

GLOBALIZING GENRE, HYBRID FILM:  
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF REVIEWS OF CHINESE FILM *HERO*

by

XUEYAN WANG

(Under the Direction of Leara Rhodes)

ABSTRACT

Two years after the phenomenal success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, another Chinese martial arts film – *Hero*, opened in the United States to enthusiastic critics and audiences. This study examines the reception of *Hero* by a specific group of the film’s U.S. audiences – film reviewers – in an effort to understand the appeal of a genre considered very “Chinese” to American viewers, and to explore issues regarding culture and international communication. Drawing on globalization theories and film studies literatures, discourse analysis of *Hero*’s reviews reveal that *Hero* is not perceived as a film from a “foreign” cinema or a “foreign” genre – the exotic “other”, but a hybrid film from a familiar, stylized and hybrid genre. This study articulates two contradictions of globalization – convergence and disjunction, “local” and “global”, and suggests that hybridity is the critical lens through which contemporary cultural formation and international communication ought to be conceptualized.

INDEX WORDS: Cinema, genre, martial-arts, discourse analysis, film review, film reception, international communication, cross-cultural communication, globalization, hybridity, *Hero*, Zhang Yimou

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## DEDICATION

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Popularity of Chinese martial arts films in the United States**

The overwhelming success of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) in the United States brought unprecedented attention to Chinese martial arts cinema. The modestly budgeted film, which cost \$15 million to make, grossed over \$120 million in the U.S. box office and became the most commercially successful foreign language film in U.S. history. The Chinese film went on to receive ten Oscar nominations (including Best Picture) and eventually won in four categories (Best Foreign Language Film, Best Cinematography, Best Music, Original Score, and Best Art Direction – Set Decoration).

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*'s commercial success and critical acclaim in the United States was a surprise to many people, as few expected that a local genre, with its distinct cultural roots and specificities, could attract and fascinate viewers from a completely different culture (Lee, 2003). The film was an eye-opener not only for American moviegoers, but also for Chinese filmmakers who had long vied for mainstream recognition from the West. One awakened filmmaker is Zhang Yimou (Tang, 2004), master behind such festival award-winning art films as *Red Sorghum* (1987) and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) and arguably China's most internationally recognized and celebrated director. In 2002 Zhang introduced his own martial arts film – *Hero*, a star-studded epic aimed at capturing the hearts of both Chinese and Western audiences. The film became an immediate hit in China, grossing over 243 million Yuan (\$30

million) (Tang, 2004). *Hero* was nominated for a Best Foreign Film Oscar the following year (it lost to Germany's *Nowhere in Africa*).

After a controversial two-year shelf-life at Miramax, *Hero* was given a wide release in the United States in 2004. The film opened to enthusiastic critics and audiences, despite that it had already been available on imported DVD for some time (Snyder, 2004). *Hero* topped the box office with a record-breaking opening weekend for a foreign film, taking in \$18 million, and stayed on top for two weeks. Though falling short on the success scale of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Hero* ended its theater run in the United States with an impressive \$53 million.

### **Discovery, optimism, and criticism**

The consecutive success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero* has induced great optimism from both Hollywood film studios and Chinese filmmakers, though this optimism is at the same time dampened by criticism.

For Hollywood film studios, there is a newly found respect and enthusiasm for Chinese martial arts cinema. Though Hong Kong martial arts films have been circulating among cult fans in the United States for decades, never before has this type of film received such mainstream critical attention, or been exposed to and accepted by such a wide audience (Cousins, 2004). *Hero*'s success has also restored Hollywood's interest in foreign films, or "local-language production" in general (Laporte, 2004). Major Hollywood studios are now competing to invest in production of Chinese martial arts movies and in other local filmmaking, hoping to turn more foreign movies into major hits in the United States (LaPorte, 2004).

The popularity of the two movies has also sparked great optimism from Chinese filmmakers and industry administrators. *Hero*'s production model – a combination of big budget,

martial arts, and star-studded casts – is now seen by many as the magic formula for China’s emerging “commercial movie industry” and transnational Chinese cinema (Tang, 2004). Director Zhang Yimou has proudly announced his plan to make a series of martial arts epics (Berndtson, 2004). His *Hero* follow-up, *House of Flying Daggers*, opened in China during the summer of 2004 with substantial support from the Chinese government (Smith, 2004). The film was recently released in the United States by Sony Classics.

Administrators in the Chinese film industry are seen to be equally optimistic, particularly regarding the prospect of exporting Chinese martial arts films to mainstream Western markets. Woody Tsung, chief executive of the Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry Association, projected putting ten to fifteen Chinese films to wide release in the United States in the near future (Cheng, 2004).

It must be acknowledged that the widespread optimism is shadowed by the criticism that both *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero* have received at home. While both films enjoyed commercial success and critical acclaim in the United States, audiences and critics at home responded differently. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was never a box office hit in Taiwan, Hong Kong or mainland China<sup>1</sup>. Despite the film’s stellar cast, audiences’ reception of *Crouching Tiger* was lukewarm. Even the film’s record-setting Oscar win failed to spark enough interest to improve its lackluster box office performance (Lee, 2003). *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was also a critical failure, as it was ridiculed by Chinese critics for its slow pace and lack of cultural authenticity (Landler, 2001). Critics accused the film for deliberately pandering to Western viewers’ craving for the “exotic,” at the cost of “authentic representation of its original culture” (Lee, 2003, p.283). The movie was dismissed as a manipulating “wholesale commodity”

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<sup>1</sup> Box office gross for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in the three regions are as follows (in U.S. dollars): Taiwan, \$80,000; Hong Kong, \$250,000; mainland China, \$160,000 (Source: [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)).

that turns elements of Chinese culture into voyeuristic exhibition for Western audiences (Lee, 2003, p.283).

Like *Crouching Tiger, Hero* was a critical failure in China, though not the critical disaster that *House of Flying Daggers*, Zhang's next martial arts film, later became. *Hero* was heavily criticized for its lack of depth, and its over-emphasis on visual presentation of landscape and martial arts spectacles at the cost of plot and character development. Chinese critics also attacked the film for its distortion of history, particularly in terms of its sympathetic depiction of one of China's most ruthless despots in history (Tang, 2004).

If *Hero* was already a critical failure in China, *House of Flying Daggers* was a disaster. The film is said to have received the "sharpest comments in China's movie history" ("Zhang stabbed by his 'dagger'", 2004). *China Daily*, China's leading official newspaper, described Zhang's second endeavor in the martial arts genre as a "tourist promotion" film that provides "a gorgeous garment" but "not a soul." The newspaper dismissed the story of *House of Flying Daggers* as "simplified and ridiculous" ("Zhang stabbed by his 'dagger'", 2004). Criticism for the film was so overwhelming that even industry administrators felt the need to interfere. Tong Gang, director of the Film Administration Bureau, voiced ardent support for *Daggers*. Praising the movie for demonstrating "confidence and strength needed for home-made movies to enter the international market," he admonished the media to be more tolerant and careful in their criticism ("Zhang stabbed by his 'dagger'", 2004).

## **Purpose of Study**

The popularity of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero* in the United States and its consequences raise interesting issues. How do we make sense of the popularity of a small cinema

in the home market of the world's most powerful film industry? How do we explain the appeal of a genre considered very "Chinese" (Lee, 2003) to audiences from a completely different culture? What factors might have contributed to the nearly opposite responses the two films received in the United States and in China? And more generally, how might a movie like *Hero* help us understand the dynamic of international communication, particularly in the context of accelerating globalization? With growing interest in Chinese martial arts cinema and increasing presence of foreign films in the United States, these questions become increasingly relevant and critical.

This study seeks to explore these issues by examining how *Hero* is received by audiences in the United States. I focus on one specific group of *Hero*'s American audiences – review journalists for major daily newspapers and popular magazines in the United States. Guided by theories of globalization, my study uses discourse analysis to reveal the discursive strategies employed by review journalists to interpret *Hero* and construct the meaning of the film to their readers. A total of 70 *Hero* reviews, including 64 newspaper reviews and six magazine reviews, are examined. All reviews studied were published during the time period between August 23, 2004 and September 6, 2004.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Hero* is a “transnational” film in terms of its production, distribution and exhibition. The film is co-financed by investors from China, Taiwan and the United States and is produced by the combined efforts of filmmakers from China as well as other parts of the world (cinematographer Christopher Doyle is from Australia). It has been distributed in many different countries. The transnational nature of *Hero* dictates that the study of its reception should not be confined to traditional aspects of film reception – film textuality, industry structure, audience, etc. (Staiger, 1992), but also be situated in the broader contextual framework of cinema, nationhood and cross-cultural communication.

This literature review will look at five realms of study. Literatures on Chinese film industry and film genre will provide an economic and artistic context for *Hero*, and studies on national cinema, transnational cinema, and reception of Chinese films in the West should shed light on relevant critical issues concerning cross-cultural reception of *Hero*.

The term “Chinese cinema” is itself a tricky concept. Though the term was originally used to refer exclusively to the cinema of mainland China, scholars and critics alike have begun to adopt the term in a broader sense to also include the cinema of Hong Kong and Taiwan (Lu, 1997). One reason for this conceptual change is the growing recognition that despite ideological and political differences, the three regions have shared “common legacy in Chinese history, culture, and language,” which has resulted in strong similar thematic concerns and styles in their

films (Zhang, 2002, p.18). In addition, the increasing interflow of capital and talent in filmmaking of the three regions and the frequent inter-regional co-productions make it difficult and unnecessary to discuss the three cinemas as separate entities (Lu, 2002). This literature review, as well as this thesis, conceptualizes “Chinese film” and “Chinese cinema” as films from all three regions and inter-regional co-productions. However, the discussion on Chinese film industry will be limited to the film industry of mainland China, as such a scope will be sufficient to provide an economic background for *Hero*.

### **Chinese film industry**

Filmmaking in China started in 1908 with the opera movie *Conquering Jun Mountain* (Zhang, 2003). Since then, the development of China’s film industry has been shaped by politics and social transformation of the country, and in recent years has been increasingly influenced by modernization and globalization (Clark, 1988; Zhang, 2003; Zhang, 2004). Over the years the industry has evolved through three stages – from freely competing studios to consolidated state monopoly, and to what some now call a growing “transnational cinema” (Lu, 1997).

Early development of the Chinese film industry largely followed the market-driven model of Hollywood studios (Zhang, 2003). Up until the late 1920s, film production was carried out by independent, small-scale production companies. Early Chinese films were mainly cinematic presentation of traditional arts such as traditional Peking Opera. Low-budget family dramas and literature adaptations also emerged during the early years. Film exhibition was controlled mainly by foreigners during this period (Zhang, 2003).

The four sectors of cinema – film finance, production, distribution and exhibition – began to integrate and concentrate in the late 1920s, as a few major Shanghai-based privately owned

studios emerged to dominate the market. Martial arts films with themes of Confucian ethics and superstitions became immensely popular during this period until the Nationalist government, which used severe censorship to regulate ideological content of movies, banned them completely in the late 1930s (Zhang, 2004). Market-driven competitions were also interrupted by the strong efforts of opposing political forces in China seeking to use cinema as a propaganda tool during this time. Japanese invaders suppressed films with patriotic themes in their occupied area and forced production of movies promoting Japanese ideology, while the Communists established small-scale film production teams in their controlled area to promote their cause (Zhang, 2003). Despite the interruptions, during this period cinema developed into a mature industry in China, with established market and expanded genres (Zhang, 2003).

The course of the film industry took a sharp turn with the establishment of the Communist regime in 1949. Based on the Leninist tradition of socialist cinema (Pang, 2002), the Communist government established large state-run film studios and placed film production under central planning. Privately owned film studios from the earlier periods were officially confiscated and merged into the state-run studios. In the Communist studio system, film production was funded and allocated by the government based on a quota system, and film distribution was controlled by a single state corporation. Every process was supervised and censored by the Central Film Bureau (Zhang, 2003). In 1950 the government banned Hollywood movies completely, and limited movie import to a few selected titles from the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. Between 1950 and the late 1970s domestic pictures monopolized the movie theaters (Berry, 1998).

The Communist studio system was in full strength during the period between 1950 and late 1970s, when the film industry was completely transformed into a government propaganda



machine. Politically correct genres dealing with revolutionary history, war, ethnic minorities and literature adaptations dominated the screen. Commenting on the status of the film industry faced during this period, Zhang (2003) wrote:

... party ideology penetrated everyday life, and the planned economy eliminated market functions ... the audience had little effect on production. In short, box office revenues were rarely of anyone's concern, and, like cinema itself, artists were reduced to mere functionaries in the revolutionary machinery (p.10).

The industry experienced steady growth prior to the Cultural Revolution of 1966, though the growth was largely a result of market monopoly and paucity of available entertainment sources. By 1965 China was producing fifty features a year (Chen, 1989).

The monopoly of state-run studios began to disintegrate in the late 1970s, as the opening-up reforms during this period promoted commercialization of the film industry and relaxation of the government's ideological control (Hao & Chen, 2000). The 1980s witnessed the emergence of what Zhu calls "the second entertainment wave" (Zhu, 2003, p.102). During this period, low-budget martial arts pictures, thrillers and comedies co-produced by state-run studios and Hong Kong or Taiwan producers became very popular (Yau, 1993). The 1980s was also a period in which Chinese cinema began to gain international reputation in the art-cinema circuit, thanks to a group of graduates from the Beijing Film Academy known as the Fifth Generation Chinese directors, whose work has been so popular with Western film scholars that their names have almost been equated with Chinese cinema. Among these directors Chen Kaige (*Yellow Earth*, 1984), Tian Zhuangzhuang (*House Thief*, 1986) and Zhang Yimou (director of *Hero*) have been the most prominent members. Films created by these directors won numerous awards at international film festivals for their distinctive visual and narrative styles (Lu, 2002; Zhang, 1997). Some of the Fifth Generation directors also managed to attract foreign funding and distribution for their films. However, due to the controversies regarding the political

representations in these films, many of them (including the award-winning ones) were censored or even banned by the Chinese government and only received limited attention in China (Lu, 1997).

Though the rediscovery of entertainment pictures enlivened the cinematic scene in China, the industry went into rapid decline after its state-subsidized monopoly was threatened. From 1984 to 1994, film attendance in China dropped from twenty-five billion to three billion (Zhu, 2003). The inefficiency of state-run production and distribution system and the rigidity of film censorship had finally caught up with the shrinking film market increasingly encroached by alternative entertainment sources, including television (Zhang, 2003) and pirated videos (Wang & Zhu, 2003). In an effort to “restore the theater-going habit” of Chinese audiences, in 1994 the Ministry of Culture lifted the ban on Hollywood imports (Zhu, 2003, p.915). In 1995 Hollywood movies were allowed to enter the Chinese market on a ten-pictures-per-year quota. The quota was raised to twenty per year with China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (Zhu, 2003).

The reintroduction of Hollywood movies in China has had significant impact on the Chinese film industry. First, it intensified the crisis of state-run studios and prompted a series of reform measures in the film sector, which would gradually eliminate state subsidy and leave the studios to market competition (Zhang, 2003). Second, it propelled Chinese filmmakers to adopt Hollywood-style production and market models, and to produce big-budget and hi-tech entertainment pictures – what the Chinese media call “domestic big pictures” (Zhu, 2003, p.86). Co-production was already a major trend in the 1980s, and since the 1990s investment from Western countries (particularly from Hollywood majors) has been steadily increasing and playing a larger role (Brent, 2003). Imported Hollywood movies now occupy a lion’s share of

China's film exhibition market – in 2001 domestic films accounted for only one third of total box office receipts in China, with the rest of the market taken by Hollywood blockbusters (Zhang, 2004, p.281).

Since late 1980s, Chinese filmmakers have been seeking ways to tap into the mainstream international market (Yau, 1993). The industry has been developing into what some call “transnational cinema,” due to the increasing involvement of foreign investment and international market in film production and distribution in China (Lu, 1997). On one hand, domestic filmmakers are increasingly depending on foreign investment for funding of “domestic big pictures” to compete with Hollywood blockbusters in China (Zhu, 2003, p.86); on the other hand, Chinese filmmakers are eager to gain market access in other countries to offset the disadvantage of their limited domestic market (Zhang, 2003). The success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* opened the door for Chinese movies in the mainstream international market. *Hero* is Chinese filmmakers' first major attempt aimed at a double win – to win Chinese audience back from Hollywood blockbusters, and to strive for a commercial breakthrough in the world market following the lead of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Brent, 2003).

### **Film genre and Chinese martial arts cinema**

Genre has been an important concept in the film business for over thirty years (Neale, 2000). According to Gledhill (1985), the term was first adopted in the 1940s to describe Hollywood movies. Genre studies became a legitimate and full-fledged branch of film studies in the United States and Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

A French word imported from studies of Fine Arts, *genre* means type or kind (Neale, 2000, p.9). Over the years the term has been used by film professionals, critics and audiences

alike to categorize and make sense of movies by common theme, style and structures (Neale, 2000). When “auteur theory” (Truffaut, [1954]1976) – the theory that grants authorship to directors and regards cinema primarily as a form of personal expression – became widely dismissed as being unable to account for business nature and structure of Hollywood, *genre* became a standard concept for describing and categorizing movies (Ryall, 1975/6).

Critics have different opinions regarding how the concept of *genre* ought to be defined in the context of film studies. While Buscombe (1971) suggested that visual commonality be the prime criterion for conceptualizing genre, Ryall (1975/6, p.28) proposed a multi-dimensional definition, suggesting that genre not only be defined by common visual style, but also by “patterns,” “forms,” “styles” and “structures” that “transcend individual films.” Furthermore, Ryall (1975-6) posited that definition of a particular genre and its characteristics ought to be a negotiation between the textual construction of filmmakers and reception from the audience – audience readings and expectations.

Neale (2000) identified fourteen major genres from film criticism and film studies: action-adventure, biopics, comedy, detective films, gangster films, suspense thrillers, epics and spectacles, horror, science fiction, musicals, social problem films, teenpics, war films, and westerns. Neale (2000) acknowledged that the identified genres were based on commercial Hollywood movies, and that the marginal, local, and hybrid genres have been largely ignored by film critics and scholars.

The term *genre* is often conceptualized on two different levels, which lead to two different uses in film criticism and scholarship. One takes an aesthetic approach and conceptualize genre only in terms of stylistic characteristics (Metz, 1974; Schatz, 1981). The

other takes a social/cultural approach and focuses on a genre's social and cultural implications and significance (Braudy, 1976; Cawelti, 1976; McConnell, 1975; Sobchack, 1982).

The martial arts genre initially appeared in China in the 1920s. Early martial arts movies were spectacles based on folklores of superstitions (Zhang, 2004). The genre later flourished in Hong Kong, where it developed into a mainstream staple and made up the bulk of Hong Kong's movie export to other parts of Asia and the world (Bordwell, 2000). Chinese movie stars such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan have achieved regional and international stardom for their performance in martial arts movies.

Movies like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero* – historical epics with swordplay – belong to a distinctive branch of martial arts movies called *wuxia*<sup>2</sup>, a Chinese term that could be translated into martial-arts and sword-fighting (Bordwell, 2000)

Stylistically, *wuxia* movies rely on elaborate period costumes and sword fighting sequences to attract audiences. Bordwell (2000) notes that, in *wuxia* films fighting scenes are carefully choreographed and staged as spectacles. Unlike more Hollywood films, martial arts fighting scenes are designed as the core and essence of *wuxia* films, as narratives are built around them and are often secondary to them (Bordwell, 2000; Reynaud, 2003).

Story-wise, *wuxia* films are mostly based on adaptations of Chinese *wuxia* novels, or on anecdotes of real or fictional characters in Chinese history (Bordwell, 2000; Lee, 2003). Like *wuxia* novels, most *wuxia* films endorse traditional Chinese values, particularly Confucianism and social hierarchy (Reynaud, 2003).

Two central concepts – *xia* (Chinese word for “hero”) and *jiang hu* (Chinese word for “river and lake”) dominate the discourse of all *wuxia* films (Lee, 2003). The *xia* is a heroic figure

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<sup>2</sup> The Chinese term *wuxia* is composed of two separate words: *wu* and *xia*. The literal meaning of *wu* is martial arts, and *xia* can be literally translated into hero.

who uses his martial arts skills to “conduct his/her righteous and loyal acts,” and is usually the protagonist in a *wuxia* film (Lee, 2003, p.284). The *xia* fights against social injustice, and is often a rebel against the corrupt feudal government. The *xia* is a “moral arbitrator in an anarchic, confusing world” (Bhaska, 2001, p.164), and is described to be similar to the figure of Robin Hood in Western imagination (Lee, 2003).

The concept of *jiang hu*, however, is believed to be “untranslatable” (Lee, 2003, p.284). In Chinese imagination, *Jiang hu* is the place where *xia* lives and fights, and is an alternative geographical realm as opposed to home and country. *Jiang hu* operates according to its own rules, which are often in conflict with the laws. Familiar sights of *jiang hu* includes inns, desert, bamboo woods, temples, etc. (Lee, 2003).

The genre of *wuxia* films is deeply embedded in Chinese history, with the different schools of martial arts, elaborate weaponry, period costumes and social relations depicted in them bearing strong references to traditional Chinese culture (Lee, 2003). Scholars have noted that *wuxia* films are romanticized versions of Chinese history, as they capture the cultural imagination of a mystic China that has never really existed (Bhaskar, 2001; Bordwell, 2000; Lee, 2003) and to a great extent represent “Chineseness” (Lee, 2003, p.286).

## **National cinema**

National cinema has long been an important concept in film discourse and critical studies (Crofts, 1993, 1998; Higson, 1989). Conventional conceptualization of national cinema was based on “common-sense notions” that associated nationality with films produced within the borders of a nation-state (Crofts, 1998, p.385). Such a conceptualization has had two implications (Crofts, 1993; Elsaesser, 1980; Higson, 1989; Wolfenstein & Leites, 1971). First,

national cinema is a uni-dimensional notion that could be defined by geographical boundaries alone. Second, characteristics of national cinemas are to be conceptualized against Hollywood as well as against each other. In other words, Hollywood is regarded as an extrinsic “other” to national cinemas, which are defined mainly in terms of their difference from Hollywood.

The geographically-based, dualist conceptualization of national cinema was challenged in the 1980s, when filmmaking and consumption grew more converged and more complicated on a global scale (Crofts, 1998). Cinemas’ geographical boundaries were blurred by the rising number of international co-productions and increase of film export (Moran, 1996). At the same time, Hollywood studios’ role in local film finance and distribution and the impact of Hollywood films on the style of local productions also rendered the dualist conceptualization over-simplistic and erroneous (Armes, 1987). As Crofts (1993, p.63) observed, pitching national cinema against the paradigm of Hollywood betrays “imperialist aggression” and “defiant national chauvinism.”

Several scholars have attempted to reconceptualize national cinema as a multi-dimensional notion. Rejecting the dualist approach, Higson (1989) suggested an “inward-looking” approach that would take into consideration film production, distribution and consumption and the context of the entire process – political-economy, national identity and cultural heritage – when conceptualizing national cinema. Higson (1989) especially stressed the relationship between culture and cinema, arguing that “how audiences construct their cultural identity in relation to the various products of the national and international film” is central in conceptualizing national cinema (Higson, 1989, pp.45-46). Rather than regarding Hollywood as an extrinsic “other” to be measured against, Higson’s (1989) approach acknowledged the influence of Hollywood on national cinemas.

Echoing Higson's (1989) focus on the connection between culture and cinema, Crofts (1993) first suggested using the existence of culturally specific genres as a gauge of the strength of a national cinema, but later recognized that the hybridization of genres had made the criterion ineffective (Crofts, 1998).

The integrity of the national cinema concept has been increasingly challenged by globalization theorists and scholars who reject the notion of nation-state as a clear-cut entity. Appadurai (1990) argued that with accelerating transnational flow of people, technology, finance, media images and ideology, the nation-states no longer operate as self-governed independent entities and that their boundaries have been deterritorialized. The cultural hybridity resulted from the transnational flows has also made it difficult, if not impossible, to map clear-cut national cinemas corresponding to distinct national cultures and identities (Smith, 1991).

As a result of the complexity, scholars suggest that when conceptualizing national cinema, both globalization in general and transnationalism in film in particular ought to be accounted for (Crofts, 1998; Halle, 2002). Nevertheless, due to the complexity in this conceptualization process, clearly defining and mapping national cinema has almost become an impossible task, a never-ending trap (Zhu, 2003). The term national cinema is now used more often as a descriptive label, rather than as a critical concept with specific cultural or artistic implications (Zhu, 2003). For example, the term national cinema has been reduced to describing a national film industry in some cases (Zhu, 2003), and to describing cultural aesthetics in others (Smith, 2000; Soila *et al.*, 1998).



## Transnational cinema

Few studies have directly defined or addressed the concept of “transnational cinema,” though the term frequently appears in film criticism and scholarship. One reason might be that, since its birth, cinema has always been transnational in nature – film technologies and techniques have spread across national borders from the very beginning, and Hollywood films have always had a dominating presence in many countries of the world (Lu, 1997). Transnational cinema has seemed to become a concept taken for granted.

Based on Bamyeh’s (1993) definition of transnationalism as a process of global consolidation, transnational cinema might be defined as films whose “tritych” – production, distribution and exhibition (Sifaki, 2003) – goes beyond national borders. Hollywood movies are best examples of transnational cinema, as they are routinely distributed to and exhibited in other countries.

Considering different production goals and market characteristic, Halle (2002) identifies three models of European transnational cinema, which he believes could also be applied to describe other transnational cinemas. In the first model, what Halle (2002, p.21) calls the “global free market,” movies are aimed towards a global audience and are often produced by Hollywood filmmakers looking for cheap labor abroad. Annaud’s *Enemy at the Gates* (2001) is an example. In this model, center of production is “of little consequence” (Halle, 2002, p.21) and cultural identity is irrelevant. These movies are not different from Hollywood productions, as they tend to reflect and rely on Hollywood aesthetics, star system and transnationally oriented narratives.

Halle (2002, p.32) names his second model “closed trade zone.” Movies adopting this model are produced for an imagined “European community,” which in reality is always far less coherent than filmmakers envision. Unlike the previous model, which targeted a global audience,

movies of the “European community” model are designed for a general European audience. In order to appeal to viewers from all European countries, these films seek to represent an imagined common European culture and avoid political and cultural conflicts within the community. As a result, they often lack “cultural considerations” and have fared miserably with their target audience (Halle, 2002, p.33). They are often ridiculed as “Euro-pudding” for their blandness (Halle, 2002, p.33).

Halle’s (2002, p.37) third model of European transnational cinema, “international federation,” is the “most reactionary.” Unlike the other two models, movies in this model approaches the paradigm of national cinema in that they bear distinct national cultural identity, despite that they are produced for consumption of global audiences. In this model,

the nation becomes a commodity, dependent on exchange beyond its borders. National culture and national character mark exports and provide “authentic” experiences for tourists, whether physical travelers or cinematic voy(age)eurs (p.38).

Lu (1997) observes that transnational elements have existed in Chinese cinema from the very beginning, as the earliest Chinese cinematic productions were funded and exhibited by foreign individuals or foreign studios. Transnationalism became a major phenomenon in Chinese cinema in the 1980s, as a result of the globalization of the film business, and the increasing integration of China into the world market and Chinese film industry into the system of global capitalism (Lu, 1997). According to Lu (1997), transnationalism in contemporary Chinese cinema can be seen in three major aspects: involvement of foreign capital and talent in film production and co-production, overseas distribution of Chinese films, and established Chinese filmmakers working abroad (particularly Hollywood projects). John Woo (*Broken Arrow*, 1996; *Face/Off*, 1997; *Mission Impossible II*, 2000) and Ang Lee (*Sense and Sensibility*, 1995; *Hulk*,

2003) are the two most prominent examples of successful Chinese directors working in mainstream Hollywood.

Two models have been identified to describe transnational Chinese films, which might be regarded as two variations of Halle's (2002, p.37) "international federation" model. One is the "Zhang Yimou model" (Lu, 2002, p.20), named after the Fifth Generation director for his prominent association with such movies. Movies in this model are made with foreign capital and for the consumption of an international, rather than a domestic, audience. Lu (2002) maintains that foreign tastes play a significant role in dictating the themes and styles of these movies, and that they are created to cater to foreign audiences' craving for the "exotic." Films created by Fifth Generation directors, such as *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) are commonly associated with this model. Most of these movies gained more success in international markets than in their native China.

Another model of transnational Chinese film is identified by Zhu (2003, p.131) as "strategy of product differentiation." Zhu (2003) posits that movies associated with this model contain cross-culturally translatable cinematic elements that can appeal to international audiences, and yet these films still retain distinct Chinese origin. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2001) is regarded by Zhu (2003) as the best example of this model.

### **Reception of Chinese films in the West**

Scholarship on Western reception of Chinese films emerged in the 1970s when a small number of films made in Hong Kong achieved moderate commercial success in the United States. Since the late 1980s, with the recognition of Chinese directors at international film festivals, scholarly interest in Chinese films grew correspondingly. Most existing studies focus

on Hong Kong-made Kung Fu flicks and films from Fifth Generation Chinese directors. These films have been available in theaters and/or on video on a limited scale in the West and have received limited popular and critical attention from cult Kung Fu fans and Art-house movie viewers.

Studies on Hong Kong Kung Fu films in the 1970s suggest that they were accepted by American audiences because certain themes in them resonated with the historical and social context in the United States. Kaminsky (1982) and Chiao (1981) attributed the short-lived popularity of Kung Fu films in the 1970s to the theme of violence, vengeance, and destruction in these movies, which he argues had a direct appeal to the poverty-struck inner-city audiences during that period. Desser (2000) notes that intense nationalism and male masculinity in Bruce Lee's Kung Fu movies resonated with the rebelliousness of the black and youth audiences and provided an escape from the trauma of the Vietnam War.

Studies on more recent Hong Kong Kung Fu movies (particularly movies from Jackie Chan) indicate that their moderate popularity rests on their multiculturalism, or lack of cultural specificity, and presentation of Kung Fu/martial arts spectacles (Shu, 2003). Fore (1997, p.116) points out that reediting and dubbing in Jackie Chan's *Rumble in the Bronx* (1996) significantly toned down the movie's cultural traits and turned the movie into a Hollywood action movie with "Asian kicks." Shu (2003) also suggests that the demonstration of Kung Fu skills in Chan's movies have contributed to their moderate success.

Literature on Western reception of films from Fifth Generation Chinese directors has attributed the appeal of these movies to their aesthetic styles and cultural (mis)representation (Lu, 1997; Lu, 2002; Marchetti, 2003; Sibergeld, 2003; Xu, 1997; Yau, 1993; Zhang, 1997; Zhang, 2002).

Many scholars have accused Fifth Generation directors of making exhibition movies to cater to the Westerners' desire for the exotic "other" (Lu, 1997; Lu, 2002; Wilson, 2001; Yau, 1993). Studying Zhang Yimou's films from the 1980s, Lu (1997) charges that the director has turned his movies into exotic exhibitions of Chinese objects, costumes and artifacts and that his movies have produced different and often distorted images, narratives, and historical discourse of China "for the pleasure and gaze of the Western viewer" (p.126). According to her,

The greatest irony of contemporary Chinese cinema seems to be that some films achieve a transnational status precisely because they are seen as possessing an authentically "national," "Chinese," "Oriental" flavor by Western audiences. In the meantime, the domestic Chinese audience dismisses the same film as "misrepresentations" and "mystifications" of China (p.11).

The reinvention of Chinese tradition in the movies for Western fetish is seen as a "willful surrender to the dominant discourse of First-World culture" (Lu, 1997, p.128).

Scholars have attributed the exotic aesthetic style and cultural representation to the market dynamism behind these movies – international investment, global distribution network, and multicultural audiences – and as a result of globalization (Lu, 2002; Yau, 1993). Yau (1993) maintains that the shift from a homogeneous domestic audience to a heterogeneous international market has resulted in the exoticized style and narratives in these movies, while Lu (2002, p.172) attributed this practice to the "commodification of cultural products in the global market economy."

There have been objections against reading transnational Chinese films from the perspective of cultural representation. Xu (1997) argues that the film medium itself is global and thus resists a precise cultural reading. According to him, an emphasis on cultural authenticity ignores the heterogeneous factors in China's social transformation and historical mobilization. Lee (2003) challenges the criticism of stylistic alteration and cultural misrepresentation for

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* by arguing that such criticism fails to account for the transformation and hybridization that both the martial arts (*wuxia*) genre and the Chinese culture have experienced over the years. Lee (2003, p.292) maintains that the movie ought to be considered as a cultural translation that transforms the martial arts tradition into “a new filmic language” that transcends its original “Chineseness.”

The above literature review provides an economic, artistic and critical background for the discussion of *Hero*. *Hero* can be seen as a product of a film industry experiencing significant structural changes, and as an effort both to overcome the industry’s internal hardships and to reach out for external market and influence. The literature also situates the film in the whirlpool of arguments concerning the artistic and conceptual changes in film and film studies brought by the globalization of film production, distribution and consumption.

While foregrounding the economic, cultural and artistic context of *Hero* and relevant critical issues, the literatures bring up interesting questions regarding national identity, transnationalism and cross-cultural communication. For example, is *Hero* perceived as a product of a distinct “Chinese cinema” – the extrinsic, exotic “other” to Hollywood movies? Is the martial-arts genre regarded as an original foreign genre, or a hybrid genre that has become familiar to Western audiences? And what specific meanings have been attached to the genre? In what ways might *Hero* be related to other cultures, and how is the film’s cross-cultural nature identified and constructed?

These are some of the questions that this study hopes to explore. Most existing studies on reception of Chinese films in the West focused on the intrinsic texts of film – structure, narrative, style – for clues of elements that might have appealed to Western audiences and influenced them.

These studies invariably used a text-oriented approach, which has been the paradigm in film reception studies (Staiger, 1992). While many of these studies situate the reception of a film in its historical and social context and provides a rich analysis of the film's visual, narrative and structural languages, the textual approach fails to offer a real audience perspective beyond the scholar's subjective presumption and interpretation (Staiger, 1992). In reality there is always the possibility that the film audience may not perceive what the filmmakers have intended for them to see, or what the scholars presume they should see. Thus, this study attempts to use an audience-oriented approach to overcome this conceptual gap, and to provide insights that traditional text-oriented approach may not be able to discover.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Theoretical perspective and research questions**

This study will be guided by economic and cultural theories of globalization.

Globalization theories propose that the contemporary world is characterized by unprecedented connectivity and complexity, in which it is no longer feasible to map economies and cultures by geographical boundaries. Hybridity is the key process of the world's current economic and cultural formations – as economies are converging, each culture in the world is also transforming by incorporating elements from other cultures that it has come in contact with. Instead of pure, indigenous cultures that grow independently, what exist now are hybrid cultures and cultural forms that are influenced by and interact with each other.

Globalization theories provide a critical lens to examine the dynamism behind contemporary cultural phenomenon, particularly those involving transnational and cross-cultural communication. The transnational nature of *Hero* and globalization-related discussions from related literatures situate my study in the theoretical realm of globalization. As mentioned in the previous chapter, though predominantly a Chinese film and officially categorized as such, *Hero* contains transnational elements in its finance, production, distribution and exhibition. This study in particular deals with one aspect of *Hero*'s transnationalism – its transnational/cross-cultural reception by American audiences, which fits nicely in the critical scope of globalization theories. In addition, relevant literatures demonstrate the increasing impact of economic globalization on



cinema, and show a growing influence of globalization theories on communication and film studies.

Theories of globalization stemmed from the observation that fast growing international trade and economic ties between countries have resulted in unprecedented convergence of the world's economies (Giddens, 1990; Jameson & Miyoshi, 1998; Pieterse, 1995). Globalization is seen in two forms: the establishment and growth of multinational corporations and their growing impact in regional, national and global economies (Featherstone & Lash, 1995; Hirst, 1996), and the emergence and consolidation of a world market in which production and finance are distributed on a global scale (Cox, 1992; Hirst, 1996). Globalization theories posit that economic convergence has reduced nation-states' ability to manage and govern their national economies, as economic activities are now occurring on a global scale and are no longer contained by geographical borders (Appadurai, 1990; Dupuy, 2001; Lash & Urry, 1987; Ohmae, 1995).

Scholars initially studied globalization solely as an economic phenomenon, but later recognized that it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that has significant resonance and implications in politics (Giddens, 1990; Pieterse, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999), history (Pieterse, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999), and culture (Dziemidok, 2003; Jameson & Miyoshi, 1998; Smith, 1990; Tomlinson, 1991, 1999). The cultural dimension of globalization has been widely discussed and theorized, and has taken on an increasing role in critical cultural studies and studies of international communication.

Cultural theories of globalization emerged as critique of earlier theories of international cultural relations. The cultural/media imperialism theses, which were based on the observation of accelerating unilateral flow of cultural products (especially media products such as film and television programs) from developed capitalist countries to developing countries, dominated the

conceptualization of international communication in the 1960s. These earlier theories posited that the prevalence of imported cultural products in developing countries had a detrimental influence on the national, local and indigenous cultures of these countries, erasing their specificities and turning them into homogenous capitalist cultures (Boyd-Barrett, 1977; LaPorte, 2004; Mattelart, 1979; Oliveira, 1992; Schiller, 1976; Tunstall, 1977). Regarding the cultural influence of developed countries as a by-product of their economic domination, theorists like Schiller (1976) named the phenomenon *cultural imperialism*, focusing on the unbalanced, hegemonic nature of international communication. Some theorists (Boyd-Barrett, 1977) also used the concept *media imperialism* to stress the critical role media played in this cultural domination. These early theories invariably conceptualized the dynamism of international communication in such ideology-laden constructs as *Westernization*, *Americanization*, *cultural dependency*, etc. which suggested predictable and uni-directional impact of the transnational flow of cultural products.

Cultural theories of globalization, which started to appear in the late 1980s, rejected cultural/media imperialism theories' approach to conceptualize international communication as a one-directional process with predictable and detrimental outcome. Instead, globalization argued that cultures affect each other "in a far less purposeful way" than originally conceived (Tomlinson, 1991, p.175). These theories regard globalization as a consequence of modernity (Giddens, 1990), but one that does not follow its logic of center (developed countries) and periphery (developing countries) (Appadurai, 1990; Tomlinson, 1991). In other words, rather than as a predictable, uni-directional process, globalization theories suggest that cultural transformations are disjunctive, unpredictable, and occur in both directions, thanks to the increasing flows of people ("ethnoscapes"), technology ("technoscapes"), media products

(“mediascapes”), capital (“financescapes”), and ideas (“ideoscapes”) across national borders (Appadurai, 1990). These flows have blurred or even erased national borders, and have reduced the ethnic purity of all cultures, including those formerly regarded imperialist cultures. The cultural dimension of globalization is conceptualized in such terms of *interconnectedness*, *interdependency*, *interculturalism*, and *multiculturalism*, which all suggest multi-directional influence (Dziemidok, 2003; Jameson & Miyoshi, 1998; Pieterse, 1995; Smith, 1990; Tomlinson, 1991, 1999).

Globalization theorists like Pieterse (1994) and Appadurai (1990, 1999) posit that the world’s current economic and cultural formations ought to be conceptualized through the lens of *hybridity*, which has two critical dimensions. One is *deterritorialization* – the separation of economic and cultural forms from national origin or locality (Appadurai, 1990, 1996, 1999). Geographical and cultural essentialism, which grants economic and cultural forms ethnographic identity, is deemed obsolete. The other dimension is *hybridization*, the fusing of structural, cultural forms from different countries/cultures. Economically, globalization has brought structural hybridization – novel organizational forms that incorporate elements from different countries/cultures, or what Pieterse (1995, p.52) calls “pluralization of organizational forms” and “novel mixed form of co-operation.” Culturally, globalization has also given rise to hybrid cultural forms, or “translocal cultural expressions” (Pieterse, 1995, p.63) that combine local cultural forms with elements from other cultures or art forms (Appadurai, 1990, 1996, 1999; García Canclini, 1995; Lull, 2000).

Globalization theories propose that the increasing connectivity and interdependence between the world’s economies and cultures have brought down geographical barriers and given rise to hybridity, which has become a major process in contemporary cultural formation. These

theories provide a powerful tool to explain transnational cultural phenomenon from an integrative perspective, and they will be most helpful to make sense of the transnational, cross-cultural reception of *Hero* in terms of market dynamism and patterns of hybridity. At the same time, as film is considered not only an expression of but a major driving force of globalization, critical examination of *Hero*'s reception in the United States will contribute to our understanding of globalization, particularly in terms of such issues as nationhood, cultural formation and hybridity that globalization theories continue to deal with. Globalization theories would suggest that *Hero* is perceived as a culturally-transferable product designed for audiences from different cultures, and that the film is perceived as a product of a hybrid genre that is becoming increasingly familiar to Western audiences, instead of a pure local product of a cinema of the "other." This study poses the following research questions:

1. How do reviewers address *Hero*'s national origin?
2. How do reviewers make sense of *Hero* in terms of its genre?
3. How do reviewers interpret *Hero* and reconstruct the film using film language, their cultural experience, and other contextual signifiers?
4. What implications might U.S. reviewers' reception of *Hero* have on critical understanding of globalization and culture?

## Method

This study uses discourse analysis to reveal discursive patterns in review journalists' reception and interpretation of *Hero*. Originated from post-structuralism and the thinking of Foucault (1972), discourse refers to "groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking" (Rose, 2001, p.136). Discourses

mediate between language and its context, as they are both shaped by and reflect the “social, historical and institutional formations” within which they are produced (O’Sullivan, 1994, p.92).

Though both are based on close textual work, discourse analysis goes one step further than textual analysis in that it investigates not only the text itself, but also *intertextuality* – how the meaning of one text is produced in relation to other texts or discourses (Kristeva & Moi, 1986). Hence, discourse analysis goes “beyond the text” to reveal structural, cultural formations and relations in the larger social context within which the text is located (Tonkiss, 1998, p.249).

As Johnstone (2002) explains:

Discourse analysts work outward from texts to an understanding of their contexts, trying to uncover the multiple reasons why the texts they study are the way they are and no other way (p.27).

Furthermore, discourse analysis is not confined to the text being studied. It is also concerned with absence – “silence or gaps,” or the omission of “alternative accounts” (Tonkiss, 1998, p.250). Discourse analysis makes conjunctures regarding how such omission might be critically interpreted.

Initially used in linguistics, discourse analysis is a critical approach that has been employed to explore many kinds of questions and used in a variety of humanistic and social-scientific disciplines, including communication research (Johnstone, 2002). I use discourse analysis because it fits the purpose of my study and is particularly helpful for investigating questions related to globalization. Discourse analysis relates the reviews of *Hero* to their social context, and thus situates the film’s reception in the discussion of broader issues of globalization such as contemporary economic, cultural and social formations and global dynamism. In addition, by focusing on intertextuality, discourse analysis will identify how texts from other

cultures and art forms are referred to by reviewers to make sense of *Hero*, and hence will help reveal patterns of hybridity – the central proposition of globalization theories.

My choice of using film reviews as subject of study is based on three grounds: reviewers' role as a film audience, the influence of film reviews on general audiences, and past film reception studies.

First, reviewers write initial reactions to a newly opened film. As an established business practice, journalists from newspapers and magazines are invited to advance screenings of a film so that they can write reviews for the general public. Film reviews are the journalists' emotional and critical response to a given film, and thus it is legitimate to treat them as literature of the film's reception.

Second, due to their specific business and critical functions, film reviews may provide more insights into film reception than responses from ordinary viewers. Major business functions of reviews include providing summary and information about a film, offering evaluation, and serving as publicity for the film's producers (Bywater & Sobchack, 1989). As film reviews are reconstructions of reviewers' interpretation, they provide insights into the reviewers themselves and their relationship to the business and social processes they work in. Moreover, studies have shown that film audiences frequently rely on reviews to make decisions regarding whether to see a movie (Austin, 1989), and their expectations of a film are often influenced by the reviews (Crofts, 1992). It has also been found that ordinary movie viewers tend to produce similar responses to a film and interpret it the same way as in the film's reviews (Cooper, 1999). In this sense, film reviews are cultural intermediaries that mediate between the film and its viewers and might be used to predict reception from general audiences (Kathleen Lee & Dowling, 2003).

Third, due to their easy availability and reviewers' knowledge in films, film reviews have been repeatedly used as subjects in reception studies (Cooper, 1999, 2000; Hall, 2001; Kathleen Lee & Dowling, 2003). Regarding the benefits of using reviews as reception literature, Crofts (1992) pointed out that:

No other source yields such detailed and condensed responses to texts, nor so readily allows the analyst to make symptomatic readings which sidestep the empiricist pitfalls of mass communications research methodology (p.220).

Film reviews are generally divided into two types: reviews from the popular press, which are written for a mass audience; and scholarly criticism, which is written for film professionals and scholars (Hall, 2001). While popular press reviews – newspaper reviews and magazine reviews – are published immediately preceding or after the film's release, scholarly reviews are not constrained by time and may be published years after the film's theatrical release.

Prince (1997) called attention to the different characteristics of newspaper reviews and magazine reviews. Newspaper reviews are targeted at a general audience and follow a relatively fixed format. In addition to plot summary and background information, newspaper reviews often provide a “highly personalized and subjective response” to the film (Prince, 1997, p.321).

Reviews from general-interest magazines, on the other hand, are less constrained by length and format, and offer may more detailed and in-depth discussions of a film regarding its structure, style, etc. (Prince, 1997). Nevertheless, other scholars maintain that the distinction between newspaper and magazine reviews are not always or necessarily clear (Bywater & Sobchack, 1989; Hall, 2001).

My study mainly focuses on newspaper reviews, and is supplemented by reviews from selected influential general-interest magazines. Due to *Hero's* recentness, availability of scholar

criticism is very limited. The highly academic nature of such criticism also makes it inappropriate for my study.

A sample of 70 *Hero* reviews – including 64 newspaper reviews and six magazine reviews – are analyzed in this study. Two criteria were used to select the newspaper reviews. First, they were published during the week of *Hero*'s national release date (August 29, 2004) or the week immediately after it. Second, they must be retrievable from the LexisNexis database, which covers a wide selection of newspaper titles from all over the country. The resulting sample contains reviews from five major national daily newspapers and 57 regional daily newspapers from 27 states<sup>3</sup> (*The Washington Post* and *The Houston Chronicle* each carried two *Hero* reviews during the time period). All newspaper reviews studied here were published between August 26, 2004 and September 3, 2004. The magazine reviews are selected from major popular titles published during the week of, or the week immediately before or immediate after *Hero*'s national release date. Six reviews from six magazines are selected, including two reviews from general-interest magazines (*Time*, *The New Yorker*) and four reviews from entertainment-oriented magazines (*People*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Rolling Stone*, *Premier*). The magazine reviews selected were published between August 23, 2004 and September 6, 2004.

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<sup>3</sup> See Table 1 for the list of newspapers and the location of publication.



## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will discuss major discourses identified in reviews of *Hero* as a way of examining how issues of nationality, genre and cross-cultural interpretation of the film are addressed by reviewers.

The 70 reviews analyzed in this study vary considerably in length and depth. Some reviews are brief and basic, covering mainly the traditional ground of journalistic reviews, including plot synopsis and evaluation of the film (Clark, 2004; Garde, 2004). Others are long and rich, providing in-depth discussions regarding *Hero*'s structure, style and theme (Craft, 2004; Gillespie, 2004; Travers, 2004). Interestingly, as has already been observed (Bywater & Sobchack, 1989; Hall, 2001), distinction between newspaper reviews and magazine reviews in terms of details contained is not clear. In fact, reviews from some major newspapers (Craft, 2004; Ebert, 2004; Meyer, 2004) are noticeably longer and richer than the selected magazine reviews.

*Hero* has received overwhelmingly positive reviews. Many reviewers raved about the film, describing the film with such high praise as "breathtaking masterpiece" (Toppman, 2004), "outrageous beauty" (Lane, 2004), "a movie experience of the first order" (Kaltenbach, 2004), and "sheer movie grandeur" (Schwarzbaum, 2004). A few reviewers complained about the film's convoluted storyline (King, 2004), lack of emotion (Turan, 2004), and latent political message (Hunter, 2004), yet the shortcomings do not seem to prevent them from enjoying the film or recommending it to their readers. Of the varied descriptions regarding *Hero*'s national origin,

genre and interpretation, four dominant discursive patterns and themes can be detected. First, *Hero* is labeled as a Chinese film, but not perceived as a “foreign” film or part of a foreign national cinema. Second, the film is a product of a familiar, hybrid genre, a genre that *we* – American audiences – have already taken for granted. Third, *Hero* is inherently hybrid in its structure, style, theme and characterization. Furthermore, instead of being a merit of the film, *Hero*’s plot is inconsequential, and even distracting.

### **Nationality without meaning**

*Hero* is remarkably different from most U.S. releases in that it has all Asian faces, is based on Chinese history, and is shown in a non-English language (Mandarin, the official dialect of Chinese) with English subtitles – which makes it difficult not to address the fact that the film is “foreign.” The film also had an unusual release in the United States – it was introduced to U.S. audiences two years after the film was shown in China and other Asian countries. By the time it arrived at U.S. theaters, *Hero* had been available on imported DVD for quite some time. As one reviewer jokes:

Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* has been inching toward these shores from China with the excruciating slowness of Ulysses making his way back from Troy (Richards, 2004).

While most reviewers acknowledge that *Hero* is a “Chinese” film (Keenan, 2004) or “from China” (Denerstein, 2004), national origin is not a focus in the reviews. The discourses on *Hero*’s origin trivialize the film’s nationality to a mere label, without specific meaning or a concrete sense of “foreignness” attached to it. Instead of a product of a distinct national cinema, *Hero* is perceived and constructed primarily as the creation of a distinguished individual – its director, the “auteur.” The absence of concrete “foreignness” is seen primarily in two discourses:

the nationality of *Hero* is a vague concept without a context; and the construction of *Hero*'s director, Zhang Yimou, as a familiar auteur.

#### "Chinese" without a context

Reviewers do not feel that *Hero*'s "foreignness" is an unusual quality of the film that deserves to be focused on or celebrated. Seventeen of the 70 reviews analyzed never specify the origin of the film, or acknowledge that the film is non-American. In most of the reviews that do acknowledge *Hero*'s nationality, "Chinese" is no more than a fleeting mention, a label that does not carry any specific meaning, or lead to any further discussion. For example, Harrison (2004) from *The Houston Chronicle* introduces *Hero* as such at the beginning of his review:

The new Chinese martial arts movie *Hero* is – according to the trailer – “A Quentin Tarantino Presentation,” but don’t expect a skinny blonde in a yellow jumpsuit or the filmmaker’s trademark black humor.

This is the only time he refers to the film as being “Chinese.” Such is the case in many other reviews of *Hero*, in which the national origin of the film is mentioned as a casual label and is never contextualized to be made meaningful. Rarely is *Hero* discussed in the context of Chinese cinematic tradition, Chinese culture, or in relation to other Chinese films that would convey the idea that *Hero* is part of an alien national cinema, the “exotic other” with a distinct and different cultural identity. The only other Chinese film that most reviewers (80 percent of them) refer to is *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, yet comparison of the two films is limited to their apparent technical and stylistic similarities that have more to do with genre than with cultural tradition (Anderson, 2004; Bernard, 2004; Craft, 2004; Gillespie, 2004), and commercial opportunities (Gabrenya, 2004; Kleinschrodt, 2004; Means, 2004). A few reviews also compare

*Hero* with Hong Kong commercial martial arts movies in terms of genre characteristics and quality of the films (Beifuss, 2004; King, 2004).

In reviewers' discourse of *Hero*'s origin, nationality is a casual label that needs to be acknowledged, but not taken critically. This is counter to the idea of previous studies on reception of Chinese films in the West. Many studies on films created by Fifth Generation Chinese directors suggested that those films appealed to Western audiences and critics solely for their "exotic" representation and style (Lu, 1997; Lu, 2002; Wilson, 2001; Yau, 1993). In other words, images of the "exotic other" – being "foreign" and "different" from Hollywood films and Western way of life – are the ground upon which those Chinese films were perceived, understood and appreciated. The dualist conceptualization – "self" vs. "other" is obviously missing in reviewers' discourse of *Hero*, as nationality and origin is given little attention.

Also noticeably absent in the reviews are references to a number of relevant and marketable background facts of *Hero*. With a budget of \$30 million, *Hero* is the most expensive Chinese movie ever made, and has been the most commercially successful film in China so far. It has a top-notch all-star cast, which includes some of the finest and most expensive working actors from China and Hong Kong. The film also received an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film in 2003.

Though providing publicity for films is a critical business function of journalistic reviews, the above-mentioned publicity-worthy facts are largely ignored by reviewers. Forty of the 70 reviews do not mention any of these facts. Only 11 reviews make a reference to the film's Oscar nod, which is surprising considering the credit normally attached to the honor. Mentioning *Hero*'s phenomenal success in China, super-star cast and Oscar nomination would produce an alternative discourse to *Hero*'s origin, as these facts would publicize the film as a "foreign"

blockbuster. This is obviously not the reviewers' intention. In their dominant discourse the appeal of *Hero* is not in it being "exotic," as the casual mention of nationality and the absence of relevant facts both minimize the film's status and achievement as a "foreign" film.

### Zhang as a familiar auteur

Reviewers' discourse on *Hero*'s origin is obviously influenced by the auteur theory (Truffaut, [1954] 1976), which regards cinema as personal expression and grants authorship of a film to its director. While *Hero* is not contextualized as part of a "foreign" national cinema, it is primarily perceived as an individual's artistic creation. Referring to the film as "Zhang Yimou's *Hero*" (Clark, 2004; Craft, 2004) and Zhang as the "the real auteur" (Dargis, 2004), reviewers not only construct the film as a personal creation of its director, but also construct Zhang as a familiar name to American audiences and a figure with distinct personal style.

*Hero*'s director, Zhang Yimou, is undisputedly one of China's most prominent and celebrated directors. He has a strong reputation in the West for his signature ethnographic dramas such as *Red Sorghum* (1987), *Ju Dou* (1990), and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991). Thanks to the numerous awards these films won at international film festivals, Zhang has made a name among Western film scholars, and art-house movie fans with a passion for international cinema. Most of his award-winning films are available in the United States on video. Nevertheless, Zhang's reputation is limited to art-house movie fans and the film studies circle. None of his previous films has captured sufficient mainstream attention to make Zhang a household name.

Despite Zhang's relatively unknown status to most film audiences in the United States, reviewers construct Zhang as a familiar figure whose films can be quoted casually, rather than a foreign veteran that needs to be introduced to a general audience:

Director Zhang Yimou is not known as a martial arts director, but he is known for making insightful films with a strong visual impact, such as *Raise the Red Lantern* and *The Road Home* (Keenan, 2004).

Zhang Yimou's name in the credits as writer-director is a virtual guarantee of quality. A glance of his resume – *Ju Dou*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, *The Story of Qiu Ju*, *The Road Home* – is ample testament (Thompson, 2004).

Zhang, no stranger to Technicolor splendor after the triumphs of *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* – opens with a nervy entrance to a third century BC palace (Lovell, 2004).

In addition to being a familiar director whose previous works can be quoted casually, Zhang is also constructed as an auteur with a distinct personal style, which can be used as a benchmark to measure *Hero* against:

...the same psychological acuity, romantic lyricism, aesthetic brilliance and deep humanity that infuse Zhang's other films permeate *Hero* – and also his more recent Cannes triumph, *The House of Flying Daggers* (Wilmington, 2004).

Zhang has already demonstrated his painter's eye for compositional detail in previous films, including *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Red Sorghum* (Hornblow, 2004).

...the film [*Hero*] never musters the intimate feel the gifted director brought to such early films as *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Ju Dou* (Travers, 2004).

Though most reviews acknowledge Zhang as a “Chinese” director, Zhang's nationality takes a backseat to his personal talent and achievement in the reviewers' discourse, as he is not perceived as a part (not to mention a significant part) of “Chinese” cinema. His membership in the most celebrated group of Chinese directors – the Fifth Generation – is a fact too important to ignore if Zhang is perceived and introduced primarily as a “Chinese” director. Zhang's nationality is trivialized in *Hero*'s reviews, as only five of them acknowledge his role as one of the Fifth Generation directors. The dominant discourse of Zhang constructs the director as a distinguished auteur that is to be perceived and evaluated in terms of his artistic achievement and personal style, rather than in the context of a “foreign” cinema.

Reviewers' discourses on *Hero*'s origin exemplify some issues in recent debates on conceptualization of national cinema. Scholars have argued that with growing transnational elements in filmmaking, the concept of national cinema has become so convoluted and difficult to map that it can no longer be used in a concrete sense (Zhu, 2003). In other words, the overlapping and hybridity in the world's filmmaking today no longer allow conceptualization of films in terms of national origin and cultural identities. Reviewers' reception of *Hero* demonstrates this conceptual change, as nationality is used merely as a descriptive label, rather than a critical concept with specific cultural or artistic implications.

Discourses of *Hero* also reflect upon the broader issue concerning nationality in the context of globalization. The lack of geographic and cultural essentialism in *Hero*'s reviews, as shown in the trivialization of the film's geographical and ethnical origin, corresponds with Appadurai's (1990, 1996, 1999) idea of *detrterritorization* – the conceptual separation of cultural formation from its geographic origin. Reviewers' construction of *Hero* as primarily a personal creation of its director also echoes Wiley's (2004) proposition that nationality is being replaced by “new forms of belonging” (p.86) that are articulated on other conceptual levels as “logic of social and cultural organization” (p.79). In discourses of *Hero*, nationality is replaced by individuality as a primary conceptualization of the film's origin.

### **A rising hybrid genre**

Discourses of genre are easily noticeable in reviews of *Hero*. Using such terms as “martial-arts epic” (Bernard, 2004; Hunter, 2004; Ross, 2004; Steelman, 2004), “Chinese martial arts fable” (Anderson, 2004; Beifuss, 2004), “spiritual-romantic martial arts genre” (DeFore, 2004), “martial arts extravaganza” (Ebert, 2004), “martial arts drama” (Garde, 2004), “martial-

arts sword-fighting genre” (Neman, 2004), and “floating *wuxia* style of martial arts films” (Means, 2004), reviewers define *Hero* as a genre picture – a film that evidently displays the textual conventions of an established genre, and can be made sense of in terms of these conventions (Ryall, 1975/6). The different names used by reviewers to describe the genre are variations of what might be called the “martial arts genre.”

Neale (2000) suggested that film reviews and criticism tend to focus on genres of commercial Hollywood cinema and neglect local, hybrid genres. While “martial arts” is not among the 14 mainstream genres identified by Neale (2000), reviewers of *Hero* clearly refer to it as if it is an established genre with considerable influence. Three variations can be identified in reviewers’ genre discourses of *Hero* – First, it is a fine example of a trendy, familiar genre. Second, “martial-arts” is a stylized and hybrid genre that is undergoing transformations.

#### A trendy, familiar genre

Rather than a film from a foreign genre, *Hero* is constructed as a movie from a genre that is already known and popular in the United States.

The “familiarity” of the genre is seen in the ease and frequency with which the term “martial arts” is used. Obviously reviewers do not have any difficulty describing *Hero*’s genre, as the term “martial arts” – picked up by 48 of the 70 reviews studied – is readily available. Some reviewers refer to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as an exemplar representative of the genre, the “gold standard of mass-market martial-arts movies” (Bernard, 2004).

Reviewers also define the martial arts genre as a trendy one, as they call it “currently in vogue” (Neman, 2004) and “a trend” (Anderson, 2004). Contrary to Neale’s (2000) observation of discursive dominance of Hollywood genres, the martial arts genre, which he might define as a



marginalized one, is constructed in reviews of *Hero* as a very familiar and popular mainstream genre. It is even perceived as too familiar by some reviewers, as they keep referring to its characteristics as “cliché” – “Asian cliché” (Wirt, 2004), “cinematic cliché” (Richards, 2004), “the now-cliché Hong Kong-style wire work” (Craft, 2004).

### A stylized and hybrid genre

There have been two general approaches to conceptualize film genre. One is the aesthetic approach, which defines genres mainly by common stylistic characteristics (Metz, 1974; Schatz, 1981). The other is social/cultural approach, which focuses on a genre’s thematic concerns and social implications and significance (Braudy, 1976; Cawelti, 1976; McConnell, 1975; Sobchack, 1982). Reviewers evidently take the aesthetic approach, as the “martial arts” genre is constructed as highly stylized and visually-based.

The “martial arts” genre – or *wuxia* in Chinese – as Western experts specialized in international cinema (Bordwell, 2000) and Chinese film scholars (Lee, 2003) have observed, is characterized by three major aspects: story, theme and style. Story-wise, films in this genre are based on Chinese *wuxia* novels, or on Chinese history. Thematically, the spirit of *xia*, or heroism and honor, is the moral core of all martial arts films. Style-wise, the genre can be characterized by its elaborate period costumes and spectacular fighting sequences. Reviews of *Hero* mostly concentrate on the genre’s stylistic features and one aspect in particular: the “floating” warriors (Means, 2004).

Reviewers seem to be fascinated by the scenes in which characters jump to incredible heights and fly in the air – “actors flying about in harness” (Meyer, 2004a), as the “flying” stunt

is constructed as the central and indispensable stylistic characteristic of the martial arts genre.

One reviewer even goes as far as to assert that:

... dismissing the characters' lighter-than-air constitution as the new Asian cliché is rather like dismissing Western movies for relying on gunplay, big bosoms and car chases (Thompson, 2004).

Reviewers seek to make sense of the “flying” stylistic feature through the lens of modern science and technologies that enable its execution. The “flying” feature is constructed as a visual “stunt” that is against logic and laws of modern science, as it is described in such terms as “anti-gravity” (Craft, 2004) and “gravity-defying” (Hartl, 2004) that “break many other laws of physics” (Strauss, 2004). The style is also constructed as a spectacle, or “visual gimmickry” (Meyer, 2004b), enabled by computer-created “special effects” – “digitally enhanced gravity-bending” (Richards, 2004), “multidirectional digi-fu” (Lee, 2004) – and by the stunt technique of “wire work:”

...use of wires to assist the actors in pulling off seemingly impossible acts of physical prowess... Zhang takes the technique to extreme lengths (Marks, 2004).

Wire work, in which the characters are suspended in midair and conduct their spinning and twirling battles seemingly free from the mundane constraints of gravity, strikes some viewers as the coolest thing ever. In their eyes, it is magical. But others find it silly (Neman, 2004).

Yet the movie's seeming set pieces – the flying swordsman/woman bits – don't work. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is all you can think, and at times with a snicker... sooner or later you start wondering if the flying Wallendas used wires (McCreadie, 2004).

Reviewers' discourses of *Hero* not only regard it as a fine genre film – a “Holy Grail of martial arts pictures” (Kimmel, 2004), but also one that redefines the genre by incorporating elements from other genres and art forms. As Denerstein (2004) from *Rocky Mountain News* writes, “this is how a true artist elevates a genre.”

Some reviewers compare *Hero* to commercial martial arts movies from Hong Kong to demonstrate how by incorporating elements from other genres and art forms, Zhang has transformed a low-brow – “rag-tag” (King, 2004), “chop-socky” (Meyer, 2004a) – local genre into a globally attractive hybrid genre:

In the minds of many movie fans, Hong Kong martial-arts movies are synonymous with low-budget, slapdash filmmaking – rife with jagged, breakneck pacing, laughably fragmented dialogue and confusing fits of flying fists and feet... Zhang stoops to conquer the lowly chopsocky genre and produces a silky, muscular masterwork (King, 2004).

*Hero* is perceived to be superior to Hong Kong martial arts films in that it not only contains the original characteristics of the martial arts genre – “refined-swordplay techniques brought to the fore in the last quarter century of martial arts cinema,” but also incorporates elements from Zhang’s previous works – the “elegant lyricism of his own prestigious historical epics,” and styles of other filmmakers, genres and cinemas – “stoic pageantry and samurai tradition of Akira Kurosawa” (Craft, 2004). Zhang’s hybridization of elements from other genres in *Hero* overcomes and compensates the inherent weakness of the original martial arts genre. As some reviewers write, the hybridization transforms the “scruffiest of film forms” into “stateliness” (King, 2004), which gives the genre appeal to a “universal audience” (Mohan, 2004).

The reviews analyzed set the genre of *Hero* – the “martial arts genre” – in the discursive terrain of an established, mainstream genre. *Hero* is not perceived as from a “foreign,” or local genre, but one that has become a generic part of Hollywood filmmaking and of American audiences’ general knowledge about cinema. The genre is conceptualized solely in terms of its style. The cultural specificities that are associated with the genre are thus neglected, or reduced to a matter of aesthetics, which can be easily incorporated into Hollywood filmmaking. Films like *The Matrix* films (1999, 2003) and *Kill Bill* films (2003, 2004) have well incorporated the

aesthetics of Chinese martial arts films. The “martial arts” genre as constructed by *Hero* reviewers is remarkably different from the definition from film scholars specialized in international cinema (Bordwell, 2000) or Chinese scholars (Lee, 2003). In reviewers’ discourses of *Hero*, it is a stylized and hybrid genre with only a vague, abstract cultural root, and one that fits readily and comfortably as part of Hollywood.

### ***Hero* as a hybrid movie**

Intertextuality is a major interpretive tool employed by reviewers to make sense of *Hero*, as reviewers frequently seek to understand the film via its relationships to external texts. Reviewers’ interpretations of *Hero* betray the film’s inherent hybridity, as discourses on *Hero*’s structure, style, theme and characterization reveal patterns of intertextuality with other cinemas, art forms and cultural artifacts. *Hero* is constructed less as an original, culturally specific film than a hybrid one that contains elements that Western viewers are able to identify.

### *Rashomon* structure

Reviewers construct *Hero*’s structure as story-telling within storytelling – a presentation of different and conflicting versions of the truth. Most reviewers (60 percent of the reviews analyzed) compare the structure of *Hero* to that of *Rashomon* (1950), a classic movie from Japanese auteur Akira Kurosawa. In *Rashomon*, four eye witnesses for the murder of a samurai and his family are called upon to recount what has happened. Each eye witness gives a startling different account of the incident, and the film unfolds as a struggle between truth and deceit.

Reviewers’ discourses revolve around how *Hero* borrows the story-within-story structure from *Rashomon* to tell its own story:

Zhang, who wrote the screenplay with Li Feng and Wang Bin, pays tribute to *Rashomon* with the various versions of the story (Pickle, 2004).

The screenplay, written by Yimou with Feng Li and Bin Wang, borrows its structure from *Rashomon* (Toppman, 2004).

There's something grand but distant and almost fetishistic about the operatic solemnity with which Zhang approaches the Rashomonic story of assassins attempting to kill a king, and even the love story (Schwarzbaum, 2004).

*Hero* is about a warrior (Nameless) going to the King of Qin to recount how he has killed the king's three most feared assassins. As the king throws in his judgment and knowledge of the assassins, the warrior's version of the story changes, and the truth unfolds gradually. In the film, "alternate versions of reality start to blossom" (Anderson, 2004) in "Rashomon-style:"

It isn't long before we realize this is a *Rashomon*-style affair, in which the swordsman's account may or may not be true (Thomson, 2004).

*Hero* was written by Shang, Feng Li and Bin Wang in the style of the Japanese classic *Rashomon*, and it tells and retells the story of the attempted murder of a Chinese emperor by a trio of martial arts-trained assassins (Hornblow, 2004).

The story unfolds in the patchwork style of conflicting realities we associate with Kurosawa's 1950 classic *Rashomon* (Richards, 2004).

Corliss (2004) from *Time Magazine* calls *Hero* "*Rashomon* with a Mandarin accent," while Clark (2004) calls it a "latest" *Rashomon* "knock-off," implying that this is not the first time the structure has been adopted. Hamilton (2004) mentions another film, *Basic* (2003) starring John Travolta, which is structured in a similar way. By comparing *Hero* to *Rashomon*, reviewers construct the film as having a hybrid structure. *Hero* is perceived as a martial arts film with a narrative structure borrowed from another cinema, a classic Japanese film.

Reviewers' association of *Hero* and *Rashomon* also provide additional insights into contemporary filmmaking and global dynamism. *Rashomon*'s director, Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa, has a unique position in Western cinema and is himself an embodiment of

globalized filmmaking. Though all of his films are in Japanese and are concerned with Japanese history and cultural traditions, Kurosawa's films, including *Rashomon* (1950) and *Seven Samurai* (1954), have had huge followings in the United States. The styles and techniques in Kurosawa's films have had great impact on Hollywood filmmaking. Reviewers' discourses not only reveal *Hero*'s hybridity, but the hybridity in filmmaking overall, as the easily detected intertextuality between *Hero* and *Rashomon* demonstrates the influence of Kurosawa on general knowledge about cinema.

### Hybrid style

For reviewers, *Hero* is too beautiful – “hypnotic” (Anderson, 2004; Clark, 2004), “breathtaking” (Thomson, 2004), “lavish” (Wilmington, 2004), “ravishing” (Bernard, 2004; Corliss, 2004; Marks, 2004) – to be perceived as a film alone. Described as “painting in motion” (Rea, 2004), “visual poetry” (Gladden, 2004), and “part ballet and part opera” (Denerstein, 2004), the film is seen as having a hybrid style that incorporates elements from other art forms – particularly fine arts – in its aesthetics. As Verniere (2004) from *The Boston Herald* calls *Hero* “a cinematic hybrid of ballet, martial arts, acrobatics and painting,” reviewers' discourses of *Hero*'s style focuses on the film's intertextuality with other art forms, including painting, dancing and poetry. The hybridization of art forms transforms *Hero* into a more aesthetically sophisticated film than what the martial arts genre normally has to offer. As Ebert (2004) comments, “a film like *Hero* demonstrates how the martial arts genre transcends action and violence and moves into poetry, ballet and philosophy.”

*Hero* is frequently compared to painting in terms of how the film uses rich color to define its style and establish its tone. Color plays such a defining role in the film's style that it becomes

the most striking feature of the film, as one reviewer gushes “Jet Li, Maggie Cheung, and Tony Leung co-star with RED! ORANGE! YELLOW! BLUE! INDIGO! VIOLET! ”(Lee, 2004).

*Hero* uses a different color scheme for each version of the story, and each color scheme is so distinctly strong and symbolic that the film evokes the sensory awe normally reserved for great paintings:

...Mr. Zhang and his excellent production team signal with startling shifts of color that alternately flood the screen with a red as vivid as that of a Little Red Book, a spotless white, a delicate blue and a pale pistachio so mouthwatering you may want to lick the screen (Dargis, 2004).

Referring to *Hero*'s color as “palette” (Anderson, 2004; Craft, 2004; Vice, 2004) and “canvas” (Lee, 2004), reviewers describe the film as a collection of stunning beautiful shots, each one of which could be taken out individually as a piece of painting.

...there is not a single shot that could not be clipped out and hung in a museum as a work of art (Sobczynski, 2004).

Zhang seems to be painting a titanic scroll he can hang at a martial arts convention for gaping adolescents (Elliott, 2004).

Zhang makes much use of color and impossibly exaggerated choreography to present these vignettes, each its own carefully and lovingly stylized canvas within a larger mural (Marks, 2004).

Reviewers also relate the stylized fighting scenes and somberness – “operatic solemnity” (Schwarzbaum, 2004) in *Hero* to poetry and dancing, calling the film a “sonnet” (Meyer, 2004b), a “visual poem” (Ebert, 2004) with “a heart that is all poetry” (Ross, 2004), and “as much a ballet as film” (Thomson, 2004). One of the film's most talked about scenes, the duel between Sky and Nameless in a courtyard, is described as “deadly dance” (Kennedy, 2004) that is “more ballet than battles” (Ross, 2004).

By focusing on *Hero*'s intertextuality with painting, poetry and dancing, the film is constructed as having a hybrid style, a fusion of cinema and other art forms.

### Hybrid theme

As one reviewer writes, “nothing in *Hero* – from the size of the king’s army... to the details of the fights – is remotely realistic” (Gabrenya, 2004), *Hero* is not perceived as a realistic presentation of Chinese history, though history appears to be the theme of the film. Rather, history is perceived to only provide a “framework” (Wilmington, 2004) for *Hero*. Reviewers’ discourses construct *Hero* as a “fablelike view of ancient Chinese history” (Gillespie, 2004) that does not require one to “know or care a great deal about Chinese history” (Richards, 2004) in order to understand and appreciate the film. *Hero* is “history portrayed as myth” (Persall, 2004), or a mythified tale of nation building – “the birth of China as a nation state” (McCreadie, 2004).

The historical backdrop of *Hero* is described as “ancient,” a remote era so far away from the present that it becomes almost vague and abstract:

Set in medieval China, when the nation was broken into several warring states... (Mohan, 2004).

Set in a mythic time and place, filled with glory and daring and action aplenty... (Kaltenbach, 2004).

Instead of pinning the film to a specific time with specific historical references, most reviewers describe the setting of the film as a vague period, the characteristics of which are abstracted into a universal background for any “birth-of-a-nation” myth: violence, disorder and heroism.

A few reviewers associate *Hero* with China’s most well-known historical symbol and tourist attraction – the Great Wall. As one reviewer writes, a major character in the film, the King of Qin, is “the same guy credited with building the Great Wall” (Steelman, 2004). Another reviewer writes:

That life has been regularly threatened per the ruler’s campaign to unite China’s warring kingdoms into something one of the characters calls “Our Land” – a united entity that, as



history turned out, resulted in the construction of the Great Wall to mark that single-nation concept. (Craft, 2004).

The association between *Hero* and the Great Wall, which is not entirely accurate, fortifies the film as a “national myth” (Axmaker, 2004). Though the King of Qin initiated the construction, only a small portion of what is now known and seen as the Great Wall was completed under his rule. Due to the wear and tear from the long years, most of the part built in his era can no longer be seen today. The building of the Great Wall is generally seen as the combined effort of many dynasties in China’s history, and most of the well-preserved sections of the Great Wall was built during the Ming Dynasty, which was about seven hundred years ago. By crediting the King of Qin as the sole builder of the Great Wall, reviewers put a vague historical backdrop, an historical figure and an abstract historical symbol in their discursive realm, which strengthens the discourse of *Hero* as a myth. Though set in Chinese history and featuring Chinese characters, *Hero* is a myth not culturally specific, but hybrid and universal – its “birth-of-a-nation” theme might be planted into almost any country’s founding history and resonate with audiences from other cultures.

### Hybrid characters

Reviewers do not regard *Hero*’s characters as “purely” Chinese with culturally specific manners and emotions that Western viewers might find difficult to relate to. Rather, reviewers perceive *Hero*’s characters as similar to familiar figures in American cultural imagination and in American films. Some reviewers regard the martial arts skills of the characters as resembling the superheroes in Western imagination, and most reviewers identify a parallel between *Hero*’s protagonist, Nameless, and Clint Eastwood’s character Man With No Name in Sergio Leone’s spaghetti westerns.

To some reviewers, the extraordinary martial arts skills of *Hero*'s main characters – jumping to incredible heights, floating in the air, walking on water, etc. – is similar to the “super-human powers” (Gladden, 2004) of Superman and Spider-man. Like these Western cultural figures, *Hero*'s characters are “outsize super-hero, super-villain roles” with “supernatural” abilities (Wilmington, 2004). It is made explicit in reviewers' discourses that the skills and powers of *Hero*'s characters are not realistic or logical, but are part of the mythical surrealness that the film, which “doesn't take place in a rational world” (Gabrenya, 2004), deliberately seeks to create.

Reviewers also find similarities between *Hero*'s protagonist, Nameless, and Clint Eastwood's well-known character Man With No Name from the spaghetti western trilogy directed by Sergio Leone. The trilogy, including *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For A Few Dollars More* (1965), and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966), introduced “spaghetti westerns” – westerns “made in Italy”, hybrid of Hollywood genre and Italian filmmaking.

Apart from the similar names (Meyer, 2004a; Sterritt, 2004; Turan, 2004), some reviewers see a deeper connection in the two characters' personality and manners. As one reviewer notes:

Like Clint Eastwood's Man With No Name, he [Nameless] simply shows up and gets his business done, leaving a trail of bodies in his wake (Kaltenbach, 2004).

Kaltenbach (2004) sees such a strong similarity between the two characters that he believes Zhang must have studied the classic icons in spaghetti westerns and “effortlessly transplants them to ancient China.”

Steelman (2004) identifies deeper parallels between the two characters and the movies. Comparing *Hero*'s assassins to gunfighters in spaghetti westerns, Qin palace to Fort Apache, and

the duel in a chess garden in *Hero* to the saloon brawl in the Clint Eastwood trilogy, he suggests that “it’s best to think of *Hero* as a spaghetti western.”

Apart from *Hero*’s protagonist, reviewers also identify familiar traits in other characters in *Hero*. Denerstein (2004) suggests that Flying Snow’s revengeful ambition, determination and her tragic fate relates the character to a Shakespeare figure, as “Flying Snow eventually morphs into a Lady Macbeth-like figure as the plot reveals itself in flashbacks.”

By relating *Hero*’s characters to familiar figures in Western cultural imagination, reviewers describe these characters as hybrid figures that are not uniquely “Chinese,” but possess qualities that can be related to from the lens of a different culture, and thus can be understood and resonated universally.

Reviewers’ interpretation of *Hero* is informed by globalization theories in that it reveals discursive themes of hybridity. Globalization theories posit that hybridity is the key factor in understanding contemporary cultural formations (Appadurai, 1990, 1996, 1999). Hybrid cultural forms may contain elements from different cultures as well as elements from different art forms. Focusing on *Hero*’s intertextuality with other cinemas, fine arts and Western cultural imagination, reviewers’ discourses clearly construct the film as hybrid, and one that is not necessarily attached to a particular culture.

In addition to hybridity, reviewers’ interpretation of *Hero* also reveals a discursive pattern of Romanticism, an influential philosophy in filmmaking and criticism today (Kleinhans, 2003). Beginning in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, Romanticism is a particular worldview that has been a paradigm for arts. Romanticism is an antithesis of Naturalism, which posits that arts should be a realistic representation of life (O’Sullivan, 1994). Rather, Romanticism focuses on aesthetics and seeks an aesthetic and stylized representation of life (Rand, 1969). While Romanticism is a

multi-faceted philosophy, there are two aspects of it that overlaps with reviewers' discourses of *Hero*. First, Romanticism suggests an aesthetic view of the world – to understand the world through the exploration of beauty and emotion. *Hero* is perceived as “unrealistic,” “stylized” and “mythified.” Instead of a realistic presentation of Chinese history, the film is constructed as an abstract, aestheticized version of a “birth-of-a-nation” myth.

Reviewers' discourse on *Hero*'s intertextuality with fine arts also resonates with another aspect of Romanticism. Romanticism defies the distinction between “low” and “high” arts and seeks incorporation of the two (Williams & Pinkney, 1996). It interpolates popular art forms – such as film, television and popular music – with high arts, which have been traditionally conceived to belong to different ranks and irreconcilable. Reviewers' discourses are clearly informed by Romanticism as they seek to interpret *Hero*'s style through its intertextuality with fine arts – painting, poetry, ballet, etc.

### **Plot as inconsequential and distracting**

Plot is normally deemed as a most significant part of a film. It is a belief commonly held by filmmakers and film critics that telling a good story should be the prime concern of any film. Such a view is reflected in two implicit, yet observable features of journalistic reviews: First, reviews do not give out spoilers of major plot twists; and second, quality of the plot is often a major criterion in evaluating a film. However, these conventions are apparently broken in reviews of *Hero*, as discourses lay heavy focus on the visual and dismiss the film's plot as inconsequential, and even distracting.

### Plot as inconsequential

Many of the reviews analyzed are surprisingly generous in terms of the plot details they provide. Nameless' hidden motive and the king's eventual victory are *Hero's* major and final plot twists, yet they are casually revealed in reviews of the film:

We can easily image the king being correct in his rewriting of Nameless' stories, and we wonder if Nameless has invented them as a strategy to get closer to the throne and murder the king himself (Ebert, 2004).

Soon, the ruler tells the swordsman how he believes events occurred, toying with the audience's conclusions and revealing human nature, as movies and warfare do (Persall, 2004).

Tipped off by oddly flittering candle flames (an ill wind?) between himself and Nameless, the king smells the ultimate assassination plot perhaps hiding under the guise of loyalty and service (Ratliff, 2004).

Then the king presents a version of events as he imagines them, suggesting Nameless is a traitor (Toppman, 2004).

These reviews apparently do not leave much chance for their readers to be surprised by what is going to happen in the film. Though giving out critical clues of major plot twists is an unusual and even taboo practice, it does not seem to be a concern for reviewers of *Hero*. Such unusual practice reveals a discursive message that *Hero's* plot does not have much significance in itself. In other words, the story being told is not as much an attraction as in most other movies, and thus disclosing the plot twists will not ruin potential audiences' viewing pleasure. In *Hero*, plot is perceived as secondary to visual splendor, which is constructed as the greatest merit of the film. As one reviewer writes, "romance and even deep emotion take a back seat to the decor" (Clark, 2004). Another reviewer suggests that "the founding of the first Chinese empire weighs in as less compelling than Mr. Leung's melting eyes, Ms. Cheung's implacable beauty and Ms. Zhang's ability to flicker from rage to vulnerability with hummingbird grace and speed" (Dargis, 2004).

### Plot as distraction

For some reviewers, not only is *Hero*'s plot inconsequential compared to its visual, it is perceived as an annoyance that distracts the viewers from enjoying the film. Beifuss (2004) complains that instead of easing understanding, the English subtitles "get in the way," as *Hero* is "a movie that might be more effective if we could let its images wash over us without the distractions of plot and fact." *Hero* is described as "one of those pictures in which the hypnotic visuals are the movie" (Clark, 2004), in which the story being told only distracts the viewers' attention and prevents them from being completely engrossed in the visual.

As plot is constructed by reviewers a distraction that could be dispensed with, cultural or historical specificities – any detail of the film that may not be readily transferable to Western audiences – become trivialities with little significance. A few reviewers point out that *Hero* contains a troubling political message that justifies "imperialism" (DeFore, 2004) and "tyrannical rule" (Lane, 2004). Nevertheless, as Denerstein (2004) writes – "I wasn't bothered" – reviewers do not appear to be concerned about a political reading of the film, or allow the "hidden" political message to eclipse their praise to the film. The political controversy surrounding the film, the "debate" (Axmaker, 2004), is also trivialized in comparison to the film's visual achievement, as it is "drowned out by the spectacle" (Axmaker, 2004). *Hero* is described as a film that can be, and even better be, appreciated purely through the lens of aesthetics, as *Hero*'s visual alone is sufficient to make it a worthy film.

### Visual as high point

As plot is regarded as secondary to visual spectacle in *Hero*, reviewers seek to use outstanding scenes, scenes that are "insanely beautiful" (Craft, 2004) and memorable, to make

sense of and introduce the film. Some reviews start with description of a particular scene, prioritizing visual impression of *Hero* over anything else:

Arrows soar like locusts and assassins tiptoe across lakes like skipping stones in the visually dazzling *Hero*, a color-coded Chinese martial arts fable populated by killers named for weapons, the weather and the heavens, when they have names at all (Beifuss, 2004).

Cavalry in black armor, riding black horses and holding black banners aloft, gallop into a walled citadel where thousands of black-clad courtiers stand awaiting their arrival (Moore, 2004).

Droplets of rain hang in midair, waiting to be cleaved by a silver blade. Torrents of yellow leaves swirl about, and then engulf, two female combatants. Archers' arrows swoosh skyward, blotting out the sun before peppering a city gate (Lovell, 2004).

By placing description of scenes at the beginning of reviews, reviewers construct the visuals of *Hero* as the most impressive aspect of the film. For these reviewers, the beautiful scenes in the film are what come to mind first, and are what they want audiences to pay foremost attention to. Three critical fighting scenes in *Hero* – the duel between Nameless and Sky, the duel between Flying Snow and Moon, and the showdown between Nameless and Broken Sword – are most discussed. Many reviews include detailed and vivid description of one or more of them:

During one of those magically surreal fights in which combatants fly, gold leaves swirl in a vortex created by the flashing swords of two women locked in mortal combat (Kennedy, 2004).

Reviewers' discourses on *Hero*'s plot and visual – visual as attraction and plot as inconsequential and even distraction – also reveals the Romantic notion that aesthetics is the lens through which the film is to be perceived, understood and appreciated. The influence of Romanticism in reviewers' discourses should also be understood as an illustration of globalization. Romanticism represents a notion of what might be called “global aesthetics,” as its focus – style and visual – is easily and readily transferable cross-culturally. By highlighting

aesthetics and making it the prime perspective from which *Hero* is to be interpreted and judged, reviewers demonstrate a conscious effort to maximize the film's cross-cultural appeal and minimize its cultural specificities.

In this chapter, I have discussed the dominant discourses in *Hero*'s reviews regarding the film's origin, genre, and interpretation. In the discourses of origin, reviewers construct *Hero*'s nationality as a vague label, a nominal concept without a context or concrete sense of "foreignness" attached to it. *Hero* is perceived not as a product from an "alien" cinema, or an "exotic other." It is perceived primarily as a piece of work from a distinguished individual – its director, the "auteur." As for the film's genre, *Hero* is not seen as a product of a "foreign," "local" or "marginalized" genre, but constructed as a fine example of an already established and popular genre – "martial arts," which is at the same time stylized and hybrid.

Referring to *Hero*'s intertextuality with other cinemas, art forms, and Western cultural imagination to make sense of the film's structure, style, theme and characterization, reviewers construct the film as a hybrid entity that incorporates elements from other cultures and art forms, rather than an original "Chinese" film that could only be understood from the perspective of Chinese cultural and theatrical traditions. Reviewers' discourses surrounding the interpretation of *Hero* also construct the film's plot as inconsequential as compared to the visual. Plot is even regarded as a distraction, a burden that can be dispensed with. By putting a heavy focus on visual, cultural or historical specificities that might exist in *Hero* becomes trivialized.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I will summarize the findings of this study and discuss their general implications on issues regarding globalization, cultural formation and international communication.

#### **Summary of findings**

This study seeks to understand the cross-cultural reception of *Hero* in the context of globalization. It focuses on a group of specialized audience – review journalists for major newspapers and magazines in the United States – in an effort to examine how they construct the film to their readers. Discourse analysis is conducted on a sample of 70 newspaper and magazine reviews of *Hero* in order to reveal the discursive patterns in these reviews regarding the film’s origin, genre and interpretation. Identified discourses are discussed in relation to globalization theories and relevant literatures.

Four discursive patterns are found to be dominant in the reviews. First, the nationality of *Hero* is perceived as merely a vague label, a deterritorialized concept without a context. Rather than conceptualized as a product from an “exotic,” “Other” cinema, *Hero* is constructed primarily as an artistic creation of an distinguished individual – its director, Zhang Yimou, the “familiar auteur.”

Second, in the discourses of genre, *Hero* is constructed as a fine example of a familiar and popular genre – “martial arts.” The genre is characterized as stylized, described only in terms of its stylistic and aesthetic features. Reviewers also construct the genre as hybrid, transformed and elevated by its incorporation of stylistic elements from other genres.

Intertextuality is a major interpretive tool employed by reviewers to make sense of *Hero*. The third dominant discourse constructs *Hero* as a hybrid film that incorporates elements from other cinemas, art forms and Western cultural imagination. The film is seen as borrowing the story-within-story narrative structure from Japanese film *Rashomon*, and as having a hybrid style that demonstrates characteristic features of fine arts, such as painting, poetry and ballet. *Hero* is portrayed as being a “birth-of-a-nation” myth, a hybrid theme with vague historical reference and is universally recognizable. Characters in the film are also constructed as hybrid figures that possess qualities that parallel those of familiar characters in Western imagination.

Fourth, reviewers construct *Hero* as a film that can be understood and appreciated through the lens of aesthetics. The film’s plot is deemed inconsequential and even distracting, in comparison to its visual. By dismissing *Hero*’s plot and hidden political message as insignificant, cultural and historical specificities that might be associated with the film become trivialized.

In this study, discourse analysis provides a critical way to examine the reception of *Hero* from the perspective of globalization. Discourse analysis goes beyond the review text and contextualizes reception of the film in discussions of broader issues regarding globalization, such as contemporary economic and cultural formation, nationality and international communication. Discourse analysis’ focus on intertextuality also helps reveal patterns of hybridity – the central proposition of globalization – in *Hero*.

Review journalists' reception of *Hero* is clearly informed by globalization, as it exemplifies globalization theories' proposition of hybridity and what might be called a notion of "global aesthetics." Reviewers' discourses trivialize *Hero*'s nationality, geographical and cultural background and thus illustrate the critical concept of *detrterritorization*. Discourses on *Hero*'s intertextuality reveal the film's *hybridization* with other genres, cinemas, cultures and art forms. In addition, reviewers' interpretation of *Hero* demonstrates the influence of Romanticism, the "global aesthetics" that maximizes the cross-cultural appeal of the film and minimizes its cultural specificities.

### **Implications**

With the rapid development of communication technologies and increased interdependence of economies, the world has become more connected and open than ever before. The media and culture scene is becoming especially dynamic and complicated, as media images are now flooding across national borders at a scale unseen and probably even unimagined before. While American films and television programs still dominate the world's media market as they continue to enjoy huge popularity in other countries, a new phenomenon is rising – foreign media products are now flowing into the United States and achieving success with American audiences. The recent popularity of Chinese martial arts cinema is a good example of this new phenomenon.

The success of *Hero* in the United States offers a great opportunity to study the rising phenomenon and explore critical issues regarding contemporary cultural formation and international communication. Reviewers' reception of *Hero* demonstrates that the older

paradigm of cultural/media imperialism is indeed obsolete and that globalization is the critical lens through which global cultural dynamism can be better conceptualized.

Cultural and media imperialism theses predicted the homogenization of local cultures. The older paradigm was based on two premises that became heavily criticized in recent years: The first is uni-directional flow, or that media images should flow from developed countries like the United States to developing countries with less advanced media systems. The second premise is the celebration of cultural essentialism, or that the ethnic purity of cultures exists and should be preserved. The present study further proves both premises to be faulty. As a Chinese film, *Hero* represents the successful existence of multi-directional flow. *Hero* is perceived to demonstrate a clear pattern of hybridity, and national, ethnical and cultural identity is clearly not a concern in reviewers' discourses. In studying of contemporary cultural dynamism, the outdated bipolar conceptualization should give way to the more integrative paradigm of globalization.

At the beginning of the study I posed some relevant questions concerning *Hero* and cross-cultural communication: How do we make sense of the popularity of small cinema in the home market of the world's most powerful film industry? How do we explain the appeal of a genre considered very "Chinese" to audiences from a completely different culture? What factors might have contributed to the nearly opposite responses both *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero* received in the United States and in China? By reflecting upon this study's findings and critical thinking of globalization, these questions may now be answered.

The first question articulates a major contradiction of globalization – convergence and disjunction. Globalization has brought convergence on an unprecedented scale, with the convergence of economies and consolidation of global market. Yet this convergence does not occur in a clear-defined and predictable manner, nor does it result in homogenization of cultures,

as would be expected from the logic of modernity (Appadurai, 1990; Tomlinson, 1991). On the contrary, the growing connectivity and interdependence have brought more disjuncture and fragmentation, in the sense that it is no longer possible to predict the direction of communication and cultural flows, or articulate the influence of the flows. The popularity of Chinese martial arts films with American audiences and the increasing presence of foreign media products in the United States is an illustration of both the convergence and the disjuncture.

Blurring old boundaries of culture – geography, nationality, ethnicity – globalization has compelled us to make sense of contemporary cultures in new ways. As reviewers' discourses of *Hero* demonstrate, globalization's contradictory characteristics of convergence and disjunction can be reconciled on new conceptual grounds – rather than national cinema and cultural identity, *Hero* is interpreted and constructed from the perspective of individuality, aesthetics and hybridity.

The second and third question, which concern *Hero*'s cross-cultural appeal and its different critical responses from American and Chinese critics, articulate another contradiction of globalization – the local and the global. As media images and cultural products frequently and almost freely flow across national borders, conceptual boundaries for the local cultures and the global cultures are difficult to define: Where does the “local” end, and where does the “global” begin? Where do cultural specificities belong? And what specific qualities make a culture “local” or “global” – Is the American culture to be considered a “global” culture, and the Chinese culture a “local” one?

Globalization theorists have sought to reconcile the contradiction between the “local” and the “global” by reconceptualizing contemporary cultural formation through the lens of hybridity (García Canclini, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999). All cultures ought to be considered as hybrid in the

sense that they possess characteristics and specificities from other cultures. *Hero* and the martial arts genre are accepted and appreciated by American audiences because they are no longer perceived as “Chinese.” *Hero* is interpreted and constructed by reviewers as a hybrid film from a hybrid genre, as the film incorporates traditions of other genres, cinemas, cultures and art forms. The hybridity of *Hero* might also explain why Chinese critics, who may insist on reading the genre from cultural and historical specificities, have reacted negatively to the film. Hybridity is a negotiation between the “local” and the “global.” Whether it is celebrated or condemned, hybridity is an inevitable outcome of cultural dynamism of globalization. It is the critical lens through which contemporary cultural formations ought to be conceptualized and examined.

*Hero* is a product designed to maximize the opportunity provided by the contradictions. It is designed for a heterogeneous global market. As director Zhang Yimou acknowledged, *Hero* was never intended for Chinese viewers only, but with prospective foreign audiences in mind. The film was shaped by knowledge of audiences both domestic and abroad, which already makes it no longer a “Chinese” film in a monolithic sense, but inherently hybrid. *Hero* might be seen as an embodiment of globalizing transnational cinema – being shaped by globalization, and at the same time contributes to globalization’s momentum and influences its dynamism.

### **Suggestion for further study**

This study uses discourse analysis of film reviews to analyze how *Hero* is received and interpreted by its audiences in the United States. Further research on a less specialized audience, the film’s text, cross-cultural comparison and other Chinese films should complement the current study by providing additional critical perspectives to explore the propositions of globalization theories.

Due to the business nature of reviews and professional background of reviewers, film reviews have potential drawbacks as reception literature. As reviewers' reception might be affected by the format of reviews, time restraint and professional knowledge of film, their discourses could be different from what the general film audiences might perceive. Thus, further study on ordinary viewers of *Hero* will reveal how general audiences in the United States interpret the film, and might provide additional insights into cross-cultural reception of *Hero*.

An analysis of *Hero*'s film text will also extend the scope of the current study by demonstrating what is actually in the film. Such a study should include a critical analysis of the film's structure, theme, style and characterization. By analyzing the film's text, a further study will contextualize reviewers' discussion of *Hero*'s hybridity.

In addition, it will be helpful to compare American reviewers' reception of *Hero* with responses of native Chinese reviewers. A comparative study of U.S. reviews and reviews from Chinese journalists will reveal patterns regarding on what specific grounds critical opinions diverge. Such a study should provide additional insights into the "global" and the "local", especially in terms of how hybridity might be conceptualized differently by native and foreign viewers.

Finally, I would like to further explore critical reception of other Chinese martial arts films. *Hero* is only the second Chinese martial arts film to be released to mainstream American audiences. As more Chinese martial arts films are being introduced in the United States, it would be necessary to examine if similar discourses will appear in reviews of other Chinese martial arts films, or if new discursive patterns will be found. Studies on reception of other Chinese martial arts films will further explore cross-cultural reception of the martial arts genre and provide insights into the ongoing dynamism of globalization.

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## APPENDICES

**A. Newspaper Reviews by State of Publication**

<b>State</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>
<b>National</b>	<i>The Christian Science Monitor</i>
	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
	<i>The New York Times</i>
	<i>USA Today</i>
	<i>The Washington Post</i> (2)
<b>California</b>	<i>The Daily News of Los Angeles</i>
	<i>The San Diego Union-Tribune</i>
	<i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>
	<i>San Jose Mercury News</i>
<b>Colorado</b>	<i>The Denver Post</i>
	<i>Rocky Mountain News</i>
<b>Connecticut</b>	<i>The Hartford Courant</i>
<b>Florida</b>	<i>The Florida Times-Union</i>
	<i>Sarasota Herald-Tribune</i>
	<i>St. Petersburg Times</i>
	<i>Tampa Tribune</i>
<b>Georgia</b>	<i>The Atlanta Journal Constitution</i>
<b>Illinois</b>	<i>Chicago Daily Herald</i>
	<i>Chicago Sun-Times</i>
	<i>Chicago Tribune</i>
	<i>The Pantograph</i>
<b>Louisiana</b>	<i>The Advocate</i>
	<i>The Times-Picayune</i>
<b>Maryland</b>	<i>The Baltimore Sun</i>
<b>Massachusetts</b>	<i>The Boston Globe</i>
	<i>The Boston Herald</i>
	<i>The Telegram &amp; Gazette</i>
<b>Michigan</b>	<i>Detroit Free Press</i>
<b>Missouri</b>	<i>Lincoln Journal Star</i>
	<i>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</i>
<b>Nebraska</b>	<i>Omaha World-Herald</i>
<b>New Jersey</b>	<i>Herald News</i>
<b>New Mexico</b>	<i>Albuquerque Journal</i>
	<i>The New Mexican</i>

<b>New York</b>	<i>The Buffalo News</i>
	<i>The Daily News</i>
	<i>Newsday</i>
	<i>New York Post</i>
	<i>The New York Sun</i>
<b>North Carolina</b>	<i>The Charlotte Observer</i>
	<i>Star News</i>
<b>Ohio</b>	<i>The Columbus Dispatch</i>
<b>Oklahoma</b>	<i>Tulsa World</i>
<b>Oregon</b>	<i>The Oregonian</i>
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	<i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i>
	<i>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</i>
<b>South Carolina</b>	<i>The Post and Courier</i>
<b>Tennessee</b>	<i>The Commercial Appeal</i>
	<i>The Knoxville News Sentinel</i>
<b>Texas</b>	<i>Austin American-Statesman</i>
	<i>Dallas Morning News</i>
	<i>Houston Chronicle (2)</i>
	<i>San Antonio Express-News</i>
<b>Utah</b>	<i>The Deseret News</i>
	<i>The Salt Lake Tribune</i>
<b>Virginia</b>	<i>Richmond Times-Dispatch</i>
	<i>Roanoke Times &amp; World News</i>
	<i>The Virginian-Pilot</i>
<b>Washington</b>	<i>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</i>
	<i>The Seattle Times</i>
<b>West Virginia</b>	<i>Charleston Daily Mail</i>
	<i>The Charleston Gazette</i>

### B. Reviews examined

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