New Line Cinema, Jackie Chan, and the Anatomy of an Action Star

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ABSTRACT

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Jackie Chan's Hollywood career began in earnest with the theatrical wide release of *Rumble in the Bronx* in early 1996 by independent studio New Line Cinema. New Line released two more Chan films – *Jackie Chan's First Strike* (1997) and *Mr. Nice Guy* (1998) – after they were acquired by the media conglomerate Time Warner. These three films, originally produced and distributed by the Golden Harvest studio in Hong Kong, were distributed and marketed by New Line for release in North America. New Line reedited, rescored, and dubbed these films in order to take advantage of the significant marketing synergies of their conglomerate parents at Time Warner. Specifically, this case study analyzes the distribution and marketing strategies of New Line Cinema for the domestic theatrical releases of these three Jackie Chan films. More broadly, this analysis argues that the Hollywood studio oligopoly, backed by fully integrated media conglomerates, has largely controlled the theatrical release of foreign films in North America by not only *authorizing*, but often by *authoring* them as well. Finally, this analysis addresses a crucial, though under studied, subject in Film, Media, and Cultural Studies: that being the process, and products, of media importation.

Dedicated to:

Tate Fegley

You're a nice guy.

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Kaia Scott

Marc Steinberg

Edmund Stenson

Haidee Wasson

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INTRODUCTION

In *An Alan Smithee Film: Burn, Hollywood, Burn* (1997) – screenwriter Joe Eszterhas' navel-gazing mockumentary of Hollywood bureaucracy – a disgruntled director absconds with the reels to his fictional blockbuster, *Trio*, in order to prevent the studio from reediting the film in post-production. In addition to established Hollywood properties Sylvester Stallone and Whoopi Goldberg, this action film-within-a-film also stars Jackie Chan, sarcastically labeled by a title card as "superstar, linguist, scholar". Although Chan only has a cameo role in the film – disappearing into the background as Hollywood personalities such as Shane Black and Harvey Weinstein mug for the cameras and swap insider jokes – he is nonetheless given a scene in which he arrogantly informs a room full of studio executives, "I never die. Even if I die, I will come back with reincarnation. So, I never die. Ok?" The pushy Hollywood phony portrayed by Chan in *Alan Smithee* belies the unromantic, corporate source of his stardom. Chan's breakthrough success in Hollywood only the year before with *Rumble in the Bronx* (1996) may have less to do with the Chan and more to do with the distribution and marketing strategy of New Line Cinema, and their corporate parents at Time Warner.

When Jackie Chan reentered Hollywood with New Line Cinema's version of *Rumble in the Bronx* – returning a full decade after the embarrassing failure of four Warner Brothers-Golden Harvest co-productions in the early 1980s – he was not reentering Hollywood unfettered, and he certainly was not dictating his fate to obliging studio heads. New Line released three of Chan's Hong Kong action films, originally produced and distributed by Golden Harvest, in North American theaters: *Rumble*, *Jackie Chan's*

First Strike (1997), and *Mr. Nice Guy* (1998)[1]. These releases were reedited, rescored, and dubbed from their original versions by the distributor, and consequently given theatrical wide releases throughout the US and Canada.[2] New Line followed up these releases with its in-house productions of *Rush Hour* (1998), *Rush Hour 2* (2001), and *Rush Hour 3* (2007). Though Chan would work extensively for other Hollywood studios after *Rush Hour*, New Line was responsible for establishing and rewriting his persona for the North American market, starting with *Rumble*. Indeed, from 1996 to 2001 – when New Line released *Rush Hour 2* – Time Warner's "independent" studio was responsible for five of the top 10 highest grossing Chan films at the domestic box office, including three of the top five ("Jackie Chan"). In this period, New Line converted Chan's Hong Kong films into highly profitable Hollywood product, with an equally marketable Hollywood persona for Chan buoyed by their versions of *Rumble*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy*.

The Players: New Line Cinema and Jackie Chan

New Line Cinema was founded in 1967 by Robert Shaye. Though initially a small non-theatrical film distributor – focusing primarily on screenings of cult and exploitation films on college campuses – the shape of the company changed significantly when New Line began theatrical distribution in 1973 and film production in 1978 (Wyatt, "Major Independent" 76). New Line's mandate was to "tap those markets which would be

[1] The Golden Harvest studio, based in Hong Kong, produced and distributed the original versions of *Rumble in the Bronx*, *Jackie Chan's First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy* throughout the East Asia region in early 1995, 1996, and 1997, respectively, and generally a year or so before their North American release.

[2] According to Box Office Mojo, *wide release* refers to a film released in 600 or more theaters, while *limited release* refers to a film released in fewer than 600 theaters ("About Movie Box Office Tracking and Terms").

ignored by the majors, and to maximize the difference of [their] product from more traditional commercial film" (ibid). New Line continued to grow throughout the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, particularly with the success of their exploitation/genre films – such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1985) – and with the formation of its Fine Line label in 1990. This effectively split New Line's product in two: mainstream and genre films were released under the established New Line label, while "specialty" art films were released under Fine Line (Wyatt, "Major Independent" 78). In dividing their releases between mainstream and specialty products, New Line was preparing for a considerable expansion into commercial film production and distribution.

New Line's growth continued as the studio partnered with domestic and foreign film producers. In particular, New Line's success with the distribution of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990) and its sequels (1991 and 1993) – all produced by Jackie Chan's longtime partners at Golden Harvest in Hong Kong – brought the company to the attention of media mogul Ted Turner. Turner Communications acquired New Line in 1993, essentially to provide new content for Turner's cable networks. Subsequently, Time Warner's purchase of Turner in 1996 created at that time the largest media conglomerate in the world. New Line's films played a vital role in Time Warner's vertically and horizontally integrated media empire, with synergies possible across a range of proprietary windows, including: film production and distribution, broadcast television, cable and pay television, music, publishing, and sports (Holt 162). Due primarily to their association with Time Warner, New Line's access to production and distribution funds increased significantly (Wyatt, "Major Independent" 84). New Line continued to release upscale genre films – such as the *Rush Hour* franchise – while also

bankrolling costly blockbuster productions like the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003), *The Last Mimzy* (2007), and *The Golden Compass* (2007). Though the three *Lord of the Rings* films were immensely profitable for the studio, New Line still faced many difficulties. Time Warner significantly downsized the studio and placed it under the control of its Warner Brothers studio in 2008, following several high-profile box office failures and reports of in-fighting with Warners over distribution and marketing practices (Thompson, "New Line's Rebel Days Come to An End"). Since 2008, the New Line label has produced, co-produced and/or co-distributed a number of films under the auspices of Warners, including: *Sex and the City* (2008), *Sex and the City 2* (2010), *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012), *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* (2013), as well as horror films such as a remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (2010), and *The Conjuring* (2013).

Jackie Chan began working in the Hong Kong film industry in the early 1970s. Initially, he was employed as a faceless stuntman in martial arts films for Golden Harvest – including small roles in the Bruce Lee vehicles *Fist of Fury* (1972) and *Enter the Dragon* (1973) – before graduating to stunt coordinator and eventually star in films such as *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master*, both released in 1978 (Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, Second ed. 34). After completing *The Young Master* (1980) for Golden Harvest, he was sent by the studio to star in four Hollywood co-productions for Warner Brothers: *The Big Brawl* (1980), *The Cannonball Run* (1981), *Cannonball Run II* (1984), and *The Protector* (1985).[3] Chan did not return to Hollywood until New Line released their version of *Rumble* in 1996. Chan remained prolific in the Hong Kong film industry throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, even while working in Hollywood. He

[3] These films are discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.

continued his association with Golden Harvest until 2001, and in 2004 he opened his own film studio in Hong Kong, JCE Movies Limited.[4]

Film Distribution, Conglomerate Hollywood, and Imported Media

In contemporary Hollywood, film distribution is tightly controlled by the "Big Six" studios, all subsidiaries of vertically and horizontally integrated media conglomerates: Warner Bros. (Time Warner), Paramount (Viacom), 20th Century Fox (21st Century Fox, recently spun off from the former News Corporation in June 2013), Sony Pictures and Columbia (Sony), Buena Vista (Disney), and Universal (Comcast).[5] These six distributors, as well as a number of independent film distributors with a minority market share, advertise, promote and release films, in addition to negotiating theatrical runs with exhibitors (Miller, Schiwy, and Salvan 201). Together, they controlled a combined 77% of the domestic theatrical box office in 2013 ("2013 Market Share"), indicating a highly concentrated market, and within the range of the 75-85% market share that the Hollywood oligarchy has historically maintained (Miller et al., *Global Hollywood* 151).

Besides domestic and international theatrical releases, these studios exploit their intellectual properties through a plethora of media platforms – often synergistically owned by the distributors' conglomerate parent companies – including pay-per-view, on-demand, cable and network television, online streaming services such as Netflix, digital downloads, and more. In this era of multiple media platforms, Jeffrey C. Ulin has described distribution as "the art of creating opportunities to drive repeat consumption of

[4] *The Accidental Spy* (2001) was the last Chan film produced and distributed through Golden Harvest.

[5] *Vertical integration* describes the ownership of production, distribution, and exhibition interests in one industry, while *horizontal integration* describes the ownership of at least one interest – production, distribution, or exhibition – in multiple industries.

the same product" through the careful licensing of a given property across media platforms, through the staging of periods of exclusivity (windowing), and through differential pricing in these windows (5). Contemporary Hollywood, then, can be characterized as "in the business of acquiring, licensing, and regulating media rights" as much as in the business of producing films (Drake 81). Yet despite this abundance of media platforms and ancillary markets, the theatrical release has remained a crucial component of film distribution, as theatrical release represents the first window in a product's lifecycle, affecting in large part ancillary revenues (Litman 173).

Tom Schatz has dubbed this era of the studio system "Conglomerate Hollywood", an era inaugurated by a wave of mergers and acquisitions in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The formation of the Time Warner conglomerate in 1989 is particularly important in this regard, marking a time when "the logic of synergy and tight diversification met the larger forces of globalization, digitization, and US media deregulation" (25). For Schatz, Conglomerate Hollywood represents the third and most recent revolution of the Hollywood industry, distinguishable from previous revolutions in its focus on the integration of the Hollywood studios into global media corporations (27).[6] As part of these vertically and horizontally integrated media corporations, Hollywood studios become beholden to the risk-reduction and profit-maximization strategies of their new corporate owners. In *High-Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood (*1994), Justin Wyatt links structural changes within the industry as a result of conglomeration to the "high concept" Hollywood aesthetic that it generated, paying particular attention to the integration of film production with marketing imperatives (20). Marketing is a key

[6] The first revolution, Schatz argues, was the creation and stabilization of the Hollywood studio system in the 1920s-1940s, while the second revolution began with the Paramount Decree, representing the rise of the Hollywood talent agent and the film "package" system (13).

component of film distribution, as it simultaneously makes consumers aware of the product and creates an impulse to purchase it (Ulin 382). Yet marketing's integration into Hollywood film production has also reinforced the power of the Hollywood oligarchy. Marketing has become Conglomerate Hollywood's primary weapon to not only assuage conglomerate owners against the financial risk of film production, but also to protect the studios' domestic and international markets against new competition in film distribution via the creation and maintenance of economic barriers to entry.[7] Escalating marketing expenditures in Hollywood film distribution ensure the stability of the oligarchy's market shares against the threat of independent or foreign competition, as "competitive marketing now requires investments on a scale beyond the reach of smaller distributors everywhere" (Miller et al., *Global Hollywood* 151).

Conglomerate Hollywood has had a particularly strong ideological effect on foreign films imported to North America. Hollywood's marketing practices have not only generated vast economic barriers to entry in film distribution, these practices also function as a kind of cultural gatekeeper, "blessing only those film projects with commercial potential and marketability and making sure such films appear in advertisements and theatres near you" (Miller et al., *Global Hollywood 2* 268). This is the case for domestic film producers as well as foreign film producers/distributors. Hollywood studios and their conglomerate owners benefit immensely from this gatekeeping function of marketing; not only does it prevent foreign film producers and distributors from competing directly with Hollywood at the domestic box office, but it virtually forces foreign filmmakers to work with a Hollywood distributor for any kind of

[7] *Economic barriers to entry* refer to the financial difficulties a new firm (in this case, a film studio) may face when entering a market (here, theatrical film distribution) on a competitive level.

significant or "mainstream" theatrical release. As this case study will illustrate, conglomerate-owned Hollywood distributors and their subsidiaries exercise this control over the mainstream theatrical distribution of foreign films through marketing as well as textual strategies. As Chapter 1 explains in more detail, the choice made by New Line Cinema to launch the Hollywood stardom of Jackie Chan with *Rumble in the Bronx* was hardly accidental: indeed, executives for New Line assessed the appeal of the Hong Kong film for North American audiences based primarily on its American setting ("Jackie Vaults for US Stardom").

Hong Kong and Hollywood

Though New Line Cinema's Jackie Chan project was hardly the beginning of the Hong Kong-US screen trade, it nonetheless represented a significant shift in the distribution of Hong Kong films in North America, particularly in regards to the scale and profile of release. Historically both the Hong Kong and US films industries have been involved to some degree in mutual influence and trade. Law Kar argues, for example, that the training of Hong Kong's first filmmakers in America, as well as Western influences on Cantonese opera, helped Hong Kong cinema reach a "golden age" in 1937-1941 (44). Furthermore, Kar cites an American businessman, Benjamin Brodsky, as an inspiration to the founders of the Hong Kong and Chinese film industries: his Asia Film Company, one of the first in Shanghai and Hong Kong, made him "an important catalyst in the true beginning of Hong Kong cinema" (46). Kar also underlines American business interests in Hong Kong's first major film studio, Grandview, founded by Moon Kwan Man-ching and Joe Chiu in 1933 with Chinese *and* American businessmen (50).

According to Kar, Moon Kwan Man-ching was also responsible for distributing films from the Lianhua studio in Shanghai to diasporic communities in the US and Canada in the 1930s. This established an extensive network of Chinatown theaters in major cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Montreal, and Toronto (Kar 59). Additionally, Poshek Fu has argued that the Hong Kong/Singapore based Shaw Brothers studio set up a business network in the 1960s that catered to a "global pan-Chinse public," including diasporic Chinese communities in North America (1).

Similarly, Jackie Chan was not entirely unknown in Hollywood prior to New Line Cinema's version of *Rumble in the Bronx*. His early successes in Hong Kong cinema in the late 1970s and 1980s did not go unnoticed, particularly in the trade press. Chan received notice in *Screen International* as early as October 1979, when the trade reported an international distribution lineup by Hong Kong-based Ocean Films for his early hits *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (1978) and *Drunken Master (*1978) ("Ocean aims for world with martial arts"). *Screen International* described Chan as a "Bruce Lee lookalike" or successor in several articles on Golden Harvest's global aspirations in 1980 ("$60m Golden Movie Pact"; "Chow reaps a Golden Harvest").

Outside of the aforementioned cycle of co-productions between Warner Brothers and Golden Harvest, Jackie Chan's involvement in the North American market prior to 1996 was limited to small deals with specialty distributors, and special appearances at film festivals and retrospectives. For example, Golden Harvest opened a US distribution label, Rim Film Distribution, in early 1993 to repackage its Hong Kong films for limited engagements with North American exhibitor AMC Theatres (McGeachin). Its initial package included films such as Chan's *City Hunter* (1993), Jet Li's *Once Upon a Time in*

China II (1992), John Woo's *The Killer* (1989), and Stanley Kwan's *Rouge* (1988). More significantly, Bruce Ingram reported in *Variety* for March 18, 1991 that Chan and Golden Harvest had been close to signing a distribution deal with Miramax for several of Chan's most successful Hong Kong films, only for the deal to fall through when Golden Harvest refused to allow Miramax to reedit Chan's *Police Story* (1985) and *Police Story 2* (1988) (Ingram). Given that New Line – and, later, Miramax – released only reedited, rescored, and dubbed versions of Chan's films (including both *Police Story* films), this report suggests that Chan and Golden Harvest eventually capitulated to the demands of Hollywood distributors to reedit his films in order to access the mainstream North American market. This suggests the power of these domestic distributors over both the circulation and the textual features of foreign films. Though these influences, associations, and networks of distribution and exhibition unquestionably played an important role in the early dissemination of Hong Kong and Chinese cinema in the North America, including the early dissemination of Chan's films, they represent only marginal activities when compared with New Line's mainstream distribution and marketing strategy for *Rumble*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy*.

Hence, this case study of the distribution and marketing of New Line Cinema's Jackie Chan films from 1996-1998 argues that the distributor and its conglomerate owners at Time Warner played a significant role in adapting and ultimately transforming his Hong Kong films into vehicles designed for Hollywood stardom. Indeed, I suggest throughout this work that New Line authored his Hollywood stardom through marketing and promotional paratexts, and through their versions of *Rumble*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy*. In a broader sense, this case study reveals the significant and active role played by

conglomerate-backed Hollywood distributors in regulating the domestic release of foreign films, both in terms of assessing their marketability and in manipulating them to be marketable.

Methodology

On a micro level, this case study argues that the distribution, marketing, and textual manipulation of these three Chan films is symptomatic of Hollywood's control over the distribution of imported media in the US, particularly in the mainstream theatrical distribution of feature-length foreign films. More generally, this is larger critique of the political economy of Hollywood, particularly the conduct of the "Big Six" studios and their conglomerate backers in the domestic media marketplace, where the market structure of oligopoly curtails independent and foreign competition at the box office.[8] Janet Wasko has defined the political economic study of film as primarily the analysis of "motion pictures as commodities produced and distributed within a capitalist industrial structure" ("Critiquing Hollywood", 10). In order to go beyond the uncritical description of the industry's market structure, Wasko argues that a political economic approach must place the film commodity "within an entire social, economic, and political context and [critique it] in terms of the contribution to maintaining and reproducing structures of power" ("Critiquing Hollywood", 11). Thus, the political economic approach is fundamentally critical, contextual, and interdisciplinary, concerned equally with the stages of production, distribution, and exhibition that render film as a commodity. Though the proceeding case study aims to analyze primarily the policies and practices of a single conglomerate-owned Hollywood film studio in the years 1996-1998, it functions

[8] For the Hollywood studios, the domestic marketplace consists of the US and Canada.

more generally as a critique of Hollywood's continued dominance over the domestic distribution of foreign media.

This represents an under studied avenue through which Hollywood studios have maintained and reproduced structures of power in favor of the industry. In order to conduct this kind of political economic analysis, I analyze not only the film texts – acquired by and domesticated from their original versions by New Line – but also the key promotional paratexts that position and induce meaning in those film texts, including posters, print advertisements, publicity appearances, film trailers, and others.[9] I believe the principal benefits of the political economic approach are the connections this approach allows me to make between text, paratext, and context, between the acquisition and manipulation of the foreign film text by Hollywood studios, and the concomitant maintenance of Hollywood's hegemony through market concentration and conglomeration. Thus, this case study illustrates that not only are Hollywood studios interested in maintaining control over the North American market through domestic film production and distribution practices, but also by recapitalizing – that is, by purchasing and profiting from – foreign films and remaking them in Hollywood's image.

Furthermore, this case study needs to be situated within the discourse of Media Industries Studies, an emerging academic subfield of research cutting across the disciplines of Film, Media, and Cultural Studies, and incorporating methodologies from fields such as economics, business, journalism, sociology, anthropology, law, and others. Media Industries Studies is necessarily a contextual and interdisciplinary approach,

[9] I borrow this term from literary studies to indicate any smaller text, such as a film trailer, that is engaged primarily in presenting a larger text, such as a feature-length film. For the purpose of this study, I have focused on the paratexts of promotion; in other words, on the advertisements and promotional appearances which try to drive consumption of the principal text. See: Gerard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of* Interpretation (1997).

dictated in large part by the convergence of the media industries themselves; in other words, scholarship in the humanities and social sciences must converge in much the same way as the media industries have converged if this scholarship is to remain critically relevant (Holt and Perren 11). Michele Hilmes argues that media industries analysis is the "translation of authorship into a dispersed site marked by multiple, intersecting agendas and interests, where individual authorship in the traditional sense still most certainly takes place, but within a framework that robs it, to a greater or lesser degree, of its putative autonomy" (22). For Hilmes, analyses of the media industries like this one are not fundamentally opposed to traditional humanities-based scholarship (such as the *auteur* theory and its focus on the creative autonomy of the individual), but are instead "a vital enrichment of our understanding of cultural production and a necessary corrective to the narrow categories of traditional scholarship" (ibid).

Following Hilmes, I have fused together a traditional Film Studies approach, centered on textual (and paratextual) exegesis, with a political economic approach, concerned with the critical explication of ideology, market forces, and market structure. This approach is hardly new, however: historical precedents for this kind of combined analysis include David Bordwell, Janet Steiger, and Kristin Thompson's *Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (1985); Justin Wyatt's *High Concept* (1994); and John T. Caldwell's *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (1995). Futhermore, this case study has also been inspired and informed by, and in one sense seeks to supplement, Toby Miller et al.'s *Global Hollywood* (2001) and *Global Hollywood 2* (2005). In focusing solely on Hollywood's global aspirations, these two valuable texts have nonetheless neglected what I feel is an under-studied and under-

theorized element in the global screen trade: that being the importation and manipulation of foreign media by the Hollywood studios. This case study aims, at least in part, to fill in that gap in the scholarship.

Structure

I have organized this work into two chapters. In the first, I briefly establish the effects of conglomeration on the Hollywood media industry. I pay particular attention to the acceleration of marketing initiatives within this industry in order to describe the intensification of economic barriers to entry in theatrical distribution that have reproduced Hollywood's power over the North American market. New Line Cinema's distribution and marketing of *Rumble* represents a particularly potent example of that power. I situate New Line's *Rumble* as the key text for understanding the distributor's project of capitalizing on and converting Jackie Chan's global stardom into a specifically Hollywood one. Therefore, this chapter is primarily concerned with an analysis of the paratextual material disseminated by New Line to promote their version of *Rumble*, including the press kit, promotional appearances orchestrated by the distributor, preview screenings at prominent North American film festivals, film posters, and the theatrical trailer. This is followed by a comparative analysis of New Line's version of the film with its original version – released in 1995 by the Hong Kong studio Golden Harvest – paying particular attention to the ways in which the North American distributor manipulated the film to produce synergy between this version of the film and the paratextual material used to market it. I argue that the extent of New Line's control over the textual features of the film, as well as its integration with an aggressive "high-concept" Hollywood marketing

strategy, functions as a useful example of contemporary Hollywood's influence and control over the global media marketplace.

In the second chapter, I examine the critical coherence and continuities of New Line's version of *Rumble in the Bronx* with two other Chan films released by the distributor in 1997 and 1998: *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy*. These films were distributed, marketed, and manipulated by New Line in the same manner as *Rumble*. Furthermore, I look to an agreement between New Line and another Hollywood distributor, Miramax's Dimension Films label, as evidence of cooperation between "competitors" in North American film distribution. New Line and Miramax agreed to avoid overlap in the theatrical distribution of Chan films, a business arrangement that is also evident in the textual features of Chan films released by both distributors: Miramax reedited, rescored, and dubbed its versions of *Supercop* (1996) and *Operation Condor* (1997) in much the same manner as New Line's *Rumble*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy*. Therefore, this chapter argues that New Line's distribution strategy for Chan's films relied not only on consistent and synergistic marketing initiatives between promotional material and film texts, but it also relied to some degree on brand consistency between distributors in the same market. This chapter concludes by drawing a line from New Line's distribution strategy for Chan's Hong Kong films to Chan's full co-optation in Hollywood with the blockbuster action film *Rush Hour* (1998), produced *and* distributed by New Line. Thus, the distribution of Chan's Hong Kong films by New Line reinforced rather than challenged the domestic and global media power of Hollywood.

Finally, I conclude this case study by examining the legacy of New Line's distribution and marketing strategy for Jackie Chan post-*Rush Hour*. I also look to the North

American release of Chan's most recent film, *Chinese Zodiac* (2012), as well as the recent release of Wong Kar-wai's martial arts film *The Grandmaster* (2013) and Korean director Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer* (2013), in order to bring this research up-to-date.

CHAPTER 1: *Rumble in the Bronx* and the "Anatomy of an Action Star"

Jackie Chan concludes his autobiography, *I Am Jackie Chan: A Life in Pictures* (1998), with a typical Hollywood dénouement: basking in the box office success of *Rumble in the Bronx* (1996), Chan is given a gala premiere for the film, a place on Hollywood's Walk of Fame, and an agent with the William Morris Agency. "This was being a star in America," Chan writes (Chan and Yang 334). On the preceding page, Chan provides an account of his negotiations with New Line Cinema for the distribution and marketing of *Rumble* in North America. Chan's narration of this meeting emphasizes New Line's marketing savvy and its "publicity machine":

> "'The idea we have isn't just to introduce people to the movie,' their marketing guy said. 'It's to introduce them to Jackie Chan.'
>
> 'I've been here before,' I said. 'I think people already know me.'
>
> The marketing guy laughed. 'Yeah, some people may have seen your American films, and you've certainly got a big cult following,' he said. 'But seriously, do you think that America – middle America, shopping mall America – knows Jackie Chan? The *real* Jackie Chan? Do they know you're the biggest action star in the world?'" (Chan and Yang 333)

In order for *Rumble* to reach "middle America, shopping mall America", and in order for Chan to enjoy the spoils of Hollywood stardom, he and his partners at Golden Harvest needed to sign a deal with a Hollywood distributor, particularly one with the financial resources to distribute and market the film for theatrical wide release.[10]

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[10] *Rumble in the Bronx* opened on February 23, 1996 in 1,794 theaters, made $9,858,380 on its opening weekend, and closed with domestic box office total of $32,392,047 ("Rumble in the Bronx").

New Line's role as *Rumble*'s North American distributor is significant in that the success of the film in launching Chan's Hollywood stardom can be directly attributed to the coherency, consistency, and commitment of its distribution and marketing strategy, in particular the manipulation of the original Hong Kong version of the film for its North American release. New Line's ability to distribute and market *Rumble* for "middle America" was the result of corporate conglomeration. Like other film studios, both majors and independents, New Line was caught up in the wave of conglomeration that consumed Hollywood studios in the 1980s and '90s. This wave considerably increased industry expenditures on marketing, bolstered the importance of distribution and rights management within the Hollywood film industry, and intensified economic barriers to entry for competitors in distribution (Miller et al., *Global Hollywood* 150). These barriers to entry in first-run theatrical distribution take on an explicitly ideological dimension concerning Hollywood studios' distribution and marketing of foreign films. *Rumble* is a key text in this regard, as New Line's version of the film and its star were carefully translated and Americanized for the domestic market. An analysis of New Line's distribution, marketing and textual practices in preparing *Rumble* for North American release can illustrate the significance of film distribution as a process of translation, particularly as it subtends the status of foreign films under the virtual oligopoly of Hollywood.

Literature Review

Analyses of the global film industry have too often mischaracterized Jackie Chan as a boundless, and borderless, auteur figure who pursues his style of filmmaking virtually unmediated by the very real political economies of film distribution. For instance, even though Gina Marchetti notes the reediting and dubbing of the film by New Line, she nevertheless returns to the notion that "Chan has *transformed himself* into a Hollywood star, without severing his ties to Hong Kong, Japan, and his non-Western fans, by creating a new 'ghetto myth' of transnational multiculturalism" (157, emphasis mine). Similarly, David Bordwell contends that *Rush Hour* (1998), the fourth Chan film to be released theatrically by New Line, proved that Chan could "*reinvent himself* as a mainstream Hollywood actor" (85, emphasis mine). Like Bordwell, Kin-Yan Szeto argues that Chan has cultivated a "cosmopolitical perspective" which has enabled him to navigate the transnational media environment with "an inventive flexibility that has enabled him to succeed both commercially and ideologically" (113-114): for Szeto, Chan is primarily responsible for his own success. Kenneth Chan acknowledges the "limited agency" of Chan in Hollywood, but limits this acknowledgement to the ways in which Chan is caught up in "complex studio bureaucracies, especially when it comes to his safety during stunt work" and in the inevitable handover of some creative control to writers, directors, and executives (132). And though Mark Gallagher takes some stock of New Line's involvement with Chan and *Rumble*, he describes this work as "*limited to* [dubbing, reediting, and rescoring] and to the films' marketing" (121, emphasis mine). Gallagher downplays the role of New Line in abetting his Hollywood stardom in favor of attributing Chan's North American success to his comic persona and a "gradual

redefinition as an action star rather than a martial arts star" (121). My point in identifying the orientation of the preceding academics is not to argue against analyses of Chan's creative labor and agency in filmmaking, but merely to avoid the industry-sponsored overdetermination of film production and the veneration of the individual *auteur* figure. Instead, I hope to more accurately describe the complexities – economic and aesthetic – involved in Chan's transition to Hollywood stardom.

Only Steve Fore has adequately described New Line's involvement in marketing and manipulating *Rumble in the Bronx* for North American theatrical release. Fore looks to issues of marketing to pinpoint the ways in which New Line translated the foreign film star for domestic audiences. Fore pays particular attention to the reediting, rescoring, and dubbing of the film, though he is ultimately ambivalent regarding the effects of this translation in terms of Hollywood's representation of racial difference (255). Ultimately, Fore concludes his essay by noting that "hegemony leaks" and that Chan's success in the US market "represents an as yet small-scale but significant revision of the master narrative of global marketing" (258). However, Fore's analysis of the film suffers from a critical lack of perspective, insufficiently situating the historical development of film distribution and marketing, and its specific functions under conglomeration, as well as the legacy of New Line's version of *Rumble* in Chan's Hollywood career.

This chapter, then, looks to the marketing and textual manipulations of New Line Cinema's *Rumble in the Bronx*, paying particular attention to its marketing strategy, and traces lines from marketing paratexts (press kit, posters, publicity, and theatrical trailer) to the film text itself (reedited, rescored, and dubbed from the original for the purposes of marketing). I situate this case study by briefly describing New Line's place under the

corporate umbrella of Time Warner, a media mega-corporation capable of cross-collateralizing and bankrolling increasingly expensive distribution and marketing campaigns. *Rumble*'s success in reaching "shopping mall America" ultimately came at the behest of New Line and its extensive marketing outlay, which reinforced the conglomerate's hegemony over the domestic media marketplace. More broadly, this case study suggests that the economic and cultural hegemony held by Hollywood distributors is a result of the strict regulation of foreign film imports via scalars of escalating marketing expenses. New Line's version of *Rumble* clearly illustrates that the domestic distributor was not only *authorizing*, but also *authoring* foreign film.

Time Warner, Turner, and New Line Cinema

The Time Warner conglomerate was formed in 1989, joining together the publishing interests of Time, Inc. with the film and television interests of Warner Communications. Conglomerates like Time Warner were supported by two decades of favorable US government policy decisions under the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations (Holt, *Empires of Entertainment* 3-4). This merger in particular created a model for media conglomeration that emphasized the creation and maintenance of media properties that could be moved synergistically between media platforms (Holt, *Empires of Entertainment* 126). Time Warner merged with Turner Communications in August 1996, bolstering the conglomerate's holdings in media platforms, producers and content – including New Line Cinema's *Rumble in the Bronx*, released roughly six months before the Time Warner-Turner merger was made official.

New Line came under the Time Warner corporate banner approximately two years after they were purchased by Turner, and their version of *Rumble*'s illustrates that the once independent studio had already adjusted to a conglomerate's need for certainty. Under conglomeration, increasingly-costly marketing campaigns were part of the parent companies' efforts to alleviate the perceived uncertainty and high risk of investment in the film industry (Miller et al., *Global Hollywood* 147). Yet marketing in conglomerate Hollywood simultaneously contracted the market for both mainstream and independent film distribution and created an economic barrier to entry for distributors unaffiliated with large parent companies (Litman 31). In this way, marketing reaffirmed distribution as the locus of power within the Hollywood industry, as the high cost of competitive marketing in mainstream theatrical distribution virtually forced foreign filmmakers to work through the Hollywood majors.

Under the ownership of Turner and then Time Warner, New Line developed into what Justin Wyatt termed a "major independent", an ostensibly independent-minded studio that retained some of its former autonomy, but with the addition of significant financial resources ("Major Independent" 84). For instance, in the June 6, 1997 edition of *Screen International*, New Line's VP of acquisitions Mark Ordesky boasted: "I have every weapon at my disposal that a major studio has; I can spend $50m or whatever it takes just as they can" ("Executive Suite" 24). In dealing with Jackie Chan and his producers at Golden Harvest, New Line's affiliation under Turner – and later, under Time Warner – put the distributor in a powerful position to negotiate favorable terms in acquiring Chan's films, the most obvious being the distributor's right to reedit, rescore, and dub them for the domestic market, based principally on the distributor's considerable access to funds

and the promotional synergies of conglomeration. Such an imbalanced and asymmetrical relationship – between a foreign film producer with no track record or market share and a domestic distributor backed by the world's largest media conglomerate – points to the interrelated ideological processes of film distribution, marketing, and the textual manipulation of foreign films.

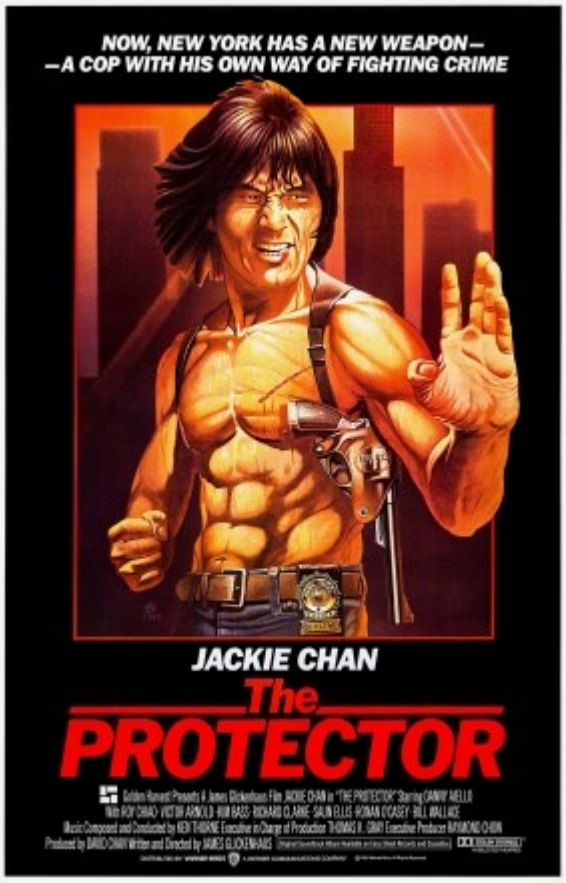

Figure 1: Theatrical release poster for *The Protector* (1985). Though Jackie Chan's name is placed above the title, this poster emphasizes the narrative and generic identity of the film rather than the star persona of Chan.

Enter New Line Cinema

In an article for *Variety* on Hollywood's import of Hong Kong films and filmmakers, New Line's Mark Ordesky described the marketing strategy for *Rumble in the Bronx*: "The timing could not be better for this type of movie… as far as we're concerned at New Line, we've never heard of 'The Protector.' This is not 'the second coming of Jackie Chan,' but the 'coming of Jackie Chan'" (Brodie 113). *The Protector* (1985, Figure 1) was a Hollywood action film starring Chan and co-produced by Warner Brothers and Golden Harvest. It made only $981,817 in its lifetime domestic gross ("The Protector"). The failure of *The Protector* at the domestic box office signaled the end of Chan's first tour in Hollywood, a cycle of films which also included the Warner Brothers/Golden Harvest co-

productions *The Big Brawl* (1980, Figure 2), *The Cannonball Run* (1981), and *Cannonball Run II* (1984). Ordesky's invocation of *The Protector* in the *Variety* article not only serves to distinguish New Line's marketing savvy, for the purposes of self-promotion, from that of Warner Brothers a decade earlier, but more generally it indicates the escalated importance of marketing under conglomeration. Unlike New Line a decade later, Warner Brothers in the early 1980s had neither the synergistic resources of a conglomerate nor the confidence in his appeal to establish Chan in "shopping mall America" with vehicles like *The Protector*.

Figure 2: Theatrical release poster for *The Big Brawl* (1980). Similarly, this poster is more concerned with identifying the genre of the film than the star persona of Chan. This is particularly evident in the taglines for the film below the main image of Chan: "A Martial Arts fight to the finish. Filmed in America by the producers of 'Enter the Dragon.'"

Jackie Chan attributes the failure of these co-productions to his lack of creative control (Chan and Yang 318-319). Mike Walsh argues that Chan's initial failure in Hollywood signaled the end of Golden Harvest's aspirations for truly global film production and distribution (172-173). According to Walsh, Golden Harvest's difficulties stemmed from the fact that it could not secure a firm relationship with a Hollywood studio, and that studios like Warner Brothers regarded films like *The Big Brawl* and *The Protector* as marginal efforts (173). In other

words, Hollywood studios like Warner Brothers not only lacked the deep financial pockets that conglomeration would bring for distribution and marketing expenses, but they were also less than enthusiastic about the films' potential in mainstream markets, and this may have resulted in weak marketing campaigns for co-productions with Golden Harvest.

Chan and Golden Harvest's association with Warner Brothers in the 1980s provides a useful counterexample through which we can distinguish the function and significance of marketing for New Line's version of *Rumble*. Warner Brothers had partnered with Golden Harvest on martial arts films several years prior to the release of their Jackie Chan vehicle *The Big Brawl*. David Desser has described the initial importation, co-production, and cooptation of martial arts cinema by Hollywood studios in the 1970s, beginning with *Five Fingers of Death* (1973) and culminating with the success of the Bruce Lee film *Enter the Dragon* (1973), co-produced and distributed by Warner Brothers. David Desser astutely noted the importance of Warner Brothers in developing the genre for the domestic market, asserting that "no other U.S. studio was as intimately involved in the production and distribution of martial arts movies as Warner Brothers" (24). Warner Brothers began by importing and distributing a dubbed version of *Five Fingers of Death*, and the studio ultimately capitalized on the success of these imports by producing or co-producing their own martial arts films (Desser 27). When Warners co-produced Jackie Chan's *The Big Brawl* in 1980, the studio had already shifted away from distributing imported martial arts films and had replaced them with Hollywood productions. In this sense, Warner Brothers' Jackie Chan was *produced* in Hollywood,

whereas New Line's Jackie Chan was *distributed and marketed* in Hollywood, at least initially.

New Line began its formal relationship with Chan and his partners at Golden Harvest in early 1995. In the March 5, 1995 edition of the *South China Morning Post*, it was announced that the distributor had signed a multi-million dollar deal with Golden Harvest International for the rights to distribute *Rumble in the Bronx*, a potential sequel, and two other unnamed films. The *Morning Post* enthusiastically endorsed this deal as one that "should establish Asia's top action actor as a major movie star in America" ("Jackie Vaults for US Stardom"). Similarly, Henry Sheehan gushed over the deal in an article for the *Orange County Register* of March 7, 1995, taking special notice of New Line's newfound "marketing muscle" under the ownership of Turner Communications.

In his autobiography, Chan underscored the marketing power possessed by New Line, describing the "publicity push" he would receive from the distributor, a push that would put him "on the covers of magazines, in newspapers, on talk shows. Not as some kind of strange animal, or Bruce Lee clone, or one-hit wonder who'd just gotten off the boat from Hong Kong. As the biggest star in the world" (Chan and Yan 333). However, even the biggest star in the world needed to be "groomed" for Hollywood stardom first.

"No Fear. No Stuntmen. No Equal."

New Line Cinema was never shy in discussing its marketing strategy for *Rumble in the Bronx* with either the popular or trade presses. As early as the announcement of New Line's deal with Jackie Chan in March 1995, New Line president and COO Michael Lynne stated: "We look forward to *grooming* and *refining* his image as today's pre-

eminent action-adventure star" ("Jackie Vaults for US Stardom", emphasis mine). Lynne's choice of words indicate New Line's overall marketing disposition towards *Rumble* and Chan; in this case, "grooming" and "refining" implying a process of improvement. This disposition is made more explicitly ideological in an article for the *New York Times Magazine*, in which Mitchell Goldman, President of Marketing and Distribution for New Line, stated that "We're in the business of Americanizing Jackie Chan as much as we can" (Wolf). This process of "grooming", "refining" or "Americanizing" Chan also involved a commitment to Chan beyond *Rumble*. Goldman refers to this in the same *New York Times Magazine* article when he claims that "[once] we establish him as an action star in an American setting, it will be easier for his Asian pictures to cross over" (ibid). For *Rumble*, New Line launched an extensive marketing campaign that would establish him in the crowded star gallery of mainstream Hollywood, and would provide the marketing groundwork on which all other producers and distributors would build.

For Jackie Chan and Golden Harvest, *Rumble* was originally thought of as an "international" Hong Kong film, one that would feature a Western setting, a predominantly non-Asian cast, and English dialogue (Chan and Yang 332). In other words, Chan and Golden Harvest anticipated "Americanization" by producing a film amenable to that ideological project, a kind of self-Americanization that proved appealing to New Line. New Line president and COO Michael Lynne even stated that "[because] of its New York setting and the growing interest in Asian cinema, we believe this is the right vehicle for Chan to win over American audiences" ("Jackie Vaults for US Stardom"). Though one can argue that Chan anticipated and to some extent authored his

Hollywood stardom by voluntarily shifting his local Hong Kong identity to a more global and globe-hopping action star persona (Szeto), it was New Line that ultimately authorized *and* authored Chan's Hollywood success to a far greater degree. This was accomplished through New Line's extensive marketing campaign, integrated into its version of the film via the reediting, rescoring, and dubbing of the original. Thus, while the "Americanization" of Chan may have begun as a project of self-Americanization, his distribution deal with New Line shifted the locus of Americanization from the star to the distributor, and in particular the distributor's marketing department.

In their press kit for *Rumble in the Bronx*, New Line describes the film as Jackie Chan's fifth American film in the previous two decades. In other words, the distributor was not merely handling the distribution of a foreign film, but was actively reconstituting *Rumble* as a Hollywood film. New Line's "Americanization" of *Rumble* and Jackie Chan began with this re-presentation of the film as a product of Hollywood. In this regard, New Line's press kit reveals rather plainly the distributor's marketing strategy for the film. This press kit is a key paratext in analyzing the dissemination of New Line's marketing messages across media platforms. Press kits serve several important purposes for distributors; most notably, they provide key messages – a set of marketing ideas which succinctly define and effectively communicate the salability and brand identity of a given consumer item – as well as images and information for outside use in print, television, and online coverage of the film (Ulin 406). For Hollywood distributors, an effective press kit is one that is simultaneously "engaging and informative, and also has direct messaging – the film if not already a brand will hopefully become one, and staying true to a brand requires concise and bounded messaging" (ibid). *Rumble*'s press kit exhibits this kind of

"bounded messaging" and is the most obvious locus of New Line's marketing strategy, to which its paratextual and textual practices cohere.

Rumble in the Bronx's press kit includes a 24-page document about the film and its star, adorned with the logo for the film and contact information for New Line publicity agents, as well as glossy stills from the film and posed photos of Jackie Chan (Figure 3). This document includes a brief plot synopsis, production history, a biography of Chan, his full filmography, and brief biographies for director Stanley Tong and Golden Harvest producer Raymond Chow. In the press kit, and subsequently in all related marketing materials for *Rumble*, New Line's strategy is guided by a core assumption: the assumption of audience unfamiliarity. New Line's marketing operates under the assumption that the audience for mainstream Hollywood films needs to be introduced to Chan. In order to offset his foreignness, New Line deploys a kind of Hollywood heuristic which makes Chan familiar by comparing him favorably with what the distributor presumes to be more familiar faces. This takes the form of quotes culled together from various newspaper and magazine articles which compare Chan to Clint Eastwood, Gene Kelly, Jim Carrey, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd, and this also includes individual

Figure 3: Promotional photo for New Line's *Rumble in the Bronx* (1996). This was one of many photos included in New Line's press kit for the film. It was also one of the most widely reproduced images of Chan in print media, and it remained so long after the release of *Rumble*.

attestations from Hollywood personalities such as Sylvester Stallone and Quentin Tarantino. More importantly, New Line distills his persona into two key messages which defined his Hollywood stardom well after the release of *Rumble*: Chan performs his own stunts, and often suffers severe injuries as a result of this high-risk style of filmmaking. The Chan brand established by the distributor in the press kit for *Rumble* – particularly these key messages – was then carried over in a coherent and consistent fashion in all promotional paratexts prepared for the film.

For New Line, one of the keys to effectively marketing *Rumble in the Bronx* was the orchestration of publicity and the regulation of media access to Jackie Chan. New Line's distribution deal with Chan and Golden Harvest included Chan's commitment to promote the film prior to its theatrical release. Like other publicity departments in Hollywood, New Line's marketing team not only managed media coverage for the film, but the distributor also managed access to its star. In this way, a publicity department like New Line's could exercise "a degree of editorial control and gatekeeping power" over the kinds of press the film received (Drake 74). In other words, the publicity department "functions as the gatekeeper to talent, and manages access to talent in a way that at once is hopefully respectful to people's time… and maximizes positive exposure for a film/property" (Ulin 407). New Line's coordination of publicity for *Rumble* and the gatekeeping of Chan represented yet another avenue through which the conglomerate-backed distributor extended its marketing strategy.

Following his deal with New Line in March 1995, Chan's first major television appearance was to accept a "Lifetime Achievement Award" at the MTV Movie Awards on June 10. Quentin Tarantino introduced a three minute montage of Chan fight scenes,

prominently featuring clips from *Rumble in the Bronx*, set to the 1974 disco hit "Kung Fu Fighting". At the conclusion of his acceptance speech, Chan promoted *Rumble* by stating, "I believe there are many people that don't know me, but that doesn't matter. Please go to see *Rumble in the Bronx*, you'll know me better". Chan made several more appearances on MTV prior to the release of *Rumble*, including an interview on *Alternative Nation* in early 1996, which featured clips from two fight scenes in the film as well as a martial arts exhibition by Chan with the show's host. This martial arts exhibition became something of a convention in Chan's television appearances during, and indeed long after, the publicity tour for *Rumble*. This is most likely attributable to the kinds of key messages set up by New Line's marketing strategy, which foreground above all Chan's ability as a performer. Chan's appearance on the *Late Show with David Letterman* a week prior to the release of *Rumble* further exemplifies the perpetuation of these key messages in outside publicity for the film. Letterman introduces Chan with a 30-second montage of fight scenes, similar to the montage that introduced him at the MTV Movie Awards the previous year. A few minutes into the interview, Chan breaks a glass on the host's desk, an incident which culminates with Chan climbing on top of the desk to perform a succession of acrobatic maneuvers. Later, when Letterman asks Chan about the injuries he has suffered as a result of performing his own stunts, Chan allows the host to feel a hole in his skull, the scar from a nearly fatal accident on the set of *Armour of God* (1986). This emphasis on the key messages of performance and physical consequences remains coeval with New Line's publicity for the film across media platforms, including its print campaign in newspapers and magazines.

In anticipation of the February 23, 1996 theatrical release of *Rumble in the Bronx*, profiles of Chan appeared in both trade and popular presses, including: *Time* ("Jackie Can!"), *Variety* ("Hong Kong's Chopsocky Stars Try U.S. Translation"), the *New York Times* ("Jackie Chan, American Action Hero?"), *Film Journal* ("Action King Jackie Chan Gets Ready to Rumble"), *Newsweek* ("Chinese Takeout"), *Box Office* ("Jackie Chan, Superstar"), the *Village Voice* ("Leaps of Faith: Jackie Chan Invades America – Again"), *Entertainment Weekly* ("Kong Kings"), and the *Washington Post* ("Kung Pow!"), among others. Though this list is by no means comprehensive, it nevertheless indicates the effectiveness and scope of New Line's publicity campaign across a plethora of entertainment magazines, journals, and newspapers. The similarities between these articles points to the legibility and availability of New Line's key messages and marketing materials for *Rumble*. New Line's key messages, emphasizing Chan's capacity for performance and his fearlessness, remain the focus in these often transparently promotional pieces. Virtually all of these articles describe his stunts and injuries, specifically the ankle injury suffered while jumping from a bridge to a hovercraft in *Rumble*, as well as the aforementioned accident from *Armour of God*. These articles also reproduce the stills and posed photos provided in New Line's press kit. Lengthy profiles of Chan in the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and the February 1996 issue of *Box Office* make extensive use of these promotional images, in particular the promotional image in Figure 3.

New Line's marketing strategy for *Rumble in the Bronx* also included screenings of the film at prominent North American film festivals. New Line's version of *Rumble* played a midnight screening at ShowEast, an industry trade show and exhibition, in the

fall of 1995 ("Schedule of Events"). *Rumble* also had a midnight screening at the Sundance Film Festival in January 1996 ("1996 Sundance Film Festival"). Festival screenings such as these ensure "that influential people can be impressed by the film and help spread the word" prior to theatrical launch (Ulin 408). As part of New Line's marketing strategy, these two festival screenings raised the promotional profile of *Rumble* with industry filmmakers and tastemakers, as well as critics and cinéphiles.

Rumble's posters represent one of New Line's most direct marketing appeals. Posters – as well as trailers, discussed below – have more immediate visibility in the crowded media marketplace than any other promotional image prepared by the distributor, and in order to be effective for Hollywood studios, they "need to convey a succinct and compelling message" (Ulin 404). New Line prepared two posters for *Rumble*, one for theatrical release and the other for home video. Both convey *Rumble*'s key messages through either the rhetoric of a high concept tagline or through graphic representation. The theatrical release poster for *Rumble* (Figure 4) features a nondescript fist bursting through an image of the New York City skyline. Chan's name is placed above the title of the film, and beneath the fist

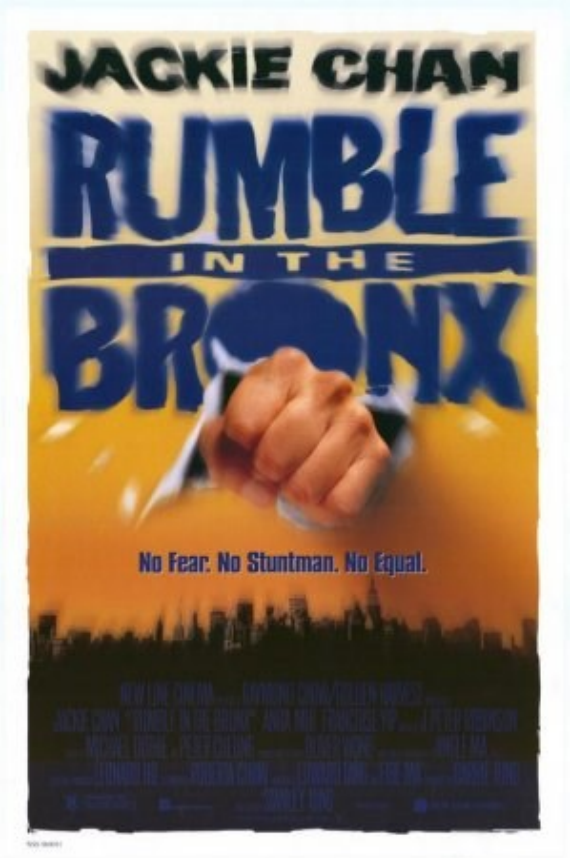

Figure 4: Theatrical release poster for *Rumble in the Bronx* (1996). Compared to the poster for *The Protector* (Figure 1), this one emphasizes the larger star persona of Jackie Chan over the specifics of this film in particular.

is the films' tagline: "No Fear. No Stuntmen. No Equal." Though an image of Chan is not featured in this poster, the tagline nevertheless conveys New Line's key messages through succinct, high concept Hollywood rhetoric: that is, the tagline underscores the importance of performance ("No Stuntmen. No Equal") as well as the physical consequences ("No Fear"). New Line's home video poster for *Rumble* (Figure 5), however, uses an image of Chan to convey the same key messages. Under the heading "Anatomy of an Action Hero", this poster anatomizes Chan's body by pointing to particular limbs and describing the litany of injuries Chan has suffered as a result of doing his own stunts. In this poster, Chan is wearing a black t-shirt, jeans, and sneakers, a costume identical to the posed photos New Line included in its press kit for the film. Both the theatrical and home video posters for *Rumble* convey the same key messages, albeit by different rhetorical and visual methods. Significantly, the home video poster links the image of Chan disseminated by New Line *directly* (via posters, trailers) with the image of Chan disseminated by New Line *indirectly* (via press kits, stills and posed photos used in

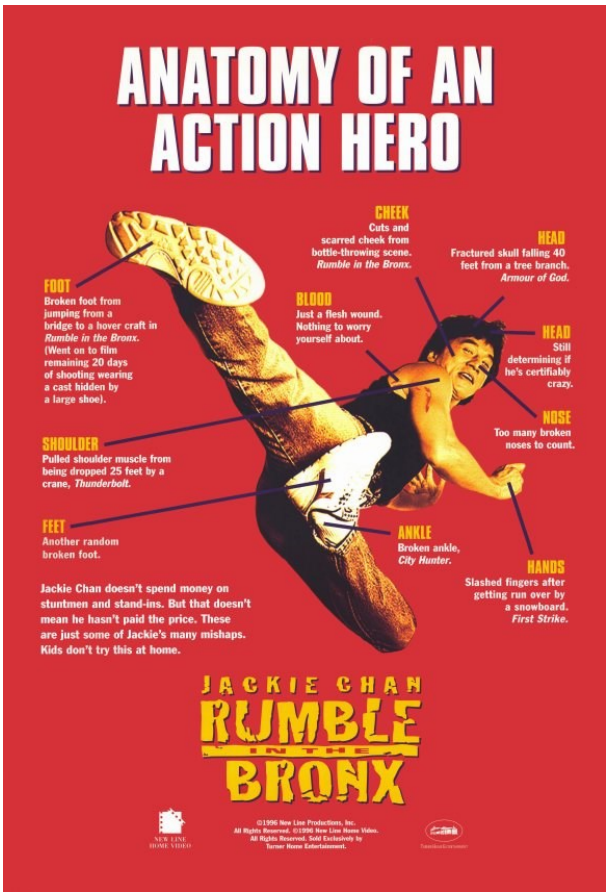

Figure 5: Home video poster for *Rumble in the Bronx* (1996). The arrows indicate the injuries Chan has incurred throughout his career, including two while filming *Rumble*: a broken foot and a scarred cheek.

outside print and television coverage), revealing a coherent and consistent marketing strategy.

New Line's trailer for *Rumble in the Bronx* condenses this marketing strategy into a one-minute trailer that explicitly introduces Jackie Chan to the "middle America"/mainstream audience assumed by the distributor. Trailers, Lisa Kernan argues, reveal "the process by which audiences are implicitly defined by promotional discourses, as the studios attempt to know what 'the audience' wants" (3). New Line's implicit definition of the "middle America"/mainstream audience for *Rumble* is given an explicit dimension in the theatrical trailer for the film. Much like New Line's press kit assumes that this domestic audience is unfamiliar with Chan, their trailer begins in a similar manner, with a voice-over stating, "If you've never seen him before, you've never seen action," in this case "you" representing an "average" American spectator. Furthermore, this trailer conveys the New Line's key messages by focusing solely on Chan's stunts in the film, while a voice-over describes him as "the action hero who does all his own stunts". Pointedly, this hyperactive montage of stunts leaves no room for even the most rudimentary plot description: Chan's character is never named, and the narrative is never outlined. Again, *Rumble*'s trailer directly conveys the New Line's key message for the film, focusing on Chan's performance and the physical consequences.

In sum, New Line Cinema's marketing strategy for *Rumble in the Bronx* translated Jackie Chan's stardom from Hong Kong to Hollywood, capitalized on particular aspects of his persona, and rendered them as highly functional and succinct marketing messages. New Line's positioning of *Rumble* and Chan was not limited to marketing materials, however: it was also predicated on the integration of this marketing strategy with the

reedited, rescored, and dubbed version of the film. In *High Concept*, Justin Wyatt described the integration of marketing and merchandising initiatives as fundamental components in the development of a marketing-oriented style of filmmaking that emerged from Hollywood's conglomeration in the 1980s and '90s. New Line's version of *Rumble* presents an intriguing case study that complicates Wyatt's formulation of the high concept Hollywood film. By focusing on Hollywood productions, Wyatt does not account for the consequences of marketing's integration into the distribution of foreign films like *Rumble*. I contend that New Line's integration of marketing with the coeval strategy of textual manipulation for *Rumble* considerably expands our understanding of film distribution, marketing, and media imports under conglomeration.

New Line Cinema's *Rumble in the Bronx*

New Line's version of *Rumble in the Bronx* is reedited, rescored, and dubbed from its original version, and is roughly 17 minutes shorter. Besides the editing of several subplots and scenes, this version also includes the addition of an entirely new opening credits sequence, a new score, the addition of licensed alternative rock music, and a new English-language dub. Such textual work represents the most significant element of New Line's distribution and marketing strategy for *Rumble*, and is the key to fully comprehending the importance of marketing for conglomerate Hollywood, especially for the mainstream theatrical distribution of foreign films.

New Line sought to integrate its marketing strategy into the film by reediting or entirely eliminating scenes they deemed incommensurable to that project. In other words, *Rumble* was primarily reedited to emphasize New Line marketing strategy, particularly

its key messages, and more generally to refocus the film on Jackie Chan. Most of the 17 minutes excised from the original are from the first half, and this involves the elimination of scenes or subplots that do not directly involve Chan. For instance, when Keung (Chan) arrives in the Bronx to attend his Uncle's wedding and help him sell his supermarket, he meets up with the supermarket's new owner, Elaine, and promises to stay in the Bronx to help her while his Uncle is on honeymoon. In the original version, Keung's conversation with Elaine ends and the scene transitions to another, where his Uncle and Aunt perform a wedding song together. New Line's version of this scene, however, concludes immediately after Keung agrees to help Elaine, in essence keeping only the most essential plot information – Keung's motivation to stay in the Bronx – while eliminating a nearly two minute sequence that has little bearing on the development of the narrative or on Chan. In shortening this scene and others like it, New Line not only brought the film in line with the norms of narrative efficiency and star-orientation typical of Hollywood feature film narration, but more importantly this placed considerable emphasis on Chan by removing scenes involving only periphery characters.

New Line's supplemented its reediting of the film by adding a new credit sequence at the start of the film. The original version of *Rumble* opens with Keung exiting from JFK International Airport in New York City, and the opening credits begin after Keung enters his Uncle's car. In this case, there is almost no emphasis placed on Keung's arrival; when the film starts, he's already on his way out of the airport. New Line's version, however, stresses the diegetic and extra-diegetic "arrival" of Keung/Chan by adding an approximately two-minute credit sequence at the start of the film. This credit sequence consists of an initial shot of an airplane flying against a rising sun, which fades into a shot

of the Statue of Liberty, and then cuts to the plane's touchdown at the airport. Though this addition may seem relatively simple, it represents New Line's most ostentatious modification to the original *Rumble*. Keung/Chan's arrival in New Line's *Rumble* is significant because this sequence directly sews the distributor's marketing strategy into the film, such that the introduction of Chan to "middle America" is extended from promotional paratexts to the film text itself.

Similarly, *Rumble*'s rescoring furthered aligned the original film with the distributor's marketing strategy, domesticated the original's production values, and aligned it with the conventions of film scoring in Hollywood. J. Peter Robinson's score for New Line's differs from the original's that it "more poundingly adheres to the conventions of musical styles used in Hollywood action films" (Fore 250). This is particularly noticeable in the film's action sequences. In the original version, these sequences feature a much quieter score that is laid over the top of the image, remaining relatively independent of the scene's choreography and editing rhythm. New Line's version of *Rumble* features a louder and more dynamic score, tethered closely to the editing rhythms of each scene. Furthermore, New Line incorporated licensed music into the film, in particular the alternative rock songs "Elegant Everyday" by Gold Tilt, "Stigmata" by Ministry, and "Kung Fu" by Ash. The incorporation of these licensed songs once again illustrates the integration of New Line's marketing paratexts with the film text, as similar alt-rock songs accompanied promotional montages of Chan for television appearances on MTV, for instance, one of the primary cable networks New Line utilized to market *Rumble*.

Finally, *Rumble*'s dubbing presents probably the most theoretically challenging aspect of the distributor's textual manipulation of the original version. On one hand, dubbing

has a thoroughly ideological dimension that dovetails with the distributor's self-professed project of Americanization. Dubbing a film like *Rumble* into English – a language with a historical basis of cultural and economic power – may represent one strategy through which "Hollywood proposed to tell the story of other nations not only to Americans, but also for other nations themselves, and always in English" (Shohat and Stam 52). Thus, this "grafting" of one language on top of the body language and expressions of another facilitates "a kind of cultural violence and dislocation" (ibid). On the other hand, though dubbing effaces "the fact of a film text's foreign origin", it nevertheless can "lead to the increasing international exchange of films and to the creation of markets in Anglophone countries which are not exclusively dominated by Hollywood productions" (Ascheid 39-40). Yet in the international exchange of films, the contraction of the domestic North American markets by conglomeration and deregulation serves to create an imbalanced and asymmetrical exchange, one that favors Hollywood on its own soil and allows the industry oligopoly to largely dictate favorable terms when importing foreign films. Dubbing represents one strategy through which Hollywood studios can "Americanize" foreign films and recover them as Hollywood products, retaining control over the domestic industry.

Like New Line's other textual manipulations of the original *Rumble*, dubbing integrated the distributor's marketing messages into the film, while simultaneously translating the original's dialogue. The original version of *Rumble* is a multilingual film with a roughly 50/50 split between Cantonese and English. Dubbing the entire film in English, as opposed to subtitling it, eliminates an aspect of the original film that would have been problematic under the Hollywood rubric of continuity; that being the

unexplained ease of inter-lingual communication between characters in the film. In several scenes throughout the original version of *Rumble*, characters speak to each other in different languages without any problems in communication. For instance, in the second half of the film, Keung meets up with a gang member's girlfriend at a nightclub. In a conventional shot-reverse shot pattern, they discuss her job as an exotic dancer. However, Keung's dialogue is spoken in Cantonese while she replies in English. No explanation or motivation is given to explain how they can understand each other. New Line's version of this scene, however, dubs over the entire conversation with English dialogue, removing its seemingly logical inconsistencies and sewing up any gaps in the diegesis. Furthermore, New Line's dubbing of this scene, and others like it, improves the original's audio recording as well as the actors' line delivery. In the original version, the English-speaking gang members that confront Keung throughout the film often cannot be understood as their dialogue is indirectly recorded, poorly mixed and performed. *Rumble*'s English-language dubbing, then, "translates" not only language but also aesthetic standards of audio recording and mixing.

Ultimately, New Line's success in marketing their version of *Rumble in the Bronx* and Jackie Chan was in large part contingent upon the distributor's dissemination of a coherent and consistent version of the film star, made possible by the financial resources and inherent synergies of conglomerate ownership. This involved the coordination of marketing strategy and the textual manipulation of the original to fit New Line's key messages. Interestingly, this also required the policing of New Line's exclusive distribution rights under their agreement with Chan and Golden Harvest. In early 1996, Jamie Portman reported that Chinatown theaters in major North American cities such as

Vancouver and San Francisco could not import Chan's latest films as they had for years prior to the release of *Rumble* (Portman). In blocking Chinatown theaters from booking Chan's latest films, New Line exercised its exclusive North American distribution rights and ensured that the Hollywood stardom of Chan established by the distributor would not be compromised by a different version. This illustrates that Chan's Hollywood stardom depended on the reaffirmation of Hollywood hegemony through rights acquisition and the reinforcement of economic barriers to entry in marketing.

CHAPTER 2: "Jackie Chan Fights for America" in *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy*

On February 28, 1996, one weekend after from the opening of New Line Cinema's *Rumble in the Bronx*, the Time Warner subsidiary acquired the international distribution rights to *Jackie Chan's First Strike* (1996) and the domestic distribution rights to *Thunderbolt* (1995), two Chan films produced by Golden Harvest. New Line President and COO Michael Lynne stated that "New Line has made a major investment in Jackie Chan, and we are in it for the long haul" (Johnson and Cox, *Daily Variety*, "New Line kicks up Chan deal"). Similarly, Mark Ordesky, New Line's Executive Vice President of Acquisitions and Co-Productions, was quoted in an article for *PR Newswire* on February 27, stating that this new deal "strongly reaffirms our commitment to Jackie Chan and Golden Harvest… we look forward to *further* grooming and defining his image as the world's most beloved action-adventure star" ("New Line Cinema Makes 'First Strike' on 'Thunderbolt,'" emphasis mine). Ordesky's comments are nearly identical to those made by Lynne in a March 1995 article for the *South China Morning Post*, when New Line announced its initial deal with Chan for the domestic rights to *Rumble* ("Jackie Vaults for US Stardom"). New Line's acquisition of *First Strike* and *Thunderbolt*, and its commitment to Chan post-*Rumble*, underlines the importance of conglomerate-owned domestic distributors in the establishment of Chan's Hollywood stardom after *Rumble* in the highly concentrated North American market.

As argued in the previous chapter, New Line established the Hollywood stardom of Jackie Chan with their version of *Rumble in the Bronx*, and this version of the film was reedited, rescored, and dubbed to make it more marketable in "middle America." The

scale of New Line's marketing strategy for *Rumble* was made possible by the deep pockets of the distributor's parent company, Turner Communications, particularly the synergies available across Turner's media empire. Along with the rest of Turner, New Line was brought under the umbrella of the Time Warner conglomerate in late 1996, facilitating the growth of New Line once more with significantly larger access to funds for distribution and marketing operations, and with considerably more synergies possible across Time Warner's holdings in film, television, and print media. New Line's commitment to Chan following the Time Warner merger – with the theatrical wide releases of *First Strike* (1997) and *Mr. Nice Guy* (1998) – provides further evidence of the domestic industry's intense concentration under conglomerate ownership, and its long-term effects on the theatrical distribution of foreign films.

This chapter focuses primarily on the domestic distribution and marketing of *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy*. This will entail an analysis of their marketing paratexts in addition to an analysis of the film texts themselves – as with *Rumble*, these films were reedited, rescored, and dubbed to render them as marketable for theatrical distribution. These films followed a marketing strategy that expanded New Line's introduction of Jackie Chan to "middle America" and extended it through 1997 and 1998, leading up to New Line's production of the Hollywood blockbuster *Rush Hour* (1998). Even Chan films released theatrically by "rival" independent film distributor Miramax/Dimension Films –*Supercop* (1996) and *Operation Condor* (1997) – aided New Line's endeavor by simultaneously avoiding competition with New Line in theatrical distribution, and by presenting a stylistically identical version of Chan. By focusing principally on New Line's *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy*, I will provide an example of what Toby Miller,

Freya Schiwy, and Marta Hernández Salván have described as Hollywood's "textual power" in the concentrated ownership of distribution, a power they claim "is of particular significance in determining screen diversity" (198). While Chan's arrival and acceptance in Hollywood may seem at first glance to be indicative of an increase in screen diversity, this analysis of the distribution and marketing practices of New Line argues that the distributor reinforced rather than challenged the business and aesthetic practices of Hollywood.

New Line Cinema, 1996-1998

In 1996, 1997, and 1998, Hollywood distributors owned by media conglomerates possessed a combined 91.81%, 92.48%, and 88.04% market share in theatrical distribution, respectively (Kunz 126). Arguably, concentration of this scale "can act as a barrier to entry to small independent distributors, with little industry experience or contacts and without the financial security and wherewithal that accrues to having a giant corporate parent" (Litman 31). This kind of economic barrier to entry not only applies to independent distributors, but also – and perhaps more stringently – to foreign film producers as well. As this case study of Jackie Chan's involvement with New Line has thus far illustrated, access to the North American market for the theatrical distribution of foreign films is tightly regulated by distribution and marketing practices that favor established, conglomerate-owned Hollywood studios. Competition with these studios in theatrical distribution requires a financial commitment beyond the means of foreign and independent producers/distributors, and as a result foreign films are subject to the power of Hollywood, at least in terms of mainstream theatrical distribution.

Despite New Line's advantageous position under Time Warner, the distributor's place within the conglomerate was relatively unstable following a financially troublesome 1996. On January 8, 1997, *Hollywood Reporter* noted that Time Warner's acquisition of Turner Broadcasting in 1996 included a careful evaluation of New Line's worth. The conglomerate considered selling New Line before Wall Street estimates of the distributors' worth dropped considerably following several high profile failures at the domestic box office, specifically the films *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996) *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996), and *Last Man Standing* (1996). These three films "reflected New Line's first dip into bigger-budget movie-making, a significant departure from the company's origins as a low-budget genre supplier" ("Bad timing for New Line troubles"). Instead of selling New Line, Time Warner looked to involve an outside financial firm to invest in the distributor. According to the *Hollywood Reporter* for July 29, 1997, this was accomplished when New Line acquired $400 million in funding through 1999 from a group of banks led by ABN Amro. This outside investment significantly cut internal investment for New Line at Time Warner, part of an overall plan to reduce the conglomerate's debt across its subsidiaries (Collier). *Hollywood Reporter*'s August 5, 1997 analysis of New Line's box office performance in the previous year suggested that this arrangement for outside financing allowed the distributor to operate relatively independent from Time Warner ("New Line Cinema '96-'97").

Even though New Line's funding was provided by outside investors, it came only at the behest of Time Warner, and it was the synergies possible under the conglomerate that made the investment possible. While the burden of financing New Line's production and distribution costs directly may have been offloaded from Time Warner's books, the

distributor nevertheless *depended* on the conglomerate's brand name and synergistic media assets to capitalize on that investment. This is significant given the sheer number of media assets owned by Time Warner, especially following its merger with Turner in 1996. Within Time Warner, New Line had access to a plethora of proprietary windows through which they could distribute and market their products.

Enter Miramax: *Supercop* and *Operation Condor*

Miramax, an independent film studio acquired by Disney in 1993, released two Jackie Chan films to domestic theaters following New Line's success with *Rumble in the Bronx*: *Supercop* on July 26, 1996, and *Operation Condor* on July 18, 1997.[11] Both films were released under Miramax's genre label, Dimension Films, and were subject to a marketing strategy similar to New Line's releases. Not only was Miramax/Dimension's version of Chan thematically consistent with that established by New Line's *Rumble in the Bronx* – and perpetuated by New Line's *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy* – but these theatrical releases were deliberately staggered to avoid direct competition with New Line at the domestic box office. Almost an entire year separated the February, 1996 release of *Rumble* and the January, 1997 release of *First Strike*; Miramax/Dimension's *Supercop* and *Operation Condor* ensured that Chan remained in the spotlight of the domestic box office at least twice per year in 1996 and 1997.

As early as the release of *Rumble in the Bronx*, New Line and Miramax/Dimension Films reached a contractual agreement to avoid competition at the domestic box office. In the June 25, 1997 issue of *Daily Variety*, Dan Cox reported that New Line had filed suit

[11] Golden Harvest released the original version of Supercop in 1992 as *Police Story 3: Supercop*. They also handled the original release of *Operation Condor* in 1991 under the title *Armour of God 2: Operation Condor*.

against Miramax in New York federal court. New Line alleged that Miramax had violated an agreement to stagger the release dates of their respective Jackie Chan films, while also taking into consideration other action films aimed at a young male demographic. The conflict stemmed from Miramax's decision to move the release date of *Operation Condor* from September 19 to August 22 ("New Line socks Miramax with suit"). By moving *Operation Condor* to an August 22 release, Miramax had inadvertently positioned the film to compete that weekend with New Line's comic book adaptation of *Spawn* (1997). No report could be found on the resolution of this conflict. In the end, Miramax moved *Operation Condor*'s release to July 18, far away from New Line's *Spawn*. Reports of this conflict between New Line and Miramax provide indirect evidence of cooperation between these ostensibly "rival" studios in Hollywood. A news item in the June 25, 1997 issue of *Hollywood Reporter* quotes the aforementioned suit, in which New Line alleged that Miramax "has caused and continues to cause New Line further harm by destroying the very certainty that the parties contracted for" (Steuer). "Certainty" in this case suggests that the strategy of cooperation between these distributors was obviously meant to reduce the risk of theatrical distribution for both parties.

In this respect, Miramax/Dimension Films' choice of Chan films to release is significant. New Line's initial distribution deal with Chan and Golden Harvest put New Line in an advantageous position to acquire the distribution rights to Chan's latest Hong Kong films. This left Miramax/Dimension to choose from Chan's older films, from which the Disney-owned distributor chose to release retitled versions of *Supercop* and *Operation Condor*. In both cases, Miramax erased references to the original films' status as sequels, something New Line would also do with their version of *First Strike*

(originally released as *Police Story 4: First Strike* in 1996). Miramax's selections were also limited to recent films set in a multicultural milieu – much like New Line's *Rumble in the Bronx*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy* – as opposed to period films steeped in the history of China or Hong Kong, such as *Drunken Master II* (1994). In other words, Miramax released films theatrically that had already been produced to some degree with the global market in mind, much like the original version of *Rumble*. Miramax's version of Chan in *Supercop* and *Operation Condor* could be easily synched with the Hollywood image of Chan established in New Line's *Rumble*, particularly in the similarities between the distributors' promotional rhetoric and images. This entailed a marketing strategy that drew significantly from the work of New Line, including the reediting, rescoring, and dubbing of the film for the purposes of marketing. In other words, Miramax/Dimension Films' *Supercop* and *Operation Condor* complimented and extended New Line's version of Chan rather than disrupted it.

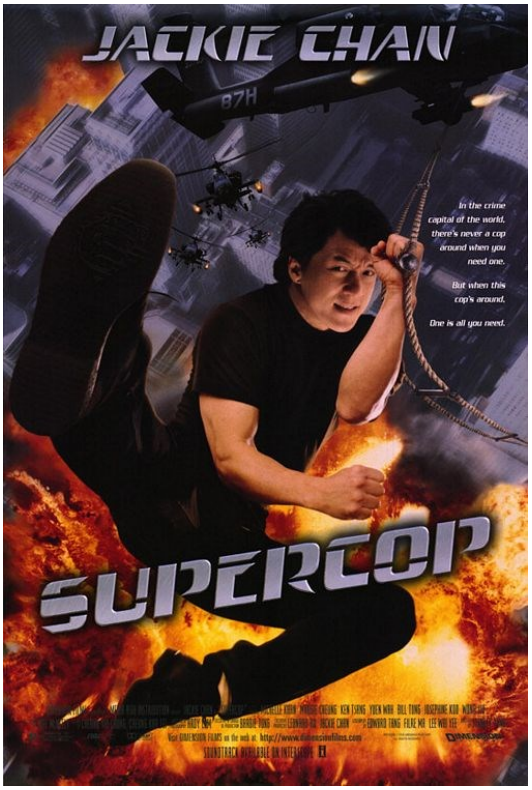

Figure 6: Theatrical poster for *Supercop* (1996). Promotional text on the upper right reads: "In the crime capital of the world, there's never a cop around when you need one. But when this cop's around, one is all you need."

Marketing materials for Miramax's versions bear this out. For instance, *Supercop*'s poster (Figure 6) features Jackie Chan striking a martial arts pose while hanging from a helicopter, whereas *Operation Condor*'s poster (Figure 7) features Chan

in a more neutral pose, smiling with his arms folded across his chest, and two women stand on either side of him holding a gun. Like New Line's posters for *Rumble in the Bronx*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy*, both Miramax posters position Chan's name above the title of the film in a text roughly the same size as the title. Furthermore, much like New Line's tagline for *Rumble* emphasized Chan's peerless abilities ("No Fear. No Stuntmen. No Equal."), Miramax's tagline on the *Supercop* poster similarly emphasizes Chan's singularity ("When this cop's around/One is all you need."). Like the home video poster for *Rumble* and the theatrical poster for *Mr. Nice Guy*, the poster for *Supercop* depicts Chan in a dynamic martial arts pose: in all three of these posters, Chan is kicking high with his right leg with his left leg is tucked underneath his right. Finally, Miramax's posters for *Supercop* and *Operation Condor* both depict Chan wearing a black t-shirt and jeans, a costume virtually identical to New Line's posters for *Rumble* and *Mr. Nice Guy*. The posters for both *Supercop* and *Operation Condor* compliment the rhetoric and images of Chan presented initially by New Line rather than trying to differentiate them from it. These

Figure 7: Theatrical poster for *Operation Condor* (1997).

posters represent an important aspect of Miramax and New Line's cooperation in establishing and maintaining a consistent version of Chan in Hollywood.

Similarly, the trailers for Miramax's films build on the foundation established by New Line in marketing *Rumble in the Bronx*. As the next Jackie Chan film to be distributed to mainstream theaters, Miramax's *Supercop* trailer does not perform the work of "introducing" Chan to mainstream audiences like *Rumble*'s trailer. Whereas *Rumble*'s trailer was structured to present Chan's credentials as a Hollywood action star to an audience assumed by the distributor to be unfamiliar with him, *Supercop*'s trailer makes no such concessions. Instead, this trailer begins by laying out the basic premise of the film, an element entirely absent from *Rumble*'s trailer: "In the crime capital of the world, where an army of criminals has taken over, there's never a cop around when you need one". *Supercop*'s trailer then continues with a montage of fight sequences and stunts from the film, while a voiceover narrator reiterates the high concept tagline for the film: "But when this cop's around, one is all you need". Chan is not identified until the end of the trailer, and, as in the trailer for *Rumble*, he is identified by his actual name rather than by his character's name. Similarly, Miramax's trailer for *Operation Condor* begins with the film's premise – "An international terrorist organization is about to seize a fortune in stolen gold… and the only one that can stop them is a secret agent codenamed Condor" – before moving on to a familiar montage of fight sequences and stunts. As before, he is identified as Jackie Chan rather than by his character's name. In these trailers, Miramax does not present a different version of Chan than that established by New Line. Instead, Miramax's trailers extend New Line's marketing by presenting their Chan films with complementary rather than contradictory rhetoric. This is particularly obvious with the

trailer for *Supercop*, which instead of reciting Chan's credentials as an action star like New Line's *Rumble*, focuses on both the familiarity of Chan and the novelty of this film in particular. Understood in light of New Line and Miramax/Dimension Films' contractual agreement to avoid direct competition in domestic theatrical distribution, similarities between these marketing paratexts suggests cooperation between industry "competitors" to corner the market in the distribution of Jackie Chan films, effectively limiting potential competition from foreign producers and distributors, as well as reinforcing distribution as Hollywood's industrial center of power.

The contractual agreement between New Line and Miramax seems to have similarly animated Miramax's textual work on both *Supercop* and *Operation Condor*. Like New Line's version of *Rumble in the Bronx*, Miramax's version of *Supercop* was reedited, rescored, and dubbed by the distributor. Most obviously, Miramax's *Supercop* is about four minutes shorter than the original version and, like New Line's *Rumble*, includes an entirely new opening credits sequence added by the distributor. Whereas the original version begins after four black title cards (revealing the title, producer, stars, and director of the film), Miramax's version only begins after a hyperactive two-minute montage of images and sound effects from the film. Unlike the opening credits sequence for New Line's *Rumble*, Miramax's opening for *Supercop*'s neither implicitly nor explicitly presents Chan's "arrival" in Hollywood. In a sense, then, Miramax's opening for *Supercop* takes New Line's textual work for granted. Furthermore, Miramax's *Supercop* is similar to New Line's *Rumble* in that the distributor eliminated scenes from the film to refocus the film on Jackie Chan, effectively eliminating scenes involving "minor" subplots. For example, Miramax's version of the film eliminates the original's opening

scene, in which Kevin Chan's (Jackie Chan) superiors at the Hong Kong Police Department discuss the inroads made by drug traffickers in China and the need for a "supercop" to stop them. By eliminating scenes like this, as well as other minor subplots, Miramax streamlined the film as a star vehicle for Chan. Likewise, Miramax's version of *Operation Condor* is about 18 minutes shorter than its original version. This includes the addition of an opening credits sequence similar to *Supercop*, in which credits for the film are superimposed over a montage of images and sound effects from the film. And like their version of *Supercop*, Miramax eliminated scenes from the original version of *Operation Condor* that involved minor subplots and moments of incidental dialogue, particularly in scenes where Chan is not present.

Finally, Miramax rescored both *Supercop* and *Operation Condor* in much the same way as New Line rescored *Rumble in the Bronx*. In particular, *Supercop* was retrofitted with a licensed soundtrack, released on Interscope Records a week after the film debuted in domestic theaters. Like *Rumble*, the soundtrack for *Supercop* featured contemporary American alternative rock and hip hop songs by No Doubt, 2Pac and The Outlawz, Tha Dogg Pound, and Warren G. This soundtrack also included songs recorded for *Supercop* specifically, such as Tom Jones' version of "Kung Fu Fighting" and Devo's "Supercop" theme, both of which play over the outtakes and final credits. Though Miramax's effort to integrate licensed music into *Supercop* was more synergistic than New Line's efforts to do the same for *Rumble* – New Line did not release licensed soundtracks for *Rumble*, *First Strike*, or *Mr. Nice Guy* – nonetheless the decision by both distributors to do so was guided by a consistent appeal: to integrate the films' marketing into their respective versions of the films, with that marketing aimed at a principally young, male

demographic. While *Operation Condor* does not feature any licensed music, its new score by Stephen Endelman and Paul Rabjohns is quite similar to that composed by J. Peter Robinson for New Line's films. Lastly, Miramax released only English-dubbed versions of *Supercop* and *Operation Condor*. This decision, as well as the utilization of Chan to dub himself in both films, suggests further the similarities – one might also say synergies – between these distributors' marketing and textual strategies.

What this all suggests is that New Line's distribution strategy post-*Rumble in the Bronx* benefited rather than suffered from "competition" in the domestic distribution of Jackie Chan's Hong Kong films. In fact, New Line's contractual agreement with Miramax/Dimension Films – as well as the commensurability of their marketing and textual strategies – mitigated the risk of sustaining Chan's brand equity between projects by spreading that risk across studios (and, therefore, across conglomerates) and by agreeing to avoid direct competition at the theatrical box office. Therefore, while the cost of mounting Chan's Hollywood stardom with *Rumble* may have been incurred primarily by New Line and its conglomerate parents at Time Warner, the cost of maintaining that stardom via the marketing of subsequent films throughout 1996, 1997, and 1998 was sustained by a *de facto* cross-collatoralization of marketing costs between New Line, Miramax, and Miramax's conglomerate parents at Disney. Ultimately, New Line's involvement with Miramax also suggests that cooperation between distributors in Hollywood's oligopoly has functioned to inhibit outsiders – such as foreign film producers and distributors – from gaining a true foothold in the highly concentrated North American market for theatrical distribution. For Hollywood outsiders, meeting the economic barrier to entry in mainstream distribution and marketing means a lengthy and

therefore costly financial commitment, only realistically sustainable by the media conglomerates and their subsidiaries. New Line's cooperation with Miramax is a potent example of the concentration of ownership in Hollywood and the business practices used to maintain that control, particularly against the threat of imported media.

Re-Enter New Line Cinema: *Jackie Chan's First Strike* (1997) and *Mr. Nice Guy* (1998)

New Line Cinema's version of *Rumble in the Bronx* – helped along, to some extent, by Miramax/Dimension Films' version of *Supercop* – established the formula for marketing Jackie Chan in Hollywood. This section will examine two Chan films distributed by New Line after *Rumble*: those films being *Jackie Chan's First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy*. Intriguingly, both films in their original versions reveal a relatively linear movement on the part of Chan towards more extensive English language production and orientation: *First Strike* features considerably more Anglophone actors than *Rumble*, while *Mr. Nice Guy* was Chan's first English-language production in Hong Kong.

Jackie Chan's First Strike was released by New Line on January 10, 1997, to 1,344 theaters, with an opening weekend box office take of $5,778,933 and a final domestic gross of $15,318,863 ("Jackie Chan's First Strike"). Similarly, New Line released *Mr. Nice Guy* to 1,463 domestic theatres on March 20, 1998, with an opening weekend box office of $5,250,704 and a final gross of $12,716,953 ("Mr. Nice Guy"). Though New Line released these films to slightly fewer theaters than *Rumble in the Bronx*, its distribution and marketing strategies were similarly extensive. Building on the establishment of Chan's Hollywood stardom with *Rumble*, New Line continued to

promote Chan as a thoroughly consistent brand with *First Strike*. Like *Rumble*, New Line promoted the film through television appearances, such as Chan's return visit to the *Late Show with David Letterman* on January 8, 1997, two days before *First Strike* opened. New Line also orchestrated Chan's cameo on an episode of the sitcom *Martin*, originally aired on the Fox network on December 19, 1996. Chan's appearance on *Martin* is a clear example of corporate synergy, as the show was produced by HBO, a subsidiary of Time Warner. More important, however, was Chan's endorsement deal with Pepsi. Chan signed an agreement with Pepsi to promote its Mountain Dew soft drink in late 1996. This deal cross-promoted Mountain Dew with *First Strike*, with an played extensively on MTV in anticipation of the film's release (Benezra, "Chan Does The Dew As Pepsi Gets Behind Flick"). The ad featured Chan performing several stunts in Hong Kong, including a speedboat chase and a hand-to-hand fight in a crowded street, before four teenagers appear as apparitions on the wall, imploring Chan to "See the Dew. Be the Dew." Significantly, this ad featured Chan speaking entirely in English and dressed in modern clothing, and this is consistent with the brand of Chan marketed by New Line in support of *Rumble*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy*.

Figure 8: Theatrical release poster for *Jackie Chan's First Strike* (1997).

Like its poster for the theatrical release of *Rumble in the Bronx*, New Line's poster for *First Strike* (Figure 8) does not feature Chan's image. Instead, the *First Strike* poster features the face of a nondescript man, shaded red and framed by the crosshairs of a gun. Superimposed over his right eye is a map of the world, shaded blue, with a red dotted line drawn between the US and Russia. At the top of the poster is the film's tagline: "Jackie Chan Fights for America in His Biggest Action Film Ever." In this case, New Line organized its marketing of *First Strike* under the assumption of an audiences' familiarity with Chan; whereas the theatrical release poster for *Rumble* was part of a marketing campaign that "introduced" Chan by underlining certain characteristics of his persona ("No Fear. No Stuntmen. No Equal."), the poster for *First Strike* is instead concerned with presenting the novelty of his latest film ("…His Biggest Action Film Ever."). Unlike *First Strike*, New Line's theatrical poster for *Mr. Nice Guy* (Figure 9) features Chan's image, this time striking an action pose against a blue background. His name appears in much larger and brighter script than the film's title, with the film's tagline ("Fight first. Apologize later.") in a small type at the bottom of poster. Not only does this image strongly resemble the poster for Miramax/Dimension Films' *Supercop*, in both Chan's pose and dress, but the

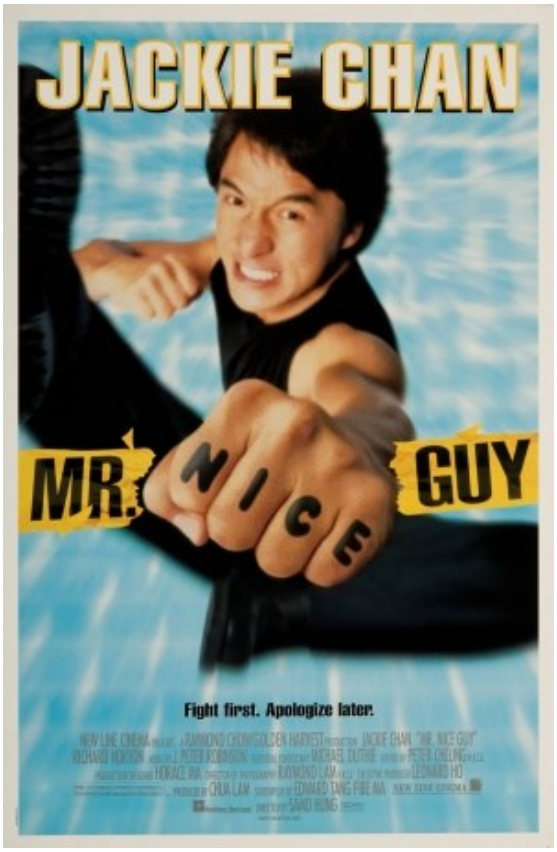

Figure 9: Theatrical release poster for *Mr. Nice Guy* (1998). This poster uses elements of the *Rumble in the Bronx* promotional photo in Figure 3.

image is actually recycled from New Line's collection of publicity photos and stills for *Rumble*.

New Line's theatrical trailers for *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy*, however, clearly chart the extent and usefulness of Jackie Chan's self-Americanization, particularly in the original films' use of English language dialogue. Recall that New Line's trailer for *Rumble in the Bronx* relied on a narrator to "introduce" Chan. As a result, *Rumble*'s trailer only features three brief lines of English dialogue lifted from the dubbed version of the film – and in only one case is the dialogue speaker shown – with all three instances serving to characterize Chan rather than introduce the narrative. Similarly, New Line's trailer for *First Strike* again relies on a narrator, only in this case the narrator's purpose is to briefly convey the narrative of the film ("The Cold War is over, but a new battle has begun…") and its novelty as spectacle ("Jackie Chan… in his biggest action film ever"). As with *Rumble*'s trailer, *First Strike*'s trailer features only two instances of English dialogue, both spoken off-screen. By minimizing the amount of dialogue shown in the trailer for *First Strike*, New Line was masking the fact that the film was dubbed, that it was indeed a foreign film. Thus, *First Strike*'s trailer played an integral part in New Line's strategy to present the film as a Hollywood product. *Mr. Nice Guy*, however, was Chan's first English language production for Golden Harvest, and New Line's trailer for the film demonstrates the distributor's acceptance of, and even appreciation for, this tactic of self-Americanization. Though the second half of the trailer consists solely of a stunt montage – similar to those in *Rumble* and *First Strike* – set to the Third Eye Blind's pop song "Semi-Charmed Life," the first half of the trailer clearly shows Chan and

several other characters in the film speaking English. These six lines of dialogue are integrated with the voiceover narration to describe the basic plot of the film.

In summary, New Line's distribution and marketing strategy for *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy* indicates a further investment on the part of the distributor to establish Jackie Chan as a distinctly Hollywood brand. This investment would have been unlikely without the financial assurance provided by New Line's conglomerate parents, particularly the line of credit New Line was able to establish in 1997 with the help of Time Warner. Furthermore, as the trailer for *Mr. Nice Guy* exemplifies, New Line's role as Chan's most prominent North American distributor extended the distributor's influence into foreign film production. Chan's Hong Kong productions – most notably, the original versions of *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy* – were a product of Chan's calculated self-Americanization, particularly in their use English language dialogue. Though Chan presented himself as amenable to the distribution and marketing objectives of Hollywood with his original productions of *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy*, New Line's continued strategy of textual manipulation served only to refocus these texts for their eventual replacement with the production of New Line's *Rush Hour*.

New Line's textual manipulations of the original Hong Kong versions of *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy* differ significantly from that of *Rumble in the Bronx* in that many of Chan's local productions – these films in particular – became increasingly self-Americanized, particularly in the use of English language dialogue. In this sense, the integration of marketing and the issues of translation that animated New Line's manipulation of *Rumble in the Bronx* take on a slightly different dimension in both versions of *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy*. This suggests that the self-Americanization of

Chan's Hong Kong productions intensified following the release of New Line's *Rumble in the Bronx*, and represented one avenue through which the Hollywood distributor influenced foreign film production practices in advance of domestic distribution.

New Line's version of *First Strike* is about 22 minutes shorter than its original version. Consistent with its reediting of *Rumble*, the reediting of *First Strike* included the addition of a new opening credits sequence to reorient the film for a North American audience. Whereas the original film begins with only a single establishing shot of Hong Kong, this new opening credits sequence lasts about two minutes and features a succession of panoramic shots of Hong Kong's harbour, in addition to shots of ferries, skyscrapers, and neon signs with Chinese characters. Furthermore, New Line's reediting of *First Strike* simultaneously sought to integrate the textual features of *First Strike* with the distributor's marketing strategy. Like *Rumble*, New Line's reediting of *First Strike* eliminates several "incidental" scenes that do not lead directly to stunts involving Chan. As before, the guiding principle behind most of these cuts is the foregrounding of Chan's stunts. This includes several scenes cut from the original – such as a comedy scene in which Chan, stranded in Australia without money, tries to borrow money from pedestrians – that do not build to any spectacular stunts.

New Line's reediting of *Mr. Nice Guy* was more subtle. Again, New Line shortened *Mr. Nice Guy* by a few minutes in order to bring the film in line with its marketing strategy. Specifically, the distributor shortened several dialogue-heavy scenes, winnowing them down to only their core narrative material and virtually eliminating exchanges between characters other than Chan. For instance, in an early scene Chan has dinner with his adopted family in Australia, where he explains his reasons for staying in

the country as a chef rather than a cop. In the original version, this scene is about a minute longer and includes details on a supporting character's failed marriage. New Line cut this information from its version, paring down the scene to include only the dialogue concerning Chan's character. Moreover, New Line also cut several brief exchanges throughout the film that create a second, ultimately unresolved romantic subplot for Chan. New Line also removed virtually all instances of direct violence against women in the film, most likely looking to keep the film's content within the bounds of a PG-13 rating. However, unlike *Rumble* and *First Strike*, New Line did not add an opening credits sequence to *Mr. Nice Guy*. Instead, the distributor simply switched around the first two scenes in the film in order to refocus the narrative on Chan; instead of the film opening with the villain, as in the original, New Line's version begins with Chan's character. Though these edits may seem minute, they nonetheless belie the significance of the distributor in spurring the self-Americanization of Chan's Hong Kong filmmaking. *Mr. Nice Guy* is not only a product of New Line's domestic distribution and marketing strategy, but it is also a product of the distributor's influence on global film production.

This is nowhere more apparent than in the rescoring and dubbing of *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy*. As noted in the previous chapter, though the original version of *Rumble in the Bronx* was shot in both Cantonese and English, New Line dubbed over virtually the entire film in English. Rerecording the English dialogue in *Rumble* allowed the distributor to essentially translate production cultures, erasing "bad" line readings and simultaneously bringing the audio quality up to stringent standards set by Hollywood. This is also the case with *First Strike*, though the increase in English language dialogue over *Rumble* considerably improved the matching of dubbed dialogue to visible speech in

the film. Furthermore, *First Strike* is significant in that the original version of film includes several scenes of direct sound recording in English. For instance, suspected of wearing a police wire, Chan is forced at gunpoint to strip while singing "I Will Follow Him". This is the only scene in *First Strike* that is not dubbed by New Line, suggesting that Chan's self-Americanization with more extensive English language dialogue was welcomed and readily incorporated by the distributor. As noted previously, *Mr. Nice Guy* was Chan's first fully English language production. That *Mr. Nice Guy* was only partially dubbed by New Line provides further evidence that the distributor had to some extent successfully distended its distribution and marketing strategies into Chan's Hong Kong productions. For the most part, New Line's dubbing of the film is limited to some rerecording of dialogue between the film's villains, again, for the purposes of "upgrading" its production values to Hollywood standards. Most notably, nearly all of Chan's original English language dialogue is retained in New Line's version.

These films suggest the influence of New Line's distribution and marketing strategy for Chan even at the level of their original Hong Kong production. The original versions of *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy* illustrate that "[commercial] potential and marketability are assessed *and* manipulated in a film's textual elements during pre-production and production, effectively merging distribution into production and blurring the old scalar and spatial divisions of this labour process" (Miller et al., *Global Hollywood 2* 272). Going further, *First Strike* and *Mr. Nice Guy*, in their original versions and in their reedited, rescored, and dubbed versions for New Line, add to this model an understanding of how Hollywood distributors have also been able to merge *domestic* distribution and

marketing into *foreign* film production cultures, embroidering Hollywood's hegemony and values not only in its own markets but in foreign markets as well.

Promoting *Rush Hour* (1998)

In "Hong Kong goes international: The case of Golden Harvest", Mike Walsh describes the response of Hollywood to the success of kung fu films *Fists of Fury*, *Deep Thrust: The Hand of Death*, and *Five Fingers of Death* in April 1973. According to Walsh, Hollywood responded with three overlapping strategies to capitalize on the fad: by importing more films from Hong Kong, by coproducing films with Hong Kong studios like Shaw Brothers or Golden Harvest, and finally, by the "domestic replacement" of Hong Kong films with Hollywood productions (169). For Golden Harvest, Hollywood's three-pronged incorporation of Hong Kong cinema in the early 1970s gave the Hong Kong producer/distributor "temporary access to the American market, but only on the basis of what was seen by the US production industry as a fad which could be domesticated" (170). As Walsh claims at the conclusion of his essay, the "undiminished dominance" of Hollywood distributors in both domestic and international distribution has continued to dictate the flow of Asian films in global markets (175). Going further, as this case study of New Line Cinema and Jackie Chan has thus far suggested, Hollywood's influence in the global circulation of Asian cinema only intensified following the industry's push towards conglomeration in the late 1980s. There are similarities, however, between the aforementioned strategies adopted by Hollywood studios in the early 1970s and those adopted by New Line for Jackie Chan, namely the transition from importation to domestic replacement. This suggests continuity in how

Hollywood distributors have maintained economic and aesthetic control over foreign film imports.

When the blockbuster film *Rush Hour* was released on September 18, 1998, it represented the apotheosis of New Line's marketing and distribution strategy for Jackie Chan. *Rush Hour* opened in 2,638 theaters with a first weekend box office gross of $33,001,803 and a cumulative total of $141,186,864 ("Rush Hour"). For *Rush Hour*, New Line served as both the film's producer and distributor: clearly, *Rush Hour* was the "domestic replacement" for Jackie Chan's Hong Kong productions. However, New Line's imported versions of *Rumble in the Bronx*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy* were also, in a sense, "domestic replacements" for their original versions. Considered in this way, New Line's versions of these films provide potent examples of Hollywood's textual power over foreign films, particularly in theatrical distribution.

Consider, for instance, the television special "Masters of the Martial Arts" presented by Wesley Snipes, produced by New Line Television, and broadcast August 18, 1998 – one month prior to the theatrical release of *Rush Hour* – on the Time Warner-owned cable channel TNT. This was a gathering of prominent martial artists and Hong Kong filmmakers in a hybrid variety/award show. Between martial arts exhibitions and musical performances, this synergistic exercise in cross-promotion highlighted two of New Line's upcoming action films: *Blade* (1998) – Wesley Snipes' comic book adaptation that opened the next day – and *Rush Hour*. By way of reintroducing Jackie Chan, New Line played the theatrical trailer for *Rush Hour* and followed it with a montage of stunts from *Rumble in the Bronx*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy*. New Line continued to utilize a similar highlight reel, composed of highlights from these three films, as a kind of

promotional video resume for Chan. New Line, then, successfully capitalized on and replaced Chan's Hong Kong productions in the domestic market with *Rush Hour*, and ultimately the distributor recycled these films in support of their Hollywood productions. Other studios would follow New Line's lead, as Chan's Hollywood films beyond 1998 were produced and/or distributed by studios such as Buena Vista, Dreamworks, Sony/Columbia, Paramount, and Lionsgate. This left Miramax to quietly release versions of Chan films from Hong Kong – *Twin Dragons* (1999) and *The Legend of Drunken Master* (2000) – long after Chan had completed his transition to Hollywood stardom.

CONCLUSION

Jackie Chan was 41 when *Rumble in the Bronx* was released by New Line Cinema. In promotional material for the film, Chan's age was a common narrative thread. For instance, in the *New York Times* for January 21, 1996, Jaime Wolf opined that Chan's goal of Hollywood stardom "must be realized soon, while Chan is still capable of the exertion his roles require. Though he is in excellent condition, the years of stunt work have taken their toll" ("Jackie Chan, American Action Hero?"). Similarly, David Richards' article for the *Washington Post* on February 25, 1996, describes *Rumble* as Chan's "last chance" at making it in Hollywood, citing his age as a growing impediment to his success: "He's at a time in his life when muscles begin to lose their elasticity and bones snap more easily" ("Kung Pow!"). In May 2012, Chan announced his retirement from action films at the age of 58 during the promotion of *Chinese Zodiac* (2012), claiming "I'm not young anymore. I'm really, really tired", while also expressing a concern that "the world is too violent right now" (Singh). A few days later, Chan clarified this statement on his Facebook page by noting that he was not retiring from all action films, but was merely looking to scale back the number of high-risk stunts he performs in order to take care of his aging body (Chapman). Indeed, Chan has refused to truly retire from action films despite approaching his 60th birthday: his current schedule includes a role in *Police Story 2013*, to be released in China on December 24 (Frater, "Jackie Chan's 'Police Story'"), as well as a Hong Kong-China-USA co-production titled *Skiptrace*, currently in pre-production (McNary).

In the sixteen years between the release of *Rumble in the Bronx* and the announcement of Jackie Chan's (semi-) retirement from the action genre in *Chinese Zodiac*, there has been both continuity and change in Hollywood. Despite persistent concerns over his age and physical well-being, Chan has been a key participant in many of these continuities as well as changes to Hollywood's business model. As this case study has illustrated, his career in Hollywood provides a valuable case study for the critical reevaluation of the industry's complex and often contradictory treatment of imported media. To conclude, I hope to briefly bring these concerns up-to-date in order to comment on the current status of foreign films – particularly, foreign films imported from China and/or Hong Kong – in the North American market.

Jackie Chan in Hollywood, 2000-2012

Following *Rumble in the Bronx*, *Jackie Chan's First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy*, New Line successfully shifted its star-making strategy for Jackie Chan from the distribution and translation of his Hong Kong films to Hollywood productions. New Line would release only three Jackie Chan films theatrically after their version of *Mr. Nice Guy* in March 1998, all three produced by New Line as part of the *Rush Hour* franchise (1998, 2001, and 2007). New Line's engagement with Chan reached its apex with *Rush Hour 2* (2001), which earned more in its opening weekend ($67,408,222) than *Rumble*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy* earned during their combined lifetimes at the domestic box office ("Rush Hour 2"). Other Hollywood distributors quickly followed suit in this transition from importing Chan films from Hong Kong to producing or coproducing similar star vehicles domestically. Since 2000, Chan's Hollywood output has consisted

entirely of productions or co-productions with Hollywood studios, including: *Shanghai Noon* (2000), *Shanghai Knights* (2003), and *Around the World in 80 Days* (2004) for Buena Vista, owned by Disney; *The Tuxedo* (2002) for DreamWorks; *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) and *Kung Fu Panda 2* (2011) for Paramount, owned by Viacom; *The Medallion* (2003) a US-Hong Kong co-production for Columbia's Tristar Pictures, owned by Sony, as well as Sony's *Karate Kid* (2010); and *The Forbidden Kingdom* (2008), a US-China co-production for Lionsgate, as well as Lionsgate's *The Spy Next Door* (2010). While Chan has remained active in Hong Kong productions, none of these films have seen a theatrical wide release in North America, having been relegated to the home video market.

The North American release of Jackie Chan's latest global blockbuster, *Chinese Zodiac*, bears some similarities with the textual strategies utilized previously by New Line Cinema for their Chan films. According to a report by *PR Newswire*, the film was acquired by the North American theater chain AMC in 2013 and released exclusively in its cinemas on October 18 ("Jackie Chan's Stunt-Filled Family Action Adventure"). AMC's version of the film is about 13 minutes shorter than the original release, and the original's multilingualism – including English, Mandarin, French, Spanish, and Russian – has reportedly been dubbed almost entirely into English (Topel). Universal Pictures purchased the rights to distribute the film in North America, most of Europe, and Australia. According to Patrick Frater's article in *Variety* for November 15, 2013, Universal's purchase excludes the North American theatrical rights, which belong to AMC ("Universal Sees Future in Jackie Chan's 'Chinese Zodiac'"). As this version of the

film was not available during the research and writing of this case study, I cannot accurately assess the reediting or dubbing of *Chinese Zodiac*.

Chinese Zodiac is not an isolated case. Another recent Hong Kong-China co-production, Wong Kar-wai's *The Grandmaster* (2013), was given a theatrical wide release in North America by the Weinstein Company on August 30, 2013. As David Bordwell notes, Weinstein's version of *The Grandmaster* is about 24 minutes shorter than the original version, and differs substantially from the "European" festival version. According to Bordwell, these three versions of the film are not "simple cutdowns" of the original, but involve a complex rearrangement of sequences, including scenes unique to each version. This leads Bordwell to argue, considering Wong's track record of voluntarily reediting his films, that "we ought not to assume without more evidence that Wong was forced to change what was a definitive version" ("Moving Forward, Turning Back"). Justin Chang's interview with Wong in *Variety* indicates that the director worked with Weinstein Company head Harvey Weinstein to produce a "simpler" version of the film for North American audiences: this included the addition of explanatory intertitles, on-screen text identifiers for historical figures, and a new sequence for the end of the film to make clear the main character's relationship with Bruce Lee ("Ip Trip"). Whether or not Wong willingly participated in this process of domestication is not a particularly salient point for the purposes of this case study: however, that Wong recognized the necessity of domestication for the film's theatrical release in North America is far more telling. Similar to the self-Americanization of Chan in *Mr. Nice Guy*, Wong's anticipation of and participation in the reediting, reorganization, and reorientation of *The*

Grandmaster for the Weinstein Company indicates the persistence of Hollywood in dictating the textual features of foreign films for theatrical wide release.

Indeed, Weinstein has taken an especially keen interest recently in playing cultural gatekeeper for Asian cinema. Weinstein recently signed a production deal with the Hong Kong-based Celestial Pictures to co-produce English-language remakes of Chinese films *Come Drink with Me* (1968) and *Avenging Eagle* (1978), both Shaw Brothers films ("Weinstein Co. Leaps Aboard Remakes of Shaw Bros. Classics"). Weinstein also planned to reedit South Korean director Bong Joon-ho's action film *Snowpiercer* (2013) for domestic wide release, much to the consternation of its director ("Bong Joon-ho Hints at 'Snowpiercer' Discord"). Tellingly, however, Weinstein has recently agreed to release the film uncut in North America, but only in limited theatrical release (Jagernauth). This suggests that there remains a correlation between the scale of theatrical release for foreign films and the studio's involvement in manipulating them. In other words, while limited releases like *Snowpiercer* see relatively little or no manipulation by the distributor, theatrical wide releases like *Rumble in the Bronx*, *First Strike*, *Mr. Nice Guy*, and even the recent *Grandmaster* have generally been manipulated by the studio for the purposes of marketing to "middle America."

New Line Cinema's *Thunderbolt*

Recently, Janet Wasko reexamined the contemporary Hollywood film industry and found an industry challenged by a number of significant changes to its business model, including: new kinds of film financing, an influx and intensification of digital filmmaking technologies, unfamiliar avenues for film marketing and promotion, unfamiliar avenues

for film distribution and exhibition, the persistent threat of piracy, as well as new and shifting global marketplaces for Hollywood products ("Death of Hollywood" 308-321). Wasko, however, also inventories the continuities of contemporary Hollywood, particularly: its core commercialism, its concern with the further commodification of film through licensing and merchandizing, its reliance on relatively few big-budget blockbusters, its configuration within media conglomerates, and its global aspirations ("Death of Hollywood" 321-326). In describing these continuities, Wasko contends that the major studios have maintained their oligopolistic control of the domestic industry despite challenges to its hegemony. As a result, Hollywood studios still largely "determine what feature films actually reach cinemas and other media outlets" ("Death of Hollywood 325). Though Wasko does not explicitly address the status of foreign feature films in North America, her statement nonetheless applies to them, particularly in the kind of gatekeeping power she ascribes to Hollywood distributors. As this case study has illustrated, Hollywood's continued control over domestic distribution takes on an explicitly ideological dimension in regards to the distribution of foreign films imported by these studios for theatrical wide release.

Unquestionably, Hollywood distributors such as New Line Cinema, Miramax/Dimension Films, and Harvey Weinstein's recent endeavors with The Weinstein Company have continued to exercise considerable control over the distribution, marketing, and textual features of foreign films released to theaters in North America. This is particularly true of films imported from China and Hong Kong. From 1994-2003, eight of the 10 highest-grossing Asian films in North America were reedited, rescored, and dubbed versions, distributed by either Miramax/Dimension Films or New

Line Cinema (Rosen 39). More recently, of the combined six films from China/Hong Kong to rank in the top 25 highest grossing foreign language films at the domestic box office, three were co-productions with Hollywood studios, while the other three were distributed by Hollywood studios, and only one of these six imports was released unedited and in subtitled Mandarin ("Foreign Language").

Though theatrical distribution has long ceased to be the sole or even principle source of a studio's profits, it has nonetheless maintained an important political-economic function in terms of assuring downstream revenues for the Hollywood oligarchy across media platforms (Wasko, *Hollywood in the Information Age*). Because films rarely recoup their investment in theatrical distribution, this window in a film property's lifespan functions more "as a loss leader to create awareness of the property for downstream video, TV, and other rights" (Ulin 121). In other words, theatrical distribution is more or less an advertisement for the film's circulation in what was once known as "ancillary" windows, such as home video, video-on-demand, streaming, cable television, and broadcast television. Despite the unprecedented availability of foreign films on home video platforms in North America, particularly on DVD and Blu-ray, this platform continues to be dominated by the sale of Hollywood blockbusters. For instance, in 2012 only 18 of the 100 best-selling DVDs in North America were not given theatrical releases, while the remaining 82 DVDs on the list were almost all given wide theatrical release prior to their release on home video ("Top-Selling DVDs of 2012"). Blu-ray sales for 2012 included only five items not released theatrically, while the remaining 95 Blu-rays represented films given a wide release by the Hollywood studios ("Top-Selling Blu-rays of 2012"). Clearly, this data suggests a correlation between theatrical wide release

and home video revenue in North America. Given the limitations imposed on foreign films in the highly concentrated North American theatrical market, this has clear implications on the visibility and performance of foreign films in "ancillary" windows.

DVD and Blu-ray formats – like the Betamax, VHS, and Laserdisc formats before them – have not seriously dented the distribution oligarchy of the conglomerate-owned Hollywood studios: indeed, Wasko's description of the home video industry in 1994 as "dominated by companies affiliated with, in joint ventures with, or subsidiaries of, the Hollywood majors" (*Hollywood in the Information Age* 140) remains an apt description in 2013. Yet it cannot be denied that the DVD and Blu-ray formats have opened up some alternatives, however miniscule in comparison, to the official discourses of Hollywood. Jackie Chan films are a case in point. New Line Cinema released versions of the Golden Harvest productions *Police Story* (1985) and *Police Story 2* (1988) on VHS to coincide with the home video debut of *Rush Hour* in 1999. These films were reedited, rescored, and dubbed from their original Hong Kong versions. These versions of *Police Story* and *Police Story 2* remained the only versions available in North America until 2006 and 2007, when The Weinstein Company's Dragon Dynasty label released "Special Collector's Edition" DVDs for both films, restoring them to their original length as well as restoring their original Cantonese dialogue and original soundtracks. In this case, Dragon Dynasty – a genre label specializing in the distribution of East Asian martial arts and action films, a kind of Criterion Collection for martial arts cinéphiles – provided a

counterbalance to the version of Chan marketed by New Line in the 1990s, even though these versions have occasionally been inconsistent in their restoration strategies.[12]

Another DVD/Blu-ray distributor, Shout! Factory, has recently released Jackie Chan films that provide counter-narratives to Hollywood's version of Chan. A series of double-feature discs on DVD/Blu-ray – including restorations of early Chan films such as *New Fists of Fury* (1976), *Magnificent Bodyguards* (1978), and *Snake & Crane Arts of Shaolin* (1978) – have made available a number of films that seem somewhat at odds with the Hollywood version of Chan established by New Line Cinema. In particular, the DVD/Blu-ray disc for *Crime Story* (1993)/*The Protector* (1985) includes the Hong Kong version of *The Protector*. This Hollywood film was reedited by Chan in order to protect his more conservative Hong Kong persona (Chan and Yang 382). Chan's version removes scenes of nudity and swearing from the original, includes fight scenes reshot by Chan in Hong Kong after the original film was completed, and dubs all actors, including the predominately English-speaking cast, into Cantonese. This version of *The Protector* provides evidence of an aspect of Hollywood's global distribution strategy that is often forgotten, that being the status of Hollywood films as foreign films. Given the growing importance of the Chinese media market for Hollywood studios in 2013, this would be an interesting extension of this work to pursue in the future.

Likewise, New Line Cinema's distribution and marketing of Jackie Chan's Hong Kong films on DVD has occasionally been inconsistent with the version of Chan they established with *Rumble in the Bronx*. Though New Line has not released the original versions of *Rumble*, *First Strike*, and *Mr. Nice Guy*, the distributor released an uncut

[12] For instance, Dragon Dynasty's DVD for *Police Story 3: Supercop* (1992) restores the film's original Cantonese audio but is still the reedited version of the film originally released by Miramax/Dimension Films in 1996.

version of the Golden Harvest production *Thunderbolt* (1995) on DVD in 2006. New Line's *Thunderbolt* DVD represents something of an anomaly in their distribution strategy for Chan. Unlike their versions of *Police Story* and *Police Story 2*, which were extensively reedited, rescored, and dubbed, *Thunderbolt* is presented by New Line in its original version. Recall that the North American rights to *Thunderbolt* were acquired by New Line in February 1996, along with the North American rights to Jackie Chan's *First Strike*. Though New Line released *First Strike* theatrically in January 1997, New Line's *Thunderbolt* DVD marked the film's official debut in North America. This DVD includes both the original Cantonese audio track as well as an optional English-language dub. New Line's decision to withhold the film may be attributed to its marketability, as the distributor may have found his other Hong Kong films more appealing to "shopping mall America". In a review of the film for *Variety* in 1995, Derek Elley speculated that New Line would have a difficult time selling *Thunderbolt* to North American audiences due to its serious tone and its calculated appeal to Chan's Japanese audience (35). However, *Thunderbolt* was filmed after Chan had finished production on *Rumble in the Bronx*, while recovering from a broken ankle (Chan and Yang 365). As a result, Chan used a stunt double for most of the wide shots in *Thunderbolt*'s fight sequences. This stunt double is particularly noticeable during Chan's climatic confrontation with a Yakuza gang, and scenes such as this could have contradicted New Line's marketing strategy for Chan, which boasted: "No Fear. No Stuntmen. No Equal."

In this conclusion I have attempted to describe the legacy of New Line's distribution and marketing strategy for Jackie Chan in the mid- to late-1990s, as well as its broader implications. As I have argued, while Hollywood distributors have been challenged by

significant changes to their business model, they have nonetheless maintained, perhaps even extended, their oligopolistic control over mainstream theatrical distribution. While non-theatrical distribution platforms have provided exceptional access to foreign films outside the purview of Hollywood rights-holders, the theatrical distribution apparatus and its marketing machine has nonetheless marginalized the foreign films it has not directly co-opted for the domestic market. As recent examples such as *Chinese Zodiac* and *The Grandmaster* illustrate, Hollywood distributors have continued to largely control both the circulation of foreign films in North America, and they have continued to shape their textual features. New Line Cinema's Jackie Chan is a potent example of the textual power Hollywood distributors have continued to wield over foreign film imports.

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Note: All films are listed by their original English titles with any alternate titles indicated in brackets. Release dates refer by distributor to the initial theatrical release and to any subsequent release, if relevant.

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Rush Hour. Dir. Brett Ratner. New Line Cinema, 1998. DVD.

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