



EASTERN APPROACHES TO WESTERN FILM

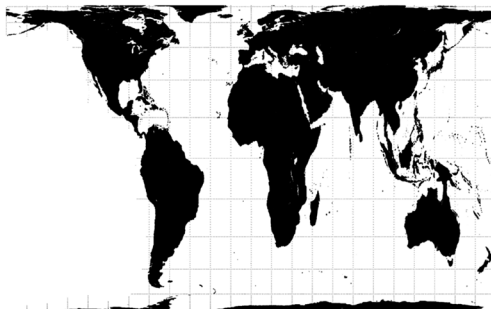
Asian Reception
& Aesthetics in Cinema

STEPHEN TEO

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Eastern Approaches to Western Film

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Eastern Approaches to Western Film

Asian Reception and Aesthetics in Cinema

Stephen Teo

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Dedicated to all students, East and West

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Acknowledgments

The idea for this book came to me in a conversation with Professor Tim Bergfelder over a dinner in Glasgow where I was attending the Screen Conference in June 2016. He suggested that it would be a great idea to write a book analyzing Western films from a Confucian point of view. At the time, I nodded favorably without being really convinced that such a book could be written. However, the seed was planted in my mind so that when the time came to write a book proposal to submit to the publisher, I was ready with some concrete ideas for chapters. The scope had widened to include not just the Confucian viewpoint but a whole “Eastern approach.” Effectively, this meant including a Daoist outlook, and for that, I am indebted to my old friend and classmate Chia Khiong Fatt whose belief in Daoism was always inspirational to me and had enthused me over the years to look for Daoist motifs in films.

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Introduction

The Eastern approach

The main function of this book is the adoption of an “Eastern approach,” certain arguments following principles of Eastern thought, to apply to the contents and narratives of Western films of my choice, all classics, made in Europe and America by a selective group of auteur directors. The approach is a synchronic application of Eastern concepts as a kind of mind exercise along the line of a freewheeling Daoist “wandering” proceeding from contact with the Western object. This is an intervention that has no precedence and historical context. Thus, I own up to the fact that this may be an entirely idiosyncratic collection of polemical essays. Be that as it may, the methodology is as follows:

Each chapter assesses the case study by seriously engaging with the criticism on record (written by mostly Western scholars) regarding the specific case. Great care is taken to scrutinize the films for their Eastern content, and the films are backed up by references to the particular Eastern philosophy or set of philosophies cited. All these references can be readily verified as long extant and influential texts. As far as possible, I refer to reputable translations, although on some occasions I resort to my own translations. The actual work of interpretation and analysis is undertaken based on the scrutiny of certain inscriptions of Eastern motifs and themes embedded in the films. It is not undertaken without any foundation for the invocation of Eastern precepts as the tools of analysis, however far-fetched it may seem on the surface of it. This involves a comparative method that I borrow from the ancient Chinese text, the *Guigu Zi*, and it is the principle of *xiangbi*, meaning semblance or likeness (*xiang*) and contrast or comparison (*bi*).¹ *Xiangbi* is a methodology of trying to know one’s opposite or an interlocutor in any form of cross communication. In my approach, therefore, it involves finding appropriate correspondences and matches of Eastern precepts to Western themes. The approach, then,

is fundamentally a reconceptualization of reading film classics, giving an alternative interpretation that is, because of its emphasis on an Eastern cultural underlayer, “proximate” to the Western texts.²

The analysis involves not just our readings of the narrative texts of the films but also reassessments of the established critical writings, or at least the more important criticisms pertaining to the specific cases, to address certain lapses or “blind spots” in understanding or interpretation and ultimately to add to the record. What is idiosyncratic is the conceptual approach based on an “Eastern” perspective. I aim to demonstrate that such a perspective can enrich the understanding of the films, hopefully achieving a more equitable balance in East-West cross-cultural communication which has tended to tilt overwhelmingly toward the West, that is to say, overwhelmingly Eurocentric. The approach marks an attempt to change one’s ways of observing and analyzing film by discerning Eastern characteristics, motifs, and philosophical elements which have the potential to entirely renew and readjust one’s view of film. It represents an effort to reformulate and reexamine the established views of the classics chosen for analysis which have been overwhelmingly appraised and analyzed from Eurocentric theoretical and philosophical perspectives. Eurocentric theory has essentially guided the international discourse on film not just on films made in the West but also films made in the East. Much academic and journalistic writing have taken this practice as the standard. This book thus goes against the grain of this practice. It seeks to inject an alternative, Eastern philosophical perspective into the film literature and to provide an addendum and corrective to Eurocentric, or America-centric, analyses.

An explication is now in order about the term “Eastern.” It is a word I happily embrace, along with the title of the book (not my original choice). I used it in my previous book, *Eastern Westerns*,³ a title that was also suggested to me (I had preferred “Asian Westerns”) and it would seem, in that instance, that with the publisher’s preference for the word “Eastern” over “Asian,” the reader could immediately grasp the essence of the term. It is so commonly used that no explanation would seem necessary. Perhaps because it is so common I should now have to further comment on the use of it and on its theoretical implications for this project. First, I should proceed by speaking about my own Eastern roots. I was born in Malaysia, of Chinese descent.

As a Malaysian, I am compelled to live with a mixture of Asian cultures and traditions, principally Malay, Chinese, and Indian—the three main population groups in Malaysia (there are also other minority groupings composed of Eurasians and indigenous ethnicities). Due to the colonial era I was born into, I was educated in the colonial language of English and it is the language that I write in, but my Malaysian nationality allows me other choices of languages (Chinese and Malay). I am a Southeast Asian, with roots in Chinese tradition, language (Mandarin and other dialects), and culture; there is also close familiarity with other Asian cultures and languages. This is my “Eastern” background.

At the same time, because of the hybridizing nature of colonialism and the thrust of Western developmental modernism that befell Malaysia, and most Southeast Asian countries, I may also be considered “Western.” Am I more Eastern than Western? This is an identity conundrum that bedevils a lot of Malaysians and I am not immune from this crisis. Although the question is somewhat beside the point of the analysis of this book, it may serve to illustrate the theoretical compulsion for the whole project as well as what some have perceived to be its central problem. Some of my reviewers have decried the approach of this book, reliant, as it is, on an East-West binary that to them is untenable, having been “problematized by decades of postcolonial theory.” My book, however, is not prepossessed by postcolonial theory, and it does not set out to argue any position within that field of theoretical study. That the East-West binary is perceived to operate in the book arises more as a condition of my Eastern approach adopted for the interpretation and analysis of Western films. I would argue that my approach presents no clear opposition between East and West but analogous comparison, and that I merely bring out what Western films have already received and absorbed of Eastern characteristics. If there is a binary, it is a rather blurred one. On the other hand, postcolonial scholarship has also brought out evidence of “bidirectional interpenetration” of Eastern and Western cultures and religions in the colonial context, as J. Jeffery Franklin has uncovered in his study of the interpenetration of Christianity and Buddhism in nineteenth-century Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).⁴ This kind of “interpenetration” may be a theme of postcolonialism as Franklin discusses it, but it is an old doctrine of Buddhist thought, expounded in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* as “All in One, One in All.” It is a doctrine that may be taken as our

lodestar, but if a binary is operative in this book, it is only because there is a need to make evident the Eastern in the Western, so often hidden and deferred in analysis.

The fundamental contradiction in postcolonial societies is the objective condition of neocolonialism. The state of postcoloniality, as Homi Bhabha asserts, “is a salutary reminder of the persistent ‘neo-colonial’ relations within the ‘new’ world order and the multi-national division of labour.”⁵ Theoretically speaking, postcolonialism involves not just a “decolonization” process but also one of “deimperialization,” according to Kuan-Hsing Chen. Both movements “intersect and interact, though very unevenly.”⁶ Chen notes that imperialism is far from being “a historical ruin”; it “expresses itself in a new form” through an “ongoing process of globalization” while former colonies undergo decolonization, which “can be a painful process involving the practice of self-critique, self-negation, and self-rediscovery” and deimperialization “which is no less painful and reflexive, is work that must be performed by the colonizer first, and then on the colonizer’s relation with its former colonies.”⁷

From my Malaysian perspective (and as a postcolonial subject), “deimperialization” imposes a greater moral burden on the West, and the West’s failure to “deimperialize” in the context of postcolonialism therefore hardly suggests the redundancy of the East-West binary, although I must reemphasize that my book does not hold up the binary in the framework of postcolonial theory but as a dualistic device for the sake of comparative film theory. To many of us living in Southeast Asia, postcolonialism has exacerbated an identity crisis within many modern Asians in the form I have described above. Some may cope better than most and find no problem with it (in Malaysian English, a response for such a conundrum could well be “Same-Same,” stating the issue of sameness from the Malaysian or Eastern perspective). While this may suggest that the binary is of no great import to some, it is necessary for Asian intellectuals and scholars to complement the process of “deimperialization” as a moral imperative for both East and West for the sake of a greater peace in the world. In this process, Chen proposes that scholars ought to engage in a discourse employing “Asia as method.” This implicates an Asian scholarship that “requires a different sort of knowledge production” from the kind of Euro-American knowledge products on Asia.⁸ I confess to being inspired by Chen’s arguments and his thesis of Asia as method. My Eastern approach may

in some way fall into his theoretical grid though with a more modest aim of trying to loosen the grip of Eurocentrism in film studies.

Issues of the East

I acknowledge that the “Eastern” terminology has some problematic ambiguities as does the term “Asian” (I use the two terms interchangeably), but I will now forgo the latter term to focus on the more serious implications of the “Eastern”—or “the issues of the East,” as an anonymous reviewer of my manuscript has put it. One of these “issues” is that of Orientalism. Orientalism is entrenched in some of the films discussed, as in the Star Wars Saga, the subject of chapter 1. It is addressed in the chapter itself, but here, I wish to address the issue as an intrinsic problem in my Eastern approach of analyzing Western films, but first, to preface my remarks, I have to say that when I was writing this book, I was never conscious of being an Orientalist at all or that I was using that particular approach in any specific way. Yet, there may indeed be aspects of Orientalism in my approach which I may put down to my postcolonial subjectivity. The problem relates to Orientalism as an ideological Eurocentric tool of analysis and as a legitimate form of intellectual discourse, using Eastern ideas and philosophy to measure and assess Western works. That my book is open to a charge of being Orientalist reveals the nature of the approach itself, which is, of course, an “Eastern approach,” and that it attains value through its semblance and contrast with Western content. This is the *sine qua non* of the book.

However, the charge presupposes that Eastern thinking must adopt modern or current Western values and Western thinking to be free of the Orientalist stain—Orientalism as distortion, bad practice, or bad epistemology. Western films should be interpreted only according to the Western European intellectual tradition (which may actually include Western norms of Orientalism). To this extent, my “Eastern” approach is, in fact, a “Western” approach. Such a standpoint does not contemplate that Orientalism can be a positive endeavor from the perspective of the Eastern intellectual, a self-Orientalism, to be sure, but nevertheless one that adopts a corrective tweaking toward the expression of an Eastern perspective or identity. Arif Dirlik observes that by the twentieth

century “orientalist conceptions had no distinct geographical origin,”⁹ which suggests to me that the idea of Orientalism is not loaded by geographical terms and that the issue is one of proportionality and balance in the comprehension of the values of East and West as well as the appropriateness and validity of the ideas applied.

The real essence of my Eastern approach, then, is to seek a balance of East and West. In the *Zhuang Zi*, it is written, “If we recognize that east and west, though opposites, cannot be without each other, their shared merit will be fixed.”¹⁰ The Eastern approach is meaningless if it is not applied to Western creations, or, in other words, it must be balanced (compared, evaluated, offset) with the Western practice. The Western works would also benefit from being balanced with an Eastern analytical outlook. The idea of balance is crucial to my own evolution as an intellectual and writer. If I am guilty of Orientalism, I am equally guilty of what some might call Occidentalism. A few years ago, I wrote a paper on a Chinese film in the Western genre with the editorial stipulation that I had to adopt a Deleuzian approach. Here then is the reverse of this book’s proposition of the Eastern approach whereby I analyze an Eastern film for its incorporation of Western elements—in this instance “Western” referring both to the geographic West and the cinematic genre of the Western. Half of my book *Eastern Westerns* is based on this reversal, and so I do know from where I have come in tackling this present book.

The next pressing issue concerns the broadness and ambiguity of the Eastern terminology. This is more like a pitfall which I happily fall into, in the spirit of Daoist wandering and acceptance of the broadness or limitlessness of any entity. Perhaps this is a good principle to grasp the abstract scope of this book. While this is a problem for some scholars, I see the issue through the lens of my Malaysian eyes. All Malaysians essentially settle down into a generic Asianness, underscoring “Asian” values of courtesy, tolerance, harmony, sociality, and, yes, broadmindedness. Being a Malaysian of Chinese ethnicity, if I were to cite Chinese cultural references in a multicultural context, I am happy to say that they are Eastern or Asian in the spirit of a pan-Asian “interpenetration” of cultures. Thus, the word “Eastern” is used in this spirit. On the other hand, it has been pointed out to me that because I have used more Chinese philosophical references in my analyses for this book, I am prone to the charge of Sinocentrism. This charge comes from the opposite of broadness

or ambiguity, and it is yet another pitfall which I have obviously fallen into, and it would be necessary here to address it in some breadth.

In my analyses, I mainly invoke Daoist and Confucianist ideas and beliefs borrowed basically from the *Zhuang Zi* and the *Analects* (also from other Confucian texts such as the *Mencius*). These comprise of ethical principles, philosophical ideas, and certain lifestyle values that I apply to the films in terms of story themes and new interpretations of narratives. In a nutshell, Confucianism usually points to ethical obligations in social institutions like the family. Obligations involve respect for one's elders, taking care of aged parents, friendship, and loyalty. The obligations govern relations in an ordered and hierarchical manner so long as there is proper observation from all, and on a macroscopic level, this embraces the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. The form of propriety may be important to ethical behavior in social institutions but in practice should bring out the substance of ethics. The Confucian philosophy emphasizes social responsibility as an implicit duty of all citizens, and it is up to each one of us to fulfill this duty with earnest sincerity. Daoism represents more philosophical abstractions of values and life choices. The individual seeks to follow the *dao* (the path) to achieve transcendence in a way that accounts for how one immerses oneself in the physical world and conducts relations with material things. This may seem paradoxical and, indeed, Daoism suggests dialectical interactions between the self and the material world. A practice in Daoist thought is *wuwei* (nonaction), trusting to one's mind in discovering natural and unpremeditated principles of action to respond to material conditions and freely flow with the *dao*.

As I see it, both schools of thought, with their ethical and metaphysical outlooks on life and death, duty and freedom, are completely pertinent to the series of films that I analyze in the following chapters. My approach is broad and general and does not address in detail the philosophical foundations of the schools of thought so cited because I do not expect that my readers are specialized in Eastern thought or philosophy but are more attuned to film studies and criticism. After all, the approach is applied to programmatic themes and motifs contained in the films I have selected and must operate within the parameters of the art of film so deployed and their particular narratives as well as the published criticisms.

I also invoke some Japanese and Indian philosophical ideas, but there is no symmetry in these invocations. All my chapters mark different instances of one school of thought being more applicable than the other, depending on the stories and themes of the films. Thus, for example, a film like *Make Way for Tomorrow* invokes more Confucianist principles than, say, Hindu thought; the Star Wars Saga is more Daoist than Buddhist but does not exclude the latter; similarly, *Vampyr* has a more Daoist outlook, but the film contains marvelous passages that immediately remind me of Indian *rasa* theory; *Le Samourai* contains Japanese Bushido philosophy as well as correspondences to the myths and actions of Chinese *wuxia* and with Daoism; and so on. This may be a piecemeal approach, but it is like wandering through a maze and encountering different varieties of narratives embedded into the hedgerow and you use what is applicable in Eastern theory along the principle of *xiangbi* (semblance and contrast) to interpret them at each moment of the turn around the maze.

I do not seek to approach the films with a preconceived set of Eastern theory that is a single, authoritative, and well-structured entity. No doubt, this is a manifestation of my own limitations, but I have made my choices based on my own personal predilections and interests, and, from that perspective, it is practically impossible for me to apply the entirety of Eastern sources of thought, from West Asia to Japan. The charge of Sinocentrism also reflects the problem of how to define the Eastern. At the same time, my use of Japanese and Indian ideas in some cases also accentuates Sinocentrism, according to the critics. This confuses what is meant by the “Eastern.” The confusion is regrettable, but at least the attempt to be inclusive has not been entirely disregarded. The sense of confusion is probably a side effect of the previous charge of ambiguity and broadness, which are not in themselves negative (I have said they ought to be embraced). I revert to my Malaysian background, its version of the broad church. Different races coexist and try to get along, and there are implicit ambiguities in understanding each other—an effect of inclusiveness—slow turns and careful negotiations in a dance of the races.

In the Malaysian context, it is implicitly understood that not all Asians think alike—a useful point to bear in mind too, in reference to another opinion that not all Asian viewers will use Daoism, Confucianism, or Buddhism, which

I mainly invoke, to approach the films of Europe and Hollywood (in fact, they will think like Westerners and that is the problem that I am trying to redress here). The Muslim Malay and the Hindu Indian will not be overjoyed with my Chinese interpretations, but on the other hand, there is always space in the Malaysian polity for mutual understanding and interaction across cultures. Such a space may be called Eastern, and when it is conjoined to the Western space (and here we may think of East and West as a unitarian space, no longer a binary), there is even greater room for cross-cultural exchange and communication. In this great ocean of space, I tend to see the charge of Sinocentrism as a minor issue, although one should always be mindful of the Chinese proverb under such circumstance, “One pole can sink the whole ship” (*yi ganzi da fan yitiao chuan*): the single stroke of criticism that seeks to sink the whole project. What matters is whether the ideas and arguments can shape up to a dialogue and a connection between cultures, and I leave it to the readers to judge whether they shape up.

The charge of Sinocentrism is a counterintuitive, over-generalized imputation of bad epistemology rather than an indictment of being part of a longstanding or impending trend of undue Chinese predominance over the whole field of Asian/Eastern studies or international film studies, of which there is no evidence in fact. It is more like an occupational hazard for an Asian scholar of Chinese culture and cinema. I have been accused of Sinocentrism even when I was writing about Chinese films and genres, such as *wuxia*, and I find it paradoxical but where the intent is an attack on my scholarship, needless to say, I stand by my scholarship unwaveringly. Here, it would be necessary for me to say that I make no apologies for citing Chinese references and invoking Chinese thought. Criticism about my use of them suggest that they do not fit the material, are out of place, and somehow, not totally belonging to the East. This last point is something that I comprehend very well, being Malaysian with a “Western” mentality (or more accurately, someone with a Western subconscious) and therefore someone who must constantly grapple with the idea that the East is not really part of us. I have no rhetorical skill to make as if I am not part of the East even as I partake of an “Eastern” approach. This book is tantamount to a self-discovery. The Chinese allusions are an integral part of me—and an integral part of the “Eastern.” Much thought and energy has been expended to ensure that they fit the material of this book.

The Eastern viewpoint

The next issue concerning the Eastern is that in fact it is all made up by the West. While acknowledging some truth to this proposition, which is essentially Said's thesis in *Orientalism*, I am not put off by it nor do I see it as an obstacle (in fact, it can also be exploited for our purposes because not all of it is "bad epistemology"). There is an East made up by the East and one needs to carefully uncover it. My methodology of Eastern investigation tries to look at the original sources even if it is reliant on translation—and on translated texts. I try to be scrupulous with the translations and with my choice of texts, ensuring as best as I can that they are accurate to the original sources (e.g., *Zhuang Zi*, *Analects*). Another method is to try to be dense with quotes from these sources and to include some vernacular, folkloric references to popular proverbs. Thus, careful choices and scrutiny of Eastern sources present a veritable set of theory that can justifiably be applied to Western material—an Eastern approach to Western matter. As someone tied to two poles, I have exerted much effort to align the East with the West through the comparative process of *xiangbi*, referred to earlier, matching and corresponding Western matter with Eastern thought. This sort of matching does not preclude the possibility that the East may contain certain Western inscriptions. This entails some negotiation with the correspondences and respect for the Western material. In the *Guigu Zi*, the engagement of opposites is always one of *fanying* (reactions and responses), a matter of reciprocity. In essence, my Eastern approach reciprocates the Western material I receive as a viewer.

The East has undoubtedly learned much from the West. We can certainly say that the West has gifted the East with Western knowledge, science, and technology, likewise with Western films, a repository of entertainment, art, and culture, offering a rich source of learning. With the Eastern approach, it is only proper that the East reciprocates with its own knowledge and ideas, cognizant of the Western substance it has received. I make no claims about the "purity" of the East. However, if there is that impression, it probably stems from my attempts to find the original Eastern resources to get around the idea that the East is an invention of the West. This idea, of course, ignores that dimension of the East as an invention of Eastern intellectuals and others, not

to mention that group of “orientalized Westerners” pointed out by Arif Dirlik, people like the Jesuits of China and Lawrence of Arabia “who sought to live as Chinese or Arabs.”¹¹ In fact, there is another whole dimension of the “Oriental West” referred to by the political scientist John Hobson in his book, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, where he demonstrates that the West had received and assimilated “Eastern ‘resource portfolios’ (e.g. Eastern ideas, institutions, and technologies)” through a process of “oriental globalization” that took place from 500 to 1800.¹² Moreover, “Western imperialism after 1492 led the Europeans to appropriate all manner of Eastern economic resources to enable the rise of the West.”¹³ Colonialism (the deeper form of imperialism), therefore, was the condition for the further integration of Eastern resources into the Western worldview, Western culture possessing and incorporating Eastern elements.

It is ironic, from our point of view, that the West that exercised hegemony over the East through imperialism and colonialism and plundered its resources has traditionally looked to the East for knowledge and wisdom. Thus, one of the principles of the Eastern approach is that in interpreting the films of the West from an Eastern perspective, we are in fact doing nothing more than disclosing what the West has took from the East, absorbed and integrated into their images and ideas, at the same time reimposing a state of balance by pointing out what is Eastern in Western films. The films that are analyzed and interpreted in this book contain Eastern signs and inscriptions that point to the aesthetic and philosophical influences of the East, suggesting that there is a more thorough integration of East and West than previously thought or imagined. The task at hand is to point out and make apparent the Eastern signs which are effectively buried in a Western cultural veneer that they do not seem obvious. The principle of the “Oriental West” can also produce an attenuated view of the East in that it is so thoroughly assimilated into the West that they do not seem Eastern anymore. In my research for this book, some of the literature on the films that I discuss refers to Oriental philosophical themes and ideas, as well as the presence of motifs, symbols, and colors, without mentioning and recognizing their Oriental provenance. They are all taken for granted as part of the Western province of knowledge and creativity. The “attenuated East” is a kind of motif in Western films that makes the Eastern approach possible. More knowledgeable Western critics do acknowledge the Eastern sources of

influence on the films but doing so not from a specific Eastern point of view. Their interest lies not so much in adopting an Eastern approach of analyzing Western films but in discussing the films as essentially Western creations coming out of Western minds.

In writing this book, I do not wish to suggest that I am alone in the endeavor of trying to break the mold of Eurocentrism in film studies through a refocusing on Eastern theorizing perspectives or use of Eastern philosophy. I acknowledge other contributors in the field, and here I principally take note of Victor Fan's book, *Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory*,¹⁴ which is impressive for its investigation of early Chinese theorists and filmmakers looking at questions of film ontology. The book makes clear that the Chinese theories are developed with a view of applying them to film practice in China. Thus, the scope and character of my book is quite different from Fan's. My book does not deal with a historical investigation of Chinese film theory nor do I invoke any specific Asian film theory (Chinese, Japanese, or Indian) but rather Eastern thinking broadly derived from philosophical ideas and vernacular proverbs, maxims, or aphorisms, and I apply them to Western films rather than to suggest that these exist primarily within Asian or Chinese films.

This book continues the theoretical direction of my previous two monographs *The Asian Cinema Experience: Styles, Spaces, Theory* (2013) and *Eastern Westerns: Film and Genre Inside and Outside Hollywood* (2017), both adopting an Eastern analytical perspective on film and genre. *The Asian Cinema Experience* suggests that we can see films made in Asia from an Asian perspective and that Asian films contain intrinsic Asian styles and theories. *Eastern Westerns* is a study of a specific genre, Westerns, made by Asian film industries and by Hollywood itself and other industries. I adopt a comparative analytical framework in analyzing Asian Westerns and Westerns made by Westerners, seeing these films through Asian eyes, evoking and employing Asian philosophical ideas and value systems (such as Confucianism and Buddhism) and ancient literary classics from India (the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*), as well as ancient dramaturgical theory (rasa theory from the *Natyasastra*). This book continues this Eastern framework of analysis by extending it to films of a broader range of genres in the canon of European and American cinemas. The Eastern approach then is a wider application of Eastern theory on the

greater field of Western cinema, inclusive of both popular films as well as more esoteric art cinema, and of old classic films as well as recent productions.

Chapters

The focus mainly on classic films is deliberate because of my predilection for older films made by favorite “auteur” directors. In this enterprise, I have chosen the classics to show the Eastern has long been present in Western films, and the various auteurs have more or less consciously evoked Eastern themes and concepts. While I am offering the approach as a new application of theory, the presence of Eastern influences and elements in Western films is not a new phenomenon. I begin with the Star Wars Saga, which crosses both the “classical” and contemporary eras (its first episode was released in 1977 and the series is still ongoing) and it is generally recognized by fans and critics as a storehouse of Eastern philosophical influences, advancing tenets of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. At the same time, the films feature Eastern-like settings, costumes, and characters. It also invokes Eastern genres such as the Japanese *jidaigeki* and Chinese *wuxia*. The theme of the family and its generational conflict between father and son would already justify an Eastern approach. It is the best example in the cinema of the “Oriental West.” The chapter lays out the Eastern elements and its philosophical themes that are now familiar as generic conceits of science fiction cinema due to the series’ popularity and widespread cult worship.

I move on to Chapter 2 by analyzing Hitchcock’s mystery murder thriller *Vertigo* (1958), where Chinese motifs, colors, and philosophical themes are transparent and some of which are referred to in the dialogue. Yet the vast literature on Hitchcock (or on the film) does not discuss these Chinese elements in any depth, therefore not really acknowledging their presence and role in determining the content as well as the imagery of the film. The chapter brings out the details and analyzes precisely the role of these Eastern parts and components, which feature as motifs in the layers of the narrative and as ethical and philosophical factors in the characterizations of both protagonists Scottie (James Stewart) and Madeleine (Kim Novak). Once again, *Vertigo* is an example of the “Oriental West,” or even, an exemplary model of its time (and

of all time) due to the sophisticated way in which the Oriental motifs, colors, and themes are embedded in the narrative and personified in the characters by Hitchcock.

Chapter 3 focuses on *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) by Orson Welles, which bears a resemblance to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* through its Chinese references that are inscribed in the dialogue and in the story. Welles's film is thriller-like in the film noir manner with a memorable femme fatale characterization by Rita Hayworth in the title role. The "lady from Shanghai" is a walking symbol of the "Oriental West" and thus the Orient is conspicuously present in the film, with a theme that the East is corrupted by the West. That the lady from Shanghai appears so completely Western in her guise is the central Eastern mystery which I unravel in the chapter. It helps that Welles himself is thoroughly conversant with Eastern philosophy, part of his infatuation with the mysterious East, and that he therefore relies not just on Western thought and dramatic structures to construct his thriller but also on Eastern culture (note, for example, his use of Chinese opera in a crucial moment) and beliefs. Despite being recut by the studio, Columbia Pictures, the film's Eastern quality and theme comes through in an innovative, refreshing style.

Jean-Pierre Melville's sublime action film *Le Samourai* (1967) is the topic of Chapter 4, the first of a focus on European art cinema in the book (the chapters following will deal with Robert Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* and Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr*). The title of Melville's film already reveals what is Eastern in the film, and in the character Jef, but this has been hardly touched upon in the literature, hence the necessity of a more incisive Eastern approach in analyzing the film here. Melville's style, which contains an abstract element of Eastern spirit, in fact incorporates Eastern concepts of heroism and action, which has in turn been influential on Asian directors (such as John Woo and Johnnie To). Melville reinterprets the traditional Japanese samurai figure as a Western persona in the guise of the taciturn professional assassin-hero played by Alain Delon who effectively functions as the walking Eastern symbol of the film, much like the lead character in Welles's *Lady from Shanghai*. I analyze the character's unmistakable Eastern characteristics (formed by Daoism and Zen) and denote how Melville also reinforces his Eastern dimension.

Chapter 5 seizes on Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966) as a far from obvious Western model of a film that can be interpreted in an Eastern way.

On the surface, there is nothing about it to suggest any connection with Eastern philosophy. Yet, it lends itself quite readily to a Daoist reading, as I will show, and it therefore comes across in fact as a rather typical European art film full of Eastern characteristics and meaning. It can be said to be the most Daoist of Western films through its employment of materialistic objects and emblems. The film's uniqueness rests on it being a French manifestation of Daoist thinking, based on Zhuang Zi, using animal and human models to achieve Daoist transcendence. Bresson's distinctive, singular style has always seemed to be misunderstood when commented on by Western critics. I analyze his filmmaking style as one that converges with Daoist Eastern essence of nonaction and quietude despite his seemingly entrenched French background and roots in European culture.

Chapter 6 offers an Eastern revisionist reading of Carl Dreyer's majestic horror film *Vampyr* (1933). Like Bresson, Dreyer is quintessentially European, but this is deceptive. I point out the Eastern roots that underpin his vampire narrative. The vampire hunter of his tale is exposed as a Daoist itinerant and his journey west is a journey into the underworld of the dead, a quest of Daoist transcendence. Dreyer employs several Eastern motifs, such as the spectacular dance of shadows seen on a wall in the vampire lair and various symbols scattered throughout the film, which are explicated in the chapter. The film's conceptual bearings are inevitably more Eastern than Western when most Western commentators think of it as difficult to follow. The film also shows certain "Oriental West" criteria due to its grounding in psychology so evocative of Jung, whose influence on the film is implicit and whose debt to Eastern philosophy is inherently entrenched in the film's very structure.

Chapter 7 switches back to Hollywood cinema with an analysis of Sam Peckinpah's Westerns. The chapter demonstrates Peckinpah's evocations of Eastern philosophy, as for example, the Daoist "straw dogs" principle, as well as other motifs found in heroic literature and films of the East, to shore up his unique brand of Western violence and chivalric manner. Elegiac moments in his Westerns are also analyzed as Chan (Zen) poetic conceits. The Westerns of Peckinpah are transformative models of East and West, challenging and revising conventions within the Hollywood Western form through his adaptation of heroic-chivalric motifs from Eastern convention. As such, his Westerns are the most expressive models of mutual East-West reciprocity in

the cinema of the West. There seems no doubt to this writer that Peckinpah actively invokes Eastern philosophical ideas to augment his worldview in the Western genre form, but they are not as apparent because the form belies the substance, thus making it all the more necessary to elucidate what is Eastern in the Western.

Leo McCarey's 1937 masterpiece *Make Way for Tomorrow* is the topic of Chapter 8. The film is truly exceptional as an example of a Confucian lesson on family, parent-child relationships, and filial piety produced by the old Hollywood studio system and directed by McCarey who is in many ways the extreme opposite of a Confucian moral instructor. A conservative Catholic and better known as a director of slapstick and screwball comedies, McCarey directs the film sensitively as a tragic melodrama. He etches out the themes of filial responsibility and the problem of the aged and makes a pitch for caring for and respecting the old. As a result, this is a very Confucian work in a very American social context, reflecting age-old Confucian obsessions about filial piety and reverence of old people. McCarey elicits brilliant performances from his actors playing the aged parents and their children, therein perfectly illustrating the Confucian essence of family and filial piety.

Finally, Chapter 9 explores the films of John Ford with a stress on the family (*The Grapes of Wrath*, *How Green Was My Valley*, *The Quiet Man*). Ford is analyzed as a director with deep convictions about family and sympathy for society's underdogs. This strain of his work can be regarded in Eastern terms as respect for family values and a natural sympathy for the Other. The chapter complements my other writings on Ford where I focus on his Westerns (in my previous book, *Eastern Westerns*). Ford's Asian values, which are seen in his Westerns, are even more evident in his non-Westerns about the family and these films are taken up for closer inspection in this last chapter. As such, while I end this book with Ford, I also pick up from where I left on Ford in my last book. Ford's work is prolific and traverses a wide range of genres, which are all open for more interpretations under our Eastern approach.

Indeed, the task here of viewing the films of the West from an Eastern perspective is unfinished because many works by the directors assessed in this book are still open to further evaluations and I have had no opportunity to explore them in any depth (just to cite a few examples: Dreyer's *Michael* and *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*, Welles's *Chimes at Midnight*

and *The Immortal Story*). Thus, the Eastern approach of this book represents a preliminary stage of application, and there is still much left to explore. Indeed, I may discuss more films in future books encompassing the works of other auteur directors in the canon of Western cinema. In the conclusion, I raise questions of how the Eastern approach may develop into the next stage and what its prospects may entail in the current state of unbalance in film studies. Ultimately, the idea of an Eastern approach must involve its own negation in the sense of the Daoist concept of *wu*, or nonbeing, but only when balance has become nonessential. The Eastern interpenetrates into all approaches and is so integrated and assimilated that it melts into nonbeing, implying no necessity for its identification. We may consider this as the final essence of the Buddhist doctrine of “All in One and One in All.”

One final word about the chapters. A criticism may be made about my choices of all male directors and that there is an overwhelming whiff of masculinity emanating from my focus on “masculine genres” (action, the Western, film noir, the thriller, horror). Such criticism is misplaced. I deal as much with women and femininity in my analysis and readings, as in the chapters on *Vertigo* (where I also touch on gender identity), *The Lady from Shanghai*, *Au hasard Balthazar*, *Make Way for Tomorrow*, and Ford’s family films. Some of the genres in question such as film noir, the thriller, and horror are not just male genres, they are bisexual. In any case, my Eastern understanding of genres does not emphasize any proclivity toward any particular genre nor does it limit my choice of genres due to predetermined questions of gender equality or group identity. It is outside the scope of this book to give a Weberian-style critical judgment about aspects of Eastern philosophy when they are perceived to run against modern Western liberal values. I do not put on shackles in using my “Eastern approach” and it would be absurd to expect that I would do so. With this approach, I enter into a contract with the reader to discover its applicability and suitability to the material, and above all, its potentialities and capabilities for broadening understanding. Eastern philosophy contains its own vastness of thought and diversity, and there are both good and bad things which might need a sense of periodicity and an objective view of history to fully comprehend. It is hoped that the reader will abide by a sense of being just and even in judging the material of this book.