

Sung Gyung Jo<sup>1</sup>  
[whitemullan@naver.com](mailto:whitemullan@naver.com)

# *A Fistful of Yen:*

## The De-mystification of an Asian Kung-Fu Hero

The importance of parody, as Linda Hutcheon notes in *A Theory of Parody*, lies in the fact that it is “one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity; it is a form of inter-art discourse” (Hutcheon 2). Remakes of old movies that embody the elements of parody are becoming more popular these days. According to Eberwein, “a remake is a kind of reading or rereading of the original” which “posit and depend on certain assumptions about audience reception” (15-6). Cinema is a relatively recent form of art and regularly incorporates parody within its own structures. *A Fistful of Yen*, which is a parodic remake of *Enter the Dragon*, is a notable instance.

In *Enter the Dragon*, Bruce Lee is a perfect “stuntman as hero” with authentic “virtuosity” (Hunt 23). The Hong Kong setting was exotic enough to attract large audiences not only in Asia but in the West. The problem, however, lies in Lee’s

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<sup>1</sup> Yonsei graduate student

perfect physique and the exotic setting itself. Throughout the film, the camera mostly captures the visual images of Asia and Lee's impressive stunts. The most memorable fighting scene in this film is when Lee kills Oharra, the first bodyguard of Mr. Han, by jumping on the enemy while he is lying on a lawn. The camera captures Lee's trademark facial expression in a close-up shot with slow motion to intensify the fierce movement of the hero. Likewise, the film seems to aim at fulfilling the pleasure of audience to sell the work in the Hollywood market, where there exists a desire of the Western audience to see real skills in martial arts instead of "pampered, stunt-doubled Hollywood stars" (Hunt 41).

Hong Kong is the other crucial element. In the opening scene of the movie, the camera captures the overall picture of Hong Kong with an extreme low-angle shot. After this, the narrow streets and local markets with natives busy with their everyday work are captured again in tracking shots with faster-cuts. At the same time, local music, which increases the sense of exoticism, can be heard.

Asia is haphazardly represented throughout the film. Especially, the feast scene on the island, in which the tournament participants first encounter Dr. Han, is the perfect example of the haphazardness involved in creating a "pseudo-Asia." The feast scene consists of a jumble of images that are "imported" from different parts of Asia. There

is a circle room with a wrestling match in the middle, while the camera also captures beautiful Asian girls, several men performing acrobatic movements in unidentifiable costumes, old men gulping down rice, unclassifiable individuals in Taekwondo uniforms, Sumo wrestlers, and an Asian man with a Rolex on his wrist. Since their main purpose is to make the images seem merely exotic and remote, the producers of the film are totally ignorant about the real Asia.

In *A Fistful of Yen*, Mr. Lu, the main Kung-fu hero, resembles Jackie Chan in that they both represent “an accessible, non-threatening masculinity” with slapstick comedy (Donalson 166). The transition from the serious and threatening kung-fu hero to a familiar and comic one may be seen to involve the deconstruction of the male body as the focus of Asian identity. In this parodic remake of the traditional kung-fu movie, the camera work deliberately exaggerates the physical actions of the characters. In the first part of the movie, when Mr. Lu is talking about “Toto concentration” to his pupil, the camera takes a side view of his face in an over-the-shoulder shot. In this way, it focuses on the movement of his pointed lips saying “Toto,” which is pronounced in quite a funny way. Furthermore, in many comic scenes that would be illegitimate in the original movie, the authority of the kung-fu action hero disappears.

It is also important to point out that the Chinese setting in the original movie becomes

an object of parody in the remake. There are some obvious implications of Korean culture as the setting of the remake movie, and some of the movements of Mr. Lu are drawn from Taekwondo and even the fighters on Dr. Klahn's island wear Taekwondo uniforms. However, the most obvious element that shows the Korean setting is language. When Mr. Lu first meets Dr. Klahn, the audience can hear Korean in the background.

Since most Westerners cannot understand Korean, they probably will not notice that the Asians in the movie are only "mimicries" of the genuine Chinese kung-fu masters. The Western audience will also be alienated as spectators who do not understand Korean in the remake version. In contrast, Korean-language speakers will become insiders. In other words, the Asians who were "other-ed" by the Westerners in the original become the "subjects" in the act of parody and alienation in the remake version. In terms of the issue of ethnicity, Chung Hye Seung's interpretation of *The Kentucky Fried Movie* will broaden the meaning of using Korean in this film:

"What the independent production *The Kentucky Fried Movie* parodies in this episode are not just big-budget Bond movies and the martial arts genre but also the very mechanisms through which Oriental masquerade and ethnic passing are perpetuated in mainstream cinema." (Chung 56)

Cinematic parody can yield interesting counter-effects on which audiences from

different cultural backgrounds can draw and negotiate. There is more to parody than just playfulness—or perhaps it is better to say that this playfulness may contain surprising political energy.

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