

East Goes West - Chinese Filmmakers in the United States

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“Hong Kong in the Hollywood Imaginary: De-territorializations and Re-territorializations in John Woo’s Films”

Over the past few decades, Hong Kong cinema has been an enabling and unsettling presence in the imaginary of Hollywood. I am using the term imaginary with its Lacanian overtones; Lacan identified three orders of understanding – real, symbolic and imaginary; imaginary refers to the domain of images. There have been a number of Hong Kong filmmakers who have impressed Hollywood such as John Woo, Wong-Kar Wai, Tsui Hark, Stanley Kwan, Ringo Lam, Johnny To. Among them, John Woo has been, in many ways, the most visible and consequential. Therefore, when examining the presence of Hong Kong cinema in Hollywood it is only natural that one turns to the work of John Woo. Interestingly, Jean-Claude Van Damme once remarked that Woo is ‘Martin Scorsese of Asia.’

John Woo is the author of such well-known films as *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), *The Killer* (1989), *A Bullet in the Head* (1990) and *Hard Boiled* (1992). These films served to gain international recognition for him and he was invited to make films in Hollywood. The result was such products as *Face/Off* and *Mission: Impossible 2*. He also has influenced a number of younger Asian film directors such as Johnny To and several Korean directors and Hollywood filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez. The aim of this paper is to examine the way the ideas of de-territorialization and re-territorialization function in John Woo’s films in a way that make them attractive to Hollywood and Western audiences. I wish to explore this theme by focusing on his celebrated work *The Killers* which has over the past twenty five years attained the status of a cult film. This is indeed a film that through the careful manipulation of visual registers and representational stratagems has succeeded in extending the discursive boundaries of action films

The term de-territorialization was put into circulation by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Here I am deploying the term in a slightly different sense that is closer to the formulations of anthropologists and globalization theorists. My focus is more on the discursive de-territorialization and the concomitant affective economies brought to life by Woo. The overall objective of my paper is to examine through the intersecting concepts of de-territorialization and re-territorialization why *The Killer* figured so prominently in the imaginary of Hollywood.