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Chinese Culture and the Art of Parody in Stephen Chow's Comedic Films

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ABSTRACT

The art of parody in Stephen Chow's comedy films, deeply rooted in Chinese culture, is a unique phenomenon that blends humor, social satire, and creative adaptation of popular cultural elements. The study employs three primary methods: intertextuality studies to analyze the relationship between Chow's works and cultural references; narrative analysis focusing on the exaggeration of actions and situations; and sociological literary analysis to elucidate social meanings through humorous language and imagery. The findings reveal that Chow's films not only satirize social issues such as injustice and prejudice but also use exaggeration and Chinese cultural motifs to create laughter and convey profound messages. This research illuminates the cultural and social value of Chow's comedies, opening new avenues for analyzing the role of parody in reflecting identity and critiquing society.

INTRODUCTION

Stephen Chow is hailed as the king of Hong Kong comedy not only due to his film King of Comedy (1994) but also because of his over 20 years of artistic creation and activity, delivering iconic roles and hearty laughter that have left a lasting impression on audiences since the 1990s. Born in 1962, as an actor, director, screenwriter, and producer, alongside Chow Yun-fat and Jackie Chan, Stephen Chow is a towering figure in Hong Kong cinema. It seems that the name Stephen Chow, meaning "shining star," reflects the dreams and destiny of a poor boy, as in nearly all his films, he relentlessly pursues the star at the horizon of art; the characters he plays often bear the name "Star" (Tinh): Tso Chung Tinh (All for the Winner, 1990), Lau Tinh (Fist of Fury, 1991), Gu Tinh - Sa Man Tinh (Tricky Brains, 2000), Tinh Tinh (My Hero, 2000), A Tinh (Shaolin Soccer, 2001), Tinh (Kung Fu Hustle, 2004), and so on. To date, Stephen Chow has acted in nearly 60 films, starting to write scripts and direct from 1994. During this period, his most prolific artistic phase was in 1990, with 11 films, though not all were successful; from then until 1995, he participated in four to seven films annually, with The Sixty Million Dollar Man (1995) standing out. Films bearing Stephen Chow's "self-written, self-directed" hallmark consistently captivated audiences: Forbidden City Cop (1996), God of Cookery (1996), King of Comedy (1999); during this phase, he produced two to three films per year. Since taking on roles as screenwriter and producer, Stephen Chow's films require more time to reach the public, but each work achieves success and gains increasingly widespread acclaim: Shaolin Soccer (2001), Kung Fu Hustle (2004), CJ7 (2008), and others. The appeal of Stephen Chow's films likely stems from the deep layers of Chinese culture but viewed through a distinctly unique lens.

This study aims to analyze the art of parody in Stephen Chow's comedies in relation to Chinese culture. The research scope includes five representative films: All for the Winner (1990), Forbidden City Cop (1996), and King of Comedy (1999), Shaolin Soccer (2001), Kung Fu Hustle (2004). The selection of these five films is based on three main reasons. First, these films represent different creative phases in Stephen Chow's career, from his early works (All for the Winner) to his peak of international success (Kung Fu Hustle), ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of his parodic style. Second, they are frequently referenced in scholarly works such as Dong Yue (2010), Yu (2011), and Bettinson (2024), indicating their influence and recognition for artistic techniques like exaggeration, imitation, and transformation, and social satire. Third, these films exhibit diversity in themes and settings (martial arts, gambling, espionage, society), fully reflecting various aspects of the art of parody, thus providing rich data for analysis and quantification of the frequency of these techniques.

To date, studies on Stephen Chow's comedies can be categorized into three main directions, reflecting interest in exaggeration, engagement with Chinese culture, and satire of social biases. The first group focuses on the characteristics of exaggeration and amplification of situations, actions, or emotions in Stephen Chow's films. Bettinson, in The Cinema of Stephen Chow (2024), identifies exaggeration and amplification as core tools for creating comedic effects, magnifying situations, actions, and emotions to absurd levels, thereby sharply exposing social paradoxes and injustices. By exaggerating elements of popular culture and incorporating Chinese cultural motifs, Chow not only elicits laughter but also satirizes norms and social biases, conveying profound messages through a unique and striking comedic style. Yu, in 007

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in Late Colonial Hong Kong: Technology, Masculinity, and Sly Humor in Stephen Chow's From Beijing with Love (2011), argues that this exaggerated amplification targets social issues: "Chow's curious appropriation of the formulas of a three-decade-old, presumably dying, British film series well known for its imperialist ideology and sexism, not only to poke fun at the original but to engage, at times obliquely and full of sly humor, with the pressing questions of Chinese modernity, is an especially tricky business that warrants closer critical attention" (Yu, 2011, p. 88). Additionally, studies such as Niche Cinema, or, Kill Bill with Shaolin Soccer (Hitchcock, 2007) and Law and Humor in Johnnie To's Justice, My Foot (Wan, 2009) share this perspective. Thus, we formulate hypothesis

H1: The Art of Parody in Stephen Chow's Comedies Employs Exaggeration and Amplification to Create Comedic Effects and Highlight Cultural or Social Characteristics

The second group of studies revolves around imitation and engagement with Chinese culture. Notably, Chen, in Stephen Chow - the King of Comedy in Hong Kong: "Laughter in Disguise" and "Seeing beyond Believing" (2011), emphasizes that Chow's comedies use imitation to portray "inferior people," thereby "express[ing] our inner voice and appeal covertly, obliquely and implicitly as the man of the people" (Chen, 2011). Through exaggerated imitation, Chow's films, as analyzed, reflect "the conflicts or the reality of the society" while satirizing political power and social norms in mainland China, particularly in the context of Hong Kong before and after 1997 (Chen, 2011). Furthermore, De Kloet, in Cosmopatriot Contamination (2007), through an analysis of Kung Fu Hustle, notes that imitation of intertextual references from both Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema creates an "intertextual hall of mirrors," where cultural transformation triggers "an eruption of dirt that renounces any longing for cultural essence" (De Kloet, 2007). Articles by Chew (Rethinking the Cultural Relations between Hong Kong and China: An Analysis of the Chinese Reception of Stephen Chow's Films, 2022) and Yang (Martial Arts Fantasies in a Globalized Age: Kung Fu Hustle and Kung Fu Panda, 2018) also align with this view. Thus, we formulate hypothesis

H2: The Art of Parody in Stephen Chow's Comedies Relies on Imitating and Transforming Elements of Popular Culture, Films, or Comics to Create New Meanings

The third group of studies tends to focus on sociological analysis methods. Dong Yue, in Exploration of Chinese Humor: Historical Review, Empirical Findings, and Critical Reflections (2010), identifies that "nonsense humor was championed by the famous Hong Kong actor, Stephen Chow (周星馳), who acted nonsense humorously in most of the movies he played or directed" (Dong Yue, 2010), contributing to changing rigid perceptions of humor in Chinese political culture. Historically, satirical forms such as folk jokes and novels were deemed "inferior forms of aesthetic expression" due to Confucian puritanism, leading to longstanding social biases against humor; literary inquisitions in Chinese history severely restricted the use of jokes and satire, as they were considered "facetious" and unworthy of attention in classical works. Alongside studies such as Digital Copyright and the Parody Exception in Hong Kong: Accommodating the Needs and Interests of Internet Users (Peter, 2013) and Stephen Chow, King of Comedy Auteurs (Teo, 2024), we formulate hypothesis

H3: Sociological Literary Analysis can be Used to Explore How the Art of Parody in Stephen Chow's Comedies Satirizes Social Norms or Biases

Based on this system of hypotheses, the research object, methods, and aspects are identified and presented through the following model:

Table 1: Research Model

Scientific Hypothesis	Research Method	Subject Characteristics	Research Aspect	Technique
H1. Stephen Chow's parodic art aims at social satire	Intertextuality Studies	Social Satire	Relationship between text and cultural references	Integration and adaptation of popular culture elements, films, or comics
H2. Stephen Chow's parodic art centers on exaggeration	Narrative Analysis	Exaggeration	Techniques of plot and character construction	Amplification and exaggeration of situations, actions, or emotions
H3. Stephen Chow's parodic art develops in the spirit of Chinese culture	Sociological Literary Analysis	Imitation and Transformation	Themes and social significance of the work	Use of humorous language and imagery to satirize social norms or prejudices

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Parodic Laughter and a Culture

Through laughter, Stephen Chow brings cinema close to the philosophical roots of Laozi and Zhuangzi in content, ideology, and techniques. His comedy, dubbed "mo lei tau" (nonsense humor in Cantonese), is characterized by its populist content, exaggerated gestures, and deadpan "rubber face" expressions. In the films of this comedy king, audiences encounter relentless absurdity, defying character design and spatial logic, such as the finale of The Mad Monk, where the Dragon-Subduing Venerable is crowned in a ceremony, delivering a speech with lipstick from the Tiger-Subduing Arhat on his cheek: "I want to be a peace ambassador, spreading love in the mortal world so humanity understands that with love, anywhere can be paradise." At times, his humor borders on vulgarity, as seen in King of Comedy, where a scene of training students to extort gangsters by mimicking his actions leads to disastrous results. Some may critique, "It's too nonsensical!" This is an accurate assessment of Stephen Chow's style, as his aim is simple laughter for laughter's sake, or "returning to the origin through joy" (Tao Te Ching laughter without profound meaning, akin to "a newborn child" or "my mind is ignorant and dull!" (Tao Te Ching). Chinese philosophical traditions can be distilled into two streams: the formalist school, rooted in Confucius's emphasis on solemn ritual and decorum, and the free-spirited, discursive school of Laozi and Zhuangzi, where Laozi embodies subtle humor and Zhuangzi revels in free, unrestrained discourse. The former seeks practical benefits to serve rulers and states, while the latter indulges in mockery (nonsense humor) and laughter, rarely concerned with utility or meaning, akin to Yang Zhu, who wouldn't sacrifice a single leg hair for the world's benefit. Thus, ordinary characters take center stage in life's theater without pretense, like Chow's lustful A Sing, embodying Mencius's audacity: "leaping over the eastern wall to embrace a girl," a boldness rarely acknowledged by Confucian scholars.

Following this, Stephen Chow's films embody the free-spirited, satirical tradition found in Zhuangzi's discourses and Tao Yuanming's poetry, marked by surprise, spontaneity, paradox, and pretense. Surprise lies in unpredictable transformations that awaken audiences with unconventional reasoning, as in The Mad Monk's critique of the Moon Elder: "This old Moon Elder, relying on his red threads, causes chaos in the mortal world. Take Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai why didn't you tie their red thread, causing their deaths? They didn't wrong you! Retire already. You might mess up, tying men with women, women with men, or even humans with pigs…" Spontaneity is effortless and unobstructed, often manifesting as self-deprecating parables, or "self-mocking humor" (Bryan Walsh, 2003), such as transforming into a superhero (Superhero of All Trades) with household items like pans, rice cookers, and toothpaste, remaining unfazed despite upheaval. Paradox, inspired by Laozi's "true words seem contradictory," refines truths through inversion and supplementation in casual fables, like in Ghostbusters: "[Why didn't you die when the ghost strangled you?] Strangling is one thing, dying is another don't confuse them…" or "If a caterpillar can become a butterfly, a chicken can become a phoenix" (The Mad Monk). This maximizes the quality of "seeming" (ruo), embracing infinite possibilities where deceptive training yields extraordinary skills (Destroyer King) or a street kid with a 20-cent manual becomes a martial arts master (Kung Fu Hustle). Above all, Stephen Chow's films impart lessons of compassion, care for family, friends, and society's underdogs. His laughter is not bitter but a means of enlightenment. If reading Cervantes thrice evokes laughter, reflection, and tears, watching Stephen Chow's films feels much the same.

Rooted in Chinese cultural traditions, Stephen Chow's laughter and comedy reflect modern thinking. Through a subversive, desacralizing lens, he presents an unconventional Sun Wukong (A Chinese Odyssey) and reinterprets Tang Monk's baldness and spiritual journey. As a British colony for 100 years (1897–1997), Hong Kong comedy inherited British stand-up traditions, with expressive faces and language creating unexpected situations, as in King of Comedy's assistant director audition, rapidly shifting expressions: awaiting a wife's delivery, a baby's birth, the wife's death, the baby calling "daddy," a monstrous baby, winning the lottery, hitting the jackpot, the baby's death, and the wife's revival, yet remaining expressionless because "extreme stimulation drives people mad, leaving them unresponsive." Or declarations like, "If you surrender before the first full moon next year, I'll spare you" (Tricky Master). Additionally, Chow draws from the 1980s–90s spoof film wave, like Airplane, Hot Shots!, and Naked Gun. Aiming to parody blockbusters, spoof films offer classic experiences with humorous emotions through exaggerated imitation for entertainment. Thus, All for the Winner (1990) spoofs Chow Yun-fat's The Gambler, From Beijing with Love (1994) parodies the James Bond series, White-Faced Bao Qingtian (1994) mocks the TV series Justice Bao starring Jin Chao-chun, Ghostbusters (1995) parodies The Professional, and God of Cookery (1996) spoofs MasterChef and Tsui Hark's The Chinese Feast. Chow even subverts Shaolin Temple legends, with A Sing in Shaolin Soccer declaring, "Singing is the only way I can express my admiration," reflecting Chow's style of weaving musical elements, songs, vaudeville, and folk dances into films, like evoking dreams with a bun-making girl (Shaolin Soccer) or the Axe Gang's dance (Kung Fu Hustle). This fusion eliminates boundaries, blending Shakespearean tragicomedy with a borderless modern world Shaolin kung fu with music and dance, Tai Chi with dough-kneading, and soccer matches with wrenches, hammers, wrestling, and bone-cracking. From A Sing's perspective amid dust, punches, and weapons, the camera reveals a fallen junior monk drooling, recreating war film scenes with fantastical gunfire, explosions, and helmet-clutching.

Yet, despite adopting Western techniques and modern thinking, Stephen Chow's films remain deeply Chinese. A kung fu enthusiast since childhood, idolizing Bruce Lee and growing up in Hong Kong's cinematic golden age, Chow parallels Jin Yong's integration of Buddhist culture into novels, turning scriptures into Shaolin techniques (Flower-Picking Finger, Veda Palm). Chow brings Shaolin skills to soccer with Iron Head, Iron Shirt, Iron Foot, and Arhat Formation, extending to other martial styles like Lion's Roar, Twelve Tan Kicks, Iron Thread Fist, and Five Lang Eight Trigrams Staff (Kung Fu Hustle). While Jin Yong's Han-centric worldview casts Eastern Heretic, Western Venom, Southern Emperor, and Northern Beggar as the "Four Barbarians" (Southern Man, Northern Di, Eastern Yi, Western Rong), Chow, in a new context, portrays America as a malevolent force, doping the Black Shirt team (Shaolin Soccer). Chow's films crystallize Hong Kong cinema's classics, providing a foundation for his creativity. The assassins' zither duel (Kung Fu Hustle) reimagines 1965's Six-Fingered Zither Demon, now vividly realized as blades, fists, and sonic barriers against spears. Western Venom's Toad Style becomes the Old Monster's technique, and Tathagata Palm, inspired by Buddha's hand subduing Sun Wukong from films 50 years prior, delivers striking visual and artistic impact in Kung Fu Hustle. The final image of a lotus-shaped hidden weapon, its iron needles forming a soaring golden lotus amid clouds shaped like Nalan, revives the tale of Buddha's flower sermon and Kasyapa's smile.

Thus, Stephen Chow's comedies weave a vibrant tapestry from the dark threads of Laozi and Zhuangzi, the vivid strands of modern thought, the blurred patches of local meaning, and the bold Western hues. But what defines Chow's essence? Perhaps it is the lowly.

Aesthetics of the Lowly

Stephen Chow's path to art was as winding as his life. Short in stature in the 1980s, when stars like Chow Yun-fat towered, he pivoted to hosting children's TV shows, gaining a youthful perspective and carving his own path amidst giants. Charlie Chaplin's Modern Times inspired the deadpan, bewildered face of a man alienated by modernity. A Sing (Kung Fu Hustle) echoes Chow's voice: "My idol is Bruce Lee," with the lesson to "channel strength from waist to feet," paving his martial arts cinematic journey. Unlike Jet Li's performative kung fu or Jackie Chan's comedic fight choreography, Chow's humor lies in language, storytelling, gestures, and deadpan expressions. His kung fu evokes predecessors, with wide-open mouths, sharp eyes, and a forward-leaning stance, exuding a childlike arrogance believing in its world despite repeated collapses, miraculously inspiring others to believe too. His comedy hinges on mundane, even trivial details, reflecting keen observation: in King of Comedy, the failed comedian's return passes a child (seemingly dead), entering a welfare office with a ping-pong paddle and basketball, where kids play badminton, wrestle, play billiards, and sleep naked on a ping-pong table. These eccentricities, odd to Western eyes, resonate with East Asian culture, as Chow elevates the lowly into a central artistic paradigm.

In relation to beauty and humor, the lowly is an aesthetic category, a life and art perspective viewing existence as an antithesis of good-evil, beautiful-ugly, noble-base, polished-disheveled. Postmodern irreverence, akin to Rabelais or Cervantes, fosters dialogue over idolization, revealing the self. Parodic tone emerges from this self-other dialogue, a bittersweet laugh at life's ironies, uncovering absurdities and aspiring to goodness. The lowly, thus, is a lucid reflection on life. In its simplest sense, it encompasses phenomena, traits, behaviors, or spirits falling outside normal bounds small, ordinary, or trivial in content and form, evoking unease or mild disdain for their diminutive scale. Opposite to beauty and nobility, it observes humanity from above, yet is vital, as Chow states: "The lowly is humanity's first lesson. Only by mastering it can we shine."

The lowly underpins Chow's nonsense humor. With a broad scope, his parodic targets are life's vices vanity, betrayal, flattery embodied in characters. Using the lowly, he pushes subjects to extremes, exposing human flaws, like licking dung off a gangster's shoe (Tricky Master) or urinating in an elevator (God of Cookery). Chow excels at depicting utterly deplorable characters: filthy, drooling, with crusty eyes, worms in ears, and cockroaches in hair (King of Comedy); or utterly humiliated, like the senior disciple stripping to wave underwear as a surrender flag, forced to wear an opponent's briefs on his head to see a doctor, admitting to being a dog (Shaolin Soccer); or the comedian king, expelled from a set, begging for a lunchbox only to have it fed to dogs (King of Comedy). These desperate scenes reflect Chow's impoverished childhood, shared by stars like Jackie Chan and Andy Lau, fostering gratitude for their achievements. As a catharsis, Chow's films uplift society's lowly morally, socially, or ethically like The Mad Monk's effort to redeem Bai Xiaoyu (a nine-lifetime prostitute), Zhou Yizhang (a nine-lifetime beggar), and Yuan Batian (a nine-lifetime villain). To achieve this cinematically, Chow invests in language and techniques. His nonsense humor ensures accessibility with rapid wordplay: "I'm a trendsetter, driving countless girls wild, revolutionizing cinema, inspiring youth, dashing and suave, the nimble Tricky Master, Koo Jing, or Jing Koo in English" (Tricky Master). Instant contrast highlights internal conflicts; dual camera shifts juxtapose grandeur with misery (Thunderstorm stage scene); saintly schoolgirl imagery clashes with a vulgar prostitute's speech (King of Comedy). Chow's nonsense humor echoes Chinese populist traditions pioneered by Lu Xun. Recognizing the lowly is the first step to nobility, as self-negation reveals profound strength, per the I Ching: "At an impasse, transform; through transformation, progress." With happy endings, Chow's comedies uphold humanism, celebrating sincere emotions (God of Cookery), mature responsibility (Fight Back to School),

human faith (The Mad Monk), transforming the lowly into beauty—the aesthetics of the lowly.

Comedy as a Parodic Technique

The investigation of parodic techniques in Stephen Chow's comedies followed these steps. Five representative films (Shaolin Soccer (2001), Kung Fu Hustle (2004), All for the Winner (1990), Forbidden City Cop (1996), King of Comedy (1999)) were analyzed to identify scenes or elements illustrating three techniques: Exaggeration, Imitation and Transformation, and Social Satire. Each film's notable scenes (approximately 10–15 per film) were examined to record technique occurrences, with scenes labeled for one or more techniques based on characteristics (e.g., physics-defying action in Kung Fu Hustle counted as Exaggeration, James Bond parody in Forbidden City Cop as Imitation and Transformation). A raw data table was compiled by counting scenes per technique per film: Shaolin Soccer (7 Exaggeration, 4 Imitation and Transformation, 2 Social Satire), Kung Fu Hustle (8, 4, 3), All for the Winner (4, 6, 2), Forbidden City Cop (5, 7, 2), King of Comedy (4, 3, 5). Across 67 analyzed scenes, Exaggeration appeared 28 times, Imitation and Transformation 24 times, and Social Satire 15 times.

Table 2: The Frequency of Parody Techniques in Stephen Chow's Comedy Films

Film	Exaggeration	Imitation and Transformation	Social Satire	Total Scenes
Shaolin Soccer (2001)	7	4	2	13
Kung Fu Hustle (2004)	8	4	3	15
All for the Winner (1990)	4	6	2	12
Forbidden City Cop (1996)	5	7	2	14
King of Comedy (1999)	4	3	5	12
Total	**28**	**24**	**15**	**67**
Percentage (%)	41.8% (rounded: 40%)	35.8% (rounded: 35%)	22.4% (rounded: 25%)	100%

To quantify, the frequency of occurrences was standardized into percentages: Exaggeration (28/67 ≈ 41.8%, rounded to 40%), Imitation and Transformation (24/67 ≈ 35.8%, rounded to 35%), and Social Satire (15/67 ≈ 22.4%, rounded to 25%).

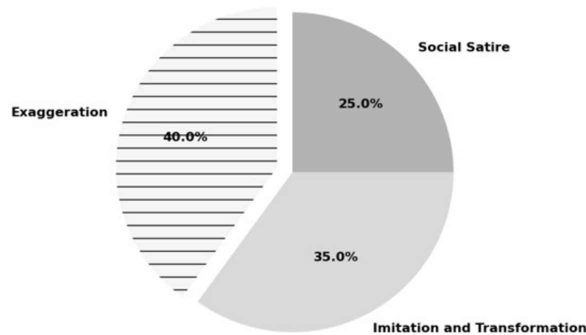

Figure 1: Proportion of parody techniques in Stephen Chow comedy films

In Stephen Chow's comedic films, exaggeration accounts for 40%, imitation and transformation 35%, and social satire 25%, reflecting a creative strategy that balances entertainment with artistic depth. Exaggeration, the most dominant technique, generates instant laughter through absurd actions and situations, aligning with the tastes of mass audiences and Hong Kong's fast-paced urban lifestyle. Imitation and transformation, at 35%, leverage intertextuality to recreate familiar cultural elements, appealing to diverse audiences from local to international. Social satire, though only 25%, subtly weaves critiques of injustice and consumerism, adding depth without compromising entertainment. This distribution ensures commercial success while shaping the unique "mo lei tau" style, challenging cultural norms and leaving a lasting impact on cinema. In essence, these techniques are not isolated but seamlessly integrated, transitioning between tragedy and comedy, the sublime and the mundane.

To convey both tradition and modernity, achieving a transformation from the base to the sublime, Stephen Chow masterfully employs parody across multiple levels. At the philosophical level, he parodies concepts, blending tragedy and comedy to depict how the clash between the ugly and the beautiful generates humor. Humor serves as laughter that rejects the ugly, affirms the beautiful, yet becomes an undeniable facet. This principle builds on life's contradictions old versus new, form versus content. Plato and Aristotle attributed humor to envy; Hobbes proposed the theory of disparagement; Bergson suggested laughter stems from perceiving others' flaws and personal pride; Kant introduced the Incongruity or Nullified Expectation theory; Freud suggested the relief of psychic energy. Thus, humor elicits laughter by rejecting the ugly, where conflicts between the flawed and the beautiful provoke amusement. These contradictions, and the perceiving subject, carry social tendencies: humor, wit, satire, or critique. However, Chow's films, where good triumphs, avoid harsh criticism, opting for lighthearted wit that resonates with mass audiences.

At the structural level, parody involves adopting a cultural presupposition or object for critique. Chow's films adhere to the structure of Hong Kong martial arts cinema: a stable protagonist faces disruption, descends into suffering and failure, then, through serendipity, achieves success, defeats the enemy, and gains fame. Chow's brilliance lies in creating "punching bag" characters pushed to their limits.

On this foundation, he parodies iconic cultural figures like Tang Bohu (Flirting Scholar, 1993), Wei Xiaobao (Royal Tramp), Justice Bao (Hail the Judge), and Sun Wukong (A Chinese Odyssey). Most notably, he parodies plot details: Sha Wenjie transforms into a Hulk-like giant after drinking a potion (Tricky Brains), or Fatso tells Sing in Kung Fu Hustle, "With great power comes great responsibility, no escape," echoing Spider-Man's uncle's dying words. Kung Fu Hustle, a culmination of Chow's 20-year career, is a compendium of such parodies, incorporating everything from local Palm of Buddha to Matrix effects, Road Runner chases, and Liu Chia-Hui's fight scenes. Gangsters become the Axe Gang, inspired by Hong Kong cinema; the "Lion's Roar" is drawn from Ashes of Time. Chow even includes a Top Hat poster and has characters mimic its pose. Master Bao and his wife blend Mr. & Mrs. Smith with Yang Guo and Xiaolongnü's romance, while the Old Monster echoes Fire Cloud Evil God from Dragon Gate and Wang Yulan's comics. The 1960s Palm of Buddha, once creating a small hole in a wall, becomes a giant handprint in Kung Fu Hustle, leveling buildings. Motifs like mentoring after subjugation or duels ending in mutual destruction, common in Hong Kong films, are revived. Chow distills childhood memories into his films, demanding cultural and historical knowledge to fully appreciate his parodic cinema. Parodying Hollywood's 007, Chow creates Forbidden City Cop, inventing Western-inspired gadgets, introducing aliens into feudal China, and calling it "Heavenly Fairy." The character Ling Ling Fat (008) mimics 007, with "eight" (fat) favored in Chinese culture, making 008 a model househusband. CJ7 draws from China's sixth rocket launch; Taiwan's 1968 anti-Japanese film Yangtze No. 1 inspires Yangtze No. 7, continuing espionage codenames.

Chow's parody extends to life, combining unrelated elements like kung fu and soccer with high-tech effects to delight audiences. Life lessons leave his mark: food carries emotion twice twice: Carefree Soul Rice (God of Cookery) and bitter-salty buns (Shaolin Soccer). Crucially, Chow uncovers truths often overlooked, emphasizing imagination's power. In Tricky Brains, a character in a mental asylum explains, "[Anything can happen.] Why? Because you lack imagination; they say imagination is more important than anything; with imagination, anything is possible," folding a paper hat and "flying" upward. Bitter life lessons emerge: Tang Niu endures humiliation to betray the God of Cookery, or Xiong betrays his boss to take his place (Shaolin Soccer).

How does Chow achieve this? His "quirky" acting is key. Screenwriter Stephen Kelly notes, "You see a unique cinematic style, films defying conventional time and form. Silly but not stupid, wild but not exhausting, his comedies are vulgar, physical, with quirky characters and, of course, cat-scratch kung fu. Fans of refined films like Crouching Tiger won't find it here. Stephen Chow, Hong Kong's comedy king, simply wants you to laugh" (Kelly, 2003).

Echoing Bergson's idea of humor as "mechanical encrusted on the living," Chow uses misplaced phrases and actions: "Teach me soccer! [Hold on], It's evening; time waits for no one" (Shaolin Soccer). Placing a comedy king with deep insight emotions must flow naturally, professionalism means acting through "action" to "cut into an amateur actor's role highlights life's incongruities and art's harshness.

Technical effects, borrowed from master directors, enhance Chow's artistry. In Kung Fu Hustle, black-and-white flashbacks feature a lone colored lollipop, linking past and present, inspired by Schindler's List's red-coated girl as a symbol of innocence. Hollywood-inspired illusions, like flames behind the Shaolin team or a blood river when Sing meets the Old Monster, add flair. Modern techniques: freezing scenes, backlighting the Black Riders' cruelty, exaggerating match outcomes with storm-like devastation, or the final Once Upon a Time in China-style group kung fu with youths in suits boarding a double-decker bus elevate his vision.

CONCLUSION

The study of comedic techniques in Stephen Chow's films reveals a clear distribution: exaggeration (40%), imitation and transformation (35%), and social satire (25%), reflecting a creative strategy balancing entertainment and artistic depth. This confirms the hypothesis that Chow's "mo lei tau" style relies on flexibly combining techniques to engage diverse audiences and challenge cultural norms. Exaggeration delivers instant laughter, imitation and transformation leverage intertextuality for relatability, and social satire adds reflective depth. The quantitative analysis of technique ratios, combined with Hong Kong's cultural context and humor theory, proves apt in elucidating Chow's distinctive style. Scientifically, the study offers a systematic view of how comedic techniques interact in Hong Kong cinema, enriching intercultural humor theory. Practically, it aids filmmakers in crafting commercially viable yet socially meaningful content and deepens audience appreciation of Chow's artistry. Limitations include its focus on select films, omitting Chow's full oeuvre, and lacking empirical audience feedback. Future research should expand to other films, incorporate audience surveys to assess the technique's impact, and compare with other comedic directors to highlight Chow's uniqueness globally. Ultimately, as a cinematic phenomenon from the 1990s onward, Stephen Chow's comedies exemplify the fusion of culture, era, and personal talent in shaping a distinct artistic style. Some may find his absurd humor unappealing, but many cherish every frame for its vibrant artistry. Chow's techniques and vision color childhoods, inspire heroic dreams, console bitter failures, and, above all, offer laughter when life denies it.

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