



EASTERN WESTERNS

Film and genre outside and inside Hollywood

Stephen Teo

Eastern Westerns

The Western, one of Hollywood's great film genres, has, surprisingly, enjoyed a revival recently in Asia and in other parts of the world, whilst at the same time declining in America. Although the Western is often seen as an example of American cultural dominance, this book challenges that view. It considers the Western from an Asian perspective, exploring why the rise of Asian Westerns has come about, and examining how its aesthetics, styles, and politics have evolved as a result. It analyses specific Asian Westerns as well as Westerns made elsewhere, including in Australia, Europe, and Hollywood, to demonstrate how these employ Asian philosophical and mythical ideas and value systems. The book concludes that the Western is a genre which is truly global, and not one that is purely intrinsic to America.

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First published 2017
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Teo, Stephen, author.

Title: Eastern westerns: film and genre outside and inside Hollywood / Stephen Teo.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2017. | Series: Media, culture and social change in Asia series | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016020631 | ISBN 9781138819429 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315744483 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Western films—History and criticism. | BISAC: PERFORMING ARTS / Film & Video / History & Criticism.

Classification: LCC PN1995.9.W4 T45 2017 | DDC 791.43/65878—dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016020631>

ISBN: 978-1-138-81942-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-74448-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by codeMantra

This book is dedicated to my mother, Theresa Lee Chun Liang

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Acknowledgements

I wrote this book over a six-month sabbatical granted by my institution, the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, for which I must thank the chair of the school, Professor Charles T. Salmon, and the dean of the college of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, Professor Alan Chan. I am grateful to my colleagues Dr. Chris Khoo, Dr. Liew Kai Khiun, and Dr. Theng Yin Leng for their support in ensuring my sabbatical. Dr. Na Jin Cheon helped me go through the process of applying. Without their help, the writing of this book would probably not have been as smooth or consistent a process. I am grateful to my students who have given eager assistance to my research, Zachary Tang Zheng Yu, Viknesh Kobinathan, and Ivan Tan. Zachary Tang was attached to my project under the Undergraduate Research Experience on Campus (URECA) programme. My colleague, Dr. Lee Sang Joon, provided strong backup with information on South Korean cinema. Dr. Adrian Danks from the RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, was an invaluable source of knowledge about Australian Westerns and on the Western genre generally. He also inspired me to focus on the whole genre by first giving me an opportunity to write a chapter on Robert Altman's Westerns in the anthology that he edited, *A Companion to Robert Altman* (2015: Wiley Blackwell). I would also like to register my appreciation to RMIT University for the use of its library resources during my sabbatical, in particular the Australian Film Institute Research Collection which is housed at RMIT University.

I was able to rehearse ideas and arguments in some of my chapters in several conferences. I thank Dr. Gina Marchetti for inviting me to the Asian Cinema Studies Society Conference held at the Hong Kong University in 2012, giving me an opportunity to vent my thoughts on the Asian Western and its specificity. I delivered a paper on the Chinese Western genre in an Asian Cinema Workshop held in 2013 at our school in collaboration with University of Glasgow's School of Culture and Creative Arts. I thank Dr. Dimitris Eleftheriotis for his support. I was able to amplify my paper on the Chinese Western at a special conference event at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China, in 2014. I am grateful to Dr. David H. Fleming and Dr. Adam Knee for inviting me to this event. This was one of the spurs towards consolidating my resolve to write about the whole genre of Asian Westerns and to offer some comparative analysis with American Westerns.

Other individuals have each in their own way provided me with invaluable support in my research. I particularly thank Ashish Rajadhyaksha for giving me pointers on *Sholay*. Fernando Paragas, Michael Campi, Eternality Tan, Cathie Gillam, Junainah Binte Abdul Latif, and Debra L'Angellier have all been friendly advisers and upfront with logistical support. I acknowledge a special gratitude to David Jowsey of BUNYA Productions. Finally, I owe an eternal debt of gratitude to my spouse, Lim Bea Fung, who kept me fed and nourished over the whole period of my writing sabbatical, making sure that I did nothing but write. She was also the manager of my research, visiting libraries on my behalf and obtaining copies of materials, hunting down journals, and often engaging me intellectually with the whole topic of the Western.

Introduction

This book is intended as a sequel to my most recent book *The Asian Cinema Experience: Styles, Spaces, Theory* (2013: Routledge), continuing certain themes from the previous book in arguing for a refocus of cinema studies from an Asian perspective. The topic of the Western is proposed here as one that can fit into a refocus or rediscovery of cinematic genres, from an Asian perspective. This is not a book on the traditional form of the Western as it is produced in America (or Hollywood), it is a book on the genre seen from a very broad critical scope covering the spectrum of West and East or even North and South. It will deal with the Western as it is produced in Asian cinemas (principally South Korea, China, Japan, India, Thailand), and it will go on to examine the Western, produced in America and other global settings (the Italian Western, the Australian Western). I will reexamine American Westerns through a comparative analytical framework in order to suggest a sense of rediscovering the classical Western from an Asian-Other subaltern perspective, evoking and employing Asian philosophical ideas and values as well as ancient Asian myths—or simply just to consider the Western from an alternative critical sensibility which will be perceptibly different from Euro-American perspectives. The aim of tackling a genre study of the Western such as this one is to offer a counter-discourse, a substitute vision of a genre generally thought to be native to the United States of America and apparently indigenous to its culture.

The Western is a popular genre form that is produced in all the major Asian film industries. Thomas Schatz has called it the ‘most flexible of narrative formulas’ (Schatz 1981, 45). Though he meant it in the context of Hollywood, the Western narrative formula has been adapted by Asian filmmakers who have shown that they can make distinctive Westerns in their own manner, fulfilling the structures and conventions of traditional Westerns. Ironically, the form itself appears to have been in a state of long decline in America and in Europe since the 1970s. The ‘Spaghetti Western’, for example, is practically a defunct genre, but it has been resurrected in Asia, as demonstrated by films such as *Tears of the Black Tiger* (Thailand, 2000), *Sukiyaki Western Django* (Japan, 2007), *The Good, The Bad, The Weird* (South Korea, 2008), and *Let the Bullets Fly* (China, 2010)—all subjects for discussion in this book. The Asian Western is, ironically, a rather more vigorous

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specimen than its 'Western' counterparts, but the most recent studies of the genre have not adequately taken into account the concept of the Asian Western and where its causal roots may lie. For example, scholars in the U. S. and Britain have lately evolved a concept of the 'Post-Western' which would seem to fit the development of Asian Westerns in the twenty-first century. Asian Westerns are models of how the Western has moved beyond the 'familiar frontier narratives that circumscribe "Westness" within a national interpretive horizon' (Young 2013, 119). Yet, the Post-Western literature only barely mentions Asian Westerns and fails to analyse the form in any significant way. Neil Campbell's book *Post-Westerns* (2013) exemplifies this neglect. It contains homilies of the post-West as a veritable movement towards a configuration that is non-American but it remains strictly obsessed with the U.S.-centricity of the form albeit as a more critical overview of American history beyond the classical framework of the frontier, or the 'historic' Western. In writing about the Post-Western or the Western generally, most European and American scholars have ignored Asian Westerns or just pay them lip service even when they are cognisant of the globalisation of the Western genre. A more generous view would be to see these scholars as taking the first step towards a more global discourse by tackling the home-front first, but equality and reciprocity in the discourse is very far from being realised.

Thus it seems to me that where Asian critics or scholars can really contribute to the literature on the Western is to write about Asian Westerns and/or to address Westerns from their own perspective. In the process, Asian scholars can further the dialogue by discussing the genre on a wider outlook and doing so as an addendum or corrective to the Euro-American domination of the field. This mirrors the Asian Western as a form which is in itself an addendum to and a revision of the Westerns of Hollywood and Europe. Another tendency, as shown in two recent publications, *International Westerns* (2014) and *The Western in the Global South* (2015), is to acknowledge the internationalisation and diversity of the Western but not really to focus on the Asian brand. This book seeks to redress the shortfall, being convinced that the Asian Western is much more unique in essence—its 'Eastern' dimension, and identity, making it so.

Placing the Asian Western

This book's primary focus on Asian Westerns will throw light on the fact that genres can be taken over by other nations and cultures. The Western is perhaps the most representative genre for this kind of critique in that it is a prototype created by Hollywood and has been used as a cultural instrument for its global expansion. Asian Westerns may be seen as an extension of Hollywood Westerns, but it may also be seen in the context of an American West that has been Orientalised. This is the theme of Richard V. Francaviglia's book, *Go East, Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient* (2011). Orientalism is 'a strong undercurrent in the region's art, film, literature, and tourism', writes Francaviglia, and it constitutes a process 'by which a broader American identity was formed but also a stepping stone to our exporting that American West to far corners of the globe'

(Francaviglia 2011, 288). Francaviglia's book deals with how the West was Orientalised by Americans themselves in recognition that the East (Asia) is vital to America's interests. Thus, the West is the natural stage for an Orientalist tradition in American arts, of which Asian Westerns are an eccentric function of this tradition. This book is concerned with the Western as it has drifted from West to East and its purpose is to investigate the genre's aesthetics and styles as they evolve and change in this Eastward movement. The Western's drift towards the East is seen here not so much as an outcome of American Orientalism à la Francaviglia but of Asian filmmakers' own fondness for the genre and their ignorance of the forces in Hollywood driving the decline of the Western there. Asian filmmakers are independently constructing their own variations of the genre free of the priorities of the U. S. market. This out-of-place nature of the development of the Western in the East is a historical phenomenon which ought to draw greater critical attention to the Eastern Western as a genre entity in itself but there is not a great deal of literature on the subject, which remains basically dormant and undeveloped. Perhaps one of the major obstacles towards greater critical recognition is that the form itself tends to cause some confusion, as reflected in the name that I use here, the 'Eastern Western'. There is a sense of wordplay, giving one the impression that it is neither a Western nor an Eastern and is therefore not a specific genre. In the literature, Asian cinemas tend to be recognized in terms of their national identities, and a genre such as the Eastern Western is not often discussed within those perimeters and may be regarded with some consternation. Asian genres like the samurai and *wuxia* movies in Japanese and Chinese cinemas respectively are often discussed in terms of being influenced by the Western and its formulas, such that they are sometimes called 'Easterns'. The result has generally been that the word 'Easterns' (referring to native genres of Asian cinemas) is confused (or misaligned) with Westerns. It is therefore necessary for me to explain the term 'Eastern Westerns' as the title of this book, and to clarify its characteristics and features.

Firstly, 'Easterns' and 'Westerns' are terms arbitrarily used mostly by Western commentators. Though European and American critics may use the word 'Easterns' to refer to *wuxia* and samurai movies, Asians themselves almost never use this term to refer to these genres; and in the consciousness of Asian critics, there is no such genre known as the 'Eastern'. At other times, European and American critics also use the word 'Eastern' essentially to refer to the Western, still to suggest a mix-up of forms but basically to indicate the predominance of the latter. Ian Jarvie's book *Towards a Sociology of Cinema* contains the following passage:

Kurosawa's Japanese Eastern-western *Seven Samurai*, was with little difficulty turned into a Western proper, *The Magnificent Seven*. The British have made westerns set in Australia (*The Overlanders*, *Eureka Stockade*) and South Africa (*The Hellions*). The Japanese, the Germans, and the Italians make their own 'cowboy' films. Now here we have a complete mix-up: westerns which take place in the West but with Japanese, German and Italian creators; westerns which do not take place in the American West, with European creators; Eastern-westerns located in the East but nevertheless manifestly western in

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spirit and theme. All this indicates how vigorous a form the western is—it can get so mixed up, have endless variations played on it, and yet somehow still retain its universal and compelling character.

(Jarvie 1970, 156–157)

From my perspective, I would not call Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* a 'Western'. Jarvie calls it a 'Japanese Eastern-western', which is a convoluted way of describing a samurai movie. Most Japanese would simply call it *chanbara*, an onomatopoeic term referring to the sounds of colliding swords, or *jidaigeki*, a more formal and less precise term which merely indicates a period movie. What Jarvie actually means is that the movie is the Japanese counterpart to the Western; and other scholars have since brought out similarities between the *jidaigeki* and the Western, comparing, in particular, the films of Kurosawa and John Ford (see Brodey 2014). While the two genres might share similar themes and myths, they are not exactly equivalent; in fact, they belong to two entirely different traditions. Thus, from the perspective of this book, Easterns and Westerns actually refer to two separate genres, while the Eastern Western refers to a definite and specific genre which is the Western, with Eastern features. A mix-up of forms is perhaps intrinsic to the very nature of Eastern Westerns, but in my discussions, I will try to distinguish clearly between the Eastern elements of the Asian Western (by sticking to the indigenous terms—thus, *wuxia*, or kung fu, or the samurai *chanbara*), and the Western as a distinctive genre in its own right.

Asian Westerns, or Eastern Westerns (for my purposes, the words 'Eastern' and 'Asian' are interchangeable, and henceforth, I will freely substitute one term for the other), are thus in a separate category of its own. I would therefore not include films like *Seven Samurai* or *wuxia* movies like Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time* into this category. It is misleading to interpret these movies as Westerns since what is at stake is the essence of their genres which have had long historical antecedence and developed national and cultural characteristics that demand more respectful considerations. Likewise, any consideration of the Western must take into account the cultural and structural terms of the Western genre as it has developed out of American national identity. The sense that the Western genre is already mired in the Post-Western sensibility may call for a greater flexibility of definition of forms but it still recognises the classical patterns of the Western and proceeds from that premise. The Asian Western also proceeds from the premise of the classical Western form. The 'complete mix-up' of 'Eastern-westerns located in the East', following Jarvie's critical approach, is now commonplace, however. It developed out of a time when Asian cinemas were still new and strange to many Western viewers and Asian genres could only be comprehended through the 'mix-up' logic. There are critics who celebrate such an approach for their 'cultural inauthenticity' in relation to the Western (see Leon Hunt 2011) but it will most likely aggravate further confusion from the perspective of this book. To avoid more confusion, this study of the topic proceeds from our present objective of revising given descriptions of the Western as they have been defined by a number of critics essentially along the line of 'the complete mix-up'. Thus, this passage

from Daniel Fried's article 'Riding off into the Sunrise: Genre Contingency and the Origin of the Chinese Western':

So pervasive has been the fusion of martial arts with the western that the former has been radically displaced: originating in the *jianghu*, or "river-and-lake," tales of banditry in China's humid southeast, the traditional martial-arts genre as it has been reconfigured for export-driven cinema now emphasizes dusty western settings.

(Fried 2007, 1493)

Fried refers to Chinese martial arts movies such as Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002), and Tsui Hark's *Seven Swords* (2005), basically as Westerns. From his perspective, Fried chooses to emphasise what is 'Western' about these films. From the perspective of this book, these films are not Westerns but *wuxia* movies. They are films that do not observe the form of the Western and it is highly debatable that their martial arts Eastern elements have been 'radically displaced' by the Western. Just because these films emphasise 'dusty western settings' do not make them Westerns. Fried therefore confuses Easterns with Westerns in the interest of theorising about the rise of the Chinese Western genre. This kind of 'complete mix-up' critical approach is, I now believe, mistaken, smacking of a lazy structuralism that fails to denote the qualitative aspects of either genre, and this is now made redundant by the appearance of the Asian Western as a specific form in itself. It is now time for a more rigorous redefinition—and delineation—of all these genres. This book is about the identification of a genre, more than anything, and while it is clear about what the Eastern Western is, it is also aware that there are many readers who may be confused by the terms as well as the forms. It will thence set out to define the form of the Eastern Western much more specifically (a form that emphasises Western-specificity)—and we begin by drawing a line between the Eastern and the Western.

A definition of Eastern Westerns is certainly in order, and I will go on to outline its form in greater detail shortly. Suffice it for now to say that Eastern Westerns are '*manifestly* western in spirit and theme', as Jarvie puts it (*italics mine*), but they also contain the same outward elements that are universal to the Western: characters dressed in cowboy costumes and big hats, gunfights (as distinct from swordfights), fistfights, outlaws, sheriffs, saloon whores, sidekicks, horses, horseriding, chases, trains, not to mention the landscape space, of which more later. It is therefore important to emphasise that Eastern Westerns are fundamentally Westerns in form as well as in spirit. Something like *Seven Samurai*, in my opinion, is not a Western, neither in form nor in spirit (though some might argue that it is so in spirit if not in form). There are certainly samurai movies, or other 'Easterns' such as *wuxia* and kung fu movies, that are not Westerns in form but could be so in spirit. One example of this is the recent Vietnamese martial arts film, *Once Upon a Time in Vietnam* (2013). The film has been described as a Western but is not a Western in form but rather more in spirit (its driving spirit seems to me to be that of George Stevens's *Shane*).

On a reciprocal basis, there are those films made by Hollywood that are clearly 'Easterns', such as Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill, Volume 1* (2003) and RZA's *The Man with the Iron Fists* (2012). I truly doubt that critics in the West would identify these films as Westerns, though they might point to some pre-existing elements that belong in the Western (for example the use of guns). The codes and action conventions deployed in their narratives are not those that define the Western form, and any Asian of my generation watching these films will instinctively know that they are very obvious tributes to the martial arts kung fu pictures produced by the Hong Kong Shaw Brothers studio. *The Man with the Iron Fists* is particularly evocative in this respect, right down to the writing of all its credit titles in Chinese characters, and its mobilisation of ex-Shaw Brothers kung fu stars in cameo roles. The films that I will analyse in the ensuing chapters of this book are Westerns that are so in form and in spirit. I freely acknowledge the American source of the Western and at times may actually insist on the 'authenticity' of the American Western form as it applies to the Asian Western. In addition, by undertaking this study, I am also acknowledging the hybridity of genre forms and the slipperiness of the generic conventions binding both Easterns and Westerns. However, for the sake of clarity, the principle of mutual respect of Eastern and Western forms (even when there is a muddying of the forms) should be observed and may go a long way in advancing this study as a more methodical and rigorous investigation.

Another sense of the word 'Eastern' should be broached here as a very pertinent sensibility when connected to the Western. In his book *The Dream Life*, J. Hoberman calls Mexican director Alejandro Jodorowsky's *El Topo* (1970), a 'mystical Western', and in parenthesis includes the words: 'an Eastern Western' (Hoberman 2003, 297). Hoberman doesn't explain his inclusion of the 'Eastern' word but the meaning is self-explanatory. 'Eastern' is a synonym for 'mystical', and obviously alludes to the mysterious East, or a philosophical but esoteric East. Hence, the spirit of the East is contained in the meaning of 'Eastern Western'. This is the sense implied by Hoberman as he applies it to *El Topo*, which is not an Eastern Western but a Mexican one (another label that Hoberman applies to the film is the 'Hippie Western' and the relation to the East then makes greater sense because it deepens the counterculture as a force behind the work). It may certainly be useful to think of the more philosophical, if not mysterious, aspects imbedded in the word 'Eastern' when we connect it to the Western genre, and I will occasionally revert to this implicit meaning in my analysis of Westerns from the West (the second part of this book)—to make the Eastern point of view more explicit. The mystical-philosophical side of the Eastern connection may hopefully shed a sharper light on the Western in this study.

The Eastern notion of the Western is not usually discussed or offered as a topic but it is present as a factor in the Western, not just in the countercultural moment of the 1970s with films like *El Topo*, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971), and *Billy Jack* (1971), all discussed by Hoberman in *The Dream Life*, but stretching back at least to the 1960s—as represented by a work such as John Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven* (a subject of this book)—and the 1950s, if not earlier. The book will target several other films in order to bring out into the open this underlying Eastern factor

in the Western and discuss it more fully. This Eastern notion, then, is inherent in the Western, and it may surprise readers to discover that it is there at all. The book will demonstrate that the Western myth is intrinsically connected to Asian myths in the form of the Indian epics, *The Ramayana* and parts of *The Mahabharata*. It will analyse Western classics on the *rasa* principle of taste and sentiment, deriving from the ancient Indian dramaturgical treatise *The Nattyasastra*. This Western connection with the East complements the Eastern (Asian) connection and interaction with the Western. Thus, the book is demarcated into these two parts with chapters in each segment analysing the mutual connections of East-West and West-East (more on the chapter divisions later). The book denotes both sides of the coin, so to speak, and offers rigorous analysis of Westerns that are located in this Eastern-Western matrix. While the Eastern notion in the Western is mostly an offbeat topic, the Asian Western remains on the critical margins as a sort of curiosity of international cinema, and has still to be formally recognised as a distinctive genre in its own right. It is time that this special genre mode and manner is acknowledged and comprehended.

Eastern Westerns: A consideration of form

The form of the Asian Western is derived from the classical traditions of the Western produced by Hollywood, but it may be closer to the ‘Spaghetti Westerns’. As a Post-Western form, the Spaghetti Westerns are placed in a position of being the most directly influential form on the Asian Western. Leon Hunt declares that ‘the Italian Western lurks at the borders of the cinematic canon’ (Hunt 2011, 100), which I take to mean that it is the most immediately contiguous to the border of the Asian Western. As Asian filmmakers travel westwards, they hit the Italian Western border first, and they freely transverse the border, picking up the traits, the manners, and the habits of the Italians. Indeed, there is a sense that the Asian Western inherits not so much the American form as it does the Italian form if we were just to focus on the examples of films like *Tears of the Black Tiger*, *Sukiyaki Western Django*, and *The Good, The Bad, The Weird*, which are the three most noteworthy Eastern Westerns of the new millennium. These films, then, may be seen as representative of the whole sub-type of the Asian Western in the development of the form and structure of Post-Westerns.

The importance of the Spaghetti Westerns lies in its vibrancy as an artistic product of the Italian film industry in the 1960s. Though derided at first, recognition of the form is now practically *de rigueur*, a process initiated by Christopher Frayling’s book *Spaghetti Westerns*. The book is now the seminal text in the analysis of non-American Westerns as a form that is quite distinctive from its American foundations. The Italian Western is seen to challenge and transform the American Western. Frayling considers the Italian Western to have developed from the Italian cinema and within its contexts of Italian history and society. Our study of the Asian Western as a project in its own right must therefore take Frayling’s now seminal text into account because the Eastern Western form is in essence quite similar to the Italian Western, being a type of genre that is both derivative of the American Western but yet departing from it in significant ways.

8 Introduction

Some of Frayling's concerns discussed in his book can be applied to the Asian Western phenomenon: the fact that the Westerns were mostly derided by critics in the beginning; the 'cultural roots' debate over the whole sub-genre; the notion of the Italian western as 'an entirely separate narrative development' (Frayling 2006, 50). Sergio Leone's films are treated as models that 'can be interpreted as a type of European genre cinema, which extends and manipulates the clichés of the equivalent Hollywood genre' and are therefore of interest because 'they attempt to criticise and redefine the "rules" of the Hollywood Western genre—an attempt which could only have come from *outside* the Hollywood system' (Frayling 2006, 136). Frayling cites the idea of the 'Anti-Western' as an aesthetic theory first applied to the genre by Italian critics that can help viewers to understand the whole cycle of the Spaghetti Westerns. These ideas are entirely pertinent to the Asian Western, and Frayling's assertion that Spaghetti Westerns 'can be interpreted as a type of European genre cinema' fits this book's own objective to interpret Asian Westerns as a type of Asian genre cinema. Eastern Westerns have emerged as a specific type of genre in Asian cinemas which is quite apart from the native genres that some critics call 'Easterns', as I have tried to explain earlier.

Frayling's stand on behalf of the Italian Western stems from his own European roots as a cultural critic. He offers a European response against the U.S.-centricity of the American Western, showing how Europeans were already contributing to the Western as a genre even back in the nineteenth century. Europeans, then, have been instrumental to the development of the Western as a genre and Frayling's book sets out to recognise the European contribution. He takes exception to how American scholars have categorised plot formations and functions in Westerns, such as those offered by Will Wright in *Six Guns and Society* (1975), without accounting for the European contribution. Wright is castigated at length by Frayling for ignoring the Italian Westerns. Frayling debunks Wright's models of oppositions, both moral ('good/bad') and ideological ones ('inside society/outside society', 'wilderness/civilisation'), that seem redundant with the appearance of the Italian Western.

More appropriate oppositions at work in the Italian Westerns, which can help us make sense of the genre, would be "victim/executioner", "Gringo/Mexican", "inside the local community/outside the local community", "pro-faction/anti-faction", "family-oriented/self-oriented", "amity/enmity" and "money/commitment to a cause". Still moral and ideological ones—but of a different order.

(Frayling 2006, 50)

Frayling offers a counter-paradigm to Will Wright's 'four-plots' model in the development of the Western: the classical plot, the vengeance variation, the transition theme, and the professional plot (see Wright 1975, 15). The Italian Western offers a plot structure, which Frayling calls the 'Italian plot' (Frayling 2006, 50), that is obviously different from Wright's model, and he discerns further variants in the development of the Italian Western that departs from the Hollywood structure.

What is of interest to us is to consider how these variants may fit the Asian Western. We do not have the space for details here but even from a superficial reading of Frayling's oppositions, there are some that match and some that do not. For example, Frayling notes a 'Gringo/Mexican' opposition as a fundamental variant in the Spaghetti Western. This Italian variant would seem to me to be a transformation of the 'Cowboys/Indians' opposition that was generic to the American form. The Asian Western has transformed this traditional opposition into one of 'Cowboys/Bandits' to fit the Asian condition, while in the case of the 'Gringo/Mexican' opposition, it offers its own Asianised variation. This is not so much a 'Gringo/Asian' opposition as an 'Asian Gringo/Asian Mexican' version. The transformation of a foundational opposition necessitates a readjustment of other oppositions. Such transformations are the norm in Asian Westerns and may result in more complex ramifications as the styles and aesthetics of the genre become more transfixed in the Asian environment. It will be the aim of this book in the following chapters to further discern and define the modifications, and *other* variants and oppositions that the Asian Western presents. The generic principles and characteristics of the Western form, in both its American and European varieties, have been so profusely defined by other critics that it is sufficient here to note that the Asian Western offers more variations simply by being Asian.

Finally, I come to the space of the Western landscape as the first condition of Western form in order to denote the quality of the Asian transformation. Landscape is often brought up to illustrate how American the Western space is and how its geography determines the notion of manifest destiny that the genre represents (see, for example, Carmichael, 2006; Borden and Essman, 2000). In this sense we can never get away from Monument Valley: Sergio Leone, for example, was so conscious of this dictum that he went back there to film at least one scene in *Once Upon a Time in the West*. But Asian Westerns show a landscape that is quite transformative—in some cases, completely artificial, and in the case of the Japanese Western, *Sukiyaki Western Django*, Mount Fuji replaces Monument Valley—thus begging the question of how Western space can be defined. I bring up space also because it emphasises geography as another vital condition of the form but here the geography is the span and dimension of vast distances underlined by the terms and notions of 'Eastern' and 'Western'. As the Western travels Eastwards, it may no longer be defined by Monument Valley because it is now defined by the padi fields of Thailand, the vastness of the Chinese desert, the rolling plains of the Manchurian steppes, and so on. More so than all other elements, the space in the American West, defined more specifically by Monument Valley, is made even more hypothetical by its transposition from the West to the East. If the landscape is seen as the first clause of the influence of the Western form on Asian cinemas, Asian Westerns have therefore incorporated a space that is even more abstracted in its transference onto the Asian screen. There is much that is culturally determined in those spaces, but there is also perhaps one vital determination—industry and a knack for genre filmmaking.

Frayling has made the point that the Italian Western cycle lasted only less than ten years. The European Western has now virtually disappeared; and the reason

for this disappearance is that there is no longer the kind of industry that sustained it in the European cinemas, nor is there any real taste or feeling for reviving the kind of widespread genre filmmaking that existed in the heyday of Cinecittà, the Hollywood on the Tiber. We might make the point that the European Western (the Spaghetti variant, essentially), has found its continuance in the Eastern Western. In Asia, there are several vital industries, from India to Thailand, from Vietnam to China, from South Korea to Japan, that seem able to sustain the form—and genre filmmaking of all kinds is the norm rather than the exception. At present, it is the Eastern space that seems to revitalise the Western—minus the presence of Monument Valley. However, this book is under no illusion that the Asian interpretation of the Western will ever replace the Euro-centric view or the America-centric one. Frayling observes that ‘Wright’s formal analysis ... crucially depends on the presupposition that the “Western myth” is far more deeply rooted in the culture he is discussing than the Italian Western “myth” ever could be, in Italian society’ (Frayling 2006, 53). Even while Frayling is arguing a strong case for the European Western, Michael Coyne has advised that ‘a Eurocentric interpretation of the Western must inevitably be a limited one’, since, the Western ‘is above all an American artifact, focused equally on the aesthetics of the nation’s past, and the ethics of contemporary America’ (Coyne 2008, 8–9). These are sobering afterthoughts.

In the chapters below, many readers who are used to reading about Westerns written from the American perspective, and from the European one, will probably find this volume terribly off-center and bizarre. This is the challenge offered by this book. It is the conviction of its author that Asian critics and scholars should not just be in the frontline of discussing and analysing Asian films and genres but also taking part in the wider discourse on foreign genres (in this case, the Western) or, indeed, foreign cinemas. Without such participation, the experience of cinema would not be complete. This book operates on the Chinese principle of *paozhuan yinyu*, meaning that it casts a brick into the discourse in order to attract nuggets of jade (symbolising wisdom).

Demarcation and chapters

This book represents a new critical arrangement towards analysing the Western, doing so from a broadly revisionist Asian point of view, unsettling traditional notions of how we think about Westerns which have generally been discussed by Western (mostly Anglo-American) critics and writers. The book is demarcated into two parts. In Part One entitled ‘Eastern Westerns’, the topic of Asian Westerns will feature as the main item of discussion. The chapters in Part One highlight Asian models of Westerns to demonstrate that the genre has gone beyond its American form or even its European ‘Spaghetti’ form. The Asian Western is thus the conceptual unit of analysis. The aim is to increase the reader’s theoretical understanding of this subgenre as a contemporary development in global cinema and in a genre that has long been associated with nationalist perspectives of scholars in the United States of America. Part Two is entitled ‘Westerns Inside

and Outside Hollywood'. The focus is on Westerns that are not made by Asian industries but produced in Hollywood and other more traditional industries that are more identified with the Western genre. However, the films will be conceptualised from the Asian point of view, incorporating myths and ethical values. The new arrangement offered by this book is to fulfill a need to revise and reassess the Western as a genre that has now been Asianised.

Chapter 1 focuses on the Thai Western *Tears of the Black Tiger* (2000), directed by Wisit Sasanatieng. This Southeast Asian Western serves as the introduction to the whole notion of *Asian* Westerns with which we begin the book. The film itself offers a genuinely bizarre hodgepodge of Thai melodrama and Western action. The chapter goes into an in-depth analysis of the film's associations with both the Western genre and native Thai variations of melodrama and action genres. The result is seen as a hybridization process in Thai cinema, and it serves as the model with which to understand other Asian Westerns in the following chapters. Our analysis will immediately help the reader to refocus attention on the objective of rediscovering the Western from our Eastern perspective. Chapter 2 discusses the Japanese Western, *Sukiyaki Western Django* (2007), directed by Miike Takashi, perhaps the most offbeat of contemporary Asian filmmakers. This Eastern Western has an even more bizarre and animated quality to it such that one may actually call it a live anime of a Western. The film is set, somewhat incongruously (but deliberately so), in a Japantown built in the middle of a wilderness in Nevada, U.S.A. Its all-Japanese characters speak in English and they are also all fully dressed in Western attire. Miike's work easily brings up questions of cultural identity, as it straddles both the Western and samurai movie forms, borrowing from such acknowledged cult classics as Sergio Corbucci's Spaghetti Western original *Django* (1966) and Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961). Chapter 3 spotlights the South Korean Western *The Good, The Bad, the Weird* (2008), directed by Kim Ji-woon. As is evident from its title, the film draws on influences of the Italian Western *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* (Sergio Leone, 1966), but it also alludes to a native form in South Korean cinema, the Manchurian Western. The chapter will delve into the relationships of the film with both forms, in order to suggest how the Western as a genre can remain true to its traditional Western sources (in both American and European shades) and change its stripes at the same time. The film presents a variant of the good-bad-ugly ternary structure by modifying the ugly to weird.

Chapter 4 investigates the mainland Chinese Western, *Let the Bullets Fly* (2010), directed by Jiang Wen. The film is seen as the Chinese model of a revolutionary Western based on the Italian 'Zapata Western' plot structure, alluding in particular to Sergio Leone's *Duck, You Sucker!* (1971). *Let the Bullets Fly* advances this plot composition with its own peculiar Chinese characteristics drawing on indigenous traditions of early twentieth-century revolution in China; and the whole thing makes for a unique transformation. Jiang Wen himself plays the role of the revolutionary-cum-bandit. The film offers another variation of the ternary structure of good-bad-weird (or ugly) characters with remarkable results (Jiang's co-stars who are coopted into this configuration are Chow Yun-fat and Ge You).

Chapter 5 continues a further investigation into the Chinese Western genre, focusing on two films *Wind Blast* (2010, directed by Gao Qunshu) and *No Man's Land* (2013, directed by Ning Hao). These Chinese Westerns suggest how the conventional Western genre characteristics and its tendency towards violence have been adapted by Chinese filmmakers for their own purposes, to fit into the notion of the West as a developmental space in Chinese terms. The discussion addresses how the Chinese cinema also owns its own genre known as the Western (*xibu pian*)—a form that is located in the Western geographical part of China itself. This indigenous form is seen to undergo certain transformation as the influence of the global Western becomes more apparent in the modern Chinese cinema, as displayed in the two Westerns investigated. The last chapter in Part One is on the Indian Western, *Sholay* (1975, directed by Ramesh Sippy). The film has been much commented upon in the literature on Bollywood. This chapter seeks to put the film in the context of Asian Westerns as a form that globalizes Asian Cinema itself through the platform of Bollywood cinema. The Western influences on *Sholay* are examined, in particular, the element of violence and the urge of domestication in the heroic protagonists played by Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra. We see how Western characteristics are transformed by Bollywood conventions.

Part Two examines Hollywood Westerns, both classics and new works, as well as two Australian 'Aboriginal Westerns' and Leone's Spaghetti Western masterpiece, *Once Upon a Time in the West*. The aim here is to comprehensively rediscover and reassess the Western genre from the marginal standpoint of an Asian critic (one who is also a fan of the Western) and reading the selected films from the Asian perspective. There will be a comparative angle but the main focus will lie on the critical need to establish a non-Western viewpoint on the Western genre. For example, the author will establish a connection of these Westerns with Indian myths based on the ancient classics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012) is seen as our catalytic work of the contemporary global cinema, as led by Hollywood, to connect East and West, and the film serves as the launchpad into this whole second part of the book. Chapter 7, then, demonstrates how *Django Unchained* is connected to Eastern mythic elements, reaffirming Tarantino's status as the most versatile filmmaker in international cinema to suggest East-West hybridity. Chapter 8 analyses Ang Lee's Post-Western, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) in depth, and also discusses his other Western, *Ride with the Devil* (1999). Lee's career crosses both American and Chinese storytelling modes and genres and his work in *Brokeback Mountain*—and in *Ride with the Devil*—presents an opportunity to examine the Western genre as it is seen in its American homeland in a framework of Eastern civilisational-philosophical values. The chapter examines the central homosexual relationship between the two Western 'cowboys' in the Eastern terms of dharma, implying duty or responsibility, as these characters function and exist in the normative prism of family. The chapter ultimately argues that its main characters are driven by Eastern ethical values even as they seem to outwardly reinforce the values of the American Western.

The famous 1960 Hollywood Western *The Magnificent Seven*, directed by John Sturges, is the topic of Chapter 9. A remake of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954), this Hollywood production has become very influential in its own right, and it is therefore addressed here in depth—but as a prototype of the sort of 'Eastern Western' that is being discussed in this book. The film is examined for its exemplary nature in spurring the traditional Western into the Eastward direction, evident in its themes and most of its characters. We investigate how it incorporates (and departs from) the Japanese original but also underscores certain values that we may recognise as falling within the purview of the Eastern Western. Chapter 10 goes to Australia to examine two 'Aboriginal Westerns', the classic *Jedda* (1955), directed by Charles Chauvel, and the contemporary Post-Western *Mystery Road* (2013), directed by Ivan Sen. This chapter goes on to apply an Asian reading on these two Australian Westerns. They are analysed for their significance within the purview of the Western's development in the Australian cinema (this industry also possessing its own indigenous version of the Western genre). At the same time, the chapter demonstrates that the two films are indebted to mythic traditions from Asia—*The Ramayana* being the mythical source of the films' narrative. *Jedda's* captivity narrative is shown to lay the foundation of the Asian connection with the ancient Indian tale of *The Ramayana*—a connection inherited in its own uncanny way by the Post-Western, *Mystery Road*.

Chapter 11 discusses Sergio Leone's acknowledged masterpiece *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) from the viewpoint of the ancient Indian theory of *rasa*. The chapter contends that Leone's film in which the Italian director views the classic Western genre in epilogic terms is exemplarily rich in *rasa* sentiments, and it denotes in detail the ways in which the film's characters, the incidents, and the whole narrative exerts *rasa* emotions. The examination of *rasa* in Leone's work, a Spaghetti Western partly shot in Monument Valley, is a deliberate attempt to infuse the classic Western with a sense of Eastern values and to investigate how the Western can be studied from the Eastern perspective. We continue this attempt in the last chapter of the book, Chapter 12, which reexamines John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) from the *rasa* perspective and also considers its relationship with the ancient Indian myth of *The Ramayana*. The Eastern outlook applied to *The Searchers* is tantamount to a revisionist reinvestigation of Ford's work, which is commonly viewed as a masterpiece but not without its controversial side. We present *The Searchers* as a case study of how *rasa* manifests in the classic made-in-Hollywood Western. The book ends with this case study as a kind of open conclusion, suggesting that further work in aligning Westerns (and, possibly, films of other genres) with Eastern myths and value systems should continue which will hopefully lead to the enrichment of analytical film studies on a comparative basis. While the book presents a counter-discourse on the Western, it seeks, in the final analysis, a wider dialogue on the genre and greater East-West diversification of film studies.

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Part I

Eastern Westerns

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