

# Film industry boom



SUCCESS Kung Fu Hustle.

WALT Disney Pictures is said to be planning a remake of Snow White in China and the Seven Dwarves are to be replaced by seven martial arts monks.

The director is expected to be Yuen Woo-ping, the Chinese director and choreographer who was involved with Quentin Tarantino's Kill Bill series, as well as Kung Fu Hustle and the Matrix movies.

Disney is only one of several major Western film studios that eventually want to turn China into a leading film production base.

Other studios attracted by China's fast-growing economy, inexpensive film production sites and increasingly popular stars and feature films are Sony's Columbia TriStar Pictures, which is already producing feature films here, Warner Brothers, which has formed joint ventures with Chinese studios, and Merchant Ivory, which filmed The White Countess, set in 1930s Shanghai, on location.

The catalyst seems to have been Ang Lee's 2000 film Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, which earned US\$128 million from US cinemas, making it the most profitable foreign-language film ever shown there.

Meanwhile, the growing affluence of China's population has box-office revenue here projected at US\$1.2 billion for 2007, from about US\$500 million in 2004.

In addition, any film shot in China is exempt from the present quota of 20 foreign films a year.

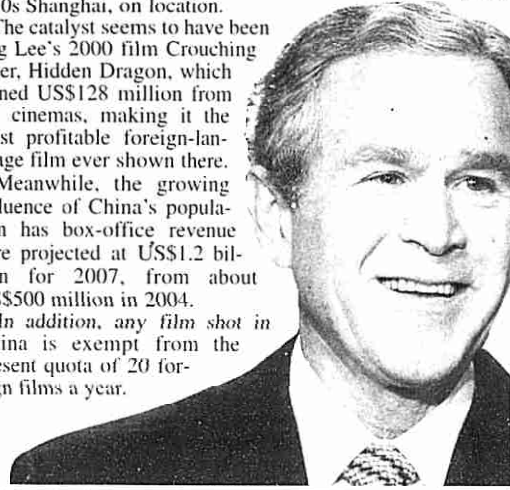
## Regional bloc wants US out

AT a meeting in Kazakhstan on July 6, the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) called on the United States to set a timetable for the withdrawal of its military bases from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

The SCO is a grouping of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Its main concerns are regional security and anti-terrorism co-operation.

It is also seen as a counterweight to US military expansion into the oil-rich region.



# Conspiracy theories chase the carnage

WE were sitting in a cafe in Notting Hill Gate. Gian-Carlo had called me 30 minutes before, only saying that he had "some information" and asking me to meet him at the Starbucks.

I had shown up 10 minutes late — he had forgotten to tell me which of the three Starbucks within 100 feet of the Tube station he wanted to meet at.

"Operation Northwoods," Gian-Carlo repeated. He had that aquiline Roman nose, but, in his basketball sports jersey, backwards baseball cap and bandanna, he was pure south London. You wouldn't have guessed that he had studied classics at Lincoln College, Oxford. I suspected that he worked for MI5.

"Around 1962, the joint chiefs of staff of the US military needed an excuse to oust Castro. The generals plotted to blow up an American ship and blame it on Castro."

"And?" I asked, slurping my cappuccino.

Gian-Carlo looked around nervously. "That's not all they said — we could develop a communist Cuban terror campaign in the Miami area, in other Florida cities and even in Washington," he recited, as if from memory.

"You dragged me out of bed to drink stale American coffee for some crackpot conspiracy theory?" I asked. I was fuming.

"Conspiracy fact." Gian-Carlo reached into his pocket and showed me a photocopy of what looked like an official document. The top of it was stamped "FOIA."

He continued. "Don't you wonder where the anthrax came from?" I had wondered. Anthrax attacks in the US in 2001 killed five people, but no-one had ever been convicted.

"Steven Hatfill," Gian-Carlo, like a magician, pulled out a photo of a man in a biohazard suit complete with gas mask.

"He was born in the States, and, according to him, in 1978, simultaneously worked for the



with PROFESSOR JONATHAN FARLEY

US army Institute for Military Assistance and the Rhodesian special air squadron. He's the closest thing they have to a suspect in the anthrax case. Why haven't they taken him in? Because he knows too much."

I leaned back in my seat. "You've lost me. So they hire white supremacists in the US army. What's your point?"

Gian-Carlo appeared exasperated. "Remember when Bush visited London in 2003? And a million thronged the streets in protest? That was bad news for the neocon hawks in Washington. It proved the lie that the UK was America's ally. What happened then?"

"Istanbul," I said, coldly. "Right. If the terrorists had wanted to do a bigger favour for Bush, distracting people's attention, I don't know what it could have been. And then there was 3/11. Spain, where 90 per cent of the people opposed the war. It looks like the conservatives, Aznar's party, are heading for defeat. And what happens? Bombs in Madrid."

I found the flaw in his argument. "But it backfired. The Spaniards kicked Aznar's party out."

"But you know America better than I do. In the States, the most jingoistic, militaristic party would have won in a landslide after an attack like that. That's what an American neocon would have predicted."

"And now?" Gian-Carlo continued: "With pressure on the G8, it looks like Bono and Geldolf and Bill Gates and Kofi Annan, even, are actually getting concessions."

"Then this. A bombing in

England, in London. "The city that elected Red Ken and George Galloway. Bombs on Edgware Road, bombs killing Muslims."

"Al-Qaida kills Muslims all the time," I said. "Look at what's happening in Iraq."

Gian-Carlo peered at me with pity in his eyes. "In Iraq, it doesn't make sense either for them to blow up civilians. Collaborators, maybe. But women in the market? No. Those attacks are planned by people who want to smear the resistance."

"You couldn't keep that a secret," I said angrily. "Someone would know. Someone would tell."

"Yeah," Gian-Carlo smiled wanly. "Just tell that to David Kelly."

"You're being irresponsible. We don't need this type of paranoid fear-mongering, not now."

"Exactly," Gian-Carlo whispered. "Question nothing. Just like the old days, just like the Blitz, when the enemy was clear, when we knew we had to follow the leader."

I was feeling sick. "You're crazy," I said. "I can't print this." I got up out of my seat and headed for the door.

"Then print it as a fairytale," Gian-Carlo called after me. "Let them think you made it up. The people deserve ..."

The door closed behind me. I took a deep breath, looked around desperately at a suffering city and walked away.

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# CHINA DIARY

with PAUL WHITE

## Oil deal tensions

THE already rocky China-US relationship could go into serious reverse drive if President Bush vetoes an oil deal.

This one is a \$18.5 billion bid by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation for the US company Unocal.

This comes at a time when the Bush administration is pressing to have oil and natural gas declared strategic resources for the US.

Unocal has huge oil and gas reserves in 14 countries, most of them in Asia, and owns the only rare-earth mine in the US. China's rapidly

growing economy is driving it on a mammoth search worldwide for energy sources. Just a decade ago, China exported more oil than it imported, but, last year, it passed Japan to become the world's second-largest oil importer after the US.

The Unocal bid "is a remarkable arrival of China into the world of global big business deals and international investing," said Clyde Prestowitz of Washington's Economic Strategy Institute. "And it does raise the issue of whether this gives influence of some kind to a government that may not always be friendly to us."

Michael O'Hanlon of the think-tank Brookings Institution put it more bluntly. "It does raise questions of how much of the country we are willing to sell to a Communist country we might be fighting some day."

Among other things, Unocal has underwater terrain mapping tech-

nology used for offshore oil exploration that might be useful for the operations of China's growing fleet of submarines.

The US is facing a series of thorny issues with China on other fronts right now.

It wants China to put pressure on North Korea over the nuclear issue and the six-party talks.

Washington has infuriated Beijing over its quotas on Chinese textiles and is putting pressure on China to crack down on the piracy of US movies, software and other goods and to loosen its fixed-rate currency policy.

If Bush does veto the Unocal bid, this could force China to seek closer energy — and political — partnerships with countries that the US wishes to see isolated and strangled, such as Venezuela and Iran and in central Asia, where China is already jostling in on Washington's toehold.

## Hound do they think these things up?

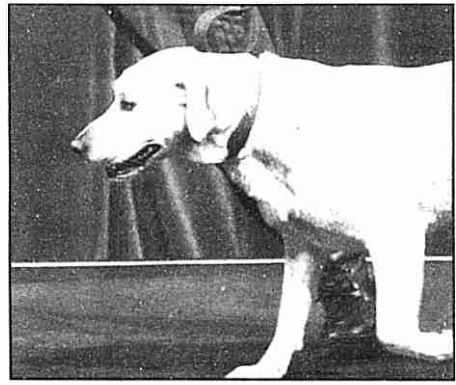
IN the endless search for a gimmick, the owners of China's millions of private restaurants are outdoing themselves.

In Beijing, a Hong Kong businessman has opened a restaurant for dogs. Owners sit their dogs in chairs and they (the dogs) are served a special range of homemade biscuits and other types of canine cuisine.

While they wait for their pets to finish their meals, the owners can huddle in a corner over beer and sandwiches.

A new restaurant in Shanghai handcuffs the clients at the door and leads them into tiny rooms done up like prison cells.

The serving staff are dressed up like ghosts and leap out unexpectedly at diners. Tortured screams punctuate the meal.



### LETTERS

## Glaring contradictions of Bush

THERE can be no moral justification for the heinous crime committed against humanity in London on July 7.

Anyone mentioning the possibility that it was a consequence of our involvement in Iraq is vilified as an apologist for terrorism, yet it was the joint intelligence committee that warned Whitehall that a war on Iraq will increase the risk of terrorism not decrease it.

This warning was not heeded by Blair, who was eager to press on with his messianic mission. I am extremely worried about the Bush-like rhetoric of "they hate us, they hate our way of life." If that was true, why did they not attack Stockholm?

How many of us are aware, that since Fallujah, the towns Al Qaim, Ramady, Haditha, Kerabla, Tel Afar and Buhruz in Iraq have had a taste of US collective punishment. Some were bombed from the air with the

inevitable consequences of innocent deaths and unnecessary destruction.

In Buhruz, north-west of Baghdad, US forces surrounded the town and cut off supplies of electricity and water for two weeks demanding that the people hand over those who attacked them on the outskirts of the town.

They had no solid proof that the attackers were residents of Buhruz or that they were sheltering there.

Do people not think that there is a glaring contradiction in Bush's message that "we are fighting international terrorism in Iraq, lest they come and attack us at home" and the "secret" decision to reduce the number of troops there, according to a recently leaked memo?

Orpington  
TAHRIR SWIFT

## Send the new Labour Making sense of the terror

THOSE who watched the recent Panorama programme on hospital cleaning must have been horrified at the revelation of corner-cutting and ignoring of basic safety regulations by the overworked employees of private contractors.

On privatisation of hospital cleaning by the Conservatives — now hypocritically demanding "cleaner hospitals" — the greedy profiteers sacked two-thirds of cleaners. How can one cleaner do three cleaners' jobs?

A friend who spent her life in nursing, including going through the London Blitz, surely the ultimate test, has told me she could not recall one case of ward infection. Beds were pulled out, horizontal surfaces cleared, so that everything could be scrupulously cleaned. Nurses and cleaners worked as team. Ward cleanliness was a clinical matter, as much as operating theatres.

The crime of "corporate manslaughter" should be sternly enforced. The free-market fanatics in the Tory government who introduced this lunacy to comply with the free market rules of Brussels.

The new Labour ministers, who have continued this criminal policy and proclaimed their intent to extend it, should be sentenced to long periods of hard labour, which should commence with cleaning up infected hospitals.

Cleethorpes  
ERIC CLEMENTS

## Making sense of the terror

THERE is no justification for terrorism. The London bombing is tragic, but we now know from the Downing Street memos that the reasons behind the war were, in fact, faked.

No-one knows what the reason was that caused these particular terrorists to act. I believe, however, that when wars are started without justification that it increases the likelihood of a terrorist attack.

When governments lie to people to start wars, it puts the safety of the people in jeopardy and it may well turn out that the British are paying the price for the moral failings of their leader.

No-one has clean hands anymore.  
MARC PERKEL  
San Francisco

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