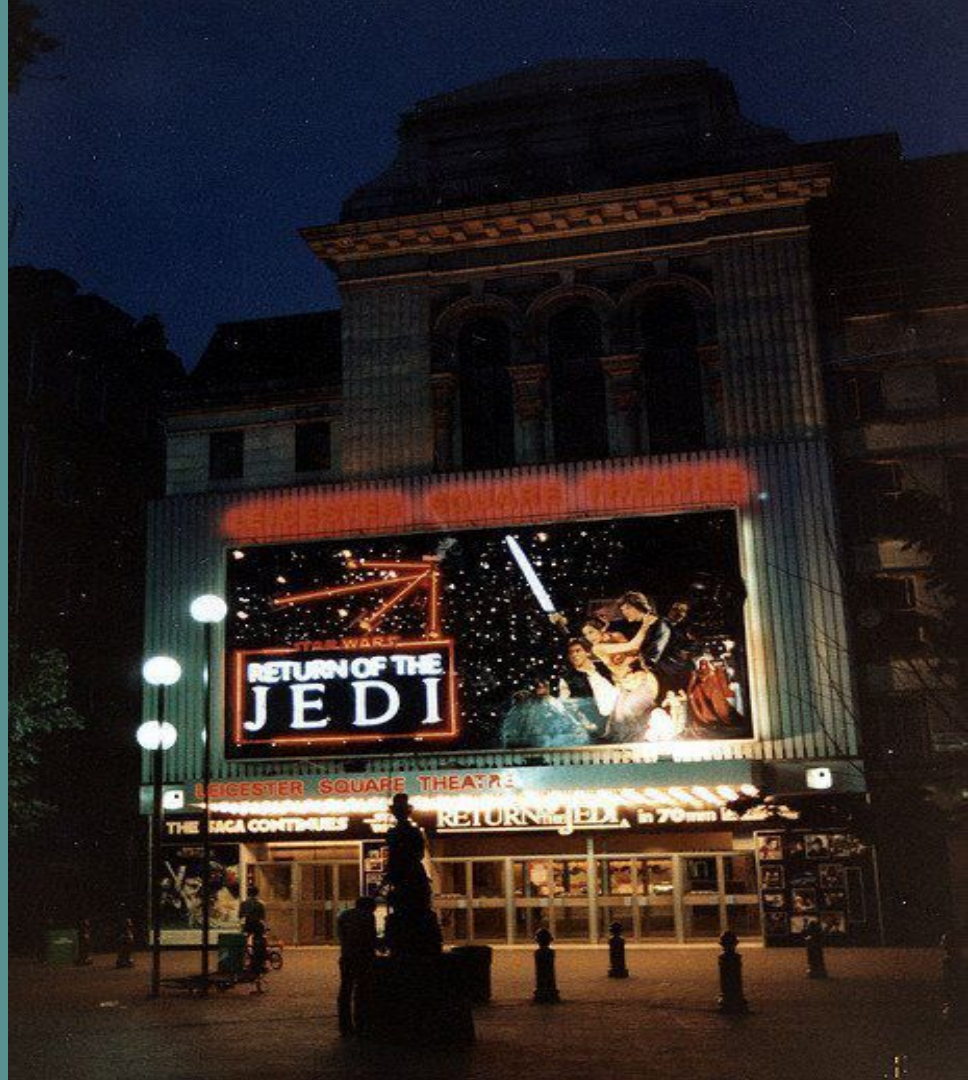
MODULE 11:

THE ARRIVAL OF MULTIPLEXES, 1971-1993



CHAPTER 8: FREEDOM AND WANT SEE

Read: Cousins, pgs. 379-389* End Chapter 8. Also closely review Episode 11 of *The Story of Film*.

Keywords:

Kung-Fu Cinema/Gun-Fu Cinema

Social, Moral, Transcendental, Films

Bruce-splotation

Hong Kong New Wave

Indian Masala filmmaking

Multiplex trend

Dolby Stereo

Stars

King Hu, Bruce Lee, Sharmila Tagore, Amitabh Bachchan, Mercedes Mccambridge

Directors:

Raymond Chow, King Hu, John Woo, Yuen Woo-ping, Tsui Hark, Li Han-hsiang, Robert Clouse, Raymond Lee, Ramesh Sippy, Moustapha Akkad, Youssef Chahine, William Friedkin, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas

THE HONG KONG NEW WAVE: A REFUGEE CAMP FOR CHINESE FILMMAKING

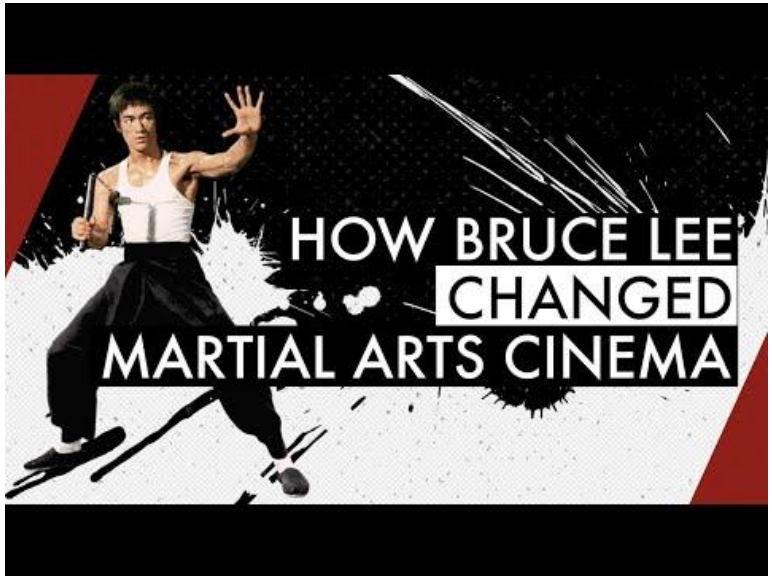
No city other than New York, has been more filmed than Hong Kong. Few would have predicted that the New Wave which swept around the world would make much impact on the very commercial film culture of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's first movie golden age was in the 1950s with the Shaw Brothers (see Module 6). At the time, it was the largest private film studio in the world with 1,400 staff and 25 different departments. 4,000 years of Chinese history were acted out here.

King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* (1971) led the transformation of Hong Kong cinema. What made it so original, so unlike closed romantic realism, was that the nature of the reality portrayed in the film shifted between each of its three sections. Gives birth to Kung-Fu cinema.

At first its focus was social, then moral and interpersonal, and finally transcendental. *A Touch of Zen* was hugely influential, directly inspiring international box office hits such as *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000). John Woo called Hu "a cinematic poet, a cinematic painter and a cinematic philosopher."

BRUCE LEE: THE ENRAGED DRAGON



Even if you've never seen a Bruce Lee movie, you know who Bruce Lee is. That's the impact of an icon. You probably know the vague outline of Bruce Lee as a martial artist who died young and would notably caterwaul as he fought his opponents on screen.

He never really belonged anywhere he went. He was a child star in Hong Kong, but because he was born in America, he was considered too American. When he tried to make it in Hollywood, he was considered too Chinese.

The biggest splash he made was as Kato in *The Green Hornet*, but that show was canceled after one season. It wasn't until he went back to Hong Kong that he discovered that *The Green Hornet* had opened the door and gave him an opening to make movies that would allow him to present his martial arts philosophy of Jeet Kune Do, which is a mix of other martial arts driven by an individual's own style and what's needed to win the fight.

While in Hong Kong, Lee would make three movies: *The Big Boss*, *Fist of Fury*, and *The Way of the Dragon*. Each movie would shatter Hong Kong's box office records and further establish Lee as an international star, especially *The Way of the Dragon*, which Lee wrote and directed. These films were big enough to finally get Hollywood's attention, and they made the star vehicle *Enter the Dragon*. Lee died of a cerebral edema a month before *Enter the Dragon* opened, and never saw it become a massive success.

Before Lee died, he shot about 30 minutes of usable footage on his next project, *Game of Death*. Five years later, that footage was repurposed into a Bruce-sploitation picture that relies heavily on a body double and footage from Lee's previous movies until you get to

TSUI HARK: THE STEVEN SPIELBERG OF HONG KONG CINEMA

Describing Tsui Hark's standing within the Hong Kong film industry is far from straightforward. He's a director, producer and sometime actor, a restlessly industrious polymath with more than 80 films to his name in one capacity or another.

As director, he helped usher in the Hong Kong New Wave with a trio of biting (quite literally with 1980's We're Going to Eat You) political satires before an abrupt turn towards populist blockbusterdom with *All the Wrong Clues for the Right Solution*.

Tsui has directed several influential Hong Kong films such as *Zu Warriors* from the *Magic Mountain* (1983), the *Once Upon a Time in China* film series (1991–1997) and *The Blade* (1995).

He is viewed as a major figure in the Golden Age of Hong Kong cinema and is regarded by critics as "one of the masters of Asian cinematography." In the late 1990s, Tsui had a short-lived career in the United States, directing the Jean-Claude Van Damme–led films *Double Team* (1997) and *Knock Off* (1998). Both films were commercially unsuccessful and critically panned; Tsui himself was unsatisfied with his lack of creative control and returned to Hong Kong to continue his career,

JOHN WOO: THE AESTHETIC OF THE GLANCE

If you want to see the best work of Chinese movie director John Woo, you should zero straight in on the astonishing double bill of *Hard Boiled* and *The Killer*. They, for me and many, are the two standouts of a superb action movie career. I lean towards The Killer as my favourite, others pick *Hard Boiled*. You can't go wrong with either. Such was his success then that Woo was eventually lured to Hollywood in the 1990s, and managed, on the whole, to shoot his films on his terms.

"When I'm working on a scene", Woo explained, "I have the whole thing in my mind: the action, the tempo. When I'm shooting I know exactly what I need for every shot, every setup, and also about the speed of the camera – which angles use double speed, which ones use slow motion. I also listen to music – the music tells me the time".

He is best known for perfecting "Gun fu," a portmanteau of gun and kung fu (also known as gun kata, bullet ballet, and gymnastic gunplay), is a style of sophisticated close-quarters gunfight resembling a martial arts battle that combines firearms with hand-to-hand combat and traditional melee weapons in an approximately 50/50 ratio. It can be seen in Hong Kong action cinema, and in American action films influenced by it. The focus of gun fu is both artistic style and the usage of firearms in ways that they were not designed to be used.

Shooting a gun from each hand (usually paired with jumping to the side at the same time), dual wielding, shots from behind the back, as well as the use of guns as melee weapons (usually knife fights) are all common. Other moves can involve submachine guns, assault rifles, combat shotguns, rocket launchers, and just about anything else that can be worked into a cinematic shot. It is often mixed with grappling maneuvers. Gun fu has become a staple of modern action films due to its visual spectacle, a result of often impressive choreography and stunt work, regardless of its unrealistic

SHARMILA TAGORE: THE QUEEN OF BOLLYWOOD

Tagore began her career as an actress in Satyajit Ray's 1959 Bengali film, *Apur Sansar* (T*he World of Apu*), as the ill-fated bride of the title character. In 1959, Ray cast her in *Devi*, a film set in 1860 on Hindu orthodoxy and rational reforms. She considers it as her favourite film and performance.

Tagore: “Our films in Bombay were different. Like songs for instance, there was a lot of usage of songs to, and which was part of the narrative, so to speak. And it was always a little bit more uh... more "flowery," more uh... Not quite reality but slightly more ‘made up’ reality, so to speak. So, that was quite different and more glamour, more dressing up, more accent on beauty, more accent on youth. And uh... And not... And very general, there was a lot of generalization. Not pinpointing uh... where you come from or which time we are talking about. Like every time I worked in Hindi cinema and if I took a little longer, you know, to say something or gave a little extra pause.”

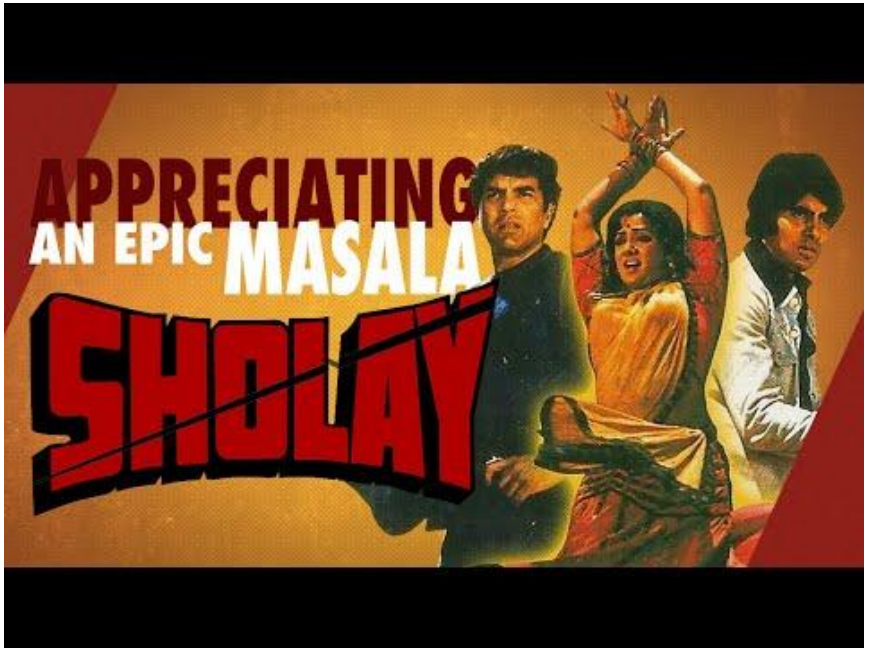
AMITABH BACHCHAN: THE KING OF BOLLYWOOD

He first gained popularity in the early 1970s as the "angry young man" of Hindi cinema and After playing the title role of *Shahenshah*, he created storm in the entire nation. In the year 2000, he became the first living Asian to have been immortalised in wax at Madame Tussauds Wax Museum. He was also elected member of the Indian Parliament from the year 1984 to 1987.

Bachan: “ I do feel that in the late 60's and early 70's there was a desire to uh... communicate ideas, spend a lot more time in expressing those ideas. The written word had a great amount of importance. Whether it was the lyrics in our songs or whether it was the dialogues of our films. In the 60's and the 70's, there was the beginning of a kind of turmoil uh... within the youth in the country.

“The most exciting thing about Indian cinema is that you get poetic justice in three hours." You don't get poetic justice in a lifetime sometimes. And that is the most attractive portion.”

SHOLAY: THE BIRTH OF THE BLOCKBUSTER



The Indian film industry grew at such a pace in the 1960s that by 1971 - when it produced 433 films - it was the biggest in the world. Amitabh Bachan, who had a screen persona which combined elements of Sean Connery and Robert De Niro, became its biggest star.

He often portrayed a troubled working class rebel who avenges a crime committed against him or his kin. He also danced. His method of doing so was so influential that it helped determine “how Indian people movie in the streets, at weddings and at religious processions.”

Sholay (1975) derived many of its ideas from American Westerns. If anything, its visual grandeur, flashback structure, and set pieces made it even more operatic than Sergio Leone’s Spaghetti Westerns.

The innovative colossus of 70's cinema. Widescreen titles like an epic, landscape like a western, music like an adventure film. Sholay was all these things. The greatest Bollywood film of its time and one of the most influential movies in the story of film. It was co-written by this man, Javed Akhtar, the great Urdu poet and screenwriter who tried to capture the spirit of the times in his screenplay.

THE MESSAGE: PICTURING THE PROPHET

Arab filmmakers themselves didn't shy away from epic, popular cinema of the 1970's. Far from it. *The Message* has been seen by as many people, as have seen any film in cinema history. It looks like a conventional biblical epic and in some ways it is. It took four months to build the sets, crowd scenes, period costumes and the like.

We don't see or hear the person because Quinn's character is talking to the prophet Muhammad, his nephew, not after the prophet has ascended to paradise but whilst he's still here on earth. Islam doesn't allow the depiction of the prophet, and so this most visual of mediums, cinema, refuses to picture him.

This 1976 Islamic epic drama film directed and produced by Moustapha Akkad, chronicling the life and times of the Islamic prophet Muhammad through the perspective of his uncle Hamza ibn Abdul-Muttalib and adopted son Zayd ibn Harithah. Released in both separately-filmed Arabic and English-language versions, *The Message* serves as an introduction to early Islamic history for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

A SEISMIC CHANGE IN AMERICAN CINEMA

A movie about a shark took $260 million dollars at the U.S. box office. A scary film about a girl possessed by the devil took $200 million at the box office. A Sci-Fi movie about the good force and the evil Darth Vader demolished all records by taking nearly $500 million.

The success of *The Godfather*, *The Exorcist*, *Jaws*, and *Star Wars* changed American and then world cinema. The reason for making a film became that the audience would want to see it, not that a director wanted to make it. The interests of young people became more prioritized. To make things exciting, to conjure new escapiist worlds, more and more flashier special effects were used.

As a result, the typical cost of a film increased by a factor of five. Because of this, far fewer were made. Since that meant that more was riding on the success of each, more money was spent on selling them to the public.

Like very early cinema, the promise of thrill, of sensation, lured people back to the cinema. This came to be known in Hollywood as "want see". What the culture wants to see. New movie theaters called, multiplexes were built. The era of the blockbuster had begun.

A NEW REALISM IN 1970s HORROR

By the late 1960s, classic horror movies pioneered by Vincent Price and Boris Karloff had run out of steam. What took their place in the period after that was something different, edgier and altogether more terrifying.

Roman Polanski's film *Rosemary's Baby* was a huge step forward for modern horror films. It became an icon in part because a major studio was producing a film about the devil, but also because the film was one of first to bring that element of realism to the horror genre.

Although *The Exorcist* would demolish many taboos about religion, profanity and childhood, director William Friedkin's approach was traditional. Taking advice from director Howard Hawks, hee would begin to make films which used straight storytelling techniques of closed romantic realism, rejecting anything too subjective, autobiographical, experimental or philosophical.

HOW *JAWS* CHANGED THE WORLD

If it wasn't for *Jaws*, movies as we know it may not be at the level they are. It gave rise to the blockbuster, created the summer movie season, changed how studios approached movies, and let Steven Spielberg take his unique vision to the world. *Jaws* went viral before that was even a thing.

Universal Studios took an entirely unique approach with Jaws. They came out with a massive (for the time) $1.8 million marketing plan. They spent nearly $1 million on TV spot advertising, which was completely unheard of. The studio wanted to come out guns blazing and make everyone know about Jaws from the get-go—instead of over the weeks and months.

Their plan was to launch twenty-four, 30-second commercial spots that would air during prime time TV. This was all done in the few days leading up to the film's release. The John Williams score, and now-iconic image of the shark in the poster, would be pushed at every opportunity. Again, a marketing approach to a movie like this had never been done before, and there was no way that people weren't aware of Jaws.

This unique approach may have been because it was released in the summer. Before *Jaws* the summer movies season was considered the off season for studios. This was usually a time when studios dumped unwanted pictures. The winter was when the big-time movies were released. *Jaws* would change this approach and was the first film to give rise to the summer blockbuster.

STAR WARS "ATE THE HEART AND SOUL OF HOLLYWOOD"

Paul Schrader: "*Star Wars* ate the heart and soul of Hollywood." Yet the movie charms its audiences,, in part because it draws richly from film history. George Lucas, a graduate of USC Film School has always been transparent about his **influences**.

Few cinemas were able to reproduce the richness of the film's Dolby Sound Stereo system, but those that could were so successful with *Star Wars* that most of the others followed suit.

Star Wars fundamentally changed the aesthetics and narratives of Hollywood films, switching the focus of Hollywood-made films from deep, meaningful stories based on dramatic conflict, themes and irony to sprawling special-effects-laden blockbusters, as well as changing the Hollywood film industry in its priorities an approach toward filmmaking.

HOW *HEAVEN'S GATE* KILLED THE STUDIO SYSTEM

For over forty years, Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* has been synonymous with "expensive flop." Not just any expensive flop, but the type associated with the fussy indulgences of a self-styled film artist. It is considered the symbolic end to a decade where the inmates ran the asylum, when iconoclasts like Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese and Robert Altman were allowed to operate within the studio system with minimal interference. The film's director, was blamed for pushing United Artists into bankruptcy. It could not be allowed to happen again.

Heaven's Gate epitomizes the excesses of the 70s film-brat boom in Hollywood, but should also represent the revolutionary spirit at its core – a determination to reject the myths and traditions that studio filmmaking had stodgily upheld. It's an anti-western, for starters. It's also just anti-west, in that it's about how the civilizing forces that tamed the country in the mid-to-late 1800s were, in fact, the villains, violently suppressing the dreams of immigrants and other unfortunates. Immigrants may have built America, the film suggests, but only the few could take ownership of it.

Heaven's Gate should not be seen as the calamitous end to an adventurous decade of director-driven studio films, but a messy kind of apotheosis, one last challenge to audiences to reconsider their understanding of what westerns and historical epics can do – and, most of all, what America itself is capable of doing.

FILMS FEATURED IN *THE STORY OF FILM* EPISODE 11

- *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (1959) dir. Li Han-hsiang
- *A Touch of Zen* (1971) dir. King Hu
- *Enter the Dragon* (1973) dir. Robert Clouse
- *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) dir. John Woo
- *Iron Monkey* (1993) dir. Yuen Woo-ping
- *Once Upon a Time in China* (1991) dir. Tsui Hark
- *New Dragon Gate Inn* (1992) dir. Raymond Lee
- *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) dir. K. Asif
- *Devi* (1960) (introduced in Episode 6) dir. Satyajit Ray
- *Mausam* (1975) dir. Gulzar
- *Zanjeer* (1973) dir. Prakash Mehra
- *Sholay* (1975) dir. Ramesh Sippy
- *The Message: The Story of Islam* (1976) (a.k.a. Mohammad, Messenger of God) dir. Moustapha Akkad
- *The Sparrow* (1972) dir. Youssef Chahine
- *The Exorcist* (1973) dir. William Friedkin
- *A Guy Named Joe* (1943) dir. Victor Fleming
- *Jaws* (1975) dir. Steven Spielberg
- *The Making of Steven Spielberg's Jaws* (1995) dir. Laurent Bouzereau
- *Vertigo* (1958) (introduced in Episode 4) dir. Alfred Hitchcock
- *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) dir. Steven Spielberg
- *Jurassic Park* (1993) dir. Steven Spielberg
- *Star Wars* (1977) (introduced in Episode 1) dir. George Lucas
- *The Hidden Fortress* (1958) dir. Akira Kurosawa
- *Triumph of the Will* (1935) (a.k.a. Triumph des Willens) (introduced in Episode 4) dir. Leni Riefenstahl