ANG LEE

Freedom in Film

Ang Lee (Li An) first came to the attention of the film world in 1993 with his second feature, *The Wedding Banquet,* a modest Chinese-language production shot on a shoestring budget of $750,000. Exactly a decade later Lee released *The Hulk,* a mainstream Hollywood summer blockbuster with a budget of almost $160 million. The reinvention of Ang Lee from an independent Chinese-language filmmaker making low-budget indies to an A-list Hollywood director almost mirrors Bruce Banner's transformation into the Hulk—but Lee's transformation is, in many ways, much more dramatic as he continually reinvents himself for each film, repeatedly experimenting with different genres and venturing into new cinematic realms.

Born in 1954 in Pingdong—located at the southernmost tip of Taiwan—Ang Lee spent his childhood moving across the island, living in Taidong, Hualian, and Tainan, as his father transferred between different cities in his capacity as a high school principal. As a student at an art academy in the seventies, Lee saw numerous Chinese and Western films, such as *The Graduate* (1967), which had a tremendous impact on him. But his true cinematic awakening came after he saw Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring (Jungfru källan)* (1960). During his sophomore year Lee purchased his first 8 mm camera through a student from Hong Kong and began making amateur films, including the black-and-white short *Lazy Saturday Afternoon (Xingqi liu xiawu de lansan)*. At the age of 23, Lee went to America to continue his studies, earning a B.F.A. in Theater Direction at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign before moving on to New York University's (NYU) famed film school, the alma mater of such directors as Martin Scorsese and Oliver Stone. At NYU, he honed his craft alongside schoolmates such as Spike Lee and produced a series of 16 mm student films, culminating with *Fine*

Line, an award-winning thesis film about Manhattan's Canal Street and the cultural/racial line of demarcation it represents in separating Little Italy and Chinatown. *Fine Line* would eventually capture the attention of Hsu Li-kong of Taiwan's Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), which would produce Ang Lee's first feature films.

A continued exploration of the very fine racial/cultural/linguistic line between East and West was the focus of Ang Lee's first two full-length features: 1991's *Pushing Hands*, about the conflicts that arise when an elderly Chinese tai chi master (Sihung Lung) comes to the United States to live with his son and American daughter-in-law, and 1993's *The Wedding Banquet*, about the generational and gender-ational gaps between a gay Taiwanese American man and the parents he tries to please through a marriage of convenience to a mainland Chinese immigrant desperate for legal status. *The Wedding Banquet*'s skillful mix of drama, comedy, and cultural critique made the film a surprise hit; it garnered Oscar and Golden Globe nominations, won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, and swept the Golden Horse Awards, with six major prizes. *Eat Drink Man Woman* was Ang Lee's third feature and the concluding piece of what would eventually be deemed his "Father Knows Best trilogy." Released in 1994, *Eat Drink Man Woman* once again starred Sihung Lung as a semiretired master chef struggling in his relationship with his three independent-minded daughters—a school teacher, an airline executive, and a college student—as they grow apart and search for a common language. Lee's first film shot entirely in Taiwan, *Eat Drink Man Woman* was also his most cinematically sophisticated, subtly juxtaposing not only the lives of the daughters but also the continuing clash of tradition and modernity in contemporary Taiwan. The film earned Lee his second Oscar nomination, and, at the time of its release, was one of the most successful foreign-language films of all time, and the U.S. box office receipts topped those of all previous Chinese-language film.

Following the success of the Father Knows Best trilogy, Ang Lee went to Hollywood, where he produced a second trio of films, in English. Steering away from the original stories and personal material that inspired his first three films, *Sense and Sensibility, The Ice Storm,* and *Ride with the Devil* seemed to have little in common other than the fact that they were all adaptations from novels. Starring Emma Thompson, Kate Winslet, and Hugh Grant, *Sense and Sensibility* is a British comedy of morals based on the classic Jane Austen novel of the same name. *The Ice Storm* is a dark exploration of a world of sex, drugs, and alienation in a quiet New England suburb in the 1970s. The film provided a springboard for Lee's sensitive observation of family ties being undone, and also served as a cinematic platform from which he could expand upon a cubist approach to filmmaking, which he discusses here. One of Lee's least-known

films, 1999's *Ride with the Devil,* starred Tobey Maguire, Skeet Ulrich, Jeffrey Wright, and pop star Jewel in one of the most thoughtful and introspective explorations of the Civil War ever committed to film. Challenging traditional dichotomies of North versus South by highlighting the loyalty, betrayal, passion, and vengeance that consumes a group of young men from a small, rural Missouri town, *Ride with the Devil* captured a new angle on American history—and a new cinematic angle on the western.

As the millennium approached and Y2K fever swept the globe, Ang Lee was hard at work awakening a sleeping cinematic beast in the form of the martial arts fantasy *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.* When the film was unleashed in 2000, it broke Ang Lee's own record for the most profitable Chinese-language film, then went on to top the list of the most successful foreign-language films of all time (a record held until the 2004 release of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*). *Crouching Tiger* became a veritable cultural phenomenon, the single most important Asian cinematic invasion since Bruce Lee's legendary crossover success in the 1970s. Produced with international funding and starring Hong Kong superstars Chow Yun-fat and Michelle Yeoh alongside veterans like Cheng Pei-pei and newcomers like Chang Chen and Zhang Ziyi, *Crouching Tiger* both resurrected the *wuxia* genre and created a new model for pan-Asian film production. Continuing his seemingly endless quest for cinematic freedom from genres and conventions, Ang Lee pushed himself even further with his next pair of features: 2003's *The Hulk* and 2005's *Brokeback Mountain*. In the oversized comic-book blockbuster *The Hulk*, Lee used the story of the iconic green giant as a springboard to explore anger, psychological repression, and even America's post–9/11 "culture of fear," combined with an oedipal twist. The film was also noteworthy for its bold and groundbreaking cinematic interpretation of comic-book style, done through radical editing, multi-imaging, and unorthodox split-screen images. *Brokeback Mountain* is a sensitive portrait of two men and their complex twenty-year relationship, which begins on a Wyoming ranch in 1963. Based on a novella by Annie Proulx, the film expands on the cinematic foundation of *The Wedding Banquet* while developing in exciting new directions.

This interview took place on January 21, 2005, while Ang Lee was in Los Angeles working on the music for *Brokeback Mountain*.

What kinds of films did you watch growing up?

I grew up watching movies at least once or twice a week—except during the year before my college entrance examinations. Our whole family would go together; we watched a lot of films. About half the movies were Hollywood films and the other half were Chinese films that came out of MP & GI, Cathay,

and of course Shaw Brothers. I watched a lot of old Shaw Brothers films; back then we didn't have video games or anything, so moviegoing was our primary source of entertainment. Later we watched a lot of the healthy realism films and a lot of Taiwanese television. I didn't get to see much European cinema until after I got into the Academy of Art.

When did you first dream of becoming a film director?

I always wanted to be a film director, but it was prohibited. My father was my high school principal and wanted me to excel academically, so it was always out of the question. I just loved watching movies and would fantasize about different scenes; when I listened to music, I would always visualize different plots and situations. Many of those situations were copies of or references to other movies, while others were scenes I made up. I always had scenes in my head. I think I liked drama, but I didn't really realize what drama truly entailed—it is about conflict and all of that—until I came to the States. It is not what you identify with life. It is to stir up the situation. (*Laughs*) I didn't realize that in Western drama, actors actually go for it [emotions they portray]; they are not pretending but actually going for it. That was the change I experienced here. But I never dared to say that I wanted to make movies. It just happened that because I did poorly on the college entrance examinations I ended up going to the Academy of Art and Drama.

Back then in Taiwan, film and theater were always together; it was like a double major. But we didn't get to touch movies; we just watched a lot of films on our own and did stage work. We had cinema lessons but never shot anything. So that was the three-year education. I did shoot some Super 8 films, but that was outside of class; I did it for my personal interest. And I also watched about ten movies a week besides what we saw in school. That was my regular schedule for a long time, watching seven to ten movies per week. The first movie I saw that really blew me away was Bergman's *The Virgin Spring*, and then I saw films like *The Bicycle Thief* and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Eclipse (L'Eclisse)* (1962), all of which knocked me out. After that, I watched film after film after film. I would go all over looking for movies and joined several film clubs—but all together, there were probably only between thirty and fifty foreign art films like that out there for us to watch. When I got to Illinois, there were a lot more film clubs, so we watched films all the time. I missed that when I got to NYU, because they didn't show us many films. But there were more than a dozen art theaters in New York, places like Film Forum, and some theaters that even had live piano accompaniment, where we could go. That was my main source of artistic sustenance during those years, and I really devoured everything. After videotapes became widely available, those theaters really suffered and many shut down—so that was really the end of an age. I don't know how students watch art films these days.

I studied theater in Taiwan and most of my credits were in theater; what I do is theatrical—it is directing, acting, and writing theater. I didn't have the ways or means to approach movies, but somehow in the back of my head, my visions and imaginations were never on stage but on a movie screen. Then I came to the States and that was the end of my acting since I didn't speak much English. (*Laughs*) Directing for the stage bored me. It depressed me because I thought that the best people were in the acting program. So I decided to switch to film. I talked to my father about it, but our conversations were not about "filmmaking" but about "getting a degree in film." (*Laughs*)

The influence of the father is a key motif in many of your films. How much does your own relationship with you father influence the way you handle this subject?

I think the influence of the father is something that weighs heavy on most male Chinese filmmakers. On *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet,* [my father had] a very heavy impact. Although I'm not gay, much of the dialogue in *Wedding Banquet* between the gay son and his father was taken directly from my father's mouth. My mother was also a model of sorts for the mother figure in those films, but to a lesser degree. I think the father figure represents the Chinese patriarchy, the social and psychological structure of society. I am the first son, so I took in a lot of those ideas that women are not important. (*Laughs*) We don't think about them. My mother was very nice, but I was raised under that patriarchal shadow, which exerted a lot of influence. I didn't know what I wanted from life, but I knew I had to please my father. He didn't speak much and was a very serious man; very Confucian. He was a good administrator, but not much fun. I had a lot of guilt that I didn't follow his path. Instead I became the funny guy who wanted to make movies. And somehow that has become my creative force, and the irony of how I see the world. It is not what I set out to believe in, but what I see is something different [from what others see]. That comes with the Nationalist regime, that whole Chinese cultural influence in Taiwan and the social structure. That is where I grew up, and I cannot really get out of it. All through my work, I always tend to think that making films was a way of getting away from my past, but you always have to come back to your roots. You try to get as far away as you can, but somehow you always come back. That is the impact of my father, who just recently passed away.

Between 1980 and 1985 you shot five 16 mm films, up to your award-winning thesis film, *Fine Line*. How important were those early filmmaking experiences to your later development as a director?

What I learned was purely technical. It taught me that I could make a movie, tell a story visually. I knew that from the first day I picked up a camera. From first to second year [of film school] they eliminate half the students. It is a strange thing, but from their very first film, you can tell whether or not someone is a filmmaker. It doesn't matter how much you know about film. You can talk about film all you want; what is important is once you are given a camera, where you put it. It is that simple. So the most important thing I took away from those films was the confidence I gained. Back then, my English wasn't so good, but when I made my student films everyone listened to me—even when I helped other people on their films, they still listened to me. So I knew that film was my medium. It was very clear that film was the right choice for me over theater. Visually telling stories, dramatic stories, that was my thing. So that's what I got most out of it. It also taught me how to exercise leadership. You might go on a shoot with three people, but the other two have to listen to you. These days, there may be two hundred people, but the feeling is about the same; then it was just on a smaller scale. Also, technically it was a good lesson about what filmmaking really entails. A director gets to learn a little about everything by working in each department. NYU is more like a workshop.

So the greatest thing you took away from NYU was the practical experience.

Right, the main thing was not the lectures or analysis of how films are made, and certainly not film history—we didn't have a single film history class, which I think is kind of a shame. I wish I had had a more formal training in film history and genres. So I had to start learning all that on my own. Maybe that is part of why it took me so long after school to finally get into the feature film world. But in terms of making movies, the most important thing is basic knowledge, hands-on experience and exercise. I think that NYU is a great place to be.

How did you get the opportunity to work with Hsu Li-kong and the Central Motion Picture Corporation to make your first feature, *Pushing Hands*?

I didn't mean to make that movie. I wrote the *Wedding Banquet* five years before that, but it didn't go anywhere. It was supposed to be a Central Motion Picture production, which had been tied to the studio before Hsu Li-kong joined it. And then I just tried to make some money. I knew that the Government Information Office (GIO) was expanding their annual script contest to include overseas entries. So I wrote *Pushing Hands* thinking that the GIO might like it; I never imagined that I'd get first place. I sent it in with *The Wedding Banquet,* which actually won second place! I went back to Taiwan to receive the awards, and that was when I met Hsu Li-kong, who was gearing up to make three new films to feature young cinematic talent from Taiwan. So mine was

the first, and the following year he produced Tsai Ming-liang's first film, *Rebels of the Neon God.* His plan was to make three movies a year. So I thought about it for two days and went back to him and asked, "What about *The Wedding Banquet?*" He said, "Well, that was the second-place winner, let's start with the first-place winner!" (*Laughs*) *Pushing Hands* was a story about an old man that I first wrote simply in hopes of winning the prize. It was good money at the time, around $16,000. Anyway, I went ahead to make the movie. I was surprised that it was actually a hit in Taiwan; it didn't go anywhere else. But that did give me the opportunity to make *The Wedding Banquet,* which put me on the map.

Did you always intend to make a trilogy, or did it just naturally unfold that way?

That just came together naturally, since I already had the first two films, both of which I wrote myself and were centered around my father, my conflict with my father and what he represents for me.

All three films in the trilogy highlight the strained relationship between the younger generation and the older generation, tradition and modernity, Confucian and Western values. What is fascinating is that this was precisely the contradiction directors were exploring in some of the earliest Chinese films, such as 1922's *Two Stars (Yinhan shuangxing).*

That's the movie I saw! (*Laughs*) They keep making these movies. And that was one of the reasons I initially did not want to make *Pushing Hands,* because that is the oldest movie in the book, the kind that people had already stopped making when I was little—those old movies that explore whether or not a person is loyal and expresses filial piety toward their parents. But somehow those themes still hit home and speak to us today.

The story for *The Wedding Banquet* features the brilliant intersection of two individuals' search for different forms of legitimization: one woman's need for national legitimization through U.S. citizenship and one man's need to win his parents' approval through a "legitimate" heterosexual marriage. How did the screenplay evolve?

I think that comes from my dramatic background and social background. My dramatic background taught me how to create a situation so all the issues and circumstances collide. You throw people into a situation in which they are not in harmony, but in conflict. Every element—each of the five main characters—represents the extreme of something, and you put them together and observe what happens. Through this process you examine humanity and our human situation. Looking back, I realize that I have always had identity problems. People like me, second-generation mainlanders from Taiwan, are a rare breed. They last only about two generations and account for a very small por-

tion of people among Chinese, but we have a very unique experience and, in some ways, represent the true Chinese—unlike the Chinese in mainland China these days! (*Laughs*) That is because in mainland China, they overthrew so many of those aspects of traditional Chinese culture that define who we are. And in Taiwan there are all kinds of local groups who have different cultural affiliations, whether they be Japanese or whatever. So we carry that torch, but only on a small scale, and we are very much alienated. And many of us came from Taiwan to the States, where we are foreigners. So all our lives we have identity problems.

I think the theme of being gay in *The Wedding Banquet* is a situation very similar to that. He is united with the motherland of China through this woman, and then the parents come in. It is on one level a political satire, China and Taiwan united, with the influence of America in the middle trying to bring them together. It just naturally came out that way. Although in the back of my mind I consider myself a genuine Chinese, I think I still have a problem with identity. But we [Taiwanese from the mainland] are drifting away, and I don't know who this "identity" belongs to in the end. I think those earlier films, from *Pushing Hands* up until *Eat Drink Man Woman,* for which I went back to Taiwan to shoot, are really about alienation and a loss of a certain structure. But that is all in retrospect; I wasn't thinking about any of that back when I was making those movies.

The only other previous Taiwan film to feature homoerotic depictions was Yu Kanping's *The Outcasts*. Were there any challenges you had to face because of the subject matter of *The Wedding Banquet*, from the studio, the actors, or the audience reception?

Well, even *The Outcasts* was not a major production. It was more of an indie that hit it big overseas among certain markets. When we made *The Wedding Banquet,* there was the feeling that what we were doing was prohibited. But the thing is, in our society there is no such thing as a God telling you what is wrong. I think it is fairly common to have straight people feeling repelled, uncomfortable, or insecure about gays; the difference is that in Taiwan we don't have that compounded by having a God telling us it is wrong. People there may be conservative just like they are here—the difference is that over there it is not a religious conservatism. But once that concept is introduced—that is another story. Now, as I'm getting set to release *Brokeback Mountain,* I'm more nervous about America than I ever was about Taiwan! (*Laughs*) But once we won the Golden Bear in Berlin, *The Wedding Banquet* was launched like a big movie. It had the first onscreen male-male kiss in a major film, and when it happened you could feel the entire audience taking a huge, collective deep breath! The irony is that it was rated PG in Taiwan, but R in the States. Looking back, I don't think the

Chinese are so uptight. I think it is a Christian thing to be so prohibitive of gay relationships. In China during the Qing dynasty, homosexual affairs were actually quite fashionable. People would call upon male prostitutes to "warm up" before visiting a woman. There is no such thing as "God forbid." But that changed. I felt like it was a taboo before I did it. Hsu Li-kong was a big supporter. At first I was reluctant to shoot that scene, because after Central Motion Picture Corporation had shelved the project for five years, I too had grown reluctant. But Hsu Li-kong pushed me to do it. I remember the first time he saw that gay kiss when he was screening the first cut, and his face turned white. (*Laughs*) He went completely pale, but he didn't say anything. And then we sent the film to Berlin, where it was a big hit. It eventually went on to become the biggest box office hit for Chinese-language film at that time. It was a strange journey. In Taiwan there was a warning stamp on some film posters that there was a bare breast exposed in the film, but they didn't say anything about the gay kiss. (*Laughs*)

Your most important creative partner seems to be your producer/screenwriter James Schamus. Could you talk about the origins of your collaborative relationship and how the creative process works between the two of you?

I brought my first project to him seeking out his help as a producer and the rest fell into place afterward. And on *The Wedding Banquet* he helped me with rewrites and expanding the English portion of the screenplay, especially the first and last quarter of the film regarding the development of Simon's character. *Eat Drink Man Woman* was entirely in Chinese, but he helped me in revising and rewriting the script. When we began work on *Sense and Sensibility,* I brought him along because I didn't know anybody in England, and he became the producer. Back then I felt very insecure about the white world, and James was a very liberal and knowledgeable person. And a very hip person! (*Laughs*) He is really like a walking dictionary. He could help me with everything, from public speaking to writing letters, checking out facts, and selling films. He always gave me all kinds of advice, telling me that I'd be doomed if I did this, or it would be great if I did that. So I developed the habit of checking with him on all kinds of fronts. Another key person for me is my editor Tim Squyres, who also gives me a lot of input. For each film I always have a series of partners whom I can bounce ideas off along the way. But over time, James and Tim have almost become predictable to me. (*Laughs*) Creatively, we know each other so well. I think he has good instincts about what will sell, especially in the art house market. These days the game is bigger, but James still remains primarily in the art house market. He is also auteurist, so his entire production approach is focused on helping directors.

Gradually James extended his services to write almost all of my screenplays from *The Ice Storm* on. I never treat him quite like a writer, but he provides me

with the kinds of textures that I need. I have tried working with different writers, but it always seems very difficult. It is hard for them to understand me and really know what I need, and provide me with what I am looking for. James seems to be the closest. So our relationship just continued to develop. Now he is running Focus Features, which produced *Brokeback Mountain.* It is good to have someone who understands you, supports you, and provides you with material. And sometimes he pitches ideas to me, projects like *Brokeback Mountain* and *The Hulk.* But sometimes when push comes to shove, like when we were finishing *Brokeback Mountain*, I also have to play a little hardball with him. (*Laughs*) He can smell when a project is right for me. For years with his previous production company, Good Machine, his development department did fine work for me. His development person, Anne Carey, also worked with me on a few projects, like *Ride with the Devil.* And on a personal level: he helps me decide which ties to wear! (*Laughs*)

There was a period of my career during which he also served as a middleman between me and the studios. On *The Hulk* I talked directly with the studio, but between *East Drink Man Woman* and *The Hulk* I felt uncomfortable doing that, so he handled it all for me. I don't always listen. (*Laughs*) But it is always good to hear his advice. Over the years I tend to check less and less with him—it has gotten to the point where I can already anticipate what he is going to say.

Eat Drink Man Woman is your sole feature-length film shot exclusively in Taiwan and stands out as a contemporary masterpiece in Chinese-language cinema. Let's talk about that film, starting with the production schedule. How long was the shoot and postproduction?

Postproduction lasted around four months. It was a sixty-day shoot. But the shooting days were very long. It was actually quite gruesome. I had never made a movie in Taiwan, and by the time I went back the industry had declined quite a bit compared with the state of the industry before I left for the States. And there was a breakdown in terms of the types of people working at the studio; there were some older crew members combined with younger intern-type employees. So the experience and talent of the crew members was very uneven. But I think my experience working on American independent films really fit well with the Taiwanese production approach. It was a semiguerrilla style of filmmaking compared with here. But I did try to introduce elements of the American independent system to that production. The thing with making films in China and Taiwan is that the studios don't plan much. They are very generous about giving you time to figure it out, but it was irritating to me that there were so many things not planned out and set up. I think it was a real waste of

energy and resources. Sometimes the Taiwan film industry really doesn't allow you to plan that much; it is all very unpredictable.

In terms of production, there is more freedom because they do give you the time to do as you wish. For the first time, I wasn't rushed when we were setting up the lighting. So cinematically we had more freedom. For the *The Wedding Banquet* I took the form of a screwball comedy, and I had to simplify the shooting in order to allow the actors to do their performance and control the quality. That is the technique I developed. But in Taiwan I got to think more about cinema.

And shooting in Taiwan, you were also not bound by the union regulations that can make shooting in the States more costly and time consuming.

Right, we just keep on going, on and on and on. Sometimes you even have to wake people up on set if they are snoring while you are recording. (*Laughs*) That was the first time that throughout the shoot I could really think about cinema and take a more auteurish approach. The first two films, I was thinking about finishing, telling the story and doing my job well. I was always trying to make the days, since the shooting schedules were very tight—we only had around 24 days. But with *Eat Drink Man Woman* I didn't know when it was going to finish or how long it was going to take. Sometimes we'd work 20-hour or 22-hour days! The average was about was about 18 hours per day during that shoot. We'd just sleep a little bit and come back to shoot. It just went on and on.

And how did food as metaphor work its way into the story?

That was there from the beginning. There has always been something fascinating about Chinese food for me. Food and sex are the two basics—sex has been done so much in cinema, but food can be just as intuitive if you do it right. But hardly anybody uses it. There are a few good examples where food is used well in cinema, but not a whole lot, so I thought I'd do something about that. On one level, I was carrying out a deconstructionist exercise on the Chinese ethical values and moral principles that have been passed down from the Nationalist Party, which was losing its grip. So I was thinking of doing something with a chef and his three daughters, each going different ways. I wanted to twist things up by having the father disappointing the daughter. So it was the opposite of what I did in the first two movies, where the children try not to disappoint their parents.

Eat Drink centers on the relationships between a father and his daughters, a theme that was central to many of Yasujiro Ozu's films. Was Ozu an influence at all when it came to your portrayal of the father-daughter relationships?

To some degree. Ozu and other Chinese family dramas were all influences. But one thing that really inspired me was the Chinese saying, "*Tianxia meiyou busan de yanxi,*" or "All banquets must eventually come to an end"—that is a saying that I really attribute to the film. Food is, of course, the metaphor, but it is really the banquet that is important. All banquets have to disperse at some point, and that is how I felt about Taiwan back then—and I think I was right. Back then you could smell it, you could see it coming—but now it is happening. And I used karaoke song lyrics to express those emotions: "gone with the wind." It was really that round table that I was after. Food is just a bonus, a teaser. And I wanted to make sure nobody eats at my table, so hardly any of the actors ever actually pick up the food. (*Laughs*)

And the food also represents the patricidal power of the father. . . .

Well, he is already gone. He is just a paper tiger. He has a poker face but doesn't know what to do. I think I must have had a plan to weaken my father movie by movie. It is funny, by *The Hulk* I end up blowing him up. (*Laughs*) Like some Greek myth, I blew him up like a jellyfish. It is funny that after that movie my father passed away. He wished that I would continue making movies even though I told him I wanted to stop. That was in February 2004. He saw *The Hulk* and loved it—I don't know why. He was very old. I told him I wanted to retire, or at the least, take a long break from filmmaking. He asked me if I wanted to teach, but I told him I didn't think so. He warned me that I would be very depressed if I stopped. So he told me to just put on my helmet and keep on going. That was the very first time he encouraged me to make a movie. In the past, he would always try to talk me out of making movies! (*Laughs*) Even after the Oscars he wasn't supportive.

So those words must have meant a lot to you.

They did mean a lot to me. So I came back and tried to heal myself by making *Brokeback Mountain*, which is, ironically, a gay movie.

Sylvia Chang played a small role in *Eat Drink,* and you and your brother Lee Khan also worked on two films with her. Both *No One Comes Home Tonight (Jintian bu hui jia)* (1996) and *Siao Yu* seem to have been heavily influenced by the Ang Lee style. How much input did you have on those productions?

Not much, she doesn't really listen to me. I tried, I even brought in James to help improve the script, but she only used the English-speaking part. Because I was somewhat established in New York by then, I put a crew together for her and they basically worked for nothing. But other than that, I had very little input; she does what she likes to do.

I think that Sylvia was a good choice to direct *Siao Yu.* It was under my name because I developed it and got a grant for the project. But then came the opportunity to direct *Sense and Sensibility.* Hsu Li-kong didn't want to let the money go and thought I should produce. I had known Sylvia from *Eat Drink Man Woman.* She is the type of woman that I would have play that role. She is someone from my generation, but still connected with the old Chinese filmmaking tradition. But she's still hip and keeps going on—most of the others kind of dwindled away.

The way the narrative shifts from one character to another and the three sisters seem to reflect one another in *Eat Drink Man Woman* also reminds me of *The Ice Storm,* which goes even further in intercutting the stories of the characters and in which the children seem to be reflections of the adults. This motif seems to be expanded even more by your use of glass, mirrors, ice, and reflections.

It was designed that way from the beginning, especially with the use of glass, mirrors, and ice, which was all planned. Of course the order sometimes changes. If I hadn't been hired to do *Sense and Sensibility,* the next movie after *Eat Drink Man Woman* would have been *The Ice Storm. The Ice Storm* represents the natural evolution of the ideas I began exploring in *Eat Drink Man Woman.* I think that beginning with *Eat Drink Man Woman* I started departing from what I had done in the first two films. I was beginning to experiment with cinema and was thinking mostly of cubism. Instead of a linear structure, I was looking at a different way to hold the movie. So I was trying to develop one incident or one character and look at it from all sides. But when you want to watch from all sides, you also have to shoot in a way that reflects that. It is funny, when I went back to Taiwan to shoot *Eat Drink Man Woman,* I felt like the whole city—it is kind of an ugly city—looked like a painting by Braque or Picasso. I didn't go all the way with [cubism] at that time, but I couldn't wait to develop it further with *The Ice Storm.* But then the chance to work with Emma Thompson came up, and I thought that might be a good step to enter into the English [film] world. So I took that challenge. It was a finished script and ready to go, but I was still brooding about *The Ice Storm.* I was drawn in by the sadness and dark elements of the story. I was very much drawn into it.

It is kind of ironic that the historical settings of both of those films lie just outside of your own personal experience. *Eat Drink Man Woman* takes place in Taiwan, but is set more than a decade after you left. *The Ice Storm* is set in your new home of America, but takes place a full decade before you arrived.

I find that it is easier for me to make art about something that I'm not so closely connected to. During my first two movies, I felt like an old lady babbling

on and on about her life! (*Laughs*) That is because it was my life. Anything that you want to do well, you have to connect to; it has to hit you on the gut level. Somehow you get a call, you hear a voice; you have to do what connects to you. Then you sort out why you are so attracted to it and why you are doing it. But I think a certain amount of distance from the subject helps to make art out of it.

Could you describe your process of scouting locations and designing sets, props, and costumes on a film like *Sense and Sensibility*?

There was about six months of research prior to shooting where I just learned whatever I could from literature, museums, visiting houses, landscape scouting, looking at costumes, checking the animals—the dogs and horses, pigs and sheep—everything! (*Laughs*) It was a long learning process. And I was also privileged to work with Emma Thompson, who was very helpful, as was the production designer. She was very generous about taking me to museums to go through paintings from that particular time so I could see the spirit of romanticism coming up, the rise of metropolitanism and the industrial revolution. She introduced the whole deal to me: landscape design, drawing, painting. It took a long time. A lot of people ask, "How did you do that?" But I didn't do it overnight by myself! (*Laughs*) It was a whole team of people, and they used my heart and cinematic talent through that collaboration. It was a group effort. After a period of time, I almost forget that I am a Chinese doing this. To me, I don't divide my work between Chinese film and American film.

One big difference was the fact that this was a relatively big studio film, as opposed to your earlier efforts, which were all produced in a more independent mode.

Moderately so; it was an A-list production, but it was shot in England, so we didn't have to deal with the unions and the studios were far away. People were basically coming to the project for their art. So it was a good transition film for me. *The Ice Storm* was more independent in spirit, but much more expensive. *Sense and Sensibility* cost about fifteen and a half million, so it was not a huge-budget studio picture, but the nature of the film was very mainstream, very classical.

***Ride with the Devil*, a powerful film set against the Civil War, is perhaps the least well known of all your films and never really saw a full theatrical release in the United States.**

They dumped it! (*Laughs*) It is a cult film in the South. I think Bruce Willis said it was his favorite film. But the studio saw the film and just dumped it. It maybe showed in a few theaters for a few weeks, but they completely let it go. The same thing happened with *The Ice Storm*, they decided not to spend any money on promoting the film. *The Ice Storm* made less money in the States than

even *Eat Drink Man Woman*. But eventually a lot of people saw it. As for *Ride with the Devil*, a lot of people in England actually saw that film, since they had a big launch over there before the U.S. release, and it was overwhelmingly praised by the critics. It played in 300 theaters there, but it did lose money.

When the DVD was finally released, James Schamus commented on how they didn't even put the African American actor Jeffrey Wright, whose character was the whole point of the film, on the cover—they couldn't even get that right!

(*Laughs*) They completely dumped it. If you checked back then on the Internet, some sites were even listing *Ride with the Devil* as a porno film! So James and I called the studio to tell them they had to get that changed, but they never even bothered. They didn't do anything for that film. Then with *The Ice Storm*, they didn't even let me know when the DVD was released! They don't care.

What have you learned from those types of experiences with the big studios?

I find that I'm lucky that I have the freedom to make the kind of movies I'd like to make with the budget I demand. But then they have the choice to sell it or dump it; there is nothing I can do. The film by that point is already done and was completed under my free will. So as a filmmaker I hoped that the next time I could make a hit, which unexpectedly turned out to be *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

Your first trio of films were all original stories, but for your next several features you almost exclusively adapted stories from novels. Could you talk about these two approaches? Which do you prefer, and what are the challenges and limitations?

I like making movies, but I don't like writing them! (*Laughs*) At the beginning of my career, nobody was giving me scripts, so I had to write them and pitch them, which is hard for me; that's why it took me so long. There was no one who saw my student film and thought, *This guy can't make a movie*. That was never an issue. But whenever I sat down to write a script it was very hard. I worked on a series of English scripts with some collaborators, but they never went anywhere. We developed one project in 1988 called *Neon*, which had originally casted Dylan McDermott, Vincent D'Onofrio, and Julia Roberts. Julia Roberts was supposed to play a runaway prostitute, but the whole thing fell through just before preproduction. The company that was going to release the film couldn't come to an agreement with the production company and they dropped it. Within a year, Julia Roberts shot *Pretty Woman* (1990). During that time, movie after movie after movie just kept falling apart, so in the meantime I wrote *The Wedding Banquet*, but everyone turned that down too. At the time, it was too gay for Taiwan and too Chinese for America; Chinese-language films

were not too welcome in the eighties. I shopped various projects around for six years, but nothing was working out for me.

I didn't literally sit down and write *Eat Drink Man Woman*, but I was involved in the process. And it was my idea. But after that, I was done with my family thing, I needed new material. I am more of a filmmaker than a writer. But my creativity comes from reacting to certain material. I need a stimulus. Like that Madonna song, "Like a Virgin"—"touched for the very first time," I need fresh material! (*Laughs*) I am always searching for that innocence, time after time. I go to that same place, but I need to borrow other material to get there. Sometimes it takes fear to get you to that place and, as time goes by, it gets harder and harder. I need material that has the brilliance and research and the heart of other writers. I borrow them. I snatch them. Sometimes, that means me completely changing half of the story. Like in the case of *The Ice Storm,* half of the film varied from the book. For *Crouching Tiger* I also wrote half of the story, completely changing portions of the novel. I was pretty loyal to *Ride with the Devil*—with the exception of two of the most important scenes. I had a different take on the book and asked James to write two new scenes, which were very important for me. But neither was in the original book.

What happened in those scenes you added?

The first scene we added was when Jeffrey Wright says that he realizes he is free after his friend and former master who gave him his freedom (Simon Baker) dies. (*Laughs*) But Jeffrey Wright realizes that freedom is not something that can be given as a gift. Being that man's friend was like being a slave to him. That's why I figured that a white boy like Tobey could relate to him. Everyone is enslaved to friendship, to relationships. To me, that is the broader meaning of emancipation. From the Civil War to civil rights is still a very long way to go. And we are still walking that road today—there is still a long way to go. So that was very important to me.

I was also very interested in the way American values prevail in the film—Yankee values. That is where the battle began. Now it has traveled to the Middle East—but it all started during the Civil War. (*Laughs*) But in all the Civil War movies I had seen, the Southern guys never seem to "get it." The Northerners are always right—everything is so gray and blue. So I wanted to add the scene with the father down South—a sad, tragic figure whose son died in battle and who actually "got it." And now there is no stop to this thing. So James wrote that for me and I was very happy that those scenes were in. I think they are revelations of the book. The protagonist is caught in a constant struggle; his heart goes to the North, but he is still tied to his culture. The backside of the story is that the young kids prevail over the world. And what is freedom? What

is absolute freedom? Slavery is just an example; in one way or another, we are all slaves to something. I think for most people that thing is our relationships and our own desires. In the end, I think that is my biggest thing: examining the feeling of freedom. That is also what is going on in the climactic scene of Jen Yu (Yu Jiaolong) flying down in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.*

In terms of editing, all of your films have a very tight and clean feel. There is never an unnecessary shot or a scene that drags. Can you talk about your strategy regarding narrative structure as it pertains to editing?

I'm always sitting next to the editor when we are cutting my films. It is a process of teamwork. Of course, they always listen to me in the end and I make the final decisions. But I listen to their input. When I'm shooting I don't like to see edited footage, because I want to remain in the dream—I don't want to see reality. (*Laughs*) Unless there is something I am short of—which rarely happens—then I look at the footage, but don't pay much attention.

And you always work with the same editor, Tim Squyres.

Right, except for *Brokeback Mountain,* because I had told Tim that I was going to take a long break, so he went ahead and took another job. So this is the first time I have worked with another editor. But the process is the same, I'm still next to him working with the footage, making suggestions. They put the film together; it will be cut, usually not very tight. And then I spend about three weeks getting used to the footage. It is a process of relearning the footage and taking it as the reality of my creative material. It is then that I have to forget about what I was thinking when I was shooting. So that is a necessary process that I have to go through. Often the editor turns out to be right, I just don't listen to him at the time. (*Laughs*)

And you often do a lot of recutting? *The Ice Storm* actually went through eighteen cuts. . . .

That was extreme. *The Ice Storm* could have turned out to be very grim and underdeveloped, so there were a lot of uncertainties surrounding that film during the editing process. Finally I realized that it would never be complete until the music was done. I sort of figured out that the music was what should glue the film together. (*Laughs*) At some point everything always falls apart somehow. Then it takes me a while to figure out how to put everything back together. *Eat Drink Man Woman* also worked that way. When I was shooting I had a lot of confusion—not about what I wanted to say, directing actors, or making scenes interesting. It was very hard to get a sense of what the movie was about. It was only after the second cut that I began to have a sense of what the movie was about. (*Laughs*)

I always compare filmmaking to cooking. Shooting is like buying the groceries. You buy all kinds of ingredients and the better ingredients you get, the better chance you have of making the movie you want. But editing is when you cook. And you have to forget about what you were thinking. You have to take everything afresh and look at it as your new reality, see what you shot not as a result, but as the ingredients of a movie. And then it is a lot of fun putting things together. And every structure has its own special qualities. In a film like *Brokeback Mountain,* for example, there is not a lot you can take out because it is based on an epic short story. It is composed of a series of little pieces that span twenty years. If you take a couple scenes out, you are left with a six-year gap! (*Laughs*) *The Ice Storm* presented a whole set of different problems in terms of editing. Sometimes it was a problem of tonality. The first couple of cuts of that film were much funnier. But then came the problem of how to deal with the death that happens later on. We had to create a balance because there is not a real linear three-act structure to that film. So the film had to be constructed in some other way. Sometimes we were making suggestions and inviting the audience to invest something, rather than telling them what to see. It is a very interesting process. I think editing is the real game.

Because *Brokeback Mountain* spans twenty years, how difficult was it for you to handle the historical breadth of the film? Besides the different historical backdrops, the jumps in time could prove especially challenging in terms of the characters' physical and psychological transformations.

You have to refer to what you missed. The biggest challenges were in art design and especially for the actors—of course hair, makeup, and all of that was also central to the transformation of those two characters. In transition, you have to leave a space to adjust to the new situation. Each time there is often only a quick cut to a new situation, you really have to resituate yourself. I think that is the art. But most important is that actors have to carry themselves differently. Lighting also helps in showing age, but I think acting is the biggest part. As a director, my biggest responsibility was making sure they were able to enter that world—because they are both young and haven't yet lived through the age range they are playing in the film. (*Laughs*)

***Crouching Tiger* is based on a multivolume martial arts fantasy novel by Wang Dulu. Before your film was made, it had really fallen into oblivion and had not been popularly read in quite some time. What led you to rediscover the novel and choose to adapt it?**

I first read Wang Dulu's fiction when a friend of mine, Su Guozhi, got hold of a Xerox copy of one of his other novels and shared it with me. I thought it was great and fell in love with this writer—that was back in the 1980s. Then,

while I was out promoting *Eat Drink Man Woman,* another friend approached me and said that I should be making martial arts films. I went through the five volumes of the original novel and basically fell for *Crouching Tiger* after reading the description of that last image of Jen Yu flying down. The character of Jen was also very rare in the martial arts genre and really gripped me. Reading the novel, it was obvious that Wang Dulu was into Freud and Greek tragedy. Besides Wang, everyone, including the so-called serious writers in his era were reacting strongly, if not overreacting to themes like that. People like the playwright Cao Yu were almost directly copying from [Greek tragedy]. But *wuxia* fiction is very uneven; you find some brilliant chapters and then the other half of the book may be terrible.

And that is partly because many of those novels were originally serialized.

Right, the authors had to make a living. Sometimes they would be inspired and write brilliantly and sometimes they just let things drag on.

But when I decided to make this film, the Li Mubai character was not really a factor. I was drawn to Jen because she was the hidden dragon—this hidden dragon represents sexual repression, which is the hardest to tame. (*Laughs*) I was into concepts like original sin at the time and she was the hidden dragon. Lo (Luo Xiaohu), who is the crouching tiger, is really not that much of a factor. It was really the female character that got me into it. But personally speaking, I identify more with Li Mubai and Yu Shu Lien. That's the kind of person I am—reasonable and a team player type. (*Laughs*) A normal person who is a good citizen, becoming a role model, and taking responsibility for his actions. So I wanted to examine it from their point of view, but my interest was in Jen. My real dream was to explore her world. Even once I got a handle on her char-

"Freedom in flight": Jen (Zhang Ziyi) jumping off a cliff in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

acter, I intentionally injected elements to convolute things in order to keep her as mysterious and dreamlike as possible. I think that when you watch the film, it is pretty evident where I am.

The structure is very bold, with a twenty-minute flashback right in the middle of the film. Was that inspired by the martial arts fiction genre and novels like Jin Yong's *Fox Volant of the Snowy Mountain*, which also feature flashbacks that turn out to be the narrative hub of the story?

Right, that's the way a lot of those novels are written. One big motivation for me to work in this genre was the freedom it brought me. It is a B genre that is quite pulpy. So I was thinking along the lines of a collage; I wanted to move from cubism to collage. I wanted to work with bigger pieces instead of small facets; I wanted each segment to be not so complicated and carry its own theme. But that is also how the novel was written.

Back then nobody thought much about martial arts films—you could do whatever the fuck you wanted. I didn't expect so many people to see it. We were initially thinking that with martial arts we could maybe do twice the business that *Eat Drink Man Woman* did, but nobody expected what it would go on to eventually do. The martial arts genre was also in decline in Asia at that time. It was over. It was just that after *Sense and Sensibility* I could do whatever I wanted in Chinese, and what I wanted to do was a martial arts film. It was unexpected, but I really cannot make a B movie. There are some things that just become that way through a lot of struggles, but it is a B genre. So on one level I do have to come to terms with the audience and the genre. On the other hand, I didn't want to do just that; I wanted to do many things. I think it was a representation of where I was and where the world was. Sometimes it hits and sometimes, like *The Hulk*, it doesn't hit and provokes anger. (*Laughs*) It is very hard to predict.

You had shot some action sequences and horseback scenes in *Ride with the Devil*, but *Crouching Tiger* must have presented a whole set of new challenges that came with the action choreography and wirework. What was that like, and how was it working with Yuen Wo-ping?

That was all about collaboration. I cannot choreograph, that's just not my thing. But at the same time, I also cannot just take whatever he gives me like some directors do. I'm a bigger shot and he had to listen to me! (*Laughs*) Usually directors just give those scenes over to the action directors, giving them three minutes of film time and expecting back a good fight. But when you do that you lose the unity of the film. The reason I wanted to do the film was not the acting, but the martial arts scenes. The plot is just a filler—I wanted to do martial arts and engage audiences on that level. So I stuck with Yuen Wo-ping.

When I made *Ride with the Devil* I had never done an action sequence, and it took me about two weeks to figure everything out. I thought I did pretty good. But martial arts is much more difficult, not only in terms of choreography, but you also have to adapt your overall cinematic sense. So I learned a lot about cinema from Yuen Wo-ping, but he still had to put up with all of my shit! (*Laughs*) He had to put up with me and all my demands, which did restrain him on several levels.

Since Yuen Wo-ping is a director in his own right, did he influence the film in other ways besides the fight sequences?

No, he never pretended. . . . I'm A list in terms of drama, and he never crossed over that line. But he was a big influence in making that movie. Not just in terms of the martial arts, because I had to adapt the whole genre and all of his experience and development over forty years in that industry. Yuen Wo-ping is an incredible director and the very best in his field when it comes to martial arts choreography. At the same time, he is always extremely humble and generous. When working with me, he always respected my artistic vision and worked with me to bring out the film's full potential. One funny thing, while I was continually trying to do martial arts, he kept reminding me that this is cinema and what we were doing evolved from Peking Opera. It is operatic, it is not martial arts. It was funny, because it should have been the other way around. I was the filmmaker and I brought him in to do the martial arts. I had been reading a lot of martial arts books and manuals and was very into it at the time. But Yuen Wo-ping kept reminding me how you make movies, what looks good. It is an abstract art; you have to do it shot by shot, and it is not always the fanciest things that look good. It is the cinematic sense, the excitement that makes it interesting.

There was a lot written about the accent training that Chow Yun-fat and Michelle Yeoh had to go through to memorize the Mandarin dialogue. What other challenges were associated with the cast preparing for their roles?

The accents were a big problem, but I knew I could always say that Li Mubai hails originally from southern China. But disposition is a bigger problem. In the case of Zhang Ziyi, I simply couldn't imagine her as a nobleman's daughter. People in China have a different disposition these days. Actually, I think the Chinese audience is the audience I know the least about. I remember when Sony Classics was investing in Feng Xiaogang's *Big Shot's Funeral*, they asked me about the ending. Apparently Chinese audiences on the mainland had thought the ending was utterly hysterical, but nobody in the West was getting it. They asked me to look at it, but somehow PRC audiences are also very

foreign to me. I have a pretty good understanding of world audiences, but I haven't the faintest clue about Chinese audiences in the PRC. Although we share the same cultural roots, our life experiences are so vastly different, and they are so different from the rest of the world. Now that China is catching up and have their own form of commercialization, their world is very weird to me. Art films are something else. When I saw *House of Flying Daggers* I couldn't help but have a somewhat strange reaction. The logic behind the way they present things is very strange and new. They didn't use to make commercial films, so these types of films coming out of the PRC are really a new phenomenon, and now to suddenly do such a large production. . . . I wish he [Zhang Yimou] had more help. He had to borrow from everywhere to put it together and although everything is right, all the features are there, beautiful and in perfect form—those are the eyes, those are the ears—for some reason it looks strange when you see them on the face. But that is their thing; we just have to accept reality. When we do something traditional, it is odd to them. In China, there is a debate about how authentic *Crouching Tiger* is, but to me it is strange—what do they know about martial arts films? Just because they are Chinese? The PRC banned these kinds of films for thirty years and only recently picked them up from Hong Kong, but martial arts is a Hong Kong and Taiwan genre. (*Laughs*)

There has also been a very strange media sensation surrounding *Crouching Tiger* and *Hero*, where a lot of critics really jumped on these films.

It is strange, but what do they have? They can jump on anything—they are very good at that! In Taiwan a lot of older people originally from the mainland really liked *Crouching Tiger*. They watched it over and over again, and they were very happy to see such a film before they died. And authenticity really wasn't something that many people questioned in Taiwan. One of the problems comes from the fact that these films were always B movies and were never examined through the more scrutinizing microscopic lens through which A-list films are looked at. When you elevate a film from B to A, you are looking for trouble because people start examining all kinds of things they never paid attention to before. It is a very funny cultural phenomenon. It is very interesting. If a film falls into the B genre then it doesn't mean to be taken seriously, and when you do take it seriously, things become problematic. But that was my challenge, and I also learned a lot from that process.

What was the single greatest challenge making *Crouching Tiger*?

Just making sense of the script was the most difficult. I didn't have much help. Of course, the screenwriter and James both gave me a lot of input, but it

was very challenging. There were a lot of sections where he'd say, "Yeah, that's Chinese, but people here are going to laugh when they see it!"

And the writing process was very complex, with several different writers involved, writing drafts in different languages.

Right, besides me there was Wang Hui-Ling, James Schamus, and even Ah Cheng. So I blended everything together to make sense out of the script. Because when you want to take it seriously, it just doesn't make sense—that is what is so fun about that genre. (*Laughs*) I wrote the scenario with my then-assistant Jean Castelli, and James wrote the first draft. Wang Hui-Ling was busy for about six months working on a television miniseries, so although I was ready to make the movie, she was unavailable. We needed funding, so based on the scenario, James wrote up a short, very rough first draft. We used that to raise the money and began preproduction. That was when Wang Hui-Ling came in to write the real script. When James read the translation, he flipped out about certain things—that was, like, five days before production! (*Laughs*) And he started writing a few scenes, basically around Yu Shu Lien's character. We sent the scripts and scene rewrites back and forth between them through translators, and you never know just what gets lost in translation. It can be difficult, because there are some things in the English script that you know Chinese characters would never say. But a lot of the problems centered around the Yu Shu Lien character, who was too conservative. But Wang Hui-Ling refused to change those parts. So nothing really changed with Zhang Ziyi or Chow Yun-fat's characters; most of the revisions were centered around Yu Shu Lien.

And were you still tweaking the screenplay during shooting?

Halfway through the shoot we were still revising! It was very painful! Martial arts films are difficult; usually 80 percent of the production schedule is devoted to the action sequences. Most productions also try to stage all of the fights in a relatively restricted area. Because it is so time consuming, you don't want to travel. But our production spanned half of China: we shot in Xinjiang, around Beijing, several locations in Hebei, the Jiangnan region, Hangzhou, and Yellow Mountain in Anhui. So it was very difficult. I have never made a movie where *everything* was difficult—the actors, the screenplay, the production, the details; it took a year to promote it! It was by far the most exhausting film I ever made.

After a brief hiatus, you returned with *The Hulk*. The opening sequence features a "lightning mix" approach, which is brilliantly executed. How much work went into that?

That was a great experience. (*Laughs*) The title sequence and the opening were so much fun to make. I was thinking of a overture to an opera. It was a comic book and moved very fast, and I found the sequence fascinating to put together. There was so much information I wanted to jam into the audience's head and there was no other way to do it. We had to put together a very quick sequence driven by style and had great fun with it. The whole thing is less than ten minutes and the same piece of music carries over that segment, which builds the excitement. There is also a classic horror film quality. Actually, I wasn't thinking about comic books. I think it is misleading to audiences for the studio to sell the film like *Spider-man*, when in my heart I was making a horror film. And that opening was really a classic horror film opening. All of the elements were there, the mad scientist, etc. And I found all of the information presented really fascinating, those sea creatures and the assembly of life and cells—actually the jellyfish is more successful than humans.

And there is also the whole psychological level introduced with the oedipal influence, the relationship with the father, repression. . . .

We just jammed everything in there! (*Laughs*) It was very exciting. I loved shooting those sequences and playing with all the multi-images.

Speaking of your use of multi-images, among the recent group of highly successful comic book movie franchises, such as *Spider-man, X-Men, Blade*, and *Daredevil, The Hulk* seems to go the farthest in trying to realize a true cinematic interpretation of the comic book form. This is done primarily through the array of comic book–inspired editing techniques: split screens, multiple angles and images.

The color, the treatment also worked to emphasize this.

Let's talk about this comic book–style editing approach. Sometimes I even felt like you wanted to take this further but were holding yourself back.

You're right, I was forced to hold back with the editing. A lot of people got angry and uncomfortable with it. I didn't have any test screenings, but I could just sense it from the people I was working with. Even my editor—he didn't like it at all! (*Laughs*) He did a great job, but he didn't like it. When I first started, I wanted to actually do more. I wanted to use that approach not only to dissect action but also to dissect information. I wanted to provide more information through multiscreens. I thought the audience was ready for this. I was even thinking about putting different time zones into the same frame. I thought people would be more open to that approach. Maybe they thought it looked gimmicky? I don't know. The first Hulk breakout was originally all multiscreen, but I had to narrow it down after I got such a negative reaction. They wanted to see what was happening in one frame. But to me that was the time to really break out—I wanted to see it happening from all sides! (*Laughs*) But I didn't get to do it.

And how did the studio react to the original strategy of highlighting the multiangles and comic book–style editing?

When I proposed it, I did an experiment. I took a scene from *Ride with the Devil* and spent two days with Tim playing with all the footage to reedit so we could see the action simultaneously from different angles. The studio flipped out—they thought it was the most brilliant thing they had ever seen. They told me that we were going to hit the bull's-eye. But once I actually did it with *The Hulk*, they began to get nervous and thought maybe I should pull back a bit.

The split screen generated a very mixed reaction. I thought it was so much fun. After doing that first sequence, I thought I could incorporate split screens into all my subsequent films. (*Laughs*) I'm so tired of intercuts and the filmmaker telling you what you should be feeling and seeing. They edit everything for you. But we have a choice. I think with the Internet, kids are growing up with multiple screens and it is not a problem—it is time for taking this on. I'm sorry I didn't get to do more. I wanted to do more time cutting and inject more movement into the editing. I wanted to have more multi-images. I even wanted to insert lichens and reptiles crawling around the bottom of the screen! (*Laughs*) They didn't like the editing, but they never forced me to change it. One complication involved the score. The studio reacted negatively to the original music and I really had to do something about it. In the end, I used Danny Elfmann, who did a wonderful job. But that process really hurt me.

And how extensive were the storyboards for those shots?

We did everything on the editing table, which was a big deal because no one had done that before. We used new tools, which made the process very slow. It was so fascinating, and I was so pissed that people didn't take it well. During the past 100 years of film history, everyone has been doing time editing. You line things up. What I was doing was space editing! It was so fascinating.

There are sequences where that form of space editing really comes together beautifully, such as where you use three screens to match the gazes of Jennifer Connelly, Eric Bana, and Josh Lucas.

(*Laughs*) I shot excessively. I shot from all angles. I spent all day on different shots. In the past, I have always been getting notes and memos from people telling me that they wanted more—they kept saying they wanted more development and they wanted it faster. I always wanted to ask them, "What am I

supposed to do? Split-screen?" (*Laughs*) So I was thinking about doing that. And although I wasn't particularly interested in doing a comic book movie, like martial arts, it gave me the chance to explore other things that I did want to do. So in terms of filmmaking, the comic book genre gave me the excuse to really stretch out cinematically.

For the scenes where the Hulk was involved, we had to do storyboards. That was good training for me, since my background is in drama. There were a few shots that, in my head, I always wanted to do. But other than that, I don't start with a vision. I begin by observing and decide how to photograph the film. I usually fashion my films through scouting and rehearsing, but because the Hulk animation was so expensive, we had to really visualize it. For the animation, we had to break it down shot by shot to cut down the costs. So that was a revisualization process by which I had to vividly image a scene before it even happened. That was a new kind of training for me.

The decision to make the Hulk entirely computer graphics (CG) was made from the beginning?

Yeah. We tried a man in a suit, but it all looked ridiculous.

And was there a lot of pressure because for your "lead" performance you were entirely at the mercy of the CG specialist?

It is funny, but I was not even thinking of that. I figured I'd do whatever I needed to do to make it work, through lighting or whatever. In the end, I was the one who put on a motion detection suit and became the Hulk! It was a very therapeutic experience—it was great! (*Laughs*) But it also was physically exhausting. After *Crouching Tiger* I developed tendonitis, so it was hard on my body. But I think my experience doing *Crouching Tiger* really helped the action. I knew how it would look in the film. By putting on the suit for one shot, I probably saved somebody three weeks of work, because I was the only one who knew from a dramatic perspective what I needed for each shot. At the same time, we were also able to save a lot of money. The film was already edited, so I was the only one who really understood everything and how that performance of the Hulk would connect with the footage we'd already shot.

Although several of your films have been commercially quite successful, with the countless products and promotional tie-ins, none seemed as overtly commercially marketed as *The Hulk*. What kinds of pressure did all of that create for you? Did it inhibit you as a filmmaker?

It didn't inhibit me at all as a filmmaker, because by the time most of the deals came through the film was already made. The only restriction I had—

which was not a problem—was with the look of the Hulk. I had to describe his look to the art department and have them make a sculpture, which Marvel Enterprise's toy makers had to approve. But they looked at it and everything was fine. Throughout the comic book series, the Hulk appears in different colors—gray, different shades of green—and different sizes, anywhere from 9 feet to 15 feet tall. So we decided to make him in three sizes. So all of those steps required approval from Marvel, but it wasn't a problem.

The marketing really killed me, though. And I found that very uncomfortable. I think the film would have been better reviewed if it was marketed like the rest of my movies, with a platform release, modest approach, word of mouth until it gradually peaked out. Then it might have been viewed as a horror film and people would have looked at it differently. My audiences were already pissed when they saw that I was doing a big film like *Spider-man*. They were already in a bad mood coming into the theater! (*Laughs*) I think it probably provoked a lot of anger.

The Hulk is about the anger I feel about the world we live in. It is about being in America and what that does to people. The Hulk is all about anger—and anger is the emotion closest to fear. I think perhaps America is scared and that is why the country is acting violently. I think that is what the film is about. I had to go through fear, which is a horror. But those are not things that are pleasurable for a mass audience to take in. After all, it was a big summer movie. In a way, I kind of got what I was wishing for, which was . . . [makes angry Hulk sound]. (*Laughs*) It came first from the critics and then from the audiences. There were some people who embraced it, and it was a great experience making that film. But the last few weeks before release were pretty torturous because of the marketing with all the toy tie-ins. The first group of prints was 14,000, with one or two thousand copies added after that. So it was a very big release, and the studio was very nervous. They wanted to make sure that they locked up the first weekend—which is also misleading for the audience. In terms of marketing, they probably did the right thing to make their money back, but, at the same time, it also created a situation where the film couldn't get its fair shot. Then again, perhaps the only reason the film survived was because of that [marketing strategy]. Who knows? The toy companies did very good and made a lot of money. The movie survived and I survived, but that last month before it came out was very tough. Everything since then reminds me of *The Hulk*!

You're constantly navigating between Hollywood and Asia. How do your approach and shooting style change when working in the United States as opposed to China or Taiwan? And what do you find the biggest challenges associated with working in each region?

It would be unfair to say that Taiwan is like this or Hollywood is like that, because each project presents its own challenges. For *Crouching Tiger*, the biggest challenge came from the fact that I went to China to make a movie that they were not equipped to make. And I had never done a martial arts film. I think that, in general, Asian crews are more obedient—but then again, they are generally pretty good everywhere. Everybody tries to give the director what he wants. I think that in Asia things are less organized and more like guerrilla filmmaking compared to here. There is less planning done. We just kind of figure things out along the way. It is also more personal in that people do things for you for personal reasons depending on how much they like or respect you. Here people are doing their job and take pride in what they do. (*Laughs*) The production is also more sophisticated here and it is easier to make a movie. For me, making one Chinese film is like making three American films, I have to work three times as hard. It is more tiresome. Chinese culture is my root, so in some ways I am more subjective and surer about what I want, even though I sometimes go against everyone's will in the process. For English-language films, I'm not always as sure and will look around more and check the reactions of people around me. It is getting much easier now as I shoot movie after movie. But still I have to doublecheck to be sure I've got exactly what I want. But while making Chinese films, what I say is what I want. I think there is more cinematic freedom. Historically speaking, Chinese cinema is basically an imitation of Western cinema—that is the history, at least. There is not an industry or culture that dictates what you have to do in the Chinese film industry. On one level, Hollywood films have the least freedom, because they are the best established. So we can be bolder with Chinese films, like the big flashback in *Crouching Tiger,* we just do it! (*Laughs*) I think I would have worried a lot more if it had been an American film.

I very much identify myself as a Chinese filmmaker. I was brought up in certain ways that influence my work. Making a movie here is no different than making a movie in Hunan, China. You just take the dialect, work with the people, and do the job there. But the backbone is very much a Chinese thing that I cannot change. I will adapt accordingly for whatever film I make; even going back to China, I ended up adapting a lot of things from here that changed the way I make Chinese films. Sometimes I wish that things were like the way they are in that John Lennon song, where you imagine there is no country, no religion. You just do your thing and people see you based on your background. I lived in a Chinese environment until I was twenty-three and that is something I cannot change. Even as a Chinese, I am more of a second-generation mainlander in Taiwan. I didn't go through the Communist regime and learned about Chinese culture through abstract resources—a romanticized vision of China that was passed down through my parents' generation in Taiwan. That is part of what *Crouching Tiger* is about. You can't go back to the past, so who knows, maybe [a film like this] is actually the only authentic way to get there.

In a recent documentary on Fellini, actors from the United States and Italy who had worked with him gave radically different accounts of what he was like. Is there a difference in your directorial approach when working with A-list Hollywood actors like Jennifer Connelly and Emma Thompson versus Asian actors like Chow Yun-fat and Zhang Ziyi?

Not that much of a difference. I think that Chinese actors expect me to show them what I want them to do. A lot of them imitate what I do after I show them. But in Hollywood, most actors have an idea about what the performance ought to be, and you either have to tone them down or direct them. I like actors who give me stimulation. They don't have to kowtow to me, but let's make a movie together. In the end, they should listen to me because I'm the director—the one who fits everyone together in one movie, and not five movies. There are some differences you see region to region in the actors' dispositions. The English tend to do more presentation because they are stage and television trained. American actors, in general, are more comfortable with the camera. And the Chinese are more in tune with performing arts like opera. Of course, there are always exceptions, but Chinese actors tend to be more passive and devoted to you, and to what you want.

You've worked with Sihung Lung (Lang Xiong) more than any other actor. He starred in all three installments of your *Father Knows Best* trilogy, and you worked with him again in *Crouching Tiger*. Could you talk about your relationship with Sihung Lung and how closely you worked with him to elicit those unforgettable performances?

He just looked right for the part. Personally, I never really connected with him. He is a funny guy who likes gossip. (*Laughs*) But his image and the way he carries himself are such that I can picture him playing my father. They don't look the same—Sihung Lung is younger. But he is a very good actor—not so much a method actor, but he delivers. And it is a beautiful thing when we come together to portray that father image that we are all missing in Chinese culture. I cannot do it without him and he cannot do it without me. So we work well together, and that influences a lot of people. So that is a beautiful thing that we share. We know each other very well in terms of our working relationship. By the time we did *Crouching Tiger,* he was beginning to have problems memorizing the lines since he was getting older. But he still nailed it every time.

You have also helped discover and develop a lot of wonderful acting talents, including Kate Winslet, Christina Ricca, Elijah Wood, and Tobey Maguire, with whom you would work

again on *Ride with the Devil*. What are the pros and cons of working with new faces verses established "stars"?

I like to work with new talent—maybe not completely new, like Winston Chow (Zhao Wenxuan), who starred in *The Wedding Banquet* and was completely new. He had never been in the business or any performing arts before. But sometimes working with actors on their second film can be a very lovely experience. There is a certain innocence as they try to please you and make so much effort. It is so genuine; they are ready to rip their hearts out for the film. And it is so believable. I think the less you tell young actors, the better. You have to think for them and discover what they are good at—it can be very unpredictable. If you work with someone like Brad Pitt you know exactly what works and what doesn't. But with young talents you don't know what sells and how the audience will take them. You have to discover all of that through the camera. So that is very challenging and interesting for me. Also, when actors are young they don't know much and are often insecure; they put themselves in your hands and you feel like their parent. (*Laughs*) It is your responsibility to bring the best out of them. Hopefully it will work for the film and work for them. When they are young and talented, you choose them because their face does certain things for you—and hopefully for the audience. But then their performances are often very uneven, so it is a lot of effort. But when it does work, you have a sense of accomplishment. And it is fresh—and that is the best part. They will never look so good and so fresh after that! (*Laughs*) You capture the best time of their life, when they are most beautiful and most appealing. It is that most exciting moment when they are just getting it—after that, they are acting. (*Laughs*)

These younger actors also have to perform complexly, so it goes beyond documentary style. So they have to adapt to acting. What is precious to me is that they are just beginning to do it. They are not that good at it yet. But the innocence goes a long way. The audience will do it for them, but the next time around the actor will have to do it for themselves; the second time around, the audience sits back and says, "Okay, what are you gonna give me?" I find that often, working with actors on their second film, you feel like you are going to pull your hair out! Particularly with Zhang Ziyi and Kate Winslet—Zhang Ziyi always reminds me of Kate Winslet because I worked with both of them when they were nineteen and it was the second film for both of them. In both cases I was so worried in the beginning that I was convinced the films were going to tank. And then after about a month—you see them grow, things start to happen, and it is simply beautiful. Sometimes I have to turn things around and work for them instead of them working for the movie. You can kill them by repeatedly telling them, "It doesn't work, it doesn't work." You need to slowly discover what works for them and what doesn't.

You are tirelessly experimenting with different film genres, from contemporary dramas to costume dramas, from Western war stories to martial arts fantasies, and from gay love stories to comic book blockbusters. I have even heard that you are planning a musical. What inspires your constant experimentation with different cinematic styles? What type of film do you enjoy most or feel most comfortable with?

I feel most at home exploring human relationships. Each time I think I am drifting away from that, I always somehow seem to come back. What people truly feel is my anchor, and that is what always gets the audience. I have tried hard to get away from that, but I can't—that's my vibe. Quentin Tarantino can blow people's heads off and audiences laugh and are entertained. But then I simply say something rough and people raise their eyebrows. People send out different vibes. It is not like I can't do it, but audiences won't take it well. In *The Hulk* I stretched to a place that made people feel uncomfortable. I think part of the problem was that it was *me* doing that film. So I think it is those films that really dig deep into the complexities of human relationships that I call home. After my fifth film, *The Ice Storm,* I was beginning to get tired of family drama—but I keep coming back to it anyway, like in *The Hulk*, which is also a form of family drama. (*Laughs*) It just happened that way. I don't have an agenda, I just wait until something hits me and I do it. It is of great interest to me that I do a lot of genre hopping. But I don't think I do straight genre films either—I mix them, I twist them. It must be a form that is just right to tell a particular story. But I am delighted to pick up the different skills that each genre requires. That is the filmmaker part of me. It always pleases me to pick up something new.

What is fascinating is that although virtually each film is a different genre, there is always something very distinct that identifies your work as an Ang Lee film. What do you think that quality is?

I don't even know what that thing is! (*Laughs*) When asked to pinpoint one theme, I used to say "people in a changing time." But I gradually found myself growing out of that. Up until today, I think one thing I have always been exploring through my work is the concept of freedom against social propriety. It is not merely someone putting a force upon you, but you putting a force upon yourself. But there is no such thing as absolute freedom. Unless, of course, you jump off a cliff to get away from it all! (*Laughs*) Other than that, as long as you are still dealing with people, you are enslaved in a relationship. I think that hasn't changed. But within that range there are all different tastes I was portraying. Then again, this theme of freedom is just an abstract concept and doesn't really identify an Ang Lee film. I guess what identifies my work is going out there every day and doing your best, trying to survive and make the scene

work—somehow it shows. There a lot of scenes that didn't work and ended up on the cutting room floor—they were never seen in the movie. I thought they would make a difference. Sometimes they are just not a great scene and are cuttable. I think your effort just shows what works for you. I try not to know too much, and that is another reason I keep hopping back and forth between different materials. I try not to know too much about any one subject. I like to move on before I learn too much about the subject and get bored. I try to maintain that innocence and freshness. Being scared keeps you alert. Once you feel too comfortable, you get lazy. Unless you are scared, you aren't doing your best.

There often seem to be recurrent themes and riffs that you begin in one film and pick up again several films later. Comic books were first introduced in *The Ice Storm* and returned full force with *The Hulk*. *Brokeback Mountain* marks a revisiting of not only the homoerotic themes first explored in *The Wedding Banquet* but also themes from the western, which you had explored in *Ride with the Devil*. You also used *The Hulk* to revisit conflicts between father and son dealt with in your Father Knows Best trilogy.

With *The Hulk*, the recurrence of the father theme really surprised me because the screenplay was original. James Schamus wrote me three drafts of the screenplay, each about different things. One of them centered on a villain with a large head called The Leader, but none of those early drafts really hit me. Then one day James mentioned that in one episode Banner's father came back as a janitor, and suddenly everything clicked. Marvel really didn't want to do it; they were very skeptical and scared. What interested me most about the Hulk was how this big green guy comes from a tiny cellular reaction in the realm of genetic engineering. So that got to me. I wanted to seek out the smallest possible thing. And when it comes to the genetic element, it is not the mother that comes to my mind, it is the father, of course.

I felt a bit hesitant at first. I wondered whether or not I really wanted to revisit the father again. After *The Ice Storm,* I thought I was done with that. But you still see it in *Ride with the Devil* and, now that I think about it, I never really stopped dealing with that theme. In *Ride with the Devil* it is funny because Tobey Maguire's father image is not his own father—he is actually fighting for his friend Skeet Ulrich's father, who is the true patriarchal figure and master of the property. And I think Chow Yun-fat is also somewhat of a father figure to that young girl in *Crouching Tiger*, but in a tricky way. So I actually never stopped dealing with the father—but I did stop dealing with the direct father-son relationship for two projects.

But when I started to focus on genetic engineering, I couldn't help but think of the father and just went deeper and deeper. In some ways that is the most personal film for me because I go to a subconscious level—not a social level.

Before that I had always been exploring these relationships on a social level through reasonable storytelling. But I think *The Hulk* goes to the limbic system of the brain, into the subconscious and the heart of male violence. It goes underneath consciousness and deep inside the animal instinct. We couldn't survive without that anger. It is part of our survival instinct and what keeps us going. We have to respect it. The fatherly anger in *The Hulk* is very unreasonable, it is very violent. I found after I made the film that some of the images I had made came back to haunt me. That is something I had never experienced in all my years making movies. Particularly that final duel with the water father under the lake. It disturbed me in a big way, haunting me every night before I fell asleep. Then there was the whole medusa and jellyfish thing. When we were watching that big jellyfish thing before it blew up, I remember Denis Muren at Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) telling me that it was the weirdest image ILM ever made. (*Laughs*) And *Brokeback Mountain* still has the shadow of the father. It is horrifying in this film. My own father passed away, and here I am doing a gay film. So it isn't over yet. Sometimes it is me as the father. While directing *The Hulk,* I was sometimes in the shoes of Bruce Banner (Eric Bana), but most of the time I was in David Banner's (Nick Nolte) shoes. I was that father. I think I was also identifying with Chow Yun-fat as father, but things gradually shifted and I moved into that irrational, under-the-surface territory. It hurts. Making a movie can really hurt. But unless it hurts, you don't usually get anything fresh.

Although you have revisited a lot of themes through your work, you thus far have avoided any formal sequels, even though there has been a lot of speculation about potential franchises connected with both *Crouching Tiger* and *The Hulk*.

I don't really see myself continuing those stories. Maybe if I find something new. But I won't do it because it is good for business. Sometimes I feel that with *Crouching Tiger* there were a lot of things left unsaid that I should finish. But I always ask myself if it is really a good idea. Perhaps some things are better left unsaid. Maybe I should just do something else. There are all kinds of films to be made; why repeat something I already did unless there is something new there to discover? Maybe it takes a longer time. There is always that hidden dragon, it just takes different forms. You see, we have a film. It is a product, you can watch it. There are certain things you can examine, and so forth. Each film takes a form, it must be etched in celluloid to be seen and elicit reactions. But to us filmmakers, no matter what story we make, we leave a trace of who we are, what we do during that period of time. I might have different interests from movie to movie, time to time. And I might address different themes, but I always do my best, struggle to make things work. I tend to go to the thing that

scares and interests me the most. Perhaps someday it may be a sequel that scares me the most. And I'll do it because of that! (*Laughs*) But sometimes it isn't characters or stories, it is the ingredients that interest me. When I'm doing a film, that becomes my life. I make story after story that appears on the screen, but I can never watch them as complete stories; to me they are always pieces of flashbacks. I cannot watch it as a story. It is a strange thing to say. (*Laughs*)

One great accomplishment of your work is the fact that none of your films feels like there are sets or soundstages; it always feels like you have created an entire world and we as the audience are merely peeking into one small corner of that world.

That is what cinema is for. Each time you make a movie, you are creating a world. In my mind, when I adapt someone's work I am making a movie *from* a script and not *to* a script. It is very important that writers understand this. You can be completely loyal to a writer, but if the vibe isn't working for you or the actors, you have to be flexible. It is not about who is right or wrong, but who is making the movie. I don't tell writers, "Look, this is an Ang Lee film, we have to do this the way it works for me." I tell them, "Look, we are creating a world." But when it comes down to it, I'm the one who has to create that world. The writer creates it on a page, but the look of the actors, the places have to work for me. Not everything works for me. Everybody has their own vibe, and I have to do what works for the vibe of the film and be true to that.

Crouching Tiger not only opened up new avenues for Asian cinema in foreign markets but also set up a new model for transregional or pan-Asian productions. After you featured stars from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia, Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, and others have expanded upon that model with films like _Hero_, _House of Flying Daggers_, and _The Promise_. What are your reflections on this phenomenon and the effects of globalism on Chinese cinema?

It is kind of inevitable. In a way I do hope the Chinese market can be on its own, because, like Hollywood cinema, the more global it gets, the less specific it gets. That may be good in some ways, but I think you need both kinds of movies. You need specialized films for targeted audiences, where you can make everything authentic and classical and the way you want it to be. Not everything is market orientated. On the other hand, the Chinese film industry cannot stand on its own. There are only around five really major directors who can call their own shots and then a lot of smaller directors like Tsai Ming-liang, Jia Zhangke, and Fruit Chan, whose movies don't really get beyond the festival circuit, and there is really nothing in between. So what 99 percent of the people are watching are Hollywood films.

I was offended when they promoted *Crouching Tiger* in Taiwan as a Hollywood film. But they said that nobody goes to see Chinese films there anymore and they couldn't sell it unless people thought it was a Hollywood production. So they promoted it as a Sony or Columbia picture. Some filmmakers like Edward Yang don't even want to show their work in Taiwan, which is strange. I hope the industry can one day be like American film, since we do have large populations in Asia to potentially support a thriving film culture. But the Chinese government is still not willing to open up and the film business is still behind the real world. Someday there will be a lot of audiences watching Chinese films. I think that is healthier. But right now it has to be international. Nobody has the budget to make decent-sized Chinese films; there is really no other choice but to look to the outside for funding. Even small-budget art films are all made with foreign money. That is just the reality we are living in. The Hong Kong film industry is declining. I think it is unhealthy and I don't personally like it.

Although films like _Yi Yi_, _In the Mood for Love_, and _Eat Drink Man Woman_ have done well in foreign markets, none has garnered the huge commercial success of martial arts films like _Hero_, _House of Flying Daggers_, and _Crouching Tiger_, and the action films of Jet Li and Jackie Chan. Do you see Chinese cinema breaking through this "action barrier"?

I would like to make efforts toward some other genres, but it is much harder. I do see things potentially going the way of contemporary Korean cinema, with Hollywood studios buying up remake rights for films like *My Sassy Girl (Yeopgijeogin geunyeo)* (2001). But it is hard for me to see true crossovers outside of action films or hits on the art house specialized market. But besides martial arts, what is there? Speaking frankly, we don't do other things well. There is nothing special we could do with political thrillers, film noir, or love stories—we are not going to top Hollywood. We can't compete in those genres. But when it comes to martial arts, we are an inspiring force in filmmaking. Those are films we excel at, and there is something special about them. I cannot think of another genre that we do better than America.

Filmography

As Director

1980 *Runner (Zhui da)*
1981 *I Love Chinese Food (Wo ai Zhongguo cai)* (short)
1981 *Beat the Artist (Cuo yishujia)* (short)
1982 *I Wish I Was by That Dim Lake (Yinliang hu ban)* (short)
1985 *Fine Line (Fen jiexian)*

1991 *Pushing Hands (Tuishou)* (also screenwriter and producer)
1993 *The Wedding Banquet (Xiyan)* (also screenwriter and producer)
1994 *Eat Drink Man Woman (Yinshi nanü)*
1995 *Sense and Sensibility*
1997 *The Ice Storm* (also producer)
1999 *Ride with the Devil*
2000 *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Wohu canglong)* (also producer)
2001 *The Hire: Chosen* (short)
2003 *The Hulk*
2005 *Brokeback Mountain*

Other Credits

1983 *Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads* (first assistant director)
1995 *Siao Yu (Shaonü xiaoyu)* (producer)
2001 *Tortilla Soup* (remake of *Eat Drink Man Woman*) (earlier screenplay)
2004 *One Last Ride* (executive producer)

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