

East beats West

Briton Bey Logan has made a name for himself producing martial arts films, writes **Clarence Tsui**

To reach Bey Logan's office in Sheung Wan, visitors have to make their way through Wing Lok Street, past stores with mostly middle-aged merchants doing brisk business selling dried seafood. SoHo this certainly isn't.

"I can't understand why people would want to live here without even thinking of speaking the language and getting to know the culture," says the 49-year-old film producer. Having lived in Hong Kong for nearly 25 years – during which he grew from a martial arts enthusiast into a film industry mover who counts Jackie Chan among his collaborators – Logan says he sees Hong Kong very much as his adopted home. He's even got a Chinese name to prove it – Gan Bei-on, given to him by Daniel Lee Yan-kong, the director of *Dragon Squad*, the 2005 action film he helped produce.

"Daniel said to Maggie Quigley and me, 'You know you guys haven't made it to the top of the profession because your names are not lucky enough – so I'll give you new names, and you will have more success.' He did all this hocus-pocus, the whole routine with the fong shui thing, and he gave me this new name," says Logan, whose Chinese name means "near the other shore".

"I don't know what Maggie's new name was – Ho Leng-lui ['very beautiful girl'] or whatever – but within a week she was offered a job

with Tom Cruise on *Mission: Impossible III* and I became vice-president at the Weinstein Company."

Logan says that complete assimilation is not what he wants. Such self-awareness is in full display when Logan explains how the name of his film company, B&E Productions, means "Breaking and Entering". It refers more to the idea of an outsider trying to force his way into a system and engage with it rather than the criminal charge.

"I'm always thinking it's East-meets-West," he says. "My company's mission statement would be to use our abilities and resources available, to bring the best elements of the East and the West for the enjoyment of all."

The latest example of this is B&E's first project, *The Blood Bond Saga: Shadowguard*. Its story about two fighters battling their way through a villain-infested fictional Southeast Asian country has all the hallmarks of both 1980s Hong Kong films (many of which portrayed countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines as tropical, crime-ridden hellholes) and American B-movies.

However, the cast and crew are distinctly international. Playing the leads are Michael Biehn (of *Terminator* fame, who also directed the film) and American-Chinese newcomer Phoenix Valen Chou; Hong Kong's Simon Yam Tat-wah and mainland model-turned-actor Emma Pei play the antagonists. The film's cinematographer is Ross Clarke, an Australian who has worked on a few Ringo Lam Ling-tung vehicles; the action is set up by

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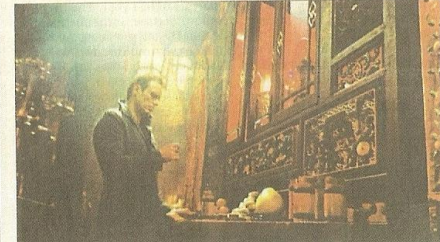
Bey Logan (above)

Louis Fan Siu-wong, who recently secured a career rebirth through his turns on the *Ip Man* films.

"Over the years I have watched endless Hong Kong action films and it's almost like they went into my subconsciousness," says Logan, who wrote the film's original screenplay, which he has since rewritten and released as a novel.

"There's one kind of devotee of Hong Kong film who will say, 'Let's just stage it like it is, as I can remember every scene and every movie and every actor.' To me, it's what I can do with what's deep in my psyche and how I can change it to tell my own story."

Born in Stamford, a small English town with a population of less than 20,000, Logan fell in love with Hong Kong cinema as a child, when he first saw Bruce Lee's high kicks. Despite spending his teenage years at Uppingham School, Logan's obsession hardly waned: "A lot of people have colourful ambitions



Michael Biehn (above) in Daniel Lee's *Dragon Squad*; Biehn and Phoenix Valen Chou (left) in *Blood Bond Saga: Shadowguard*. Photo: Edward Wong

they talk themselves out of, (but) I can say the life I'm living is definitely, absolutely, the life I would wish for myself when I was 20."

Logan was 18 when he came to Hong Kong in 1979, after telling his worried parents that his aim in life was to make films with Jackie Chan. Returning home, he learned martial arts, founded an action choreography magazine, and finally returned to Hong Kong in 1995.

"I think it's easy to fall into the trap of coming here and becoming a fake Chinese person," he says. "Of course, the more linguistic skills you have the better, but if you come in and try to do the job a Chinese person is doing, it's not going to work and people will not take you seriously... I realise in Hong Kong it is about what you can do to help that person make more money that they can't do themselves."

"I got my foot in the door

translating promotional material, press releases, subtitles, anything I can find that could help me. After doing that, the obvious next step is [when producers say] 'We need somebody to write a script – Bey could do that... we need somebody to direct a scene and, hey, Bey could do that too.'"

Logan joined Media Asia in 1998 and eventually was asked to write and produce the documentary *Jackie Chan: My Story*. His career took flight as he soon became involved in the company's *Gen-X Cops* and its sequel *Gen-Y Cops*. He joined Emperor Entertainment in 2001, reuniting with Chan as a screenwriter for *The Medallion* (2003), and then producing (and appearing in a small undead role) in the company's vampire action caper *The Twins Effect*.

Leaving Emperor in 2004, he joined forces with Quigley to form

Shankala Productions (the name, in Cantonese slang, means "far-flung land"). This collaboration led to the pair's involvement in *Dragon Squad*.

Harvey Weinstein then recruited Logan to attend to his company's acquisitions and co-productions in Asia – he now says he's the one who told the media mogul that Donnie Yen "was going to be great – and in time it came to be". (Yen choreographed and directed action scenes for two Weinstein pictures, *Highlander: Endgame* and *Stormbreaker*.)

Logan says he left Weinstein partly out of frustration about the company's lack of interest in producing films for the mainland market. "It's a big arena with all these moving parts," he says, recalling last year's second world war thriller *Shanghai*, starring Chow Yun-fat, Gong Li and John Cusack.

With his own company, he got to

be an independent producer. He talks about his studio facilities in Nanhai (where *Shadowguard* was shot), a post-production lab in Guangzhou and an animation workshop in North Point.

After *Shadowguard*, Logan takes on his directorial debut, a samurai film called *Snow Blade*. Logan says he has become more pragmatic about "the commercial and social realities of Hong Kong filmmaking". Exhibit A: *Beach Spike*, an action comedy to be released in March, with Christie Chan Sau-na and Phoenix Valen Chou starring as agile, scantily-clad beach volleyball players.

"Hot Asian girls, kung fu, bikinis, what more do you want?" he laughs. Now that's pragmatism.

The Blood Bond Saga: Shadowguard opens on Jan 27; the novel, *The Blood Bond*, is out now