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## Dancing with Hollywood: Redefining Transnational Chinese Stardom

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During the past decade, China's box office revenues increased from \$162 million to \$2.7 billion, and in 2012 China finally overtook Japan to become the world's second-largest movie market.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, China also became the biggest overseas market for Hollywood. It is therefore unsurprising that Hollywood has started to tailor its products for the Chinese market by incorporating more Chinese elements, such as Chinese locations and Chinese actors. Not only is a modernised China frequently featured in recent Hollywood blockbusters (e.g. *Mission Impossible III* [2006]; *Skyfall* [2012]), but China's top female stars also take turns appearing in the latest Hollywood hits, including Yu Nan in *The Expendables* (2012), Li Bingbing in *Resident Evil: Retribution* (2012), Xu Qing in *Looper* (2012), Zhou Xun in *Cloud Atlas* (2012) and Fan Bingbing in *Iron Man 3* (2013). Hollywood probably never saw more Chinese faces than in 2012! However, many Chinese audiences lament the insignificant parts and fleeting appearances of these female Chinese stars in Hollywood blockbusters, and call them Hollywood's 'soy sauce' – a way of mocking their trivial status in Hollywood. Chinese stars' journey to Hollywood has never been easy, and has mostly been accompanied by negative reviews and controversies most of the time. In this chapter, I hope to deviate from some conventional ways of evaluating transnational film stardom and suggest some new angles from which transnational Chinese stars can be discussed. In order to do so, it would be useful firstly to point out a few issues in the current discussion of transnational stardom.

The existing studies on transnational stars focus, with a few exceptions (e.g. Tim Bergfelder's examination of Anna May Wong's European stardom; Ora Gelley's discussion of Ingrid Bergman's work in Italy), on transnational stars' Hollywood careers, as indicated by the title of an edited collection, *Journeys of Desire: European Actors in Hollywood* (Phillips and Vincendeau 2006). Indeed, as I argue elsewhere (Yu 2012), transnational stardom indicates one-way traffic – that is, stars moving from other parts of the world to Hollywood. However, while today's Hollywood is still the destination of various journeys of desire for many non-Hollywood stars, Hollywood cannot claim full authorship of transnational stardoms. Unlike their predecessors, contemporary trans-border stars often choose to travel between their home countries and Hollywood to make films in both industries. Consequently, their star status is no longer solely determined by their Hollywood performance. In the following pages I argue that, in order to make sense of a star's transnational stardom, their star status in their home country should be considered, alongside the conventional investigation of their Hollywood career. This is not to suggest that we should make a simplistic distinction between the 'positive' or 'authentic' star image in one's home country and the 'negative' or 'inauthentic' star image constructed in Hollywood. Rather, I think more research should be undertaken to reveal how these two aspects of a transnational star's career interact with, influence and determine one another, thereby mutually shaping the star status and star image of a transnational star.

Another noticeable tendency in work on transnational stardom is the dominance of the discourse of representation. Take the study of transnational Chinese male stars as an example. Most discussions have focused on such questions as: In what ways have these male stars challenged or reinforced Chinese male stereotypes on the Western screen? In what ways have they functioned as a source of empowerment for disadvantaged social groups? This kind of interrogation has certainly contributed to our understanding of the cultural meanings of transnational stars. In Hollywood, it is not only Chinese stars who are viewed through the lens of stereotypes; stars of all other ethnicities are also closely associated with national stereotypes. The discussion of representation and misrepresentation is valuable, but the overemphasis on the politics of representation has not only created a series of critical clichés (e.g. transnational stars are selling out in Hollywood by compromising their acting skills and reasserting racial stereotypes), but also led to the neglect of other dimensions in the phenomenon of transnational stardom. One of the under-addressed areas is the economic aspect of transnational stardom. It is easy to forget the fact that Hollywood's predominant purpose in bringing in foreign talent is not to diversify its cultural representation, but to maximise its profits. In an industry that treats stars as 'symbolic commerce' (McDonald 2013), it is the belief that certain foreign stars can attract audiences into the cinema that paves the way for the crossover of these stars. In this chapter, I attempt to address this imbalance in current critical

discourse by highlighting the importance of exploring the economic dimension of transnational stardom.

Finally, the scholarship on transnational stardom is dominated by the discussion of European stars, while the unique features of transnational stars from other cultures, such as those from Asia, are less frequently explored. This is partly because there have been more trans-border European than Asian stars in film history. The only Asian stars who were able to establish a transnational career and who have attracted a broad and solid international fan-base are probably Chinese kung fu stars, in particular Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li, thanks to their martial arts skills – an irreplaceable global currency. A considerable amount of work has been devoted to the analysis of the star images of Lee, Chan and, to a lesser extent, Li. However, these stars have been mainly discussed either within the discourse of representation (e.g. the remasculinisation of previously emasculated Chinese men), or according to Hollywood-orientated critical models, such as the authenticity of their (physical) performance or the male body as spectacle. Their contribution to the transnationalisation of cinema has not received much scholarly attention. The newly emerged transnational Chinese stars mentioned above are different from their predecessors in that their star status in Hollywood has not yet been, and perhaps will never be, established in the same way. Can they be called transnational stars at all? This chapter seeks to interrogate the concept of transnational stardom through a close examination of transnational Chinese stars from the past to the present and, in particular, their star status as informed by the different types of capital they hold in their transnational careers.

In his discussion of the expanded notion of capital, Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 1998) identifies four forms of capital. Economic capital can be converted directly and immediately into money, while cultural capital refers to the skills, knowledge or educational qualifications a person obtains over a period of time. Social capital is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources' (1986: 51) accrued through belonging to a social group, network or class. Symbolic capital is any form of capital that is perceived as such by social agents who recognise and value it, and is embodied in prestige, honour, reputation and personal authority. All types of capital can be converted into economic capital, and symbolic capital plays an important role in facilitating the conversion of social and cultural capital into economic capital. Although a certain degree of overlap exists in Bourdieu's classifications, the theory of capital provides a useful theoretical tool for the discussion of star phenomena. Stars usually possess economic and symbolic capital. The latter can be equated with the fame and fantasy arising from their star status. Stars' symbolic capital can be easily transformed into economic capital when they are used to raise investment, ensure distribution and secure profits. Precisely in this sense, stars, as McDonald points out, are 'signs of economic value' (2013: 1). However, only some stars hold cultural capital, namely those whose acting skills are widely acknowledged or who build their star image around particular skills, such

as dancing. Even fewer stars can claim social capital, because stars characterised by individual charisma and success are not usually associated with a form of capital produced by social connections or networks, unless in cases where certain stars have become involved in politics (e.g. Clint Eastwood, Arnold Schwarzenegger) or philanthropy (e.g. George Clooney, Audrey Hepburn), using the resources they have accumulated over a usually very successful acting career.

After a brief introduction of Bourdieu's theory of capital in relation to the discussion of stardom, I would like to differentiate three stages in the history of transnational Chinese stars according to the presence or absence of different types of capital. As I have noted, film stars do not usually possess social capital. This is even more the case for transnational stars. Portes identifies four negative consequences of social capital, and one of them is the 'exclusion of outsiders' (1998). Despite being better paid than most, immigrant stars in Hollywood are a marginalised and isolated social group. Due to their identity as outsiders, they have very little access to social capital aggregated through social networks. I will therefore exclude social capital from my discussion of transnational stardom.

The first stage of transnational Chinese stars is marked by Bruce Lee. Lee is the first, and probably the most internationally well-known, Chinese star. With a total of merely four films, Lee stirred the kung fu craze in the US and indeed the entire world in the early 1970s, and became a cultural icon of the twentieth century. In many ways, Lee is an exemplary transnational star who perfectly combines cultural, economic and symbolic capital. Arguably the most influential martial artist of all time, Lee's martial arts skills are undoubtedly the most visible element of cultural capital contributing to his transnational stardom. Martial arts can be seen as a form of embodied cultural capital, in that they are physical skills acquired over time and have become an integral part of the person who practises them. As the founder of Jeet Kune Do, a hybrid and non-conventional martial arts system, Lee was the first martial arts star to make people believe that he was exhibiting *real* fighting skills on-screen. The cultural capital Lee embodies is unique, and has been accrued by only a small number of screen performers in the history of cinema. But the symbolic capital Lee possesses – revealed by such titles as best on-screen fighter, most famous martial arts philosopher, actor who rewrites the screen image of Asian people on the Western screen and the cultural ambassador who helped to inspire a great interest in Chinese martial arts and Chinese culture in general – will probably never be accrued by any other film star.

It is worth noting that neither the symbolic nor the economic capital of Lee's transnational film career were gained during his lifetime. As many critics point out, Lee's premature death before the release of *Enter the Dragon* (1973) contributed significantly to his unprecedented popularity and 'expedited his elevation to myth' (Hunt 2003: 76). In the Western popular imagination, Bruce Lee is at one and the same time a synonym for Chinese kung fu, a legend, and a myth. His posthumous stardom is built precisely upon this symbolic capital, which was heavily capitalised

on by both Hong Kong and Hollywood film industry. Numerous hastily made Hong Kong kung fu films were imported immediately following Lee's death, to fill what Kwai Cheung Lo calls the hole 'punched out by [his] body' (1996: 110), including 'Bruceploitation films' starring various Bruce Lee clones. Even many years after his death, Lee still enjoys the symbolic and economic capital in Hollywood that many living stars cannot attain, as demonstrated by two well-received Bruce Lee biopics produced in 1993 – *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* and *The Curse of the Dragon*.

The second stage of transnational Chinese stardom is exemplified by Jackie Chan and Jet Li, the two most famous kung fu/action superstars after Bruce Lee. Jackie Chan was first introduced to the West as another 'Bruce Lee' in the early 1980s. The failure of his initial attempt to break into Hollywood was to a large extent predictable, because as well as lacking symbolic capital he had no pre-existing cultural capital there. Although he had emerged as a new kung fu star in Hong Kong thanks to *Drunken Master*, made in 1978, his unique fighting style – comedic kung fu – had not been fully established. And, more importantly, the Jackie Chan 'brand', characterised by Chan's execution of all his own stunts, was yet to be invented. Ironically, the outtakes of stunts gone wrong, shown at the closing credits, were to endow Chan with cultural capital – that is, martial skills obtained through many years of harsh training. Chan's own words most precisely describe this cultural capital: 'You can make anyone fly like Superman or Batman, but only we special people can do my style of fighting' (quoted in Reid 1994: 2). Similarly, Jet Li claims this cultural capital via his title as a five-time national martial arts champion who started martial arts training at the age of seven, and made his name from martial arts virtuosity in his film debut, *Shaolin Temple* (1982). During the time when Hollywood action filmmaking faced a growing staleness and an absence of new action stars, the cultural capital Chan and Li carried – the capacity to display martial arts skills on-screen 'authentically' – brought freshness and excitement into the genre, and made the two stars bankable in the eyes of American producers.

However, although Chan and Li starred in more American films and attracted more revenue than Bruce Lee, neither of them ever reached the same level of stardom Lee had achieved a few decades before. Among these three transnational Chinese kung fu stars, only Lee was able to build an off-screen persona in the West that undoubtedly surpassed his on-screen persona. As Leon Hunt observes, 'the Bruce Lee publishing industries extend well beyond his comparatively modest cinematic output – biographies and, more frequently, hagiographies, collections of his essays, interviews and letters, and discussions of his "scientific streetfighting"' (2003: 77). By comparison, although Chan and Li do sometimes appear in newspapers or talk shows in the West, they do not really have an off-screen persona. Western audiences are interested mainly in their films – in particular, in their ability to display genuine martial arts on-screen, while little media attention has been paid

to their personal lives. In this sense, we might even claim that Chan and Li are not Hollywood stars in the conventional sense. The main reason for this, in my view, is that they lack the symbolic capital that Lee holds. It is their cultural and economic capital that have been exploited in their Hollywood careers.

There were also other Hong Kong stars, such as Michelle Yeoh and Chow Yun-fat, who crossed over to Hollywood around the same period; and later Mainland Chinese stars Gong Li and Zhang Ziyi were cast in American productions. All of these stars are top stars in Chinese-language cinema, and enjoy a certain level of international fame. But none of them has been able to succeed in breaking into Hollywood in the way that their kung fu contemporaries have. I would argue that this is largely because they do not have the transnational cultural capital possessed by Li, Chan and Lee, although Yeoh, Chow and Zhang, with complete disregard to their diverse acting backgrounds, have been predominantly cast in action roles in their Hollywood work. Stars like Chow Yun-fat do hold considerable cultural capital in Chinese cinema that derives from their excellent acting skills (demonstrated, for example, by the numerous acting awards won by Chow). But in their transnational careers, they are almost never awarded a role that can exhibit their acting skills. Consequently, the cultural capital they once held is sadly lost in transition.

Although the majority of transnational Chinese stars from stage two are still making films in Hollywood (e.g. Michelle Yeoh in *The Lady* [2011], Jet Li in *The Expendables* series [2010–14]), I would like to suggest that transnational Chinese stardom has entered a new era in the past few years, with more and more Chinese stars having been given the chance to appear in Hollywood blockbusters. This new stage is marked by Hollywood's changed strategy of employing Chinese film talent. While the second-stage Chinese stars usually play the leading role in medium-budget star vehicles, the current crossover Chinese stars are without exception cast in minor, supporting roles in big-budget films that target the global market. Their roles are in no way compatible with their star status in Chinese cinema, providing little space for any serious acting and hence little chance to grow their reputation on the world stage. Today's Hollywood relies more on its overseas markets than its domestic market, among which the Chinese market is the fastest-growing. It is therefore unsurprising to see these transnational Chinese stars' domestic stardom being exploited, and their being used as a way to capture revenue in the Chinese market. To some extent, Hollywood's Chinese faces could be anyone who has a visible star status in China. They do not carry much cultural capital, not to mention symbolic capital. And their economic capital is limited in that it only takes effect in the Chinese market. Compared with their predecessors, the new generation of crossover Chinese stars has the least capital to play with in their Hollywood adventures.

Even Chan and Li seem to have exhausted their leading-man status in Hollywood. After *War* in 2007, Li has not played any leading roles in Hollywood

films. His role in the two *Expendables* films is indeed expendable. Similarly, since 2007 Chan has starred in only two Hollywood films. The decline in their careers in Hollywood results on the one hand from the fact that both have shifted their focus back to the Chinese film industry in recent years, which I will discuss further below, and, on the other, is due to their reduced cultural capital. As analysed above, their physical ability has been highlighted as their main selling point in Hollywood. However, with the increasingly heavy use of digital technology in martial arts/action films that can make a non-martial artist look like a superior fighter on-screen, the position of kung fu stars in the genre has been somewhat weakened. Furthermore, both stars' sustainability has been put into doubt due to their ageing (at the time of writing, Chan is turning 60 and Li just turned 50). Their long-lasting careers as kung fu/action stars has left them with numerous physical injuries. Both Chan and Li have intimated in different ways and on different occasions that they would gradually stop making action films. This has inevitably damaged the cultural capital they have claimed throughout their transnational careers.

From the perspective of the history of transnational Chinese stardom, the capital transnational Chinese stars possess in their journey to the West has gradually reduced from symbolic/cultural/economic (stage one) to cultural/economic (stage two) to economic (stage three). This trajectory results from the changing industrial context of Hollywood, but also reveals some inherent features of transnational stardom. Theoretically speaking, all transnational stars, including transnational Chinese stars, should share at least one type of cultural capital – that is, their 'foreignness', which is gained by living in their own culture for many years and which their American counterparts are unable to obtain. Ideally, transnational stars can use this cultural capital to function as 'cultural broker' in their border-crossing performances. According to Jezewski and Sotnik, cultural brokering is 'the act of bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change' (2001). Transnational stars can be seen as cultural brokers if they reveal their own culture to people in another culture through their films, and facilitate cross-cultural understanding and exchange.

However, it is probably never the Hollywood industry's intention to use foreign stars to represent their own culture, let alone via an accurate representation. Apart from the fact that imported stars can play national stereotypes more convincingly and make the Hollywood construction of 'Otherness' more covert, it is the exoticism brought by foreign stars that is exploited by Hollywood studios. In a way, exoticism can be seen as a kind of cultural capital transnational stars hold in Hollywood – but often at the expense of the cultural capital they obtained in their own country, and in the form of simplifying, stereotyping and 'othering' these stars. Hence it represents a negative and reductive form of cultural capital and a quick way to make profit. Furthermore, assimilation is always the most important mechanism

in Hollywood's intake of foreign talent. In order to survive in Hollywood, a foreign star has more or less to compromise his or her own cultural identity and prepare to be Americanised. Because, as Phillips and Vincendeau point out in their discussion of transnational European stars, while these actors 'could certainly use their European-ness as a selling point, they understandably did not want to be subordinated into "otherness"' (2006: 16). Since Hollywood's crossover politics render transnational stars' most natural cultural capital ineffective, their function as cultural brokers is largely constrained, and often depends on the combination of their personal agenda and the extent of their success in Hollywood.

Bruce Lee, the first transnational Chinese star, was very conscious of his role as cultural broker. According to Donovan, 'Lee had always looked to kung fu films as a way of introducing the world to the Far East, as a first step in whetting the appetites of film audiences for a much larger dose of Asian culture and all it had to offer' (2008: 96). Lee obviously succeeded in achieving this goal. With only one transnational production, Lee stirred up unprecedented interest in Chinese martial arts across the world and opened the West's door to Chinese-language films. In this sense, Lee can be considered a cultural broker. Lee's cultural agenda was shared by Jet Li. As early as 1991, Li articulated his enthusiasm for spreading Chinese martial arts through film in an interview (quoted in Yang, 1991: 24). Since the transnational success of *Hero* in 2004, Li has been trying to foreground the cultural rather than physical side of Chinese martial arts by declaring on various occasions that the deeper meaning of martial arts in Chinese culture is actually to stop fighting. However, none of Li's Western roles seems to have helped him to convey this message. Li, as well as Chan, has to a large extent been reduced to a fighting machine on the Western screen. As Pham rightly notes, the so-called Asian invasion facilitated by Hong Kong action stars' crossover to Hollywood just 'enhances Hollywood's image as a racially inclusive, equal opportunity, global industry', and 'Asian actors and filmmakers are not invading Hollywood as much as they are finally being admitted into Hollywood – under very specific conditions and for very specific roles' (2004: 122). Rather than disseminating the cultural meanings of Chinese martial arts to the West, the significance of transnational Chinese stars from stage two, Jet Li and Jackie Chan in particular, probably lies more in their contribution to film performance – namely, in introducing martial arts as a form of film acting.

For transnational Chinese stars from stage three, the title of cultural broker seems even more unreachable, given that they have been mainly cast in minor, dispensable roles by Hollywood studios out of commercial considerations. Their previous star image and film background are completely neglected in their transnational career. Instead of being used as human agents who might facilitate cross-cultural understanding, these new crossover Chinese stars function in Hollywood purely as, borrowing Barry King's (2010) term, a money form. My argument is supported by Hollywood's latest strategy to strive for the Chinese market: to

produce an alternative version of their big movies specifically tailored for Chinese audiences. The major difference revolves around the star appearance. For instance, Xu Qing gets a bit more screen time in the Chinese version of *Looper*, while in its international version she does not even get a chance to speak. The Chinese version of *Iron Man 3* features Fan Bingbing, one of the hottest Chinese actresses, but she is absent from the version shown elsewhere. Hollywood's use of Chinese stars is definitely creative, but ultimately money-driven.

This observation of current transnational Chinese stars functioning as a pure money form can be more or less applied to transnational Asian stars in general. If, in the twentieth century, Chinese and Hong Kong stars were shaping Western audiences' perception of Asian stars, in the new century stars from Japan and South Korea have joined the category of transnational Asian stars, including Lee Byung-hun in the *G.I. Joe* sequel, Jeon Ji-hyun in *Blood: The Last Vampire* (2009), Doona Bae in *Cloud Atlas* (2012), Rinko Kiduchi in *Babel* (2006) and *The Brothers Bloom* (2008), and Ken Watanabe in *The Last Samurai* (2003), *Batman Begins* (2005) and *Inception* (2010). Compared to the Chinese stars from stage three, these Korean and Japanese stars probably have a little more presence in these Hollywood hits, but the way they are exploited by Hollywood is hardly different. For example, Hollywood's importation of Korean stars is clearly associated with the dazzling success of South Korean cinema since 2000, both domestically and internationally. The bankability of South Korean film stars has significantly increased in Hollywood partly because they have developed a large fan base in the East Asian region, as Hong Kong stars did two decades ago. The box office success of *G.I. Joe* (2013), involving South Korean star Lee Byung-hun, provides a telling example. This film came out top not only for South Korea's first-weekend box office, but also for first-week box office in Mainland China, Taipei and Hong Kong. Apart from Bruce Willis's star appeal to Asian audiences, Hollywood's strategy of incorporating a top Asian star also presumably contributed to its box office triumph.

[From cultural broker to money form,] I have depicted a dystopian picture of Chinese stars' transnational journey. However, as I argued earlier, their American performance is only part of their transnational career. The discussion of transnational stardom should abandon a Hollywood-centred approach and consider their transnational career in different film industries and cultural contexts. Here, I am going to exclude Bruce Lee from my discussion as he did not get a chance to go back to the Chinese film industry after his Hollywood debut. I will still use Jackie Chan and Jet Li as examples, since they are the two most successful transnational Chinese stars after Lee. Between 1998 and 2004, Chan made six American films altogether, and some of them (e.g. the *Rush Hour* series) were box office hits. However, after three box office disappointments in a row (*The Tuxedo* [2002], *Shanghai Knights* [2003], *Around the World in 80 Days* [2004]) and Chan's alleged dissatisfaction with being pigeonholed in Hollywood as 'only' an action star, he gradually moved back to the Hong Kong film industry, while continuing to make

Hollywood films. In his Hollywood adventure, Chan turned his comedic action style into an international brand, but the lament over the apparent demise of his Hong Kong persona had never ceased. His returning film, *New Police Story* (2004), which tried to reclaim the glory of his trademark *Police Story* films, did a decent job both at the box office and at film festivals. More importantly, in this film Chan started the transformation, in his own words, from an action actor to an actor with action skills, by playing a less heroic role in which he shows many emotions and even cries a few times – a role quite different from his usual comedic screen personality. In his subsequent Hong Kong films, Chan has continued to diversify his screen image by taking up a series of non-action roles, such as an archaeologist in *Myth* (2005), a thief in *Robin-B-Hood* (2006), an illegal immigrant in *Shinjuku Incident* (2009) and a revolutionary in *1911* (2011). Although the films Chan has made in the past decade have not achieved the same phenomenal success as his Hong Kong films from the 1980s and 1990s, most of them did well financially, and Jackie Chan films are still a guarantee of box office success. Chan's latest film, *Chinese Zodiac* (2012), which he starred in and directed, was the second-highest-grossing film in the history of Chinese cinema. Despite his age, Chan has proved himself still to be a top star in China, and also has the potential to become a versatile actor. In this sense, although his Hollywood performance seems less impressive, Chan can be considered as having succeeded in his transnational film career.

This is even more true of Jet Li. After four Hollywood appearances with a lukewarm reception, Li made his triumphant return to the Chinese film industry in *Hero* (2002), a sensational hit both in China and overseas. Despite its controversial political message, this film, described as the first Chinese blockbuster, not only opened a new golden era for Chinese filmmaking, but also became the most successful Jet Li film to date in the US. Following the success of *Hero*, Li started to travel between different film industries (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Hollywood and France) to make films in both Chinese and English, including *Danny the Dog* (2005) which teams up Li and French producer Luc Besson for the second time, and was widely viewed as Li's best Western role; and *Fearless* (2006) and *The Warlords* (2007), two Hong Kong productions, both critically acclaimed and commercially profitable. The former brought Li the first acting award of his career – Best Actor at the 2007 Hong Kong Film Critics Awards – as well as nominations for Best Actor at the Hong Kong Film Awards and China's Hundred Flowers Awards, while the latter won him Best Actor at the prestigious Hong Kong Film Awards in 2008. As I argue elsewhere, 'these nominations and awards are significant given that Li has long been criticised for his "lack of acting skills" and that kung fu stars in general are hardly ever given credit for their acting ability' (Yu 2012: 187). *The Warlords* also made Li the highest-paid star in Asia at the time. It is worth mentioning that both *Fearless* and *The Warlords* received mainstream releases in the West. Notably, like Chan, Li also showed an intention to break with his image as a kung fu/action star by playing a non-action role – in his case in *Ocean Heaven*



(2010), which received positive reviews. Considering these facts, Li's transnational career appears much more prosperous and promising than if we look only at his Hollywood films.

The examples of Li and Chan demonstrate that, for today's transnational Chinese stars, Hollywood is no longer the ultimate destination. In their cases, it is actually their home market that consolidated their status as transnational stars. This is not to underestimate the role Hollywood has played in their transnational career. Their Hollywood presence, however moderate, endows them with the title of 'Hollywood star' or 'transnational star'. These titles have functioned as symbolic capital in their home country, and provided them with prestige and authority, besides significantly increasing their bankability at home. Had Jet Li not been to Hollywood as an action star, he might not have got the opportunities to collaborate with renowned art cinema directors like Zhang Yimou and Peter Chan; had Li and Chan not been to Hollywood, they might not have become the top-earning stars in Chinese cinema. After returning from Hollywood, Li established the 'One Foundation', which is the first as well as the most successful private charitable fundraising organisation in China, while Chan was recently appointed to the top political advisory body (National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) by the Chinese government. The Chinese career of two transnational kung fu stars shows clearly how symbolic capital can be converted in to other forms of capital, such as economic and social capital. Presumably because of the symbolic capital associated with the titles of 'Hollywood star' and 'transnational star', Li and Chan are willing to maintain their Hollywood presence, even by playing supporting and formulaic roles.

This can also explain why so many A-list Chinese stars are keen to play minor parts in Hollywood blockbusters. A disposable role might not help them to develop an international career in any significant way, but the fact that they are invited to play in a Hollywood blockbuster alongside big Hollywood stars alone can bring them more publicity at home, and subsequently more parts and higher income. Phillips and Vincendeau argue that, for European actors in Hollywood, the "journey of desire" was always bound up with the myth of reinventing oneself and the desire for global exposure' (2006: 17). I would contend that, for recent Chinese actors making an appearance in Hollywood films, the desire for global exposure is probably the same, but instead of trying to reinvent themselves on the global stage, they tend to use the opportunity of working in Hollywood as a pathway to greater stardom in China. Nowadays, Hollywood appeals to Chinese stars more as a place where they can gain some symbolic capital that will be beneficial to their career in their own country than as a place where they might make more money or establish an international career. Although they can hardly be seen as Hollywood stars, their star status in China, and the fact they make films in both countries, makes them transnational stars.

In summary, I argue, firstly, that the Hollywood-centred approach to transnational stardom needs to be amended. A transnational star's career in his or her home country is just as important as its counterpart in Hollywood. Without scrutinising both aspects, it would be difficult to make a balanced evaluation of a star's transnational career. As demonstrated by the case study of transnational Chinese stars, a moderate presence in Hollywood can sometimes lead to a successful transnational career. In other words, one does not have to become a Hollywood star first in order to become a transnational star. Furthermore, the study of transnational stardom challenges some fundamental assumptions in star studies, such as the duality of star image as constructed on- and off-screen and star power. If Jackie Chan and Jet Li can be seen as Hollywood stars, neither of them has much off-screen presence in the West; nor do they hold much star power due to their identity as imported Chinese stars.

Secondly, I have tried to point out the insufficiency of the discourse of representation in the discussion of transnational stars, given that they are mainly used as a money form rather than as human agents. Through an application of Bourdieu's theory of capital to the discussion of transnational Chinese stars, I have suggested that the success of a transnational star depends on whether or not all other capitals they might possess can be converted into economic capital. While today's Hollywood tends to exploit an imported star's economic capital in order to secure its overseas profit, the 'symbolic capital' associated with Hollywood in turn increases the bankability of a transnational star in his or her home market.

Thirdly, confronting the popular and somewhat clichéd perception that the significance of transnational Chinese stars lies in their challenging a previously negative Chinese screen image in the West, I have argued that the contribution of transnational Chinese stars needs to be understood more in relation to their irreplaceable role in the process of film transnationalisation. While imported films from prestigious non-Western directors used to be confined to art cinema releases in the West, it is transnational kung fu stars who have helped to bring Chinese-language films into mainstream cinema. Meanwhile, they have also helped to reinvigorate the American action genre with their unique martial arts performances. As Donovan neatly observes, transnational Chinese kung fu stars 'made their films for the mainstream, middle-American strip mall audiences and they changed the look and feel and tempo of one of Hollywood's biggest genres at the same time' (2008: 221). In an opposite direction but with a similar effect, Chinese stars involved in recent Hollywood blockbusters have helped American films to bypass China's strict quota on foreign films, and to reach a wider range of Chinese audiences.<sup>2</sup> There are reasons to predict a more dynamic star traffic between China and Hollywood in the years to come. More Chinese stars might be invited to make Hollywood films, and hopefully will play more important roles in them. Meanwhile, more Hollywood stars might join Chinese productions, after

Christian Bale's starring performance in Zhang Yimou's *The Flowers of War* (2011), and Tim Robbins and Adrien Brody's involvement in Feng Xiaogang's *Back to 1942* (2012). Dancing with Hollywood inevitably results in the co-existence of challenges and opportunities. However, with an increasingly prosperous domestic film market, Chinese stars might continue to redefine transnational film stardom.

#### Notes

1. The data were obtained from 'Theatrical Market Statistics 2012', published by the Motion Picture Association of America, available at [www.mpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2012-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-Report.pdf](http://www.mpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2012-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-Report.pdf) (last accessed 1 July 2013.)
2. If a film is deemed to be a Chinese-American co-production, it is not subject to the foreign film quota. However, in order to gain the status of co-production, among other requirements, the involvement of Chinese actors is mandatory.

## Section 3

### The Politics of Stardom