Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr.

The Tao of *Star Wars*,Or, Cultural Appropriation in a Galaxy Far, Far Away[1]

The four films that make up the *Star Wars* series are among the most popular motion pictures in the world. George Lucas, the auteur behind them, has claimed "universality" for these films. Furthermore, many of those involved in the films, as demonstrated below, cite non-Western, specifically Asian, influence in both the films' visual "looks" and in intellectual content. Lucas establishes a model of the universe in which the (evil) Empire must be assaulted and defeated by the (good) Rebellion. In short, Lucas develops a colonial discourse that posits the Empire as a Western force of economic and political hegemony against which a rebellion by the East is both justifiable and laudable. Reading below this immediate surface, however, one realizes that Lucas has appropriated Asian culture and inverted the discourse. The "good" Rebellion is, in fact, not really emblematic of Eastern cultures at all, but a Western Self. The "evil" Empire and its alien overlords are Western (literally) in name only and instead actually represent the Asian Other. While a balance is maintained in the original trilogy, in *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* Lucas presents non-Western villains: alien others that represent ethnic Asians. The result of this shift in representation is a cinematic discourse which ultimately inverts

the colonial narrative and allows Westerners to remain the heroes in an Empire which is less Western at heart than Asian.

George Lucas has acknowledged the myriad of debts which the original *Star Wars* trilogy and *The Phantom Menace* owe to Asian cultures, especially Chinese and Japanese cultures. Cinematically, the films have been impacted by the film work of world renowned auteur Akira Kurosawa. James Goodwin observes that "Lucas has acknowledged the debt *Star Wars* owes in story and style to Kurosawa's comic adventure epic *The Hidden Fortress* (*Kukaushi Toride no San-Akunin*, 1958)," whose Japanese title is better translated as "Three Bad Men in a Hidden Fortress" (8). Kurosawa's film is set during Japan's civil war era and relates the story of a bold princess, rescued by an old general, who must travel through enemy territory to reach the hidden fortress. The film begins with a pair of bickering farmers who are inadvertently drawn into the conflict, much as *Star Wars* begins with a pair of bickering droids around whom the story also develops. Similar to the plans stored in R2D2 which must be brought to the hidden rebel base at Yavin, Kurosawa's characters secretly transport gold which will allow them to turn the tide of war when they reach their home territory.

The visual influence of Japanese film and culture is also evident in *Star Wars*. Obi-Wan Kenobi (whose name even sounds Japanese, as further discussed below) wears a costume that, with its long brown robe and white underrobes, suggests the kimono of a samurai. Joseph Campbell, writing of *Star Wars* in *The Power of Myth* observes that Ben Kenobi is "a Japanese sword master," seemingly implying that the character is more similar in philosophy and action to a samurai than a Western knight (145). Likewise, the two-handed lightsabre suggests the Japanese *katana* of a samurai more than Western swords. The shape and sweep of Darth Vader's mask, his breastplate, and cloak suggest the formal armor of a *samurai* or *daimyo*. Visually, the followers of the light and dark sides of the force are much more Asian in appearance than the more Western-clothed Han Solo or Grand Moff Tarkin, both of whom disbelieve in the Force, although both have seen evidence of its power.

The Asian influence on the visual look of the original trilogy becomes even more apparent in the latest episode. The costumes for *The Phantom Menace* were designed to reflect a "cultural/historical basis," claims *The Official Souvenir Magazine* (43): "Many of Lucas' costume ideas were based on fashions, styles, history and color schemes of various countries in which he is interested including Japan, Mongolia, China, North Africa and Europe" (Woods 42). One should note, however, that only the first three terms refer to countries, while the other two are geographical locations containing over a dozen countries (and many more cultures and ethnic groups) each. The dresses of Queen Amidala's handmaidens are based on the kimono (44), and, in fact, according to Trisha Biggar, the Costume Designer, the entire throne room of Naboo and the costumes and furnishings are meant to suggest "a sort of Chinese Imperial feel" (qtd. in Woods 43). In short, much of *The Phantom Menace*'s costume (and *mise-en-scene*) is inspired by non-Western and particularly Asian culture.

One can also detect the influence of Asian thought in the philosophy of the Jedi and the construction of religion in the *Star Wars* universe. While Lucas does not see *Star Wars* as "profoundly religious," he does tell Bill Moyers in an interiew that "almost every single religion" found the film contains elements suggestive of faith: "They were able to relate it to stories in the Bible, in the Koran, and in the Torah" (92-93). Indeed, within a few months of the release of the original film in 1977, Frank Allnutt wrote *The Force of Star Wars* which viewed Lucas's film as a "prophetic parable" about the coming of the Antichrist in which the Force is God, the Emperor is Satan, and the Rebellion represents the Church (26, 201). Allnutt offers a fundamentalist Christian analysis on the film which, for reasons too lengthy to debate here, attempts to make the *Star Wars* narrative fit the Book of Revelation, but fails. In the absence of a true Christ figure (Allnutt suggests Obi-Wan), the theory does not work.

Bill Moyers, in his interview with Lucas, suggests that the Force is an "Eastern view of God—particularly Buddhist—as a vast reservoir of energy that is the ground of all our being" (92). Lucas agrees that "it's more

specific in Buddhism," but he also argues that "it is a notion that's been around before that," without specifying what he means exactly or to which religious philosophies he refers. Lucas's own view notwithstanding, the language the various characters use to describe the Force suggests Taoism. Moyers' "reservoir of energy" implies the Tao. Obi-Wan tells Luke, "The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us and binds the galaxy together." The theology of Buddhism maintains that this world is an illusion that generates misery and so must be transcended. It is in Taoism that the idea of energy is a principle tenet. Lao Tzu writes in the *Tao Te Ching* that the Tao (the way) "gives them [people] life and rears them. It gives them life yet claims no possession. . . . It is the steward, yet exercises no authority" (I: x). Unlike the Western notion of God, an authoritative, anthropomorphic patriarch, the Tao is both life giving and binding, yet does not actively control human beings or demand worship or authority. The Tao is a non-present presence: "The way is empty, yet use will not drain it" (I: iv), which further suggests Moyers' "reservoir of energy," albeit one which will never be emptied. The theology and cosmology of *Star Wars* constructs an ultimate reality much closer to Taoism than to any Western religious philosophy.

Western religious philosophy does not have the idea of "flow" on which both Taoism and the Force are centered. The famous metaphor in the *Tao Te Ching* compares the Tao to water: "In the world there is nothing more submissive and weak than water. Yet for attacking that which is hard and strong nothing can surpass it. This is because there is nothing that can take its place" (II: lxxviii). The ideal follower of the Tao flows with the Tao as water flows. While seemingly weak and submissive one will overcome any difficulty by flowing. Likewise, both the original *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back* contain repeated lessons for Luke given by Obi-Wan and Yoda about how to learn to flow. The following passage from *Star Wars* is typical:

> OBI-WAN: Remember, a Jedi can feel the Force flowing through him.
> LUKE: You mean it controls your actions?
> OBI-WAN: Partially, but it also obeys your commands.

Yoda repeatedly tells Luke, "Feel the Force flow." This idea of the divine being a flowing energy which both controls and can be controlled is Taoist, not Western.

A further example of the Taoist nature of the Force is its resistance to intellectual understanding. Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber, writing in *The Shambala Dictionary of Taoism*, observes: "All Taoists strive to become one with the Tao. This cannot be achieved by trying to understand the Tao intellectually; the adept becomes one with the Tao by realizing within himself its unity, simplicity, and emptiness" (165). During the training session on the Millennium Falcon, Obi-Wan tells Luke he is thinking too much: "This time let go your conscious self and act on instinct. . . . Stretch out with your feelings." The Force cannot be understood or used intellectually; only by experiencing within one's self, by *feeling* can one become one with the Force and use it. At the climactic battle of the Death Star, Luke turns off his tactical computer and "uses the Force" to hit the Death Star with his torpedo. It is only by "trusting his feelings," "letting go," and "letting the Force flow" that the huge, mechanical Death Star can be beaten and destroyed. Like water, a single man in a small ship seems weak and defenseless against the huge mechanical (read: Western) terror of the Death Star, and yet, through the use of the Force, the living being overcomes the mechanical monster. By learning the Taoist-like teachings of the Jedi, Luke is able to defeat the Dark Side and save the Rebellion repeatedly.

Yoda is the Taoist master of the *Star Wars* universe. Once Vader and Palpatine have destroyed the Jedi, Yoda, like Lao Tzu, turns his back on civilization and goes off to the wilderness—in Yoda's case, to the planet Dagobah. In *Empire*, like Zen masters and Taoist teachers who initially play the fool to test potential students, Yoda pretends to be an insignificant native in order to evaluate Luke while teaching him valuable lesson in Taoist thought. When Luke claims that Yoda is a great warrior, Yoda responds, "Wars do not make one great," and Luke then learns that this small creature is powerful in the Force but does not resemble what Luke believes a warrior to be. This sentiment echoes the *Tao Te Ching*: "One

who excels as a warrior does not appear formidable; One who excels in fighting is never roused in anger . . ." (II: lxviii). The Jedi, likewise, is not roused in anger when he fights, for anger leads to the Dark Side.

It is in the dualistic nature of the Force that Lucas comes closest to Western religious philosophy. While Taoism recognizes that good and evil, light and dark, are merely opposites in which balance must be sought, Western philosophy judges light to be good and dark to be bad. The yin-yang symbol is the embodiment of Taoism—both light and dark aspects are present and balanced. Western religious philosophy acknowledges a dualistic nature from which the darkness must be purged. Evil is seen as separate from good and must be not only resisted and rejected but overcome. The Dark Side is the result of Taoism's being subjected to the Western concept of evil.

The non-Western influences on *Star Wars* are not limited to Asian religious philosophy and costume design, however. The film also, on the surface at least, demonstrates a post-colonial struggle against imperialism. The language of the *Star Wars* saga is that of the colonialist enterprise. In *The Phantom Menace*, the "Trade Federation" is blockading Naboo in order to force upon Queen Amidala a trade treaty with terms favorable to the Federation. Eventually, as talks break down, the Federation carries out a full-scale invasion of Naboo, in effect colonizing the planet. While the Federation is defeated at the end of the film, Lucas has made it clear that the Empire of the original trilogy has its roots in the conflict. In the next two installments of this prequel trilogy, the story of the creation of the Empire and of Darth Vader will be laid bare.

Yet, from the four current films, the construction of a colonial discourse is apparent. Senator Palpatine has dissolved the Senate at the beginning of *Star Wars*. Grand Moff Tarkin informs the men in the Death Star briefing room of this, and explains that "The regional governors now have direct control over their territories. Fear will keep the local systems in line." Governor Tarkin uses the Death Star as the colonial powers in Africa and Asia used their military might to keep the locals "in line." *Star Wars* places the theories of post-colonial political analyst Franz Fanon in

outer space: colonialism is "violence in its natural state," and "it will only yield when confronted with greater violence," that is, armed rebellion (61)—in the case of *Star Wars*, "The" Rebellion against "The" Empire. Fanon claims that liberation from imperial oppression can only "be achieved through force" (73). This claim holds true in the *Star Wars* universe as well. We may add the Jedi struggle against the Empire to Fanon's Algerian insurrection, to the Mau Mau war of Kenya, to the Boxer Rebellion of China, and to dozens of other armed uprisings against politically, militarily, and economically dominant empires. In fact, Lucas's use of direct articles and capital letters (The Rebellion, The Empire) in the *Star Wars* trilogy seemingly suggests an archetypal colonial structure and struggle. *The Wretched of the Earth* becomes "The Wretched of the Galaxy."

Lucas's films thus bifurcate the universe into two camps: rebels and supporters of the Empire. The films furthermore make moral judgements on these camps: rebels are good, they are freedom-fighters, they use the Force; the Empire and its supporters are the bad guys, they are evil, they have power and abuse it and therefore must be resisted. While the films avoid directly ascribing a parallel to real world politics, the message remains that rebellion against an evil, economically oppressive Empire is "good."

Interestingly, however, the construction of the films does suggest a real world parallel. Lucas's Asian appropriations suggest an East/West binary in which the Empire is Western and the rebellion is Eastern. The film posits a universe in which Asian-derived characters rebel against an Empire which is European in nature and name. All of the "good guys" have names derived from Asian or Asian-sounding languages. Obi-Wan Kenobi suggests Japanese. Qui-Gon Jinn suggests Chinese. Yoda also suggests a simple Japanese Zen master. Han Solo's name suggests a mix of characteristics: Han is Chinese, suggesting his possible allegiance to the Force, whereas Solo is Western, suggesting his "rugged individualism" and selfish desire to "look out for number one," the part of the character that is ambivalent and ignorant of the force. Over the course of the first trilogy Han moves from the latter aspect of his character to the former,

punctuated by the increased use of the name "Han" instead of "Solo" by the other characters in the later films.

All of the "bad guys" have names of European origin. Darth Vader resembles the Dutch words for "Dark Father," hinting at his role in Luke's life, as well as his place as the evil, paternalistic, imperialistic Lord of the Empire. Darth Maul suggests both "maul," to beat violently, and a pun on "mall," as in shopping center. It is, after all, the attempt of the Trade Federation to maintain a capitalistic monopoly on Naboo which causes Darth Maul to become involved in the first place. Darth Sidious, whose very name is a shortened form of "insidious," uses others to achieve his ends, sacrificing even his apprentice to become Emperor. The representatives of the Trade Federation are Neimodians named "Nute Gunray" and "Rune Haako"—Western (specifically employing elements of English and Dutch), rather than Asian, name formations. Gunray's title is "Viceroy," itself a colonialist title used extensively in colonies of Spain to refer to the supreme authority and agent of the king within the colony.

In the original trilogy, the characters of Empire were also visually represented as Western. The functionaries within the Empire wear Western-style military uniforms and use European-based naval ranks ("Captain Piet," "Admiral Ozzel," and so forth in *Empire*)[2]. In the original *Star Wars*, all but one officer in the aforementioned briefing-room scene in the Death Star have British accents. Lord Vader, whose costume suggests Samurai armor (perhaps indicating former Jedi status), and whose title is also suggestive of a Western colonial ruler, disregards the power of the Death Star. Speaking to an officer particularly proud of the station, Vader tells him, "Don't be too proud of this technological terror you've created, Admiral. The ability to destroy a planet is insignificant when compared to the power of the Force." Yet, ironically, the Force is not what keeps Vader alive; a mechanical body does. Vader is himself a "technological terror," a human reduced to living in a mechanical body. According to Taoism, the breath is the most important thing—one must not only breathe to live, one must breathe "correctly" in order to be one with the Tao. A machine breathes for Vader; indeed, the sound of his respirator has be-

come a hallmark of the character. Vader is the philosophy of the East perverted, mechanized, and imprisoned by the West. He becomes, as Joseph Campbell claims, a machine, a uniform which represents the dehumanized power of the state (18).

Thus, in *The Phantom Menace*, Lucas seems to be developing a narrative in which the Westerners are attempting a hostile capitalistic takeover, a colonization, as it were, of the peaceful Naboo: the economic domination of the East by the West. Resisting this takeover are the Jedi, the cultured warriors who use the Force (read: the Tao) to protect the balance of the universe. In later episodes we shall learn how the capitalistic, imperialistic Empire becomes the dominant force in the galaxy before returning the narrative to the original trilogy, in which a rebellion breaks out against the powers of Empire. In the original trilogy, Luke Skywalker is the prophesied one who brings balance to the Force by being a combination of West (son of Darth Vader/Anakin Skywalker) and East (Amidala of Naboo and the spiritual son of Obi-Wan Kenobi). The narrative of the original trilogy seems to privilege Eastern culture over Western as it decries colonialist and imperialist thought by depicting an ultimately successful armed rebellion against a political and economic empire.

The dark side, however, is seductive and deceptive, and so is Lucas's construction. He has, like so many before him, appropriated Asian culture with nary an actual Asian in sight. Obi Wan Kenobi is played by Sir Alec Guinness in the original trilogy (whose very title "Sir" ironically suggests Empire) and by Ewan McGregor in *The Phantom Menace*. Qui-Gon Jinn is played by Liam Neeson, also a British actor. Yoda is a puppet, given life by American Frank Oz. Despite Asian names and Asian culture, European, (specifically, British) actors play the Jedi. Luke Skywalker, who brings balance to the Force, is played by All-American Boy Mark Hamill. European and European-American actors ultimately represent the Asian culture that is privileged visually and philosophically.

That Lucas is subverting the anti-colonial narrative in the films manifests itself in ways other than by simply casting European and American actors as the Asian characters in both the original trilogy and *The Phan-*

tom Menace. The forces that act to protect the interests of the Empire are demonstrated to be Western in the original trilogy, in which Lord Vader and Grand Moff Tarken (played by British actor Peter Cushing), and the Emperor are clearly Western in name, in dress, and in action. Yet, in *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, Lucas superficially presents the evil characters as Western in nature, but in actuality they represent the Asian Other. Other than Darth Sidious (the future Emperor), the two major nemeses of the Jedi are Darth Maul and the members of the Nemoidian Trade Federation, in particular Viceroy Nute Gunray and his assistant Rune Haako, all three of whom are non-human alien characters. All three characters—despite their Western names, acknowledged above—suggest the stereotypical Asian Other through their behavior, costumes, and speech patterns. If the original trilogy has the films of Akira Kurosawa as their predecessors, then, as will be shown below, *The Phantom Menace* has as its predecessor *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

First, however, the major active nemesis of the Jedi in *The Phantom Menace* is Darth Maul, who, while seemingly Western-derived is actually an Asian-inspired character. According to George Lucas in his interview with Bill Moyers, "We went back into representations of evil," in order to find a way to represent Darth Maul visually (90). Moyers himself is reminded by Maul of *Paradise Lost* or the *Inferno*; however, the physical description of Satan in these two works does not match Darth Maul's visage, which seems to be much closer to the stylized makeup of Asian theatre.[3]

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is described as having "horrid hair" (II:710), as being winged and very ugly (IV:118). Zephon (another fallen demon) tells him, "[T]hou resmbl'st now / Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foul" (IV:118-9). Yet Satan can also appear innocent and friendly by "practis'd falsehood under saintly show" (IV:122). Thus, according to Milton, Satan is either foul, winged and hairy or saintly looking, neither of which characterizations describes Darth Maul, who is wingless, bald, crowned with small nubby horns, and has a tattooed red and black face. He appears malevolent, not saintly.

Dante's depiction of Satan in the *Inferno* is even less suggestive of Maul. Dante and Virgil descend to the final circle of hell to find Satan encased in a frozen lake. Satan has three faces:

> . . . one—in front—blood red;
> and then another two that, just above
> the midpoint of each shoulder, joined the first;
> and at the crown, all three were reattached;
> the right looked somewhat yellow, somewhat white;
> the left in its appearance was like those
> who come from where the Nile, descending, flows (XXXIV:39-45)

Out of these three faces sprout six bat-like wings which fan a frozen wind, and all six eyes of Satan weep constantly as his three mouths chew Judas, Brutus, and Cassius, for eternity. Perhaps Moyer was envisioning the Dore illustrations of other demons in both the *Inferno* and *Paradise Lost*, but neither of these literary works invokes anything resembling Maul.

Rather than a representation of a Western devil, Darth Maul suggests the *kumadori*, or stylized makeup of *aragoto* roles in Kabuki theatre. *Aragoto* roles are heroes and villians who are played, according to James Brandon, in a "highly exaggerated, bravura style" (10). Kabuki expert Brandon notes that this acting style began in 1673 when Ichikawa Danjro I "playing the role of the superhuman Kintoki" entered the Edo stage "wearing bold 'black and red makeup,' rampaged up the side of a mountain and single-handedly demolished a number of opponents" (10). This description also suggests Darth Maul, larger than life, in bold makeup, stunningly defeating Qui-Gon Jinn. The black lines on Maul's face suggest *Kumadori*, and horns suggest the *kijin* masks of noh, masks with horns for playing demon-gods such as *oni*.

Darth Maul's appearance also has antecedents in Beijing Opera, in which one of the four principle categories of roles are called *Jing*, "painted face roles." A.C. Scott claims that the highly colored abstract pattern makeup of *Jing* roles "suggests power," and is worn by "men of action, warriors, swashbuckling outlaws . . . as well as gods and supernatural beings" (125). Not only is Darth Maul's face similar in appearance to the makeup of *Jing* roles, but his movement and action have more in common

which the Beijing opera characters than with the Western devil. *Jing* roles require acrobatics and martial arts. The characters fight, tumble, and twirl. The lightsabre duel is clearly derived from Asian forms of combat. Few, if any, accounts of a Western devil depict such a physically active, martially combative creature. In short, a martial artist, made up to resemble a kabuki or Beijing Opera character, using Asian fighting techniques, represents the greatest challenge to a Jedi's skills, as well as the embodiment of "the Dark Side." Darth Maul is more Asian villain than Western devil, a "kung fu fighter" with a Western name and an Eastern pedigree who represents evil.

Therein, of course, lies the "Dark Side" of the *Star Wars* saga, whose worst offender is the *Phantom Menace*. Having appropriated Asian culture for both heroes and villains, and having constructed a colonialist model in which the evil Western trade federation, and later the Empire, attempt to manipulate and conquer the peaceful, cultured East, Lucas chose to cast European (Caucasian) actors in the heroic roles and reduce the evil characters to literally alien Others.

The Trade Federation uses huge battle ships run by battle droids to place a blockade around the planet Naboo until the Queen agrees to a trade treaty The Trade Federation Viceroy and his assistant are "Nemoidians," non-human alien beings who are interested in preserving a favorable balance of trade. Nute Gunray and Rune Haako both have utterly alien countenances that remain inscrutable and devoid of emotion throughout the film. Their robes and headgear suggest both the ceremonial garb of Shinto priests and the costume of Chinese scholar-officials at the Imperial Court. In short, the Nemoidian Trade Federation is represented as technologically-driven, economically-driven group of inhuman aliens. Throughout the entire film, Gunray, Haako, and the other Neimodians speak slow, broken English with slurred accents, suggesting Asian—specifically Japanese—speakers. As will be explored below, Nute Gunray and Rune Haako suggest the Japanese antagonists of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, as well as other American films about the second world war, such as *Bataan*, *Back to Bataan*, and *The Sands of Iwo*

Jima, all of which feature (even if only briefly) Japanese characters who speak broken English with slurred accents.

After committing a sneak attack on Naboo, the Neimodians take over the planet and set up prison camps. When informed that the Queen has been captured, Gunray states, "Ah. Victory." He immediately moves to confront her. The scene between Gunray and the Queen suggests the relationship between Colonel Nicholson (played by Alec Guinness) and Colonel Saito (played by Sessue Hayakawa) in *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. When Saito, a Japanese officer in charge of a group of British prisoners, tells Nicholson that the British officers must perform slave labor in the camp, Nicholson refuses. Saito responds that Nicholson will change his mind after he and the other officers sit in "ovens," corrugated iron boxes which are left out in the midday sun until the prisoners inside die from the heat and dehydration. Similarly, when Queen Amidala refuses to sign the treaty with the Nemoidians, Gunray tells her, "In time, the suffering of your people will persuade you to see our point of view." The "sneak attack" and threatening of torture for the Naboo in prison camps has its antecedents in the anti-Japanese movies of the world war two era and the Neimodians are the Japanese.

Furthermore, in *River Kwai*, the audience learns Saito's motivation: if the bridge is not completed he will be forced to commit ritual suicide. In *Phantom Menace*, Gunray must have the treaty signed or Darth Sidious will have him executed. Gunray speaks and acts very similarly to Saito, and their behaviors are remarkably similar. This similarity is noted not to suggest that Lucas is appropriating *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, but rather to demonstrate that he is presenting a very similar situation ("Other" villain must break the will of his captives in order to achieve a desired goal and avoid punishment) and has an Alien character in Asian-inspired costuming speaking in an accent which sounds "Oriental" to American ears. While the Europeans play the Asian-derived "good" characters, the villains are ethnic Asians in alien faces. Lucas has returned to good old-fashioned Orientalism.

23.1 October 2000

In conclusion, for all of Lucas's lip service to the influence of Akira Kurosawa and the influence of cultures in which he is interested, Lucas returns to the standard model of Orientalism historically practiced by artists and writers of the West. He appropriates Asian culture and philosophy and then represents it on the screen with Western actors. The political model of colonialism which is represented in the saga is an inverted one in which characters with Western names and Eastern characteristics carry out evil plans to disturb the balance of the universe while characters with Eastern origins played by British and Euro-American actors resist. Taoism is made exotic and interesting in the form of the Force, and its tenets are comfortably mouthed by Liam Neeson and Alec Guinness. The non-human (read: non-Western) characters are either comic relief (Jar Jar Binks), incomprehensible and inscrutable sidekicks (Chewbacca), or evil beings who must be stopped (Nute Gunray, Darth Maul). While ostensibly paying homage to Asian (especially Chinese and Japanese) culture and thought, Lucas appropriates them in order to construct a Eurocentric "Asia" in which Anglo faces play the Asians, and aliens represent and are equated with the ethnic Asian Other. *The Phantom Menace*, in particular, presents a scenario and characters remarkably similar to the 1958 film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, thus furthering the parallel between Asian and alien. In making the original trilogy, Lucas claimed a desire to recreate the serials and space operas of his youth. Unfortunately, with such a return comes predictable American attitudes toward foreign Others and the ethnocentrism and Orientalism of half a century ago which, upon inspection, is still with us. Although not surprising, such representations are disturbing in a series of films "universally" adored.

Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr.
Department of Theatre
Denison University
Granville, Ohio 43023

Notes

[1] I am in debt to Maura Chwastyk of the University of Pittsburgh for her insights and feedback on this article.

[2] It is interesting to note that the Empire uses Naval ranks (Admiral, Captain, etc) and the Rebellion uses standard military ranks (General, Colonel, Major). Although outside the scope of this paper, such designations indicate conflict between Empire and Rebellion is between a fleet and a land-based force, not unlike the colonial wars of the British in Africa and Asia.

[3] I am in debt to Professor Cynthia Turnbull and Erin Malone of Denison University who both independently pointed out to me the similarity between a Noh mask on my office wall and the picture of Darth Maul on my bulletin board, which had escaped my notice until then.

Works Cited

Allnut, Frank. *The Force of Star Wars*. Van Nuys: Bible Voice, 1977.

Brandon, James. *Kabuki: Five Classic Plays*. Honolulu: U Hawaii P. 1992.

The Bridge on the River Kwai. Dir. David Lean. Screenplay by Pierre Boulle. Columbia, 1957.

Campbell, Joseph, with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Dante. *Inferno*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. New York: Bantam, 1980.

The Empire Strikes Back. Dir. Irvin Kershner. Screenplay by Leigh Brackett and Lawrence Kasdan. Story by George Lucas. Twentieth Century Fox, 1980.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove, 1963.

Fischer-Schreiber, Ingrid. *The Shambhala Dictionary of Taoism*. Trans. Werner Wûnsche. Boston: Shambhala, 1996.

Goodwin, James. "Introduction." *Perspectives on Akira Kurosawa*. Ed. James Goodwin. New York: G.K. Hall, 1994. 3-23.

Lao Tzu. *Tao Te Ching* Trans. D.C. Lau. New York: Penguin, 1963.

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained*. Ed. Christopher Ricks. New York: Signet, 1968.

Moyers, Bill. "Of Myth and Men: An Interview with George Lucas." *Time* 26 Apr.1999. 90-94.

Return of the Jedi. Dir. Richard Marquand. Screenplay by Lawrence Kasdan and George Lucas. Story by George Lucas. Twentieth Century Fox, 1983.

23.1 October 2000

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
Scott, A.C. "The Performance of Classical Theatre." *Chinese Theatre from Its Origins to the Present Day*. Ed. Colin Mackerras. Honolulu: U Hawaii P, 1983.
Star Wars. Dir. George Lucas. Screenplay by George Lucas. Twentieth Century Fox, 1977.
Star Wars: Episode I: The Phantom Menace. Dir. George Lucas. Screenplay by George Lucas. Twentieth Century Fox, 1999.
Woods, Bob, ed. *Star Wars: Episode I: The Official Souvenir Magazine*. New York: Topps, 1999.