., filial piety, friendship, and community).¹⁴ Therefore, Lee's participation in kung fu cinema meant that the Hong Kong masses could now locate their true representative in the popular cultural revolution, as they did with Wong Fei-hung. Indeed, Lee's first kung fu film, *The Big Boss/Tang Shan Dai Xiong* (1971), out-grossed *The Sound of Music* as Hong Kong's all-time box office record.¹⁵ It is, however, his second film, *Fist of Fury/Jing Wu Men* (1972), that boosted the political fervor of the kung fu cultural revolution. Directed by Lo Wei and produced by then-emerging Golden Harvest, *Fist of Fury* straightforwardly deals with the history of Japanese colonialism in a close-to-life context, with realistic combat choreography. The cataclysmic affect of the film upon the people under colonial subjugation was instantly and dramatically visible. When Robert Clouse, the director of Lee's later film *Enter the Dragon*, sat down in the theater with Bruce Lee as his interpreter, he witnessed the intense "voodoo" theater of decolonization, as the Hong Kong masses identified with the film with unparalleled passion:

At one point in the film, he [Bruce Lee] said the Japanese toughs were telling the member of Chinese dojo [*sic*] the Chinese were the "sick people of Asia." Silence. You could hear the bus traffic on Nathan Road outside the theater. . . . Bruce—as the character Chen Chen—went to the Japanese headquarters to confront the murderous villains. He single-handedly laid waste to the entire organization, sending the audience to hysteria. . . . Following a dramatic pause he said, "The Chinese are not the sick people of Asia." Pandemonium! Everyone rose to his [*sic*] feet. Wave upon wave of earsplitting sound rolled up to the balcony. The seats were humming and the floor of the old balcony was shaking!¹⁶

Such a phenomenal mode of reception was by no means limited to the people of Hong Kong. In the Philippines, for instance, *Fist of Fury* ran non-stop for more than six months, prompting the government to impose import restrictions on foreign films.¹⁷ Phil Ochs, an American folk singer, also encountered

the Filipino audience's passionate involvement with the film, a total theater experience akin to the description given by Clouse.¹⁸ In Singapore, in the meantime, the opening night of *Fist of Fury* paralyzed the city in the "country's first film traffic jam."¹⁹

The unprecedented transcultural popularity of *Fist of Fury* in Asia and Third World countries, beyond the confinement of the Chinese cultural world, can be attributed to the originality of Bruce Lee. His artistic expression arguably represents the most progressive and innovative component of the kung fu cultural revolution. In order to capture the original, hence autonomous, thrust of Lee's artistic expression, the context of the kung fu cultural revolution needs to be defined. Using *Fist of Fury* as an exemplar text, this chapter focuses on the constitutional aspect of the kung fu cultural revolution.

Whereas most films of the kung fu cultural revolution suffer from an elusive contextualization, *Fist of Fury* is packed with historical and social references providing a definitive historical and structural context to the theme of Japanese villainy.²⁰ Upon such a foundation, the symbolism and allegory in *Fist of Fury* not only link the film with the historical instances that betray the reality of Japanese imperialism but also contest the symbolic kernel of imperialist culture. Through an in-depth analysis of *Fist of Fury* in historical and social context (including Lee's biographical context) I will approach the universal paradigm of kung fu revolution as a popular aesthetic of decolonization. It is the aesthetic that is rooted in the people's historical response to the crisis in Asia brought by becoming imperialist of Japan.

DIALECTIC OF KUNG FU AND SAMURAI

The Shaw Brothers' empire, which reigned over the Hong Kong film industry through the 1960s and 1970s, originated in the Shao (original spelling of "Shaw Brothers," as they were later known) family's business in Shanghai. C. W. Shaw, the eldest of the six brothers, invested in a small theater in Shanghai to showcase Chinese modern drama, *wenmingxi* (civilized drama), in the early 1920s.²¹ C. W.'s association with Shanghai filmmakers led to the establishment of Tianyi Film Company in the mid-1920s. Soon after Tianyi's inauguration, two of C. W.'s brothers (Runme and Run Run) were sent to Singapore and Malaya (now known as Malaysia) to create a market in Southeast Asia. C. W.'s encounter with a Cantonese opera theater troupe in Shanghai gave him an idea of producing the first Cantonese talkie, entitled *White Gold Dragon* (1933), which turned out to be a phenomenal success in Hong Kong, Macao, and Southeast Asia. Following the success of *White Gold*

Dragon, C. W. and Runme moved to Hong Kong to consolidate their studio, which elevated the Shaws to “a major force in Cantonese film production in Hong Kong.”²² After a period of setbacks during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong and Singapore (1941–1945), the Shaws reorganized their business and began distributing not only Chinese movies but also foreign films from the United States, England, France, and India.²³

The postwar Hong Kong film industry, in the meantime, was dominated by the legacy of the Shanghai émigré who came during the war to produce the films of resistance to Japan.²⁴ However, this “leftist” Mandarin film tradition, characterized by social didactic themes, waned due to a dwindled market in mainland China and to a counter-ideological attack from the KMT and American-sponsored “rightist” film companies.²⁵ In place of the social didacticism and ideological debate, the apolitical Shaw Brothers and the Motion Picture and General Investment (MP and GI), run by the Malaysian mogul Loke Wan Tho, emerged to take hold of the Hong Kong film industry. Their preeminence can be attributed to a pure entertainment orientation, a vertically integrated studio system, and a Singapore base that covered the Southeast Asian market.

Run Run Shaw’s (the sixth brother) move from the Singapore headquarters to Hong Kong to establish Shaw Brothers in 1957 signaled the coming of a monopoly empire.²⁶ Run Run successfully welded the Fordist mass production structure into a tightly controlled patriarchal family business organization. The Asian despotic mass production exuded its philosophy on the screen, as well as in its infrastructure. Shaw Brothers’ production formula bore a close resemblance to that of the 1950s’ Hollywood musicals in its detachment from social reality, and in a glorification of materialism flaunted in lavish costumes and elaborate staging. The formulaic escape to a pseudo-historical fantasyland proved successful when its *The Kingdom and Beauty* (1959) claimed the Grand Prix at the Asian Film Festival.²⁷ Shaw Brothers’ Movietown, a mega-studio complex completed in 1961, embodied the acme of the Fordist (and Taylorist) factory system, in which the management exerted complete control over not only the production, but also the reproduction of the labor force. Enclosed in this forty-six-acre lot perched on the hillside of Clearwater Bay were outdoor and indoor sets, processing laboratories, preview rooms, manufacturing workshops of bolts and nuts, dorms for actors and actresses, and even its own talent school.²⁸

As Run Run himself admits, his grand cinematic opera with its Chinese classical formula lasted only up to 1964.²⁹ A new trend was surging through the Asian film market: Japanese-made samurai movies. As soon as the post-war ban on samurai films imposed by the U.S. occupying forces was lifted,

Japan resumed its production with much vigor. The trend was epitomized by Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954), which earned international acclaim. Between 1961 and 1962, the production of samurai films reached its apex where forty new titles were streamed from the Kyoto fantasy factory.³⁰ The outpouring of samurai movies into the Asian market took place against the background of Japan's postwar economic expansion, facilitated by the politics of aid.

Under the guise of war reparations, Japan's government renewed its investment into East and Southeast Asia from 1955 to 1968 (with the exception of North Korea, North Vietnam, and China), in sync with U.S. military advancement in the same region.³¹ In other words, the Japanese government lay the groundwork for new market and investment opportunities for Japanese corporations. Since the mid-1960s, therefore, the entire region of Asia has come to confront the fierce force of "Japan Inc.": an inundation of "made in Japan" goods in the market, transfer of polluting factories, and direct investment in the development of commerce and mega infrastructure.

Within this political context of Japan's postwar expansionism, we can now decipher the ideological aspect of samurai movies. Samurai is a warrior class of Japan's feudal era, which lasted for more than a millennium. Since the consolidation of a centralized power structure by Tokugawa Shogun (1603–1867), the samurai class became superfluous, constituting a vast reserve army. With the dissolution of the samurai class in the modern era, according to Hiroshi Yoshioka, the image of "samurai" has come to assume a simulacrum of dominant selfhood, "a dummy to confront the Western subject."³² Viewed from this angle, the postwar mass production of samurai movies can be interpreted as Japan's postwar reconstruction of nationalism in the popular aesthetic sphere. The exportation of samurai movies to Asia, accordingly, underscores Japan's quest for cultural hegemony in Asia, based on the colonization of the unconscious by the imagery of the imperialist subject.

While the West was fascinated with Kurosawa's stylistics, the Asian cultural market was inundated with B-grade samurai movies. Most popular among them was the *Blind Swordsman* (*Zato-ichi* in Japanese) series (1962–1973). Being a blind masseur, an outcast, *Zato-ichi* appears to be a marginal figure in the samurai genre. Yet his true identity as a supernatural swordsman is revealed in the combat situation, at the moment where the *katana*/sword is drawn from his cane sheath. Aesthetically, *Zato-ichi*'s speedy and economized annihilation of multiple assailants was the core of the film's appeal and intrigue to the Asian masses. The invasion of the technologically renovated image of samurai into Asia, paradoxically, gave an opportunity for the Hong Kong film industry to reinvigorate its tradition of the martial arts

genre and to revive its nationalistic tone in order to let the other side of the story be told. With the outreach of the Mandarin cinema market over East and Southeast Asia, production of such films could provide the Asian masses (beyond the Chinese world) with a representative expression and in return invigorate the Hong Kong film industry as their spokesperson for vernacular imagery.

The One Armed Swordsman/Du Bi Dao (1967), according to Run Run Shaw's definition, is "the first film that could be called a kung fu film."³³ It indeed marked the germination of the "kung fu paradigm" in response to the colonial imagery of samurai films. The "one armed-ness" of the one armed swordsman points to the film's apparent intertextual reference to the blind swordsman's disability. In the construction of "disability," however, *The One Armed Swordsman* inscribes its distinct kung fu identity upon the dominant image currency.

Ultimately, the blind swordsman's "blindness" is a disguise for his "supernatural power," with which he could single-handedly annihilate a multitude of opponents. His "blindness," hence, is an inverted expression of mythical power of the samurai and *katana*: the superiority of blind swordsman is veiled, yet exists a priori. On the other hand, the one armed-ness of the one armed swordsman merely marks the re-starting point for a martial artist who lost his arm in an accident caused by his *sifu's* (teacher) daughter. The plot revolves around the protagonist's struggle to attain excellence through self-discipline, aided by a young peasant woman who saved him, nourished him back to health, and passed to him a scroll on sword-fighting given to her by her father. The climax involves his successful fight against the school's enemy in order to defend the honor of his school, his *sifu*, and his father, who sacrificed his life to save the school. The superiority of *The One Armed Swordsman*, therefore, is derived from the toil, perseverance, respect for the traditional wisdom embodied in the scroll, and support of loved ones. It is the real, not the mythology, that endows the narrative. In other words, *The One Armed Swordsman* reflects the life, history, and social relationships of the common people.

The end of the 1960s saw a heightened intensity in Japan's expansionism and in the antagonism of Asian masses, indicated by the public criticism waged by North Vietnam and the PRC against Japan's renewed military buildup, coordinated with its economic expansionism.³⁴ Prevailing Asian popular sentiment therefore urged the Hong Kong film industry to delineate its kung fu identity much more clearly as an independent vernacular image against the current of samurai aesthetics. Thus the Shaw Brother's kung fu films of the early 1970s, such as *The Chinese Boxer/Long Hudou* (1970) and *King Boxer/Tianxia Diyiquan* (1971) established the paradigm of kung fu cul-

tural revolution in which a righteous hero/heroine would defend his/her nation and people against Japanese imperialism by means of a fistfight. The stylistic focus on the fistfight instead of sword play (tradition of *wu xia*) marked a paradigm shift where the decolonizing desire of the masses came to pervade not only narratives but also aesthetics.

Golden Harvest, established by Raymond Chow (who broke away from the Shaw empire in 1970), vigorously cultivated the formula of kung fu cultural revolution. The company initially capitalized on the popularity of Wang Yu—who defected from the Shaw Brothers—and his one armed-ness in *Zatoichi and the the One Armed Swordsman* (1971)³⁵ and *The One Armed Boxer/Dubei Quanwang* (1971). Equally important was Angela Mao Ying, a Taiwan-born Peking opera actress, whose performance in *Lady Whirlwind/Tiezhang Xuanfengtui* (1972), as Bey Logan observes, made her “one of Golden Harvest’s most prolific players.”³⁶ By pursuing the theme of Japanese villainy and the stardom of Wang Yu and Angela Mao Ying, Golden Harvest was on the rise to rival the Shaw empire in the Mandarin cinema market with a solid focus on arousing patriotic sentiments. Thus, the Hong Kong film industry’s commercial involvement in patriotic anti-Japanese themes came to resemble its previous noncommercial patriotic campaign during the Second Sino-Japanese War or the genre of national defense films.³⁷ The nationalism expressed in both cases remained partial, as the films bypassed the existence of Hong Kong owing to their focus on the Mandarin circuit. The superstardom of Wang Yu as a representative figure of Hong Kong—made kung fu films lent testimony to this slight disjuncture between the representative medium and the represented (i.e., culture, tradition, and people from whom the art originated). A former water polo player from Shanghai, Wang Yu’s appeal seems to have rested on his refined and sophisticated look and acting, which suited the Mandarin circuit. Stephen Teo goes to the heart of the problem:

Mandarin cinema’s adoption of kung fu in the 1970s seemed an opportunistic denial of the importance of Cantonese cinema’s contribution to Hong Kong pictures because the kung fu genre was identified as primarily Cantonese, not only because of its long-running Wong Fei-hung series but also because many of its real-life practitioners were Cantonese. Even the term “kung fu” is derived from Cantonese.³⁸

In this context, one can fully appreciate the importance of Lee’s entry into the Hong Kong kung fu genre, particularly for those to whom Lee represented their identity (not only Hong Kong people but also Asian people in general). Lee was a refined and sophisticated Cantonese actor, who was also

a cutting-edge practitioner of kung fu. Yet, similar to *The One Armed Swordsman's* narrative of toil, it required a colossal struggle for Lee to climb up to the level of a popular cultural representative for the Asian masses in the Mandarin-dominated Hong Kong film industry.

Through his confrontations with the management over the script, character design, and choreography, Lee attempted to bring as much realism as possible to his films.³⁹ Beyond his intention, such an effort could place the kung fu cultural revolution back to its rightful context. For example, Lee's penchant for the character of a country bumpkin, whose moral integrity and extraordinary skill in kung fu makes him outshine other more sophisticated looking overseas Chinese (in *The Big Boss* and *The Way of the Dragon*), symbolically suggests the assertion of Cantonese identity in the Mandarin-dominated cultural world. Also through Lee's acting, the image of rebellious youth cultivated in the Cantonese cinema of the 1950s was imported into the kung fu cultural revolution. Moreover, in combat choreography Lee strove to sharpen the identity of the kung fu film, according to Verina Glassner, by convincing "his director Lo Wei to do away with the weaponry and trick effects that Chinese films to that point had relied on, and instead use his body alone to express all the force and control necessary."⁴⁰ The full realization of self, which Lee emphasized in his martial arts as well as in acting, vested Lee's films with realism, whereby the decolonizing narrative of the kung fu cultural revolution could be directly addressing the audience under colonial subjugation. This is particularly so when the narrative of anti-Japanese imperialism in the realm of representation comes to be aligned with Lee's real-life experience.

LEE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH JAPANESE IMPERIALISM

When Lee's family came back to Hong Kong from the American tour and from the birth of Jun Fan (Bruce Lee's given Chinese name), their homeland was besieged by the expanding power of Japanese colonial forces. On December 7, 1941, Japan invaded the Philippines, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, and Hong Kong simultaneously with their bombing of the American base in Hawai'i known as Pearl Harbor. On the "Black Christmas Day," as it is remembered by the people of Hong Kong, the British colonial forces finally ceded Hong Kong to Japan.

Following a period of widespread, indiscriminate killing and looting, Japan installed a totalitarian military regime in Hong Kong, where the military and civilian police (known as *Kenpeitai*) maintained the reign of terror.⁴¹

The Japanese occupational forces halted Hong Kong's commercial activities and took exclusive control over the food supply under a strict rationing system, reducing the food intake of the people to a bare minimum.⁴² A chronic food shortage grew rampantly, resulting in mass death by starvation. The civilians, who formed a long line to receive a daily ration at the "rice station," became victims of arbitrary terrorism and killings—including beheading with Japanese swords—by the *Kenpeitai*. Those who did not comply with the occupational currency were also subjected to different types of torture, which in most cases resulted in death.⁴³ The surveillance by the *Kenpeitai*, in the name of census, also turned into occasions for terrorist attacks—looting, raping, torture, and massacre—on the civilians.⁴⁴ The death toll of Hong Kong civilians due to disease and starvation caused by Japan's invasion and military occupation reached the tens of thousands (four thousand were killed strictly in the initial combat situation).⁴⁵

Lee's early childhood was in distress due to the brutal forces of the Japanese military occupation. The Japanese invasion nearly cost the life of Lee's father, who narrowly escaped a bombing at his friend's residence.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Lee's rebelliousness and resilience had already shown their first signs, according to Linda Lee: "Bruce spent his childhood there during the World War II Japanese occupation. He once perched above Nathan Road to shake his fist defiantly at a Japanese plane flying overhead."⁴⁷ As Hong Kong reverted to a British colony in the postwar era and the people regained their normalcy, Lee resumed his child actor career and attended school. Intense gang rivalry at school and his inclination for street fighting prompted him to take a formal lesson in Wing Chun kung fu, taught by the master Yip Man, in his teens. Wing Chun kung fu, allegedly invented by a Shaolin nun specifically for a woman's self-defense, bestowed Lee with a solid foundation in Chinese ancient philosophy (Confucianism, *I Ching*, and Taoism). In 1959, shortly after his last film as a child-juvenile actor at the age of eighteen, Lee migrated back to his birthplace, San Francisco. His move to Seattle opened up an opportunity to study at the university and start a career as a martial arts educator.

The American martial arts scene in the early 1960s was thoroughly dominated by Japanese martial arts. The influence of Japanese cultural imperialism was also evident at the theater, where the tsunami of samurai films reached a Chinatown theater in Seattle.⁴⁸ Teaching kung fu under such conditions sometimes required Lee to confront the forces of hegemonic culture. The following episode of Lee's encounter with a Japanese karate practitioner captures a peculiar manifestation of Japanese imperialism and a peculiar terrain of his struggle:

“When I was a student at the University (University of Washington, Seattle),” Bruce once recalled, “I gave a demonstration of kung fu. While explaining the art is the forerunner of Karate, I was rudely interrupted by a black belt karate man from Japan who sat in front of the stage. ‘No no, Karate not from China. Come from Japan!’ he hollered.” Bruce reiterated superciliously, “Karate is from kung fu.” After the crowd left, the karate man challenged Bruce. “You want to fight?” “Anytime,” Bruce retorted. “OK, I fight you next week.” “Why not now?” asked Bruce. “It took me two seconds to dispose of him,” Bruce recalled. “He was too slow and too stiff.”⁴⁹

Although an undeniable air of braggadocio in this episode may accentuate the competitiveness of the encounter between martial artists, the real point of contention is not over the superiority of styles, but history. Lee’s insistence on history, through a genealogical approach, is based on a necessity of totality in the understanding of the art, without which it could easily degenerate into a mere sport: “I hope martial artists are more interested in the root of martial arts and not the different decorative branches, flowers or leaves. It is futile to argue as to which single leaf, which design of branches or which attractive flower you like; when you understand the root you understand all its blossoming.”⁵⁰ The historical consciousness Lee represented in his demonstration came into conflict with a karate practitioner who is not conscious of the historical roots of his art.

As I will detail the formation of Okinawan *tou-di* as an original form of what is known as “karate” in the next chapter, I focus my analysis here on Japan’s colonial appropriation of *tou-di*. The base of *tou-di* was formed through the cultural exchange between China and Okinawa, since they entered a tributary relationship in the fourteenth century. The name *tou-di*, which literally means “Chinese hand” or “Tang (dynasty) hand” reflects Okinawa’s acknowledgment of China as its origin. Coterminous with the beginning of the Tokugawa shogun regime in the early seventeenth century, the southernmost domain of Japan, Satsuma, launched a military conquest of Okinawa. The development of Okinawan martial arts as a popular defense of Okinawa owes its momentum to their defense against Japanese colonialism. Under the colonial subjugation, *tou-di* emerged as an “Okinawan tradition of people’s self-defense against the foreign domination,” transmitted in guarded secrecy.⁵¹ Japan’s “discovery” of *tou-di* traces back to the radical militarization of the nation in the Meiji era, in which Japan was seeking a system of discipline to construct the collective body for national mobilization.⁵² The “importation” of *tou-di* took place during the 1920s, when hegemony of the militaristic and homogeneous culture reigned.

During the Meiji era, with the aim of preserving *bushido*, or the samurai ideology in art form, various types of Japanese martial arts (i.e., ju-jutsu, ken-jutsu, juken-jutsu, etc.) were integrated into a standardized national martial arts or *budo* (kendo, judo, aikido, etc.). The principal driving force of the nationalization of martial arts was an organization called the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai (Great Japan Martial Virtue Association), authorized by the Meiji emperor and headed by the members of the imperial household.⁵³ The colonial appropriation of *tou-di* thus entailed its fundamental transfiguration. As Muro Kenji observes, it was “forced to conform to the needs of the ideology of the Japanese empire, [it] was reshaped to become rightist, nationalistic, hierarchical and authoritarian.”⁵⁴

The process of colonization of Okinawan art form was directly inscribed in the gradual change of the name *tou-di*. Indicative of a growing culture of fascism that entailed xenophobia (e.g., anti-Chinese sentiment), the schools in Tokyo saw the name as inappropriate and altered its spelling to “karate” by applying the Japanese phonetic system (*hiragana*) instead of the original Chinese ideogram.⁵⁵ A year after the establishment of Japan’s puppet regime, Manchukuo,⁵⁶ in China, the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai proclaimed the official name change by replacing “kara” with another Chinese ideogram of the same pronunciation, which signifies “empty” or “sky.”⁵⁷ The official name change proclaimed the birth of karate-do, a newly incorporated national martial arts of Japan. Once karate had been converted into the disciplinary art of the imperialist culture, it was widely circulated as a representative cultural property of Japan along the channels of postwar Japanese expansionism, greatly aided by the American importation of karate-do through the military. Thus, in contrast to the original *tou-di*, which developed and spread out through the channel of popular defense, largely in secrecy, karate as an art of imperialist discipline became integrated into the dominant cultural paradigm.

Given this historical context, Lee’s confrontation with the karate practitioner in effect reveals the latter’s claim to karate to be based on the notion of imperial ownership that eclipses history from the consciousness. This ahistorical consciousness in turn has its roots in the myth, or what Roland Barthes calls the “evaporation of history” into the realm of myth.⁵⁸ For such a notion of ownership is tenable only by the obliteration of history and filling of the void thus created with a mythological consciousness, which in the final analysis is rooted in the samurai ideology. Such mythological consciousness was naturalized and widely disseminated not only by samurai films as mentioned earlier, but also by Hollywood’s exotic rendition of Japanese culture. Lee’s struggle in the world of martial arts, in due course, came to intersect with the realm of representation.

At the Long Beach Karate International Tournament in 1965, the kung fu demonstration by Lee and his associates caught the attention of Jay Sebring, a Hollywood hairdresser who captured Lee's demonstration on 8 mm. The film was relayed to the producer of the Batman series, William Dozier, who was looking for an "Oriental" martial artist to star in the program called *Charlie Chan's Number One Son*, at which occasion the screen test mentioned in the beginning of this chapter was conducted. Twentieth Century Fox, however, decided to cast Lee for the sidekick Kato in *The Green Hornet* TV series, which was based on the popular radio action drama of the 1930s.

The construction of the image of Kato is anchored in the institution of cinematic or Hollywood "Orientalism," the Hollywood production of otherness imposed upon the image of the people, culture, and nation of East Asia.⁵⁹ In the "Orientalist" mode of image construction, Lee was placed in a contradictory position whereby his true identity is undermined by his own action and performance. For example, the contradiction becomes very acute in an episode in which Kato successfully busts Tong, the Chinese secret society, in Chinatown for its alleged criminal operation; Kato uses his kung fu expertise to overpower the Chinese kung fu master of Tong. Kato being Japanese, Lee's combative superiority contributes to the mythology of karate rather than to a revelation in Chinese martial arts even though Lee is demonstrating kung fu in his action. In other words, the more active he was in his role as Kato the more Lee de-realized his own identity.

Lee's refusal to play any Asian stereotypes further impeded his career in Hollywood. With the help of his Hollywood pupils (Steve McQueen, James Coburn, and Stirling Silliphant, an Academy Award-winning script writer), he made special appearances on TV shows and in a film. Lee was thus confronted both by the samurai myth of the Japanese film industry and by the American "cowboy" myth of Hollywood. At the point of convergence between those myths is thus the multinational "Orientalism" that Lee needed to overcome in order for his realism to be communicated to a wide audience. In the meantime, Lee's residence in Los Angeles provided him with opportunities to incorporate other Asian martial arts into a new system, which was on the path of evolution from its Wing Chun kung fu foundation. The environment in Los Angeles not only enabled Lee to cultivate the new martial arts concept of *Jeet Kune Do*, which transcends styles and other institutionalization; it also fostered a pan-Asian consciousness in Lee that embraces transcultural connections of Asia, beyond the boundary of Chinese cultural worlds. As Lee returned to Hong Kong, therefore, his experience and consciousness along with its sociohistorical context was brought into the kung fu cultural revolu-

tion, creating a vanguard expression of the genre. In *Fist of Fury*, through its historical realism, Lee's struggle in the worlds of martial arts and cinema coalesced with the historical narrative of anti-imperialist struggle.

IMAGES OF IMPERIALISM AND RESISTANCE IN FIST OF FURY

Imperial Missive or "A Sheet of Paper"

Our story begins with the death of Ho Yun Chia, a legendary Chinese hero famous for his victories over a Russian champion wrestler and Judo experts. Poisoned by whom? For what? It was not known for certain. There has been speculation. Here is the most popular version.⁶⁰

The voice of a storyteller opens up *Fist of Fury*, seducing the audience into the timeless time and spaceless realm of legends. But *Fist of Fury* has a concrete reference to the true story of the Jing Wu (Jing Mouh in Cantonese) martial arts school, founded by Ho Yun Chia (Fock Yuen Kap in Cantonese) in Shanghai, who was "a famous patriot ready to defend his country anytime [*sic*]." ⁶¹ The master was also known by foreigners as the "yellow-faced tiger" for his fierce and triumphant combat with Japanese martial artists and Russian wrestlers. ⁶²

Although it pays homage to the formal historical reference of the Jing Wu school, *Fist of Fury* is thoroughly immersed within the folkloric world by engaging in its own version of storytelling that centers around the fiction of the grandmaster's mysterious death. In so doing, the narrative and image apparatus of *Fist of Fury* is augmented to freely absorb a wide spectrum of the historical contradictions and antagonism of modern China into a dimension of visualized oral history.

The designated time of the film's narrative, 1908,⁶³ falls in the mid-point between the Yi Ho Tuan (Society of Righteousness and Harmony) movement and the May Fourth movement in the chronicle of the people's struggle. It happens to coincide with the eruption of the Japanese goods boycott movement in Hong Kong, instigated by the "Tatsu Maru incident."⁶⁴ In the imperialist calendar, it lies between the Sino-Japanese War and World War I and in proximity to Japan's "annexation" of Korea.

Following the first scene at Grandmaster Ho's burial, the film takes the audience directly to an initial confrontation between Japanese occupational forces and the Chinese people at the funeral of the grandmaster. Led by a "lackey" Chinese interpreter named Hu, two Japanese judo wrestlers of the

Hongkew dojo⁶⁵ invade the funeral with a scroll. Presentation of scrolls for the deceased is part of the tradition called *wanlian*. They consist of parallel sentences customarily written, “The fragrance of the deceased’s name will last a thousand years,” and the giver of the scroll “mourns for him with tears (or humility).”⁶⁶ When the scroll is opened by *Daishidai* (the “senior apprentice” who now assumes the position of master), everybody present is shocked to find four Chinese characters on the scroll that say, “Sick Man of East Asia.”⁶⁷ The metaphor of nation and race implicated in this scroll of insult unfurls itself as the notion of “Chinese” is brought into question in the subsequent argument between Hu and one of the students from the Jing Wu school.

Being unable to take any insults from Hu, a student steps forward and interrogates Hu: “Let me ask you, are you Chinese or not? Dismissing and at the same time ridiculing the solemn tone of the question, Hu replies with an ostensible casualness: “Although you are the same race as mine, our destiny has become very different.”

The question of “Chinese identity” is posited several times throughout the film. This particular scene deserves close attention, for it renders the world of martial arts a window through which the interplay of national and international politics can be clearly glimpsed. Specifically, it presents a comprehensible analysis of the system of colonial oppression in which foreigners and Chinese collaborators are reaping benefits at the expense of suffering people and an imperiled nation. Historically speaking, such a diagnosis of the power structure of imperialism came into clear focus as soon as the Chinese masses struck against the British power in the wake of the British opium war in the 1840s (e.g., the San Yuan Li incident).⁶⁸

This first sign of the anti-imperialist movement soon developed into the Yi Ho Tuan movement (commonly referred to as the Boxer Rebellion) against the entire imperialist bloc at the turn of the century. It was composed primarily of peasantry—conjoined by handicraftsmen and the urban poor—who had been doubly victimized by the predatory foreigners and the collaborative Ch’ing dynasty.⁶⁹ The Yi Ho Tuan movement presented a political perspective in a comprehensible language for the people to digest the process of colonization. It saw colonization as a system in which foreigners or *Yan Mao Tsu* (literally, “foreign haired child”) overruled China’s sovereignty, assisted by the native lackey or *Er Mao Tsu* (literally, “two or second hair child”). In the Yi Ho Tuan’s discourse, *Yan Mao Tsu* are “ferocious tigers and wolves” and *Er Mao Tsu* are “collaborating with the for-

eigners, currying their favour, bowing low to the powerful and tyrannizing over the plain people.”⁷⁰

The bond between the foreign power and the lackey was fortified by a “treaty,” “covenant,” “agreement” and other types of diplomatic missives, which are the symbols and at the same time evidences of foreign domination. The legitimacy of a “covenant” is brought to a contested terrain in one of the episodes of the folktales wherein the Yi Ho Tuan attacks the cathedral in Beijing led by Chang Shao-Huan.⁷¹ A *Yan Mao Tsu*, known as “prince,” who had monopoly over both the cathedral and embassy in Beijing, was caught by the Yi Ho Tuan during his escape from the cathedral. In the carriage of the “prince” were piles of gold and silver, two young Chinese women, a whip, and a covenant. One of the women captives explains to the leader of the Yi Ho Tuan that the covenant is a certificate issued by the emperor that allows the “prince” to indulge in arson, plunder, murder, and rape in China. The covenant symbolizes the grotesque reality in the unequal treaty, beyond the veneer of an international contract based on the Western treaty system. The Yi Ho Tuan movement identified the unequal treaty as the basis of imperialist destruction of their nation. It was clearly articulated in one of the most popular posters: “Most bitterly do we hate the treaties which harm the country and bring calamities on the people.”⁷² This episode of the Yi Ho Tuan folktales effectively translates the meaning of unequal treaties into a language and imagery accessible to the masses.

In a similar vein, the scroll in the movie finds its meaning in the specific context of the relationship between China and Japan. While the scroll as a form represents the observance of tradition, the words of insult undermine the very legitimacy imbued in the observance of tradition. The significance of this seemingly contradictory existence of an insult within the observance of a traditional ritual framework must be sought in the unique historical background of East Asia. The radical transformation that Japan’s modernization scheme brought to the relationship between East Asian nations was etched in the changes of Japan’s diplomatic missives.

Since the declaration of the reign of the Ming court by Emperor Hung Wu, China had maintained tributary relationships with other Asian nations as a basis for international diplomacy, preceding the imposition of (unequal) treaty systems by the West. The emperor’s “Mandate of Heaven,” and edicts sent out to the rulers in Asia, outlined the cosmological and political order based on the Confucian worldview in which all nations were regarded equal “in the eyes of the emperor.”⁷³ In return for the exchange of tribute as a symbolic act of deference to China, each nation enjoyed the security umbrella and political legitimacy granted by China. The submission to the Chinese order,

however, did not mean subjugation to its power, nor loss of sovereignty.⁷⁴ It enabled the tributary nations to gain access to cultural and technical resources as well as to trade opportunities.

Viewed as a system of governance for international relations, the tributary system “served as a reintegrated process, removing or dissolving antagonism that might lead to conflict over commercial matters.”⁷⁵ In other words, it offered a relatively peaceful system of diplomacy based on the traditional cosmological order, and an alternative to war and conquest as a means of quelling antagonism between the nations. Particularly in East Asia (and Vietnam) where the nations share a cultural ethos (e.g., Chinese ideographic script, Confucianism, etc.) based on their ancestral connections, the diplomatic missives exchanged in traditional rituals “assumed primacy over all other forms of communication.”⁷⁶ Tributary relationships, therefore, contained the functionality of what the West called “treaty relationships,” which were sanctioned by the “kinship” of nations of a shared cultural origin. Although Japan limited its extent of involvement to “friendly trading relations,” and disengaged itself from a formal tributary relationship under the isolationist policy established during the Tokugawa shogun, the cosmological order based on the Confucian paradigm reigned as a norm in its East Asian international relations. As Japan launched its modernization cum imperialist nation building project, it came to contradict the relatively harmonious order in East Asia.

Korea was the first East Asian nation to come into cognizance of Japan’s transformation into *Er Mao Tsu*, or a lackey nation of the West, through Japan’s imperialist modernization scheme. After Japan’s first invasion in the sixteenth century by Shogun Toyotomi’s regime, Korea maintained a tributary relationship only with Tsushima *han*, the closest domain of Japan. The proclamation of the modern regime of Meiji was thus communicated to Korea through this diplomatic channel. The Korean government, however, was compelled to reject the diplomatic missive of this proclamation, as it found an unprecedented alteration in the mode of address. Japan used the term *huang san* (*kojo* in Japanese) to refer to the Japanese emperor and *ch’ik* (*choku* in Japanese) for his imperial edict.⁷⁷ Both of those terms were traditionally reserved to signify the position of China in relation to the tributary nations.

Japan interpreted that its establishment of a treaty relationship with China—based on the concept of the Western treaty system, outside the traditional jurisdiction of East Asia—gave Japan the position of “titular superiority” over Korea. Subsequently, Japan moved to forcefully impose an unequal treaty (the Kangwha Treaty of 1876) on Korea, emulating the gunboat diplomacy of the West. In leading up to the conclusion of the treaty, Korea observed drastic changes in the Japanese diplomatic envoys’ mode of address, as well as in their

attire.⁷⁸ At the ratification of the Kangwha Treaty, Japanese diplomatic corps made an appearance in Western morning coats, as if they were reenacting the ways in which the West imposed the unequal treaty on Asia, not excluding Japan. Though such a deed might have seemed incongruous to the rest of the East Asian nations, it was consistent with Japan's national policy of De-Asianization and Europeanization (*Datsu-A Nyu-Ou* in Japanese).

In defiance of Japan's imperialist scheme, the peasants in Korea rose up en masse against Japan and the West (the *Tonhak* movement of 1894), waving the banner "Get Rid of the West—Get Rid of Japan."⁷⁹ Japan, however, used this rebellion as a pretext for dispatching its military forces to Korea, the "right" to which it claimed to have garnered from China as a result of the Tientsin Treaty of 1889. Thereupon, Japan engaged in warfare with China: the First Sino-Japanese War. China yielded to Japan and concluded the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which gave Japan license to colonize Taiwan and Liutao Peninsula (the latter was returned due to the intervention of Germany, Russia, and France).

The collapse of the Confucian order in East Asia was confirmed in the so-called Twenty-one Demands, which Japan sent to the newly established republic led by Yuan Shih-ka'i, following the defeat of Germany in World War I:

It was on January 18, 1915, a dark and chilly evening, that Hioki Eki, the Japanese minister to China, instead of following normal diplomatic channels, presented in a private interview to the Chinese President Yuan Shih-ka'i a few sheets of paper watermarked with dreadnoughts and machine guns. On these pages were written the notorious Twenty-one Demands. . . . The demands hurt the pride of the Chinese people more than any real dreadnoughts and machine guns had ever done.⁸⁰

In this aggressive missive, Japan proclaimed not only the colonization of Shangtung (the colonial sphere of Germany) but also of Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, Southeast China, and the Yangtze Valley; in effect the colonization of the entirety of China.⁸¹ The Twenty-one Demands shows a drastic degeneration from the diplomatic missive imbued with high ritual significance and courteousness to a vulgar note of threat. If one is to compare the missive to a mode of speech, the Twenty-one Demands can be seen as a loss of a formal language of deference and respect, only to be replaced by malevolent slurs. This factor perhaps multiplied the feeling of hurt and humiliation felt by the Korean and Chinese people, for unlike the Western imperialist power, Japan had been bound by a shared historical and cultural heritage based on a common cosmological and symbolic order.

Parallel with the degeneration of Japan's diplomatic missives to its neighboring East Asian nations was the growth of the Korean and Chinese people's resistance, which began to coalesce as a mass nationalist movement against imperialist domination. Incidentally, the year 1919 marked the bursting forth of nationalist movements in both Korea and China: in the March First movement and the May Fourth movement, respectively. The latter has a particular relevance to the film in our discussion. It was a mass patriotic movement in which a wide range of urban masses (including the lumpen proletariat, such as beggars, thieves, and prostitutes), along with merchants and factory workers, joined the struggle first instigated by students and intellectuals.⁸² The maturity of the May Fourth movement as a social movement was indicated by its commitment to "the transformation of the Chinese economy and society" in conjunction with resistance to foreign invaders.⁸³ What was particularly remarkable in the context of our discussion is the manner in which the May Fourth movement delegitimated the authority of the imperialist missive.

In an alternative version of the May Fourth movement manifesto, one could find the redefinition of the imperialist contractuality from the viewpoint of the emergent decolonizing subject: "Japan, tiger like and wolf like, has been able to wrest privileges from China simply by sending up a sheet of paper, the Twenty-one Demands."⁸⁴ The imperialist missive, or a symbolic embodiment of its legitimacy, is hereby completely removed of authority, leaving behind its crude materiality: a sheet of paper.

Such symbolic overturning of the legitimacy of imperialist power was already existent, in the aforementioned Yi Ho Tuan folklore, in which the leader Chang destroys all the symbols vested with the colonial authority in the hands of *Yan Mao Tsu*. Chang's vociferation at the "prince" as he tears up the covenant is noteworthy: "The emperor might have made such a promise with you foreigners. But never once have we, the Chinese people, consented to such a thing."⁸⁵ The revolutionary tenor of Chang's statement stems from the configuration of the social subject ("we, the Chinese people") that is capable of abolishing the imperialist-comprador contract.

In *Fist of Fury*, the social subject of decolonization is singularly represented by Chen Zhen's first act of vengeance against the Japanese colonial establishment. Immediately after the funeral spoiled by the Japanese judo wrestlers, Chen Zhen, on his own initiative, takes the scroll back to where it belongs to, in the heart of the international settlement.

Chen Zhen enters the Hongkew dojo with the scroll concealed in cloth. He leans it on the pillar, folds his arms over his chest and asks for the master, Suzuki. Suzuki's right-hand person, Yoshida, informs him