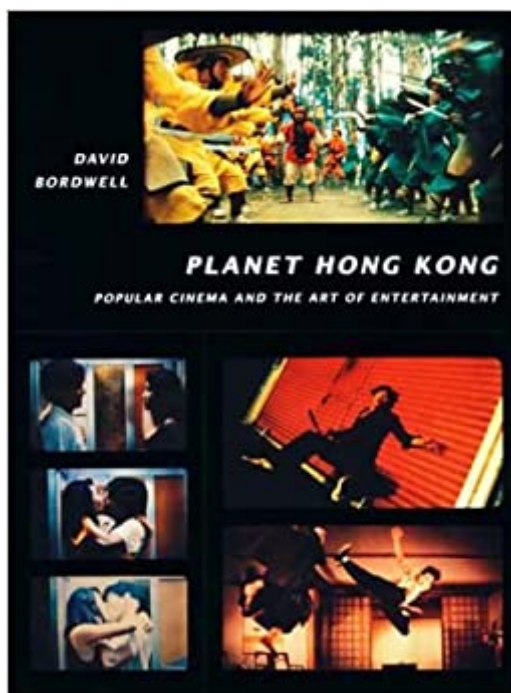


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# Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema And The Art Of Entertainment



## Synopsis

Since the 1970s, Hong Kong has been home to arguably the world's most energetic, imaginative mass-market film industry. At its peak it surpassed nearly all western countries in number of films released, ruled the east Asian market, and produced movies (ranging from John Woo's action pictures to the comic adventures of Jackie Chan) that have thrilled global audiences and attained cult status in the West. This book offers an informed and engaging look at how Hong Kong cinema has become one of the success stories of film history, and how it has influenced international film culture and the development of film as a medium. As sentimental and outrageous as Hong Kong can be, David Bordwell demonstrates that they are not merely crowd-pleasing; they harbour remarkable inventiveness and careful craftsmanship and in many cases rise to the level of a rich and delightful art. The author surveys the historical conditions that fuelled the rise of this cinema: the high output, shrewd entrepreneurship, changing world tastes, and a unique skill in action genres that cross cultural boundaries. Considering both the movies themselves and the bigger picture, he moves from deft and detailed analyses of many classics of this tradition to a broader assessment of the basic strategies and impulses of mass entertainment.

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## Customer Reviews

Hong Kong arguably offered the most dynamic popular cinema in the world between 1970 and the end of the century, and Bordwell (*On the History of Film Style*) was perhaps the most widely read figure in cinema studies during the same period. Surpassing Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover's *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* (LJ 9/1/99), Bordwell's volume is the most

comprehensive Western work on its topic to date. Bordwell first considers how the Hong Kong industry has functioned in its local context, then examines how it captured the East Asian market and achieved cult status in the West. Subsequent chapters survey local production methods, generic norms, stars, narratives, and the specificity of Hong Kong style. Finally, Bordwell shows how artistic experimentation makes the commercialized, profit-driven Hong Kong cinema unique. In so doing, he demonstrates that academic film scholarship can itself be fun, spirited, and of interest to a broad audience. Recommended for all libraries with film collections.-Neal Baker, Earlham Coll., Richmond, IN Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

One of our most inventive film scholars, Bordwell (Film Studies/Univ. of Wisconsin) takes on one of the most over-the-top cinemas. For 20 years, the Hong Kong film industry was one of the world's most commercially successful and prolific. Recently Western critics have begun to recognize it as possessing a level of creativity almost equal to its financial success despite its deep roots in genre traditions aimed at a mass audience. Bordwell examines how these elements interact in Hong Kong films to produce an art that is at the same time both popular and significant. He outlines the history, economics, and production techniques of the Hong Kong studios, particularly focussing on the genres that are most closely associated with their success (the kung-fu film, the swordplay epic, the gangster film, and the urban comedy). These historical chapters alternate with analyses of specific directors, with particular attention paid not only to such well-known filmmakers as John Woo and Wong Kar-Wai but also to some figures worthy of greater attention in the West (such as King Hu). Bordwell is clearly enchanted by the sheer physicality of Hong Kong film: its remarkable ability to convey "filmic emotion at its most sheerly physical" through a combination of razor-sharp editing styles, incredibly precise staging of action sequences, and the sheer virtuosity of performers like Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee. By rooting his analyses detailed readings of the film texts, he is able to convey as much as mere words can how this audaciously visceral cinema works. Ironically, Bordwell's decision to join the growing throng of authors with books on Hong Kong film comes at a time when the handover of the former British colony to the China, coupled with the economic shakeouts in East Asia, may well have doomed the island's film industry. Bordwell is not well known outside academic film circles, but he should be; perhaps this volume will give him the exposure he deserves. -- Copyright ©2000, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

For the history of Hong Kong cinema, Stephen Teo's HONG KONG CINEMA : THE EXTRA DIMENSION can't be topped; but this impressive book is far and away the best yet to examine this

vital art film from the aesthetic angle. Bordwell also covers some of the financial makeup of the Hong Kong film industry, and even devotes space to the often-ridiculed Wong Jing. His chapters on Hong Kong editing styles are not just informative, they're absolutely inspiring. This book should be required reading for every film student!

Since John Woo and Jackie Chan hit it big in North America, there have been a ton of books on the Hong Kong film industry. Most of them are either poorly written or poorly presented. Or, worst of all, only focus on the figures (Woo & Chan) that people here in North America would recognize. Bordwell's book is a significant improvement as he goes into great detail on the origins of the HK film industry (painstakingly documenting the rise of the Shaw brothers) and examines how it rose to prominence. This is a very well-written book that straddles the line between being an academic study and utilizing a more mainstream approach. It's a good mix that will keep you interested. I did find some of the economical stuff to be a bit on the dull side but it is few and far between. Best of all, Bordwell covers all the usual suspects (i.e. Woo, Chan, Wong Kar-Wai) and others as well. This is a great introduction into Hong Kong films, what makes them work and why they've become so popular world-wide. Bordwell is obviously a fan but he is also critical as well. This is not a fawning love letter by some slobbering fanboy but a sobering account of HK films. The man has obviously done his homework. Highly recommended!

Bordwell's book manages to balance the enthusiasm of a fan with the sharp analysis of a trained film scholar. Of all the books on Hong Kong film in English that I've read, this is the one that I keep returning to--it's chock full of original criticism (his shot by shot breakdowns of classic HK flicks are superb), that is well written and accessible (even if you don't have a PhD in cultural studies). Planet Hong Kong has led me to at least a dozen wonderful films I might otherwise have overlooked.

Not just the best book about Hong Kong cinema but the best ever written about a popular commercial movie industry. It is a model of practicality, fresh observation, and original on-site research in an academic field dominated by received ideology and sociological condescension. Bordwell pays tribute to the highly specialized film craftsmen of Kowloon, world-class experts in delivering intense pleasure to a large audience. We hope that he plans to write many sequels. Are you ready for "Planet Bollywood"?

A great book about HK film. A detailed and convincing analysis of the technical aspect of HK movies

and of what makes them good. Bordwell is limited, however, by his not knowing the language and the culture. But this seems to be very common among film critics, who mostly just rely on subtitles. For European movies this may not be a problem, but for Hong Kong movies that often have such comically and memorably bad subtitles, it's a great disadvantage to the critic.

A definite read for anyone who is interested in Hong Kong cinema. Bordwell is both an excellent writer and teacher, he's a film professor at Wisconsin, so he knows his stuff. I like his stuff on Wong Kar-Wai. A bit academic but if you can get through it it's very informative.

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