

THE HONG KONG WUXIA MOVIE: IDENTITY AND POLITICS, 1966-1976

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Thesis Abstract

In analyzing the production and reception of the *wuxia* movie in Hong Kong during the 1960s and 1970s, this paper argues that the popularity of the genre was not solely due to its entertainment value; rather, its warm reception by audiences not only in Hong Kong, but in large parts of the Chinese diaspora, was because the *wuxia pian* belongs to a long historical literary and political culture that traces back to China's imperial past. Far from a novelty, the *wuxia pian* was a modernized visual medium with themes and characters that were already familiar to people who read and watched plays, operas, and *wuxia* novels. Moreover, *wuxia* filmmakers were not mere imitators of the latest cinematic advances from Hollywood, but instead were innovators interested in recreating the splendor of the past through cinema, drawing inspiration from traditional stories, music, and fighting techniques while experimenting with western film technology and theory.

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I. Introduction

In 2000, a *wuxia* genre film produced with a diminutive budget of \$15 million named Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon surpassed all expectations by grossing over \$200 million worldwide and outperforming all other Chinese-language films in Asia. It became the most commercially successful foreign-language film in American history and the first Asian-produced feature to earn a mass audience in the West. Having achieved rave reviews from Cannes film festival critics, it was nominated for multiple Academy Awards. Ang Lee's film was proclaimed a masterpiece that redefined Chinese culture in the Western imagination.

Yet, the success of the modern *wuxia* film was rediscovery rather than an innovation, for the *wuxia* genre has had a long history in Chinese culture and cinema. Since a majority of the *wuxia* films were made in Hong Kong between the 1960s and 1970s, it is logical starting point in examining Hong Kong's cultural history and also the formation of the colony's "Chinese identity." Unlike other film genres, the *wuxia* has been in continuous production since the end of World War II, and was once the most prolific genre in both the Hong Kong and overseas Chinese cinema. Even though fashions and styles have changed, the *wuxia* genre has been enduring. It was no coincidence that the *wuxia* popularity concurred with the most chaotic period in Chinese history, when the Mainland experienced the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and simultaneously disconnected its people from the diaspora.

Disillusioned and yearning for their lost homeland, Chinese audiences in Hong Kong found the *wuxia* appropriate not only as an avenue for escapism, but also as a connection with an idealized past. In analyzing the production and reception of the *wuxia*

pian in Hong Kong during the 1960s and 1970s, this paper argues that the popularity of the genre was not solely due to its entertainment value; rather, its warm reception by audiences not only in Hong Kong, but in large parts of the Chinese diaspora, was because the *wuxia pian* belongs to a long historical literary and political culture that traces back to China's imperial past. Far from a novelty, the *wuxia pian* was but a modernized visual medium with themes and characters that were already familiar to people who read and watched plays, operas, and *wuxia* novels. Moreover, *wuxia* filmmakers were not mere imitators of the latest cinematic advances from Hollywood, but instead were innovators interested in recreating the splendor of the past through cinema which drew inspiration from traditional stories, music, and fighting techniques while experimenting with western film technology and theory. Mostly refugees who fled the Mainland, these individuals were a segment of an exiled society living in a colony which it never considered home. *Wuxia* filmmakers such as Hu Jinquan (known as King Hu in the West) can thus be seen as part of an intellectual continuum since the late Qing Dynasty that not only longed for the glory of its past in the face of Western imperialism, but one that also searched for a distinctly national culture.

II. The Cultural History of the *Xia* (俠)

The *xia* is much more than just an social group, for it has had long history in Chinese literature, particularly as traditional heroes in Chinese popular fiction. Although records of the *xia* can be found as far back as the Warring States period (403-221 BCE),¹

¹ As is recorded in Sima Qian's Records of the Historian, or *Shiji* (史記). James Liu. The Chinese Knight-Errant. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967): 13-16.

the modern concept of the *xia* first appeared in Chinese literature in the *zhiguai* (records of anomalies) during the Southern-Northern dynasties (420-589) when China was again disordered and divided; subsequently, the *zhiguai* developed into the *chuanqi* (accounts of the extraordinary) during the late Tang Dynasty when recurrent political strife and civil wars led to its downfall. In turn, the *chuanqi* evolved into the *huaben* during the Song dynasty (960-1276), as a form of oral stories told by professional storytellers. By the Ming and Qing dynasties, the *xia* appeared in the form of the novel.²

Thus, the majority of *wuxia pian* were inspired by *wuxia* literature, particularly modern novels. Tracing their roots in Tang dynasty *chuanqi* prose romances, which contained many of the elements of magic, supernatural events and vengeance, as well as *huaben* tales of Song dynasty storytellers,³ *wuxia* novels are often about *yinzi'er* (tales of strange events) and *gongan* (detective stories), as well as *tie qi'er* (tales of martial heroism). The pioneers of the *wuxia* genre that were written during the Ming and Qing dynasties thus set many of the standards for subsequent modern *wuxia* novels. Whereas novels such as the The Water Margin were thinly veiled criticisms of the government, others novels like the various *gongan* detective novels were made for popular consumption. *Wuxia* novels, often serialized in newspapers and running to hundreds of pages, became mass literature in Shanghai shortly thereafter. *Wuxia* characters and plots also penetrated into the Peking Opera by the nineteenth century, and alluring acrobatics

² In novels, the *xia* deploys numerous magical elements, and often had superhuman. Many stories played on the boundary between pure fantasy and what might be barely possible for a supremely trained and gifted warrior: not really flying, but through control of the "weightless leap"; not being invincible but being able, through control of breathing qigong, to make the body as hard as iron. Thus, to fully enjoy the *wuxia* tale we must grant that supreme skill in martial arts could give a fighter extraordinary powers. 陳平原. 千古文人俠客夢: 武俠小說類型研究. (台北: 麥田出版有限公司, 1997): 42-44 and 133-137; and James Liu. *The Chinese Knight-Errant*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967): 129-130.

³ *Huaben* tales were extremely popular during this period, the name coming from the prompt books used by the storytellers as mnemonic devices. Eric Yin. "An Introduction to the *Wuxia* Genre." Heroic Cinema Film Journal. <<<http://www.heroic-cinema.com/eric/xia.html>>> (2004).

only added to their impact. As Chinese filmmaking emerged in the 1920s, screenwriters drew stories from martial arts plays and novels, building scripts around both male and female adventurers.

Unlike in Japan, where only members of the samurai class could carry a sword, in imperial China both aristocrats and commoners could become professional swordsmen. Since the land was ruled by rival warlords, an unattached fighter could become a killer for hire. This sordid reality became glamorized in the *wuxia* tales and had great popularity after the ninth century. China had an often tense history of corrupt and tyrannical regimes, dislodged only by court intrigue and assassination. Since civil society could not guarantee the rule of law, the *wuxia* knight-errant became the central hero of popular imagination. He or she was an outlaw who could deliver vengeance in a society where law held no authority. The revenge motive took on moral resonance through the Confucian scale of obligations: the child owes a duty to the father, the pupil to the teacher.

The popularity of the *wuxia* genre over the years was due to the fact most people suffered from constant wars and confronted by the fragility of life.⁴ As Mingyu Wang argues, these stories were drawn from actual assassins, loyal slaves, and swordsmen, especially during periods of chaos, and had a psychological effect of soothing the anguished minds of the people in the imaginary world of heroes when they were disappointed to the real life.⁵

At the turn of the century as China experienced the crisis of western imperialism, political and social reformers such as Liang Qichao and Zhang Taiyan used and discussed

⁴ James Liu. *The Chinese Knight-Errant*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967): 193-194.

⁵ Yu Mingyu. *China: Once Upon a Time/Hong Kong: 1997: A Critical Study of Contemporary Hong Kong Martial Arts Films*. PhD Dissertation. (University of Maryland, 1995): 103-105.

the *xia* in advocating their own ideas of restoring the spirit and dignity of the nation.⁶ As Robert Ruhlmann asserts, the *xia*'s role in Chinese literature provided channels of expression for feelings that had little to do with the elite influence; instead, such stories provided a subversive function in challenging the dominant power structure.⁷ In this light, the *wuxia* film genre is very much a continuum of a cultural practice in Chinese history, for it acted as a political vehicle for artists and intellectuals adamant in resisting political and social injustice.

Having evolved from the May 4th movement in 1919, modern *wuxia* literary movement called for a break with Confucian values as it highlighted the knight-errant, or *xia* (俠), as the symbol of personal freedom, defiance to Confucian tradition, and rejection of the Chinese family system. Because of its controversial themes, *wuxia* literature was frequently banned during the Qing dynasty and Republican era. Although these bans inhibited the growth of the *wuxia* genre, its resurgence occurred after World War II, exemplified by the work of influential authors such as Huanzhu Louzhu, Wang Dulu,⁸ Yao Minai, who wrote about secret societies while combining it with melodramas.⁹ Popularity in the *wuxia* novel surged in 1920s Shanghai due to their highly nationalistic tales about Chinese heroes striking back at Western imperialists.¹⁰

⁶ Yu Mingyu. *China: Once Upon a Time/Hong Kong: 1997: A Critical Study of Contemporary Hong Kong Martial Arts Films*. PhD Dissertation. (University of Maryland, 1995): 107.

⁷ Robert Ruhlmann. "Traditional Heroes in Chinese Popular Fiction." *The Confucian Persuasion*. Ed. A.F. Wright. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960): 145-147.

⁸ Wang Dulu is the author of the modern day film of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

⁹ Divided into two distinct factions, the Northern school *wuxia* novelists were centered in Beijing which followed a traditional approach of focusing on traditional values while basing their stories in a historical context of realism, the Southern school was centered in Shanghai which developed from the new literary movements influenced by the West, particularly the employment of the pulp fiction. Eric Yin. "An Introduction to the *Wuxia* Genre." *Heroic Cinema Film Journal* <<<http://www.heroic-cinema.com/eric/xia.html>>> (2004).

¹⁰ In fact, the Boxers (義和團), who believed themselves impregnable to Western bullets, were influenced by the *wuxia* fantasy tales of invincibility of their characters. David Bordwell. *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 201.

The second and more influential phase on the *wuxia* literary genre was launched in the transitional period between the 1950s and 1960s. As an intriguing development in Hong Kong literary culture, “New Wave” martial arts novels published at that time became immensely popular, and thus inspired a new surge of interest in the fantastic side of the *wuxia* genre. This phenomenon inexorably fed into the developing Mandarin cinema. But although the *wuxia* films of the mid-1960s were rarely actually adapted from novels, the attempt to formulate a specifically cinematic genre was nonetheless an essential factor in the genre’s success at the time.¹¹

The Legacy of Jin Yong’s Wuxia Novels

In Hong Kong, the popularity of new *wuxia* novels rivaled that of the *wuxia pian*. But the novelist who defined the genre is Louis Cha, whose literary name is Jin Yong (金庸). Born in 1924 in Zhejiang province, Jin trained as a diplomat but pursued a career in journalism instead. He took a job as a writer for the Da Gong Bao newspaper situated in Shanghai, but was later sent to the Hong Kong office. Bored with reporting, he went into the film industry, first reviewing films and then as a screenplay writer and director for the Great Wall Movie Enterprises. In 1958, he and Shen Baosin founded a newspaper publishing company called Ming Bao Daily News, which later on became one of the major newspapers in Hong Kong. Because his novels were also published in his newspaper, readers bought Ming Bao more for Jin’s *wuxia* serials than news stories. In 1955, Louis Cha wrote his first feature length novel that would later become the Romance of the Book and Sword (書劍恩仇錄). Following the book’s immense success,

¹¹石琪, “香港電影的打發展.” 香港功夫電影研究: 第四屆香港國際電影節. (*A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film: The 4th Hong Kong International Film Festival*). 主篇: The 4th Hong Kong International Film Festival. 香港: 香港市政局, 1980: 14-15.

Jin began his writing professionally for more than thirty years.¹² When his last series, Deer and the Cauldron (鹿鼎記), was finished in September 1972, he retired from writing.¹³

Like the *wuxia* movie, the appeal of *wuxia* novels for Chinese audiences is more than just entertainment and escapism. Notwithstanding the engaging characters, plots in addition to themes of loyalty, compassion, honour, central to Jin's *wuxia* novels is the love for the Chinese nation. The majority of his stories are set in the tumultuous times of the Song, Ming or Qing Dynasty. Although Jin's heroes suffer enormous misfortunes in childhood and stand the hardest trials growing up, they nonetheless shoulder heavy responsibility in defending the nation. From being children in the troubled times to saviors as adults, protagonists embody the Confucian sense of mission to take the nation's responsibility as their own; in doing so, Jin often elevates the figure of the swordsman to a level of a national hero.¹⁴

The Distinction Between *Gongfu* (功夫) and *Wuxia* (武俠)

In contrast to the *wuxia*'s relationship with the northern style which set their swordplay narratives in early to mid-imperial China using mythical and supernatural fantasies, the *gongfu* genre is associated with more contemporary events in southern Chinese history, emphasizing the body and training. Most *gongfu* films are set in a

¹² Jin Yong's novels have been so popular that they have been canonized. When Yuan-Liou Publishing Company in Taiwan published a series of "Studies of Jin Yong's Novels" in 1984, the term "Jin Yong Studies" (金學) was created. Such studies have developed into a popular subject of study in both the public and academic circles. Many universities have organized International Conferences on Jin Yong's novels, participants of which are mostly prominent scholars.

¹³ Altogether Jin Yong wrote 15 *wuxia* novels in 17 years, from 1955 to 1972, which included 12 long novels, two novellas and one short story. (See appendix for listing of titles).

¹⁴ For more information, refer to Chen Mo, especially chapter 11, "漢夷." 陳墨. 文化金庸. 台北: 雲龍出版社, 1997.

narrow period from the Qing to the early Republican era. In particular, they focus on the development and eventual destruction of the renowned Shaolin (少林) temple in Hunan province and the consequent dissemination of *gongfu* throughout southern China. Because Shaolin priests came under suspicion from the Yongzheng emperor as a result of their effectiveness in combat under the Kangxi regime, soldiers were sent to Shaolin in 1736, slaying the monks and razing the structure to the ground.¹⁵ After the destruction of Shaolin, the survivors scattered throughout southern China where they and their successors developed the *gongfu* arts. Since various versions of these events have survived in historical records, they have been the subject of cinematic interpretations.¹⁶

III. Post-War Hong Kong: Global and Local Realities

The Hong Kong Populace

While much attention has been focused on the administrative mechanisms of colonial control, it is not until recently that scholarship has inquired into the social conditions of the Chinese population in Hong Kong and its role in colonial rule.¹⁷ A huge influx of arrived in Hong Kong by the end of the civil war in 1949. The majority of the settlers in Hong Kong focused on sustaining their livelihoods, for they were disillusioned and alienated by Chinese politics. As Ackbar Abbas contends, Hong Kong was a city of transients in which its citizens – mostly refugees – thought of the colony

¹⁵ Although the Yongzheng regime saw Shaolin as a threat, over the centuries the monks were occasionally called to help emperors with military campaigns. David Bordwell. Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 191-192.

¹⁶ Logan, Bey. Hong Kong: Action Cinema. (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1996): 49.

¹⁷ Ngo Tak-wing. "Colonialism in Hong Kong Revisited." Hong Kong's History: State and Society Under Colonial Rule. Ed. Tak-wing Ngo. New York: Routledge, 1999: 3-5.

only as a “temporary stop” regardless of how long they actually stayed.¹⁸ Hong Kong served more as a “stepping stone” and a work place refuge for these immigrants than a permanent home.¹⁹

Separation from the homeland was not only political and social, but psychological. Unlike the generation prior to the 1945, which considered themselves as citizens of the Qing or Republican government, the outbreak of the Cold War and the CCP takeover of the Mainland jolted the Hong Kong populace onto a vastly different path to national identity where no regime seemed stable.²⁰ As Choi Po-king argues, because people in postwar Hong Kong were burdened with a deep feeling of nostalgia for their lost homeland and culture and disenchanted with the chaos of contemporary politics, it was natural for them to experience a phenomenon which she describes as “political phobia.”²¹ A motley and demoralized people could not return to their home districts on the Mainland, these newly arrived immigrants refused to consider Hong Kong as a permanent residence; rather, these migrants, particularly the educated class, propagated a strong allegiance to a pre-communist China.

Academics and intellectuals fled the Mainland not only in fear of repercussions for past associations with the KMT, but also political repression on both sides of the Taiwan straits. Hong Kong provided a space for intellectual contemplation unmatched in China or Taiwan, where political persecution under the CCP and KMT denied any hint of opposition. As Helen Siu contends, Hong Kong was the “precious little island” with an

¹⁸ Ackbar Abbas. Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 4.

¹⁹ Anthony Sweeting. “Hong Kong Within Historical Processes.” pg.65. and also Albert Yee. A People Misruled.

²⁰ Choi Po-king. “A Search for Cultural Identity: The Students’ Movement of the Early Seventies.” Differences and Identities: Educational Arguments in Late Twentieth Century Hong Kong. Ed. Anthony Sweeting. (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 1990): 85.

²¹ Ibid., pg.,85-86.

environment relatively free of ideological impositions that linked networks of the Chinese diaspora together while keeping intellectual discourse alive.²²

Stability

Constant competition occurred in the triangular relationship between Britain, China, and the colonial administration. Stability ultimately rested on the administration's ability in maintaining its inhabitants' detachment from political affairs. The colonial government not only had to preserve a depoliticized environment in appeasing China, it simultaneously had to pacify its Chinese inhabitants from challenging its own colonial legitimacy. Despite its weak political grip on the colony, the administration focused on education as a cultural mechanism in preserving the "precarious balance" amidst a politically volatile landscape.

In preventing Hong Kong from disintegrating into a battlefield between Nationalists and Communists, the colonial administration sought to "outmaneuver" both sides.²³ Rivalry between the two Chinese nations threatened with social fragmentation and potential harm to the status quo of colony, for CCP and KMT Chinese institutions not only funded and operated numerous Hong Kong schools, they also indoctrinated their students and recruited them into their political efforts. Yet, because the administration could not promote a "Hong Kong-centered" consciousness or encourage a strong sense of pride and commitment to the colony to counter external influence, lest it antagonize the PRC and set off potential retaliation, the administration instead sought to shape a non-nationalistic identity that functioned solely as a "defensive" mechanism.²⁴ Even though

²² Helen Siu. "Hong Kong: Cultural Kaleidoscope." Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the End of the 20th Century. Ed. Gary Hamilton. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999): 109-111.

²³ Wong Ting-hong. Hegemonies Compared: State Formation and Chinese School Politics in Postwar Singapore and Hong Kong. New York: Routledge Falmer, 2002: 100.

²⁴ Wong Ting-hong. Hegemonies Compared: State Formation and Chinese School Politics in Postwar

the education curriculum emphasized Chinese cultural heritage, it deliberately fostered a sense of being at the “periphery” of both the Chinese and Western worlds. As Bernard Luk contends, the Hong Kong curriculum served mainly as an entrepot for Sino-British intercourse, one where it aimed at producing bilingual and bicultural elites to operate the colony, but little else beyond those objectives.²⁵

Hong Kong’s Colonial Administration

But far from controlling all political and economic aspects of its colony, the colonial administration was in reality too weak to prevent the CCP from infiltrating trade unions, societies, or the press. Not only did it fear that an overly hostile anti-communist campaign would provoke retaliation from dissidents, the administration realized that if it ever provoked the CCP into the fray, its security forces would be helpless against any military invasion.²⁶ Not interested in producing colonial subjects loyal to Britain, the colonial regime preferred governing a populace which was able to speak and read in Chinese and English, but without any strong identification or involvement in the affairs with either country.²⁷

Singapore and Hong Kong, New York: Routledge Falmer, 2002: 118.

²⁵ Bernard Luk argues that rather than cultivating a political identity, the curriculum instilled in students a sense of Chinese cultural identification with the China of history rather than with the current Chinese regimes on either side of the Taiwan straits.²⁵ Instead, Chinese history aimed at a thorough grounding in the history of traditional, dynastic China, while almost entirely ignoring modern twentieth-century history. This policy suited the political anxieties of the colonial administrators. Since these scholars posed no threat to colonial authority, they were given free reign as well as influence in the education system. Chinese history syllabuses for all levels in secondary education extended back to the most ancient periods, while ending only in 1911 with brief mention of events up to 1945. Bernard Luk. “Chinese Culture in the Hong Kong Curriculum: Heritage and Colonialism.” *Comparative Education Review*. Vol.35, No.4 (1991): 656-663.

²⁶ David Clayton. *Imperialism Revisited: Political and Economic Relations Between Britain and China, 1950-1954*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., p.102.

²⁷ 陸鴻基. “香港歷史與香港文化.” *香港文化與社會*. 主編: 洗玉義. 香港: 香港大學亞洲研究中心, 1995: 75.

IV. The Question of Hong Kong culture: "Popular" Culture versus "High" Culture

The Myth of Hong Kong's "Cultural Desert" (文化沙漠)

Since research on Hong Kong has concentrated primarily on political, economic, and social modernization, culture, particularly social identities generated from cultural practices, is often relegated to secondary importance, fundamental issues of Hong Kong's development remain haphazardly answered. As Ng Chun Hung contends, the wide "gap" in the study of Hong Kong culture is only partially filled by a series of studies by social commentators and practitioners in the field of popular culture.²⁸ Until only recently, most observers, especially Western scholars have often misguidedly branded Hong Kong as a "cultural desert." Because the colony lacked prestigious venues such as opera houses or art museums like those in Shanghai, Beijing, or London, they argued that Hong Kong did not possess "high culture," which they believed was synonymous to all of "culture."²⁹

However, as Bernard Luk argues, culture does not necessarily need to be elitist in order to qualify as being culture; even popular culture is a genuine form of culture.³⁰ Because of the British officials' lack of connections with its inhabitants due to language and class barriers, they often overlooked the flourishing of Hong Kong culture in the form of Cantonese operas, movies, and songs that were shared and enjoyed by its Chinese

²⁸ Ng Chun Hung. "New Directions in Cultural Studies." "Popular Culture and Political Society: Prolegomena on Cultural Studies in Hong Kong." Culture and Society in Hong Kong. Ed. Elizabeth Sinn. (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1995): 1-2.

²⁹ 陸鴻基. "香港歷史與香港文化." 香港文化與社會. 主編: 洗玉義. (香港: 香港大學亞洲研究中心, 1995): 74.

³⁰ Ibid. 74-75.

citizens. Instead, colonial bureaucrats cared more about creating sophisticated multiplexes and cultural fairs so that Hong Kong could benefit from western civilization.

Media as “Surrogate” for Cultural and Historical Reproduction

In analyzing the *wuxia* movie from the 1960s to 1970s, what is evident is that it was a strong cultural force in the colony’s history, for it played an integral role in the shaping of the Chinese identity for the Hong Kong populace in a period of social chaos and political turbulence.

Since the *wuxia* genre from the 1960s and onwards has been violent, fantastic and unrealistic, featuring spectacles of fighting that use historical settings not only irrelevant to the narrative, but also distorted and anachronistic, it has often been reproached for being apolitical, ahistorical, escapist, and profit-oriented. Mingyu Yang argues such avoidance of contemporary history and politics in not only films, but also other cultural products such as school textbooks, was a result of colonial regime’s policy of pacification. Although the administration held only vaguely defined censorship powers, it nonetheless censored films (or parts of them) which it believed as either ideologically hostile to British rule or offensive to Communist China.³¹ Concerned about the increased politicization of Hong Kong films, the colonial administration in May 1950 called producers together and instructed them not to make movies that would cause disturbances. “Self-censorship” thus resulted in the escapist tendency in most popular films. With studios’ sensitivities towards political issues, they paved the way for Mainland-born directors such as Hu Jinquan, who preferred historical plots set in the

³¹ Although it did censor or edit politically-oriented films, the colonial administration did not have “official” censorship authority until the passage of the Film Censorship Act on May 18, 1988. Yu, Mingyu. *China: Once Upon a Time/Hong Kong: 1997: A Critical Study of Contemporary Hong Kong Martial Arts Films*. PhD Dissertation. (University of Maryland, 1995): 62-63.

Ming or late Yuan dynasties containing only allegorical allusions to contemporary politics.³²

Since Hong Kong's postwar education system produced a "vacuum" of cultural identification only to be filled up by the local popular media, the new generation grew up acquiring a territorial identity that was drastically different from the pre-1949 period. As Eric Ma contends, the only avenue that helped native-born Hong Kongers in search of an identity was the popular media in part; their education failed to provide them with a "coherent historical narrative" to explain their place in the world.³³

In the absence of any hegemonic framework of high culture or national culture in Hong Kong, popular culture played the principal role of setting the cultural agenda. As long as there was no outright political allusion involved, the colonial authorities adopted a noninterventionist policy towards the media. Hence, largely left to operate in an unrestrained market economy, the media played a critical task in social integration. It not only performed a surrogate role in the reproduction and recreation of Chinese history and culture, it also reflected the mood and realities of the Hong Kong psyche as to what exactly constituted the meaning of being "Chinese" during that period.³⁴

V. History of Hong Kong Cinema in the 1960s and 70s

The Historical Background of the Post-War Hong Kong Cinema

Divided between the Mandarin and Cantonese dialects, filmmaking in Hong Kong was organized into two parallel industries with the Mandarin the more powerful of the

³² Hector Rodriguez. "Questions of Chinese Aesthetics: Film Form and Narrative Space in the Cinema of King Hu." *Cinema Journal*. Vol.38, No.1 (Fall 1998): 76-77.

³³ Eric Ma. *Culture, Politics and Television in Hong Kong*. (New York: Routledge, 1999): 29-30.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.58.

two. The Mandarin-language industry began when directors from Shanghai fled the Mainland beginning in the 1930s; it reached its peak shortly after the Communist conquest. Like the intellectual community, these refugees settled in Hong Kong and by the 1950s transformed the colony into the centre of Chinese film production. Reluctant to embrace the local culture, most filmmakers continued living the lifestyles they had enjoyed on the Mainland and produced films centering on themes with a longing for their lost home, all the while preferring to use Mandarin rather than the local Cantonese dialect in the films.

The success of the *wuxia* was a collaborative political campaign of the film industry, namely the two big movie studios (Shaw Brothers and Cathay) which had a nationalist agenda to squeeze the leftist studios out of business. In bypassing the social-problem and common-man stories popular with the colony's less educated population, Mandarin films favoured elitist stories drawn from Chinese literature and history. In particular, in ignoring Hong Kong itself as a specific locality, the settings of *wuxia* movies preferred Northern settings that suggested Shanghai, Beijing and other landscapes of the Mainland.³⁵

Incidentally, because many overseas Chinese audiences in Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and the West preferred movies that evoked a Northern culture, for most regarded the North as the most representative of the China they had left behind, Hong Kong's Mandarin-film industry yielded to the tastes of its diasporic audience. *Wuxia* films thus cultivated in both Hong Kong and overseas audiences a familiarity with their lost homeland while also promoting a sense of connection with each other. Since almost all

³⁵ Christina Klein. "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Transnational Reading." New Global History: Articles. <<http://web.mit.edu/newglobalhistory/docs/crouching-tiger-hidden-dragon.pdf>> (September, 2002).

postwar films in the *wuxia* genre have been produced by and for Chinese communities outside of China, the *wuxia pian* was an émigré cinema for an audience that sought its identity and links with an imaginary cultural past.³⁶

The Ritual of Movie Viewing in Hong Kong

To appreciate the significance of the *wuxia pian*, it is necessary to understand the importance of movies in Hong Kong. In the post-war period Hong Kongers were among the world's most frequent moviegoers. As David Bordwell explains, cinema is woven into the city's life, where audiences could look forward to at least two new movies every week. In 1965 the colony produced 235 movies, more than France and Germany put together.³⁷ In 1959, the average attendance per capita was twice that of the United States even when the colony had only three million people. At its apex, in 1967, attendance stood at an astounding twenty-seven annual visits per capita. Even when the movie business declined as television drew away segments of the audience, per capita attendance remained far ahead of that in other Asian countries throughout the 1970s.³⁸

Considering that much of the population people worked six-day weeks, with only evenings and Sundays free for cinema, the magnitude of the audience reveals that movies – and in turn, the *wuxia pian* – played an enormous role in the cultural fabric of the colony. Thus, it was an all-consuming passion of Hong Kong people who went to the cinema not only to escape the heat, but also for diversion, particularly from crowded living conditions, from ideological battles, or prospects of a communist takeover. As

³⁶ Christina Klein. "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Transnational Reading." New Global History: Articles. <<http://web.mit.edu/newglobalhistory/docs/crouching-tiger-hidden-dragon.pdf>> (September, 2002).

³⁷ Bordwell, David. Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 35.

³⁸ Bordwell, David. Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 33-34.

John Lent argues, film audiences wanted the opposite of reality, “not its denial nor its mirror.”³⁹

Nationalism and Nostalgia in the *Wuxia* Movie

Cultural nationalism emerged in Hong Kong in the 1950s in the context of the Cold War and political upheaval on the Mainland. But unlike their colleagues in Taiwan or China, filmmakers in Hong Kong were in a unique position to show loyalty to a past China. Suspicious about communism and distrust of British rule produced an allegiance based not on support for any particular regime or political ideology, but one based on Chinese civilization and the concept of *tian xia* (天下).⁴⁰ Such nationalism became a potent theme in the work of Hong Kong films; directors and writers searched Chinese myths, legends and history for themes and motifs on which to base their films and scripts.

For the Hong Kong audience, because local political factors made it difficult for them to overtly express nationalistic feeling for their homeland, their ready identification with familiar screen characters of a past China became helped them deal with the instability of their political situations. As Yingchi Chu asserts, such historical films helped cultivate a cultural identity in Hong Kong and the diaspora as “imperial descendents” rather than as political citizens unlike their counterparts on the Mainland.⁴¹ The *wuxia pian* used fantasy in helping satisfy a more tangible cultural need: the yearning for a link with tradition, no matter how unsubstantiated or imaginary. The films fulfilled that function with the plausibility and appeal of folk tales. Like the oral tradition, the

³⁹ John A. Lent. *The Asian Film Industry*. (London: Christopher Helm, 1990): 114.

⁴⁰ As Stephen Teo argues, this identification with the past is an “emotional wish” among Chinese people living outside Communist China and Republican Taiwan to identify with China and things Chinese, even though they may not have been born there or speak its national language or dialects. Thus, they wish to confirm themselves and fulfill their cultural aspirations by identifying with the “mother culture,” producing an abstract and apolitical type of nationalism for the past. Stephen Teo. *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*. (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1997): 110-112.

⁴¹ Yingchi Chu. *Hong Kong Cinema: Colonizer, motherland, and self*. (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003): 33-35.

wuxia cinema never ran out of stories or dreams, for they merely recycled them until they too become part of the *wuxia* myth.⁴²

The *Wuxia* Movie as Covert Political Resistance

The attraction to *wuxia* movies can also be explained by the fact that heroes and villains were clearly identified and the outcomes of the struggles unambiguous. The resurgence of the *wuxia* film in the 1960s coincided with the violent spillover of Cultural Revolution into the colony. Hence, Hong Kong's experience of violence and social upheaval and the fights on the city's streets onscreen mirrored those in the cinema. Many directors were deeply affected by the disorder. As director Zhang Che (張徹) reveals, the aesthetics of the violence in his *wuxia* films expressed the pain, emotion and death of his era. Thus, the 1967 riots and the trauma of detonation of a home-made bomb near his residence inspired the fervour, violence, and rebelliousness that so exemplified the making of his 1967 *wuxia* feature, The Assassin (大刺客).⁴³

A fragile and unstable city after the 1967 riots, the sensational news of floating corpses, victims of the Cultural Revolution, found in the Hong Kong waters hit the frontline of the newspapers. Constant fear that the political turmoil on the Mainland would spill over into Hong Kong gripped most of the colony's citizens. After 1967, the gap between Hong Kong and China grew wider, resulting in a "historical blackhole" for

⁴² Roger Garcia. "Alive and Kicking: The Kung Fu Film Is a Legend." Bright Lights Film Journal. Issue 13 (January 2003). <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/31/hk_alive.html>.

⁴³ Zhang Che was one of most eminent *wuxia* directors in Hong Kong and Asia. But other filmmakers in Hong Kong were equally touched by the chaos of the era and thus their films reflected similar themes of violence in their *wuxia* films: directors such as Xu Zenghong, He Menghua, Gao Li, Luo Wei, and Peter Pan Lee truly exemplified the *wuxia* era by incorporating gory as a defining characteristic in the *wuxia*. Law Kar. "The Origin and Development of Shaws' Colour *Wuxia* Century." The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study. Ed. Wong Ain-ling. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003: 139-140.

Hong Kong.⁴⁴ This important chapter in the colony's history became stigmatized and concealed in Hong Kong cinema, for allusion to this chaotic period was censored.⁴⁵

Although the colonial government did try to calm social dissension by strengthening its links with people in the local districts, it nonetheless refused to institute political reforms that would have permitted citizens in taking part in the political process. As opposition escalated, the government remained closed and bureaucratic, and clung to a policy of selective repression as evident in the arrests of residents of the Yan Yee Village and university students who demonstrated and camped in front of the City Hall in 1972.⁴⁶

The wave of social protests thus reflected the public discontent with the colonial political system. Large-scale demonstrations, which mobilized students and intellectuals, were organized to lobby for Chinese as an official language and to protect the Diaoyutai Islands. Moreover, security and social order had become contentious, for corruption had permeated most sectors of society. While police corruption had become serious as payment of protection money, bribery, and the shielding of gambling rackets became quite common, violent crime and street crimes were equally grim, particularly in resettlement areas where organized gangs and drug addicts not only harassed residents but also often erupted in gang warfare. Consequently, most people, especially youths, lost faith in the justice system and confidence in the credibility of the police.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Both during that era, and lasting until the end of British rule, where strikes and riots were disapproved of being alluded to in the educational curriculum and in movies.

⁴⁵ It was not until the 1990s, when the return of the colony to the mainland became a fact, that the riots were allowed to be referenced in films. Li Cheuk-to. "The Return of the Father: Hong Kong New Wave and Its Chinese Context in the 1980s." *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*. Ed. Nick Browne, Paul Pickowiz, Vivian Sobchak, and Esther Yau. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 165, 177.

⁴⁶ Lui Tai-lok, and Yiu Wai-hung. "Intrigue Is Hard to Defend: The Conditions of Transition and the Prototype of Hong Kong Culture." *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study*. Ed. Wong Ain-ling. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003): 161-163.

⁴⁷ Lui Tai-lok, and Yiu Wai-hung. "Intrigue Is Hard to Defend: The Conditions of Transition and the Prototype of Hong Kong Culture." *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study*. Ed. Wong Ain-ling. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003: 163-164.

The *Wuxia* Movie as Cultural Preservationist.

Western cultural penetration into the colony produced an equally compelling force in the *wuxia*'s popularity among filmmakers. As Hong Kong-born youths began embracing western movies, television, dress and music, the older generation worried that the loss of traditional values caused by westernization threatened an already fragile Chinese heritage. One attempt was the collaborative effort of directors and writers in reinforcing the philosophical and religious values of the ancient mythologies.⁴⁸ When transformed into the modern media of film, these modernized *wuxia pian* borrowed material from Peking Opera plays, usually tales set in imperial dynasties revolved around heroic characters that use their superhuman faculties in defending the weak and correcting injustices.⁴⁹

Besides western influences, imported Japanese movies, particularly the samurai genre, produced both inspiration and tension among filmmakers. With the popularity of imported Japanese *jidai-geki* samurai movies, there was anxiety in Hong Kong that Japanese influence was infiltrating and challenging Chinese culture. But rather than banning its features in theatres, filmmakers instead seized the opportunity to borrow the creativity of the samurai movies produce their own brand of swordfighting movies in the form of *wuxia* pictures.⁵⁰

The Shaw Brothers Company and Cathay Studios

⁴⁸ Although Hong Kong martial arts movies had existed before the introduction of the *wuxia pian*, such early movies were filmed to showcase the swift actions of *gongfu*-style boxing rather than following the precepts of *wuxia* mythology. Stephen Teo. *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*. (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1997): 99-101.

⁴⁹ David Bordwell. *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 193-195.

⁵⁰ The most famous at the time was Zatoichi's "Blind Swordsman." In fact, as Zhang Che reveals, he was attracted to the martial arts genre not only because of his familiarity with *wuxia* novels, but also because of his fascination with the Akira Kurosawa films; hence, Zhang's choice of Japan as his location for the production of *The Golden Swallow* was inspired by his Japanese influences. Stephen Teo. *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*. (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1997): 98.

Film tycoons were prominent in this cultural preservation project. By the end of the civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists, much of the mainland Mandarin film talent (centered in Shanghai) had relocated to Hong Kong. With their combination of ambition and superior filmmaking ability, the Mandarin émigrés rapidly superseded their Hong Kong Cantonese counterparts. In particular, Shaw Brothers Studios and Motion Picture and General Investment⁵¹ eventually consolidated and monopolized the film market from the 1950s to the 1970s. In keeping with their ideals of the past, both companies specialized in producing historical epics and romances. More importantly, the technology in the centralized studio system enabled their filmmakers to build cultural replicas such as the Forbidden City, classical Chinese courtyards, northern Chinese markets, temples, mountains, and forests within studio compounds.

When Run Run Shaw (邵逸夫) embarked for Hong Kong in 1959, he was already part of a movie dynasty.⁵² The Singapore-based Shaw brothers had not only built a chain of theaters and amusement parks across Southeast Asia, but were also a part of an established Shanghai film company. Although the Japanese seized much of the family's assets and even detained Run Run for subversion, by 1945 the Shaws dug up the fortune they had hidden and rebuilt their commercial empire.⁵³ Realizing that Shaw Studios could not compete with its rivals Cathay in film supply or income, Run Run Shaw came to Hong Kong himself to supervise production. Instead of focusing on constructing

⁵¹ Loke Wan Tho owned MP&GI, but after his death in 1960, it was renamed the Cathay Film Company.

⁵² Unlike most media moguls, Run Run Shaw migrate to Hong Kong directly from Shanghai. Instead, he and his brothers diversified their investment throughout Southeast Asia. Run Run later turned to Hong Kong in 1959 when he wanted to concentrate on Shaw Brothers Studios and taking over from his younger brother Shao Cunren.

⁵³ As Run Run later recalls, "The pearls were a little brown, the watches rusty, the bank notes mildewed; but the gold was nice and yellow. The diamonds, sapphires and emeralds were in excellent form. We were still rich." "Hong Kong's Movie Magic: Sex, Violence, Lousy Subtitles." *Time Magazine*. <<http://www.time.com/time/hongkong/special/movie.html>>.

theatres for greater returns as in the past, Run Run shifted the company's interest to film production by constructing a studio. Situated in Clearwater Bay in Kowloon, construction took a decade (from 1957) for completion and ultimately boasted a total area of 850,000 square feet while accommodating twelve sound stages allowing the simultaneous shooting of twelve films.

With the completion of the Clear Water Bay Film Studio Movie Town, more than 500 actors and a staff of 3,000 were under contract, living in dormitories on the lot. Shaw ran grueling assembly-line schedules to keep the sound stages busy in three eight-hour shifts in order to satisfy the company's rapidly expanding theater empire.⁵⁴ Even though Run Run was not out to make masterpieces, many of the films, particularly the *wuxia pian* defined the representation of Chinese culture and history for audiences.

The cinematic dream created by the Shaw Movie Town was primarily a "China dream," as its permanent street sets comprised mostly exquisite bridges, rivers, city walls, palaces, pavilions, and shops gracing the landscape of ancient China. During its halcyon days in the 1960s and 70s, Shaw concentrated not only on the *wuxia* genre, but also historical dramas and musicals which evoked the imperial past. Thus, the company's cinematic simulation of the "China dream" became the major selling point of the *wuxia* genre.⁵⁵

The Chinese Diaspora

⁵⁴ In output terms, Shaw Brothers Studios equaled Hollywood studios. Between 1961 to 1964, Shaw studio made 13-18 films per year. In 1965, Shaw Studios set a new record of 26 films in that year alone. As a result, Hong Kong's English language daily - The China Mail - described Mr Run Run Shaw as 'The World's busiest film producer' (March 9, 1965). Beginning in 1966, Shaw Studios reached its peak output of 40 or more Shaw Scope movies a year. "The Shaw Story." Shaw Organization Online Homepage. << <http://www.shaw.com.sg/shawstory/shawstory.htm>>>

⁵⁵ Sek Kei. "Shaw Movie Town's 'China Dream' and 'Hong Kong Sentiments.'" The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study. Ed. Wong Ain-ling. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003: 37-39.

However, movies were not made especially for Hong Kong audiences, for the colony was too small to yield profits for investors. Like the colony's textile and toy industries, Hong Kong film producers had to aim for export. Entertainment in the form of theatre troupes and recordings of popular songs had always kept overseas Chinese in touch with home; the *wuxia* was just another form of a cultural link. Thus, filmmakers tailored the product to the tastes of their overseas audiences, focusing especially on stories lifted from swordplay *wuxia* novels. As Hong Kong replaced Shanghai after 1949 as the manufacturing site for regional cinema, its films ultimately confirmed the colony as the centre of the diaspora's imagination for overseas Chinese audiences. Although exiled from one's home in China, the experience of fleeing to Hong Kong or sojourning there became the reference point for post-war generations; Hong Kong was not only Asia's "transit lounge," but also a location for nostalgia.⁵⁶

By the early 1960s, Hong Kong had East Asia's most powerful export-based cinema. The millions of Chinese diffused throughout the diaspora formed a loyal audience for Hong Kong pictures.⁵⁷ Hong Kongers were not the only audiences which saw *wuxia* as a cultural link. As Japanese production declined in the 1960s, Hong Kong martial arts movies faced little competition. Between 1960 and 1967, Hong Kong's output production even exceeded Hollywood's.⁵⁸ As Cantonese local television increased and demand for Mandarin films from Southeast Asia grew, the Cantonese movie industry came to a halt; by 1972, even Bruce Lee films (who spoke only

⁵⁶ David Bordwell. *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000: 65-66.

⁵⁷ Not only did Hong Kong features flourish in Asian countries like Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Taiwan but also in North America, Australia, and Europe.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

Cantonese) were dubbed into Mandarin.⁵⁹ The Mandarin-language *wuxia pian* thus achieved a “pan-Chinese internationalism” where martial artists and actors from Southeast Asia and Japan worked in the Hong Kong *wuxia pian* while filming would sometimes be done in those locations only to be edited in the Hong Kong studios.⁶⁰

Hong Kong Prosperity in the 1960s and 1970s

Yet, patriotism was not the only reason for the popularity of the *wuxia* genre. While the *wuxia pian* served as a cultural protection, filmmakers of the genre also had to adapt to the realities of the era. As the colony experienced the emergence of youth counter-culture in the 1960s, brewing with restless youthful rebelliousness, the film industry responded in order to satisfy its audiences’ new tastes. Indeed, “rebelliousness” became a defining theme in the *wuxia* genre, for films frequently featured youngsters rising up against establishments represented by older characters.⁶¹ As director Zhang Che asserts, *wuxia* action movies of his era were tailored especially for youths growing up in the turbulent period where youths grew too quickly for schools and society to provide room for them.⁶² Energetic, aggressive, and confrontational, films such as the *wuxia* provided an expedient outlet for the restless energy of youths, not only in Hong

⁵⁹ In the early days of Chinese silent films (with Chinese text), no differentiation existed between dialects. But with the advent of sound, the recorded voice had to be in either the Cantonese or the Mandarin dialect. Despite the aural differentiation, Chinese subtitles allowed both markets access to the films. Hence, the “new school” of *wuxia* films in effect became a transnational cinema in connecting the Chinese diaspora by using the post-dubbing technique. It not only brought about greater freedom in photography and staging of the action sequences, it ultimately allowed non-Mandarin-speaking Chinese actors and audiences in sharing a common tradition. Thus, because the Cantonese and Mandarin cinema shared the same market, they should be viewed as “competing studios” rather than as cinemas from different countries. Shaw Studios was one such Mandarin film operation. David Bordwell. *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 34-36 and 65-66.

⁶⁰ David Bordwell. *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 67-68.

⁶¹ Sam Ho. “One Jolts, the Other Orchestrates: Two Transitional Shaw Brothers Figures.” *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study*. Ed. Wong Ain-ling. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003: 117.

⁶² 張徹. *回顧香港三十年*. (香港: 三聯書店, 1989): 45-48.

Kong but also as a part of a larger worldwide trend where icons such as the Beatles and James Bond typified post-war popular youth culture.⁶³

In contrast to the Cantonese martial arts *gongfu* films, once-popular characters such as Huang Feihong (黃飛鴻) lacked individuality and were more like stereotypes void of emotions or psychology. Simple stories conducted along the lines of the good versus evil, such films no longer satisfied a society that was progressively more sophisticated and an audience that had greater demands of the cinema. Incidentally, the new style martial arts *wuxia* picture of the Mandarin filmmakers not only elevated production standards and the tastes of the audience but had also strengthened the sensation of cinema and action, while intriguingly mixing highbrow with lowbrow styles in order to integrate them into a form of mass entertainment.⁶⁴ Moreover, *wuxia* filmmakers successfully pulled in audiences with familiar folk tales, aware that the audiences know the stories and so concentrate more with the nuance than the actual plot.⁶⁵

By the 1970s, the interest in the *wuxia* genre was concurrently a reaction to changing times and tastes of the post-war generation. Not only was there a sense of self-confidence among the populace; Hong Kong was emerging as a commercial power. At the intersection between old and new ideologies as well as Eastern and Western cultures, Hong Kong audiences were no longer satisfied with “old-fashioned” martial arts and

⁶³As Zhang Che reminisces, Jimmy Wang Yu (王羽), one of Zhang's favourite stars, was a Chinese embodiment of the brand of rebelliousness, “at once melancholic, tortured, and violent,” very much on the lines of Hollywood influences of James Dean and Marlon Brando during that time period. Sam Ho. “One Jolts, the Other Orchestrates: Two Transitional Shaw Brothers Figures.” *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study*. Ed. Wong Ain-ling. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003: 117-118.

⁶⁴Zhang Che. “Creating the Martial Arts Film and the Hong Kong Cinema Style.” *The Making of Martial Arts Films - As Told by Filmmakers and Stars*. The Making of Martial Arts Films: As Told by Filmmakers and Stars. Translated by Stephen Teo. (Hong Kong: Provisional Urban Council, 1999): 17-21.

⁶⁵Ian Jarvie. *Window on Hong Kong: A Sociological Study of the Hong Kong Film Industry and Its Audience*. (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Centre of Asian Studies, 1977): 106.

melodramas pictures but instead insisted more romantic approaches, newer styles and subjects. Since Cantonese pictures at the time were not only stories saturated in local flavour and populated by folk heroes but had low artistic quality, they quickly lost ground to the rapidly developing Mandarin cinema, which had a superior feeling of nationalistic identity as well as greater cultural and technical sophistication which suited the youthful invigorating tastes of the youths in Hong Kong at the time.⁶⁶

Hong Kong movies became extremely popular at the box-office not only in the colony but throughout the Chinese diaspora as a result of the new approach of the *wuxia* filmmakers. As the *wuxia pian* turned in million-dollar profits, it became a business enterprise that initiated a decade-long trend. It seemed as if all directors were making *wuxia* pictures even though there were varying achievements. With greater investments, production standards improved, and led rise of a new generation of filmmakers conversant in both Eastern and Western cultures who integrated a western-style of thinking and technology into the *wuxia* genre.

Wuxia Filmmakers

The *wuxia pian* was a continuation of a traditional Chinese art form. An aspiration for a distinctly national culture had been a significant preoccupation of Chinese intellectuals since the late Qing confrontation with the West, and the *wuxia pian* was only an expression of this movement. As Hector Rodriguez argues, films by refugee artists reflected a widespread political preoccupation with the national and cultural identity of

⁶⁶石琪, "香港電影的打發展." 香港功夫電影研究: 第四屆香港國際電影節. (*A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film: The 4th Hong Kong International Film Festival*). 主篇: The 4th Hong Kong International Film Festival. 香港: 香港市政局, 1980: 14-15.

China in the modern age that cuts across political lines.⁶⁷ The intensity of Hu Jinquan's concern with upholding a northern culture during his southern exile was shared with other filmmakers uprooted in Hong Kong and Taiwan. By focusing on Chinese tradition, these filmmakers not only endeavoured to cement their shared identity as serious intellectuals with a genuine concern for the national identity and traditional culture, they were in reality continuing another specific art form, the Beijing Opera, or *jingju* (京劇).⁶⁸ Even though Hong Kong cinema had turned away from the northern theatre and relied instead on the southern Cantonese opera, or *yueju* (粵劇), Hu strove to reinject Beijing opera conventions into the *wuxia pian*.⁶⁹

VI. Historical Identity of the Wuxia Movie

Mandarin Martial Arts Film (武俠片)

To serve Hong Kong's large Asian market, films were made in both Cantonese (the local Chinese dialect) and Mandarin (the more widely spoken dialect). Cantonese *wuxia* movies of the 1950s and early 1960s emphasized magic and fantasy. Warriors soared endlessly, swords and daggers turned to fire, and fighters' hands could emit jagged bolts of lightning to stun their opponents ("palm power"). The plots were sketchy and the special effects were crude (sometimes scratched directly on the film negative), but the

⁶⁷ Hector Rodriguez. "Questions of Chinese Aesthetics: Film Form and Narrative Space in the Cinema of King Hu." *Cinema Journal*. Vol.38, No.1 (Fall 1998): 78.

⁶⁸ The nationalistic implications of the the Beijing opera can be shown by considering the various names that designate this art form in Chinese: in addition to the names *jingju* or *jingxi* (京戲), both of which mean "drama of the capital," the opera is also called *guoju* (國劇), or "national theatre." Hector Rodriguez. "Questions of Chinese Aesthetics: Film Form and Narrative Space in the Cinema of King Hu." *Cinema Journal*. Vol.38, No.1 (Fall 1998): 78-79.

⁶⁹ Hu Jinquan turned to Han Yingjie (韓英傑), a former Beijing opera actor 1966, and together, they applied and integrated the fighting and dance techniques of the Beijing opera into the *wuxia pian*. Hu continued to choose actors with a stage background, such as Sammo Hung and Yuan Xiaotian in his movies. Hector Rodriguez. "Questions of Chinese Aesthetics: Film Form and Narrative Space in the Cinema of King Hu." *Cinema Journal*. Vol.38, No.1 (Fall 1998): 79-80.

supernatural films established some permanent techniques of the genre. Reverse-motion shooting created impossible stunts, like leaping onto a roof. On the soundtrack, thunderous whooshes underscored leaps and blows.

In reaction to the Cantonese fantasy films the "new *wuxia pian*" emerged, which was a school of more realistic swordplay films influenced by Japanese movies and a younger generation of martial arts novelists. Filmed in Mandarin and produced by big studios like Shaw Brothers, the supernatural aura of the *xia* vanished. Now feats were presented as abilities which could be executed only by the most disciplined fighter.

Therefore, it was not until 1966 that the *wuxia pian* had reached maturity and recognition with King Hu's Come Drink with Me (大醉俠) and Zhang Che's Magnificent Trio (變城三俠). In capturing the elegance of ancient Chinese martial artistry through inventive cinematic techniques, their redefinition of the martial arts genre dominated the Hong Kong cinema and established the model for much of Hong Kong's present-day historical and fantastic films. Not only did the two use settings far removed from the contemporary period in order to provide an uninhibited romantic vision of the world of martial arts, their cinematic innovations provided new codes of behavior for their characters. Moving away from the Confucian attitudes of previous *wuxia* and *gongfu* films, the new *wuxia pian* focused on themes in Buddhism, Daoism and Chinese imperial history. While earlier martial arts films presented complex relationships and a careful causality of events, the Mandarin *wuxia pian* emphasized sword-based combat, romance,

and fantasy. Satiated in bloodshed, the presentation of the duel was the highlight of the films, and the martial arts swordsman hero was a key element in the formula.⁷⁰

The Mandarin *wuxia pian* also intensified realism by focusing not on aristocrats but on commoners, tormented heroes and heroines driven by ambition or revenge or devotion to justice and undergoing extreme physical suffering. Zhang Che quickly built a reputation for his sadomasochistic swordplay dramas. In contrast were the delicate, lyrical masterpieces of Hu Jinquan who infused energy and finesse of classical Chinese theater and painting to the new swordplay movie. His films lingered on breathtaking landscapes, treated swordfights as airborne ballets, and created a gallery of reserved, preternaturally calm warriors who fought not for prestige or vengeance but to preserve humane values.⁷¹

Never once making a film about Hong Kong, the exiled intellectual Hu instead paid tribute to the classical world of the Chinese landscape painting, animated by elegant scholars, courtesans, monks, and swordsmen. Many of his films are thus meticulous reconstructions of an idealistically enchanting China. While the China that was presented in the realistic these mythical *wuxia* films never really existed in the audiences' actual lives, these particular representations of China were typically the China that most emigrants dreamt about. The Mandarin filmmakers endeavoured to recreate a China and a society that had largely disappeared.

⁷⁰ 石琪, "香港電影的打發展." 香港功夫電影研究: 第四屆香港國際電影節. (*A Study of the Hong Kong Martial Arts Film: The 4th Hong Kong International Film Festival*). 主篇: The 4th Hong Kong International Film Festival. (香港: 香港市政局, 1980): 17-23.

⁷¹ Perhaps the most famous scene in all the new *wuxia pian* comes midway through Hu's "A Touch of Zen" (1971), where a combat unfolds in a quiet bamboo grove. Although fighters clash in midair, hurling themselves from spindly branches high above the ground or dive-bombing one another in a flurry of fast cuts, the overall impression is of poise - the sheer serenity of perfectly judged physical movement. Swordplay films fell out of favor in the mid-1970s as kung-fu swept the world and gave the Hong Kong film industry a cheaper genre to exploit. Still, there were efforts to revive the *wuxia pian*. (http://www.memebbers.tripod.com/~journeyeast/wuxia_pian.html).

The Legacy of Hu Jinquan

Hu's cinematic legacy rests on his *wuxia* films, for he was able to excel and leave his mark on the Hong Kong and Taiwan film industries. Before Hu Jinquan, filmmakers had shot fight scenes based on the acrobatic techniques of Beijing opera, which made movies seem as if they were filming a staged show. Not only did Hu's films allow him to engage the audience in his preoccupations with Chinese social history, military strategy, religion and philosophy, they also invoked and combined Chinese poetry, opera, literary traditions and even folklore with martial arts action into a commanding sense of cinema.⁷²

Hu was the first director to use advanced cinematic techniques through editing and a varied use of camera-angles, in his *wuxia* films. His technical mastery was the first Chinese-language film recognized internationally when he triumphed with the Grande Prix de Technique Supérieur at Cannes in 1975. Hu's first *wuxia* film Come Drink With Me marked the singular reworking of *wuxia* conventions and themes that not only established him as a master of the genre, but also a revitalization of interest in the *wuxia pian*.

But although Hu Jinquan is considered the most influential directors of the *wuxia* genre, he made only eleven films in his thirty year career, with his fame based on six *wuxia* features. Hu brought a literary depth to martial arts films that elevated the genre to an art form, particularly his unique blend of Chinese history and legend, politics and martial arts, philosophy and religion. Hu's early employment in painting billboards and designing hand-outs for cinemas triggered his interest in the colourful world of movies.

⁷² Stephen Teo. "King Hu." Senses of Cinema. <<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/02/hu.html> (2002)>.

Even after he moved into the Shaw Brothers Studio in 1958 in pursuit of a career in film, Hu retained his interests in art and literature, later turning to literary scholarship altogether. Hence, it was these outside interests which made his films so distinctive; inspiration for his movies derived from the arts, literature and history rather than from movies. He was most interested in Chinese history, for he had a fascination in Chinese art and literature. Thus, Hu did not see himself as part of the movie industry, but as part of the wider body of the Chinese arts.⁷³

Hu Jinquan Within the Intellectual and Scholar Community

Rather than seeing Hu solely as a filmmaker, it is more appropriate to view his work as a part of the scholarship that was being produced by the exiled intellectual community during that era. His avid interest matched by his remarkable knowledge of imperial history used film as the avenue in which he could express both his disillusionment with the political chaos surrounding him as well as his nostalgic yearning for his homeland. Very much a scholar, Hu did research in libraries and consulted with historians for information of the particular time period prior to writing scripts of his movies. As Hu reveals, he chose the Ming dynasty for most of his movies, for being one of the most chaotic periods in Chinese history, it reflected his current conditions.⁷⁴ Hu even based his choice of weapons for his characters on historical documents such as the *gujin tushujicheng* (古今圖書集成).⁷⁵

Indeed, Hu was as involved in the academic community as he was in the film industry. Invited to numerous conferences during his career, Hu often gave lectures not

⁷³ Richard James Havis. "King of Swords: King Hu." *Kamera Film Journal*. <<http://web.archive.org/web/20000118144300/http://www.kamera.co.uk/features/kinghu.html>> (2003).

⁷⁴ 胡金銓. 山田宏一, 宇田中幸詳. *胡金銓武俠電影作法*. 譯:馬宋芝. (香港: 正文社出版有限公司, 1998): 84.

⁷⁵ 胡金銓. 山田宏一, 宇田中幸詳. *胡金銓武俠電影作法*. 譯:馬宋芝. (香港: 正文社出版有限公司, 1998): 88-89.

on filmmaking, but on historical issues that concerned his own research. Two particularly significant talks that established him as a scholar were at the University of Paris in 1973 and at Harvard University in 1975, both where Hu offered his insight into the literary career of Lao She (老舍).⁷⁶ Hu also conducted studies on Matteo Ricci, and in 1982 gave a series of lectures on Ricci's scientific influence on China.⁷⁷

Hu's Cinematic Treatment of Chinese History: Yuan (元) and Ming (明)

Hu's own relationship to the concept of Chinese history is also distinguished by a marked eclecticism. Besides his use of Beijing opera, Hu's films also conjure a heterogeneous array of traditional forms ranging from history and legend to literature and painting. Hu's affection for culture is expressed in his characters familiarity with history, operas, short stories, and novels. From chanting Guan Hanqing's song, to singing Li Bai's celebrated "Drinking Alone in the Moonlight" to beginning a movie with a Buddhist *bianwen* introducing the historical background to the film's plot, Hu's *wuxia* films not only entertained audiences with action scenes, but also played a pedagogical role for his audiences.⁷⁸ As Rodriguez asserts, in highlighting shots of animals, mountains, plants, ponds, and other natural objects to create a lyrical flavour that visibly recalls the natural images of Chinese poetry, inducing traditional themes as the freedom of wordly pursuits, nostalgia for a lost home, as well as a Buddhist awareness of the vainness and self-destructiveness of human desires.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ 胡金銓. 山田宏一, 宇田中幸詳. 胡金銓武俠電影作法. 譯:馬宋芝. (香港: 正文社出版有限公司, 1998): 135-136.

⁷⁷ 黃仁. "紮實人生." 胡金銓的世界. 主編: 黃仁. 台北: 亞太圖書出版社, 1999: 147-148.

⁷⁸ Hector Rodriguez. "Questions of Chinese Aesthetics: Film Form and Narrative Space in the Cinema of King Hu." Cinema Journal. Vol.38, No.1 (Fall 1998): 79-80.

⁷⁹ In fact, it is this distinctiveness and richness of Chinese culture that is what his cinema is explicitly about. Hector Rodriguez. "Questions of Chinese Aesthetics: Film Form and Narrative Space in the Cinema of King Hu." Cinema Journal. Vol.38, No.1 (Fall 1998): 80-82.

Hu's particular fascination with the Yuan-Ming transition and the rise of Zhu Yuanzhang to power led to his creating The Fate of Lee Khan (迎春閣之風波), a film set in the final stages of the Yuan Dynasty. Illustrating Hu's attention to Chinese art and history, the film begins by showing paintings of Genghis Khan and Kublai Khan and then goes on to detail how the Han Chinese General Zhu led an army against the Mongols, before moving closer to the plot of the film, a spy story about Chinese patriots plotting to steal a map from the Mongol "King Of Henan," warlord Li Chahan. After setting the scene, Hu goes on to tell a story of his own choosing about a group of Zhu's spies opposing Li, but by then the background has been expertly sketched in.⁸⁰

Yet, the scholar that he was, Hu did extensive research into the Mongol empire prior to his working on his film. He personally traveled to Harvard University in consultation with scholars of Inner Asian history in search of relevant background information for his film. As Hu explains, because the Yuan empire had stretched its influence into Europe, the mystique of the Mongols has produced a great collection of western-language sources, far more than Chinese works.⁸¹ Hu was consumed in historical authenticity that the music used in the film was carefully researched from Yuan period archives. Even the rendition of a song comes is authentic, where his research uncovered the only remaining song from the Yuan dynasty with its lyrics intact.⁸²

As Hu confesses, The Fate of Lee Khan was meant more as a political narrative than an action picture. Fascinated with the Mongol warlord Li Chahan (李察罕) and his eventual assassination, Hu's movie revolves around this historical figure. As the Yuan

⁸⁰ Christina Klein. "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Transnational Reading." New Global History Online. <<http://web.mit.edu/newglobalhistory/docs/crouching-tiger-hidden-dragon.pdf>> (September, 2002).

⁸¹ 胡金銓. 山田宏一, 宇田中幸詳. 胡金銓武俠電影作法. 譯:馬宋芝. (香港: 正文社出版有限公司, 1998): 130.

⁸² As Hu reveals, the song was a popular piece during the Yuan period; yet, it is the only one that has been recovered. 胡金銓. 山田宏一, 宇田中幸詳. 胡金銓武俠電影作法. 譯:馬宋芝. (香港: 正文社出版有限公司, 1998): 131.

dynasty faces imminent collapse due to the revolt of its Han Chinese subjects led by Zhu Yuanzhang, The Fate of Lee Khan portrays how a group of mostly female patriots loyal to Zhu collaborate together in foiling Li Chahan attempt in attaining a strategic map from a traitor within Zhu Yuanzhang's camp. Li's meeting with the female spy takes place in Spring Inn, located in the middle of a wasteland in Shaanxi province. Spring Inn, which functions as a restaurant and casino, is a front for her secret activities as a member of the Chinese underground campaigning against the governing Mongols. More importantly, it is the meeting point where Li will meet his spy to obtain the vital map. Her mission is to liaise with other resistance fighters at the inn in order to intercept the traitor and stop him from passing the map to Li.

Based on historical records of the Chinese coastal defense, The Valiant Ones (忠烈圖), is set during the Ming dynasty in the reign of the Jiajing emperor whose rule was affected by corruption and the problem of Japanese and local pirates wreaking havoc on the southern coastal regions.⁸³ A small group of soldiers, under the command of an iconoclastic general, Yu Dayou (俞大猷), are given a special mission to destroy the pirates. The soldiers are joined and aided by a silent couple, a sword-fighting xia and his female companion. Basing its central character on an historical figure, a Japanese pirate named Bo Duojin (博多津), the narrative reveals the close relationship among Ming high officials, Chinese merchants, and Japanese pirates. As Hu argues, his motivation behind the movie was to reveal the corruption of the late Ming. As the film reveals, quite a few Chinese merchants "disguised" themselves as Japanese pirates in order to conduct in

⁸³ As Hu explains, the majority of his research of this particular period involved Ming dynasty scrolls which provided not only relevant facts but also visual portraits of the clothing of soldiers and pirates. 胡金銓. 山田宏一, 宇田中幸詳. 胡金銓武俠電影作法. 譯:馬宋芝. (香港: 正文社出版有限公司, 1998): 136-137.

private trade out of the control of the government. To differentiate between the authentic Japanese pirates and the Chinese impostors, Hu purposely distinguishes the two groups with different outfits.⁸⁴

The Cultural Revolution particularly inspired the making of Dragon Inn (龍門客棧). The struggle against intellectuals and the disgrace of Ming dynasty historian Wu Lian (吳吟) in 1966 provoked Hu into making the film as a tribute to Wu's career. Wu's work on the imperial secret police, the *dongchang* had particularly influenced Hu as a young man.⁸⁵ In examining the corruption and suppression of intellectuals by the eunuchs, the film was not only meant as an allegory to reflect the chaos occurring on the Mainland, but also as an attack on the CCP regime. In using the *wuxia pian* as his vehicle, it allowed him to criticize without politicizing while simultaneously illustrating nostalgia for his homeland.⁸⁶

Dragon Inn centres on an assassination ordered by the prominent eunuch Cao Ji of the Ming Dynasty to kill the offspring of Yu Cian, the former minister of the Department of War, who was put to death on trumped up charges fabricated by Cao Ji. Worried about any potential revenge from Yu's family, Cao orders the head of *dongchang*, Cao Shaocin to kill Yu's offsprings, who were exiled in the defense force at a frontier bridgehead called Longmen (龍門). As Yu's loyal former subordinates and xia

⁸⁴Yet, Hu did not invent the costumes. Basing much of the story on historical records, even the outfits worn by the two different groups of pirates derive from imperial documents. Yet, interestingly, this "accuracy" proved to haunt Hu as Japanese audiences were displeased that the uniforms worn by the Chinese did not resemble Japanese clothing during that period. 胡金銓. 山田宏一, 宇田中辛詳. 胡金銓武俠電影作法. 譯:馬宋芝. (香港: 正文社出版有限公司, 1998): 86-87.

⁸⁵Eunuchs had maintained imperial favor since the early years of the Ming Dynasty, when Emperor Yongle (1360-1424) seized power with the help of a eunuch-orchestrated mutiny.

⁸⁶山田宏一, 宇田中辛詳. 胡金銓武俠電影作法. 譯:馬宋芝. (香港: 正文社出版有限公司, 1998): 84-85.

swordsman escort the Yu family away from their home, the donchang eventually encounters them at Dragon Inn in which a final battle breaks out.

Hu's Use of Traditional *Wuxia* Elements: *Jianghu* (江湖) and Inns (客棧)

That Hu Jinquan taps into this mystical world so familiar in the *wuxia* genre is another reason for his films' popularity. The martial underworld of the *jianghu* has been celebrated for centuries in Chinese literature. Literally meaning "rivers 江 and lakes 湖," *jianghu* refers to the itinerant status of many of its *xia* members. Stories of the *jianghu* often emphasize the complex web of obligations and feuds that brotherhoods which symbolize a shadow or dark mirror image of conventional society.⁸⁷ *Jianghu* members recognize each other through a complex system of secret signs and signals. Hence, a visitor at an inn would arrange chopsticks and teacup in a certain pattern on his tabletop if he wished to contact the local affiliates.⁸⁸

In Come Drink With Me, Hu introduces the idea of the tavern as both an imagined world and a real society where virtuous and evil *xia* engage in a struggle based on a private code of behaviour. As the heroine Golden Swallow (金燕子) enters the tavern, traditionally regarded as a meeting point of Chinese society in real world, but a place of mystery and danger in the *jianghu*. As Golden Swallow sits on a table ordering wine and food, she is sequentially hassled by villains by fending off jugs of wine are thrown at her, coins are fired as missiles, and even challenges to a swordfight. As these scenes are choreographed to emphasize Golden Swallow's preternatural skills, Hu not only presents

⁸⁷ Such mystical brotherhoods in the *jianghu* usually comprised of members of the lower classes, including of martial artists, thieves, opera performers, monks, security guards, prostitutes, professional soldiers, and beggars. Later, this tradition would be used in both triad movies and triad societies.

⁸⁸ This explanation of the *wuxia* was first explained by Chen Pingyuan's *The Literati's Chivalric Dreams: Narrative Models of Chinese Knight-Errant Literature*. Jean Lukitsch. "Jiang Hu: Chinese Martial Underworld." *Kungfu Cinema Film Reviews* <<http://www.kungfucinema.com/articles/2003-05-28-02.htm>>

the martial arts action component of the historicist model but also illustrates the heroine in her element: the *jianghu* as the proper environment where heroes display their skills and courage, and signal their intention to eliminate the criminal world.⁸⁹ At the same time, the tavern sequences are staged with attention to characterization and a keen sense of atmosphere, demonstrating Hu's intimacy with the décor and lifestyle of traditional Chinese inns.

“Inn films,” as they are popularly referred to, are also political allegories, where one side fights for a political or patriotic cause against a side representing the forces of repression and authoritarianism. The *jianghu* is the place where the true knight-errant 俠, reveals his or her anti-authoritarianism and instinctively supports such a cause despite all odds. Violence is a means to serve two ends: to achieve the restoration of a just government, and to express the *xia*’s disdain for authority and his refusal to be shackled by officialdom. In Dragon Inn, roving swordsman Xiao Shaozi comes to the tavern to save the children of a disgraced minister who are being escorted into exile and must pass through Dragon Inn, commandeered the *dongchang*. Like Golden Swallow, Xiao easily beats off the bullying tactics of the *dongchang* minions seeking to evict him from the inn. Seeing that he cannot be moved, the captain offers him money and a position in government. This is turned down by Xiao, and in doing so, he displays the characteristic spirit of rebellion in the *jianghu*.

Hu’s Treatment of Religion: Buddhism and Daoism

Hu’s treatment of Buddhist concepts in the historicist *wuxia* model is illustrated in both Come Drink With Me and A Touch of Zen. The former features a peculiar monk,

⁸⁹ Eric Yin. “A Definition of Wuxia and Xia.” Heroic Cinema Online Film Journal. <<<http://www.heroic-cinema.com/eric/xia.html>>>

and the latter a Zen patriarch who personifies Buddhist nature. In A Touch of Zen, Hu uses the concept of Zen to pose questions about the *wuxia* genre's roots in both fantasy and reality. Hu claimed that he had no deeper motivation to impart Buddhist beliefs, but instead wanted to express Zen visually. The movie moves into a realm of Buddhist metaphysics when the Zen patriarch Hui Yuan is treacherously stabbed only to be followed by a transfiguration into Buddha as he calmly sits in the traditional Buddhist posture. The sequence is shot in psychedelic colours compounded by the use of colour negative, which indicates both a Buddhist sense of transmigration and an ontological inquiry of reality and appearance.⁹⁰

The Buddhist imagery in his movies is also linked to the Daoist concept of immortality. Traditionally, the *xia*'s acts of chivalry, using his or her powers to wipe out evil while rescuing the oppressed, implies a search for immortality as the purest form of transcendence. Yet, no matter how skilful or preternatural their powers are, the theme that runs through Hu's films is that his heroic characters all die like mortals.

VII. Conclusion

The Historical Legacy of the *Wuxia pian* on the Imaginary China: Ang Lee

As Mingyu Yang argues, the colonized in Hong Kong and much of the Chinese diaspora outside of the mainland China and Taiwan were not only politically powerless but also historically rootless. Ang Lee's status as a member of the Chinese diaspora not only complicates his own sense of Chineseness, it ultimately challenges any simple notions of cultural authenticity. Growing up in Taiwan, Lee had no direct experience of

⁹⁰ Stephen Teo. "King Hu." Senses of Cinema. <<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/02/hu.html>> (2002).

mainland China, and as an adult he only had a brief visit there, prior to the shooting of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. Although he grew up with a strong sense of connection to Chinese civilization, his connection was obscured by the ideological chasm that separated Taiwan from communist China. Like most the Chinese diaspora of his generation, the mass media mediated a sense of connection with China, one that was simultaneously intimate yet also alienating from China.⁹¹ Because of his limited knowledge of China, his version of Chinese history came from the *wuxia pian*. As a part of the Chinese diaspora, Lee asserts that people “look for that old cultural, historical, abstract China – the big dream of China that probably never existed.”⁹² Growing up satiated in *wuxia* films, Lee echoes their visual style and emotional tone in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. As a person who was brought up as a Chinese outside the Mainland, Lee explains,

“I sometimes feel strange about my Chinese identity. This identity was obtained from [King Hu’s] movies and Li Hanxiang’s movies, from TV and textbooks. It was very abstract, not because of blood relationship or land but rather an ambiguous cultural concept . . . In [King’s] time, his style was relevant to Chinese history. He used the world of the swordsman to present the abstract part of Chinese culture. He guides you into Chinese landscape paintings, a legendary atmosphere which was very special.”⁹³

A Return of the *Wuxia* Movie?

But even though it had achieved rave reviews from Cannes film festival critics, being nominated for multiple Academy Awards, and proclaimed a masterpiece that redefined Chinese culture in the Western imagination, the film met only lukewarm appreciation in Asia, particularly in Hong Kong, recognized as the birthplace of the

⁹¹ Christina Klein. “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Transnational Reading.” New Global History: Articles. <<http://web.mit.edu/newglobalhistory/docs/crouching-tiger-hidden-dragon.pdf>> (September, 2002).

⁹² Christina Klein. “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Transnational Reading.” New Global History: Articles. <<http://web.mit.edu/newglobalhistory/docs/crouching-tiger-hidden-dragon.pdf>> (September, 2002).

⁹³ 李安. “萍跡俠影憶金銓.” 超前與跨超: 胡金銓與張愛玲. (*Transcending the Times: King Hu and Eileen Chang: The 22nd Hong Kong International Film Festival*). 主編: 羅卡. Hong Kong: Urban Council: 1998: 107-108.

modern *wuxia* (武俠) film genre. The *wuxia* had passed its time in the former British colony, for while Lee's vision was based on an ancient Chinese past in which he had read in *wuxia* novels and films, younger Hong Kong audiences raised on the fast-paced Cantonese-language films of the 1980s and 1990s simply did not share Lee's romantically traditional view. In the words of one audience member, rather than evoking tradition, the film's old-fashioned theme and slow pace seemed "like listening to grandma telling stories."⁹⁴

Yet, strangely in 2000, the Malaysian conglomerate Usaha Tegas Sdn Bhd purchased the Shaw Studios' library of more than 700 films for a sum of HK\$600 million. It subsequently established Celestial Pictures Ltd. in 2002 in order to release digitally-remastered Shaw videodisc and digital videodiscs. Prior to that time, Shaw Studios refused to re-release its films, preferring to keep them in its archives.⁹⁵ Amazingly, not only were sales high, reviews of these re-mastered classics revived interest in the *wuxia* genre. Hence, although it may have passed its prime, the tradition of the *wuxia* movie continues to persist in another modernized media.

⁹⁴ Christina Klein. "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: A Transnational Reading." *New Global History: Articles*. <<http://web.mit.edu/newglobalhistory/docs/crouching-tiger-hidden-dragon.pdf>> (September, 2002).

⁹⁵ Until 2002, younger audiences only knew of Shaw Brothers films either from older generations or pictorials, but rarely got to view the movies for themselves. Due to the lack of circulation of their films in other forms of media, stars and directors of that period were for the most part forgotten by younger generations. In fact, famed Hong Kong *gongfu* film director, Lau Kar-fai had to buy bootleg copies of his own movies while on a promotional trip to English for his collection, for there were no such copies left in Asia. Bey Logan. *Hong Kong: Action Cinema*. (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1996): 45.

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Filmography of King Hu's *Wuxia Pian*

<u>English Title</u>	<u>Chinese Title</u>	<u>Year</u>
Come Drink With Me	大醉俠	1966
Dragon Inn	龍門客棧	1967
A Touch of Zen	俠女	1970
The Fate of Lee Khan	迎春閣之風波	1973
The Valiant Ones	忠烈圖	1975
Legend of the Mountain	山中傳奇	1979
Raining in the Mountain	空山靈雨	1979

[Appendix I]

Jin Yong's *Wuxia* Novels

English Title

Chinese Title

Romance of the Book and Sword

書檢恩仇錄

Sword Stained with Royal Blood

碧血劍

Flying Fox of Snowy Mountain

雪山飛狐

The Young Flying Fox

飛狐外傳

The Eagle-Shooting Heroes

射鵰英雄傳

The Return of the Eagle Heroes

神雕俠侶

The Heavenly Sword and the Dragon Sabre

倚天屠龍記

Demi Gods and Semi Devils

天龍八部

Way of the Heroes

俠客行

Requiem of Ling Sing

連城訣

The Proud Smiling Wanderer

笑傲江湖

Deer and the Cauldron

鹿鼎記

[Appendix II]