



ART OF ACTION: CELEBRATING THE REAL ACTION STARS OF CINEMA

Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon

Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon (Wo Hu Zang Long)

Director: Ang Lee

©: United China Vision Incorporated

Production Company:

Zoom Hunt International Production Co Ltd

In collaboration with:

China Film Co-production Corporation,

Asia Union Film & Entertainment

Presented by:

Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia,

Sony Pictures Classics

Presented in association with:

Good Machine International

Production Company: Golden Harvest

Executive Producers: James Schamus, David Linde

Producers: Bill Kong, Hsu Li-kong, Ang Lee

Co-producers: Zheng Quan-gang, Dong Ping

Line Producers: Shia Wai-sum, Liu Er-dong

Associate Producers: Philip Lee, Chui Po-chu

Production Manager: Helen Li

Production Co-ordinator: Peh Huie-ling

Production Accountant: Joyce Hsieh

Post-production Supervisor: Jeff Robinson

1st Assistant Directors: Lai Kai-keung,

Sylvia Liu Jingyi, Zhang Jin-ting,

Zhou Ying-ying, Zhu Hong-bo, Xu Cheng-lin

Script Supervisors: Sherrie Liu, Feng Ying

Screenplay: James Schamus, Wang Hui-ling,

Tsai Kuo-jung

Based on the novel by: Wang Du-lu

Photographed by: Peter Pau

2nd Unit Cameraman: Johnny Choi Sung-fai

Underwater Photography: Marc Robert Spicer

2nd Unit Steadicam Operator: Li Bao-quan

Gaffer: Lam Choon Wan

Special Visual Effects: Manex Visual Effects LLC

Wire Removal/Digital Effects: Asia Legend Limited

Edited by: Tim Squyres

Production Designer: Tim Yip

Art Department: Eddy Wong, Yang Zhan-jia,

Yang Xing-zhan, Wang Jian-quo, Zhao Bin

Set Department: Jiang Quan, He Yan-qing,

Tian Zhong-he, Li Yi, Wang He-gen, Zhang Quan

Property Department: Hung Hin-fat, Ng Chung-wai,

Fung Shu-wing, Li Ming-shan, Li Bao-tai,

Wang Song-bo, Ho Yi

Costume Designer: Tim Yip

Wardrobe Department: Hsu Shu-chen,

Huang Bao-rong, Wang Rong, Zhao Zhi-bin,

Chai Jun, Gu Jin-hua

Make-up Department: Man Yun-ling, Liu Jian-ping,

Ren Yi-gong, Liu Jing-dong, Fan Yong-hao

Hairdressing: Chau Siu-mui

Colour Timer: Fred Heid

Colourist: Pankaj Bajpai

Music Composed and Conducted by: Tan Dun

Cello Solos: Yo-Yo Ma, Coco Lee

Erhu Solo: Ma Xiao-hui

Bawu/Dizi Solo: Yang Jun-qiao

Percussion Solo: David Cossin,

Shanghai Symphony Orchestra

Conducted by: Chen Xie-yang

Music performed by: Shanghai National Orchestra,

Shanghai Percussion Ensemble

Sound Mixer: Andrew Paul Kunitz

Boom Operator: George Huey Leong

Re-recording Mixer: Reilly Steele

Supervising Sound Editor: Eugene Gearty

Dialogue Editors: Lewis Goldstein, Paul Urmson

ADR Supervisor: Jean Tsien

Foley Artist: Marko Costanzo

'Adventure' would certainly describe *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. But even for seasoned Lee watchers, it's a touch startling to find a director of his high aesthetic sensibility straying into a genre generally reckoned as ultra-populist, not to say downmarket. ('Cheesy' is Lee's own slyly proffered adjective.) To some extent, of course, it's a nostalgia trip, an affectionate homage to the movies he loved as a boy in Taiwan, films full of magic and poise that offered a peculiar poetry of elegant fight moves and belief-suspending stunts. But he also relished the challenge of taking the genre, and his own career, into places they'd never been before. Relating *Tiger* back to his previous films, he explains: 'In a sense sometimes I've been able to show I despise the commercial side of movie-making and in this film I could probably decide I wanted to despise the artistic side. It's not highbrow or lowbrow, and by doing it this way it's not middlebrow either. It was just so cool to be able to do it, to mix your boyhood and adulthood together. And think of the challenge. In China I have to deliver this movie as a summer blockbuster but here it has to hit the arthouses to begin with. It takes a lot of pain to keep that balance, and the physical logistics of that size of production are abusive. But I really enjoyed doing it.'

The plot is drawn from a massive five-volume novel written by Wang Du Lu some 80 years ago and the action is set a century before that, in a mythical version of the early 19th century in the late Qing dynasty. These were the last decades before encroaching western influences shattered China's ancient way of life, and the period is often wistfully looked back on as the sunset years of a simpler, more heroic age. The story revolves around two couples – one pair mature, worldly-wise, the other young and impetuous. Li Mu Bai (Chow Yun-Fat) and Yu Shu Lien (Michelle Yeoh) are among the greatest warriors of their age, pious and seasoned comrades who have never dared admit their mutual love. Weary of fighting, Li entrusts Yu with his mythic sword, Green Destiny, to present to the venerable Sir Te in Beijing. When it's stolen, Yu guesses the culprit is the young, beautiful Jen (Zhang Ziyi), daughter of an aristocratic clan. Jen is engaged to be married to a rich dullard, but she's addicted to the warrior world and is secretly in love with dashing bandit Lo (Chang Chen) who once held her captive in the desert. She's also entangled with evil villainess Jade Fox who once killed Li Mu Bai's master.

This is easily Lee's most aesthetically delectable movie so far. The unit was able to shoot all over mainland China, taking in spectacular scenery of jagged mountains and silver lakes, ethereal forests and parched deserts, and some of the compositions are so achingly beautiful you want to freeze the frame. To anyone for whom 'martial-arts movies' means Bruce Lee's high-aggression onslaughts or the cheerful knockabout of Jackie Chan, *Tiger* will come as a revelation. The fights in Chan's and Bruce Lee's films, as in the great majority of the genre, are based on Shaolin, the more violent, external strength style of classic martial arts, from which kung fu is derived. Tiger draws on the more subtle practices of Wudan, whose adherents rely for their power on personal renunciation and inner strength – martial arts as spiritual discipline. In visual terms this lends the film's fight scenes a soaring, balletic grace: the combatants pursue each other up walls and over roofs, skimming across the surface of lakes, duelling all the way. The climax comes with a breathtakingly elegant airborne duel fought out amid the green treetops of a bamboo forest.

Foley Editors: Ben Cheah, Jennifer Ralston
Dolby Sound Consultant: James Ziegler
Action Choreographed by: Yuen Wo-ping
Assistant Martial Arts Co-ordinator: Ku Huen-chiu,
Wong Kim-wai
Cast:

Chow Yun-fat (*Li Mu Bai*)
Michelle Yeoh (*Yu Shu Lien*)
Zhang Ziyi (*Yu Jiao Long*, 'Jen')
Chang Chen (*Lo*)
Lung Sihung (*Sir Te*)
Cheng Pei-pei (*Jade Fox*)
Li Fa-zeng (*Governor Yu*)
Gao Xian (*Bo*)
Hai Yan (*Madam Yu*)
Wang De-ming (*Tsai*)
Li Li (*May*)
Huang Su-ying (*Auntie Wu*)
Zhang Jin-ting (*De Lu*)
Yang Rui (*maid*)
Li Kai (*Gou Jun Pei*)
Feng Jian-hua (*Gou Jun Sihung*)
Du Zhen-xi (*shop owner*)
Xu Cheng-lin (*captain*)
Lin Feng (*captain*)
Wang Wen-sheng (*gangster a*)
Song Dong (*gangster b*)
Ma Zhong-xuan (*Mi Biao*)
Li Bao-cheng (*Flying Machete Chang*)
Yang Yong-de (*Monk Jing*)
Zhang Shao-jun (*male performer*)
Ma Ning (*female performer*)
Zhu Jian-min (*waiter*)
Don Chang Sheng (*homeless man*)
Shih Yi (*waitress*)
Chen Bin (*servant*)
Chang Sao-chen (*nightman*)
China, Taiwan, USA, Hong Kong 2000©
120 mins
Digital 4K

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For these sequences (much aided by sophisticated but unobtrusive CGI work) Lee had the services of Yuen Woo-Ping, the maestro martial-arts choreographer who also worked on *The Matrix*. 'The way he works,' says Lee with evident admiration, 'is that he makes his own assembly. It's spontaneous: he works out one shot, sees what happens and then takes on the next. It's all put together in this assembly fashion so if I don't like something it's very hard to take it out. It's not like shooting coverage on a conventional scene where you have six cameras and so many choices. If you break these sequences the narrative doesn't work. It's insane to me that every year in Asia they give the Best Editing award to a martial-arts movie because it looks so dashing. It was edited when it was shot! You can give it to any editor, it'll come out the same way. It was a very valuable lesson to me.'

The film's tonal palette (photographed by leading Hong Kong DoP Peter Pau) is altogether lighter and airier than Lee's previous work. The director 'made a decision to go with middle-tone, low-contrast. When you're doing a Chinese fantasy, of course, you think of the paintings, so you use a lot of negative space, desaturated colour like watercolour. And then I had this idea of the tiger and the dragon: the tiger in the desert, out in the open, obviously red, while the hidden dragon, representing hidden desire, everything that's taboo, will be presented in green, so I went to the forest. And you have the fatal sword, Green Destiny, and the villainess, Jade Fox.'

Matching this visual opulence, *Tiger* is suffused with a yearning romanticism that transmutes its stock-melodrama plotline into a rapturous meditation on love, honour and destiny. The flashback episode in the desert where Jen is kidnapped by her bandit chief carries a full-throated romantic charge that harks back to the days of Valentino – a far cry from the cool, spare geometries of *The Ice Storm*. To Lee this sequence was 'a bigger challenge, more scary, than doing martial arts. With martial arts the worst scenario is that I make a fool of myself and it looks funny. But a romantic scene that flops, that's just awful. Then it's all over. The lyrical element comes along with the romance, you don't really have to think about it. It's a romantic impulse in itself to go back to China and create this unreal, fantastic scenario. And making a martial-arts picture that goes back to boyhood fantasy is also a romantic quest. But the love element was something I'd never done before, so I saw it as a challenge to put myself in that romantic mood.'

Beneath these novel elements, though, *Tiger* is very recognisably an Ang Lee film – not just in its scrupulously crafted texture and attention to detail but in its humanist focus on personal relationships and its thematic preoccupations. It's revealing that Lee and James Schamus, his regular collaborator as writer-producer, originally pitched the concept as '*Sense and Sensibility* with martial arts'. Half-jokingly, to be sure; but underlying the fantasy and visual magic is the theme that runs through *Sense and Sensibility* as through all Lee's work, the theme he identifies as 'social obligation versus personal freedom'. As Lee puts it, whatever the genre, 'My reflection on the material is my creative output into the film. That's my authorship. Unless I feel emotionally and personally in touch with the material, I don't want to do it. I use the language of genre to tell something that's internal; I'm making a martial-arts picture, but what I'm really dealing with is the hidden dragon.'

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, December 2000