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WUXIA FICTIONS

Abstracts

Paul Bowman, Enter The Žižekian: Bruce Lee, Martial Arts, and the Problem of Knowledge

This article explores the question of *what* martial arts *are*. In a discussion that ranges from considerations of Asian and Brazilian martial arts to Bruce Lee’s interdisciplinary jeet kune do, to TV and filmic representations of martial arts and martial arts as cultural myths and practices, it examines the answers and interpretations that can be arrived at by following some of the main paradigms of cultural study—from Marxian, to psychoanalytic, to Foucauldian, to deconstructive approaches to the question. It considers the different type of “object” conjured up by these different approaches and points to the limits of these paradigms, before historicising the moment of the “birth” of Bruce Lee’s martial art of jeet kune do and his ensuing cinematic success. In doing so, it points out the simultaneity of the emergence of “Bruce Lee,” cultural studies, deconstruction, and the growth of *bricolage* and interdisciplinarity in culture and academia. Accordingly, it asks what the significance of such a cultural moment might be, and enquires into *how* we might possibly evaluate it, given that the very means of any evaluation appear to be themselves products of the cultural and historical moment they are trying to evaluate. It thus considers Žižek’s argument that contemporary cultural theory is, like the Western fascination with all things “Oriental,” and hence like the figure of Bruce Lee, merely a manifestation of contemporary capitalist ideology. The discussion circles from Žižekian Marxism to Heideggerian orientalism, before returning to the question of the cultural significance of martial arts via a final discussion of Bruce Lee and the political effects of *any* act of institution.

Dean Chan, Playing with Indexical Chineseness: the Transnational Cultural Politics of *Wuxia* in Digital Games

Over the past decade, *wuxia* fictions have proliferated in East Asian games networks, particularly within Chinese language territories. This essay traces a cultural history of *wuxia* digital games from PC role-playing games (RPGs) to massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), and offers a contextual analysis of their attendant significations. The games industry uptake of *wuxia* may be linked, in part, to newly emergent forms of Chinese economic nationalism. This would not only account for why *wuxia* has become an important aspect of Chinese digital-content production, but also how it modulates Chinese cultural identity within transnational games networks today.

Felicia Chan, *Wuxia* Cross-dressing and Transgender Identity: the Roles of Brigitte Lin Ching-hsia from *Swordsman II* to *Ashes of Time*

This essay addresses the cross-dressing performances of Brigitte Lin Ching-hsia in the context of the *wuxia* performance tradition, its sense of spectacle and the Hong Kong film culture of which the actress is an integral part. It investigates cross-dressing as a *performative* act, and explores the implications of Lin's casting on the genre and on Hong Kong film culture as a whole. The four major films of her latter career are addressed, namely, *Swordsman II* (Ching Siu-tung, 1991), *The East is Red* (Ching Siu-tung and Raymond Lee, 1992), *New Dragon [Gate] Inn* (Raymond Lee, 1992) and *Ashes of Time* (Wong Kar-wai, 1994).

Sinkwan Cheng, The Chinese *Xia* versus the European Knight: Social, Cultural and Political Perspectives

This essay contrasts the “*chevalier*”—a term closely tied to horsemanship, nobility and wealth—with the “*xia*,” a word which originally meant “upright” but makes no reference to gender, material possessions or social status. The virtues of the former were the direct result of the knight's belonging to the noble stock. The virtues of the *xia*, on the other hand, were independent of class, gender, or social status. This difference allows me to contrast the contents and meanings of Chinese and European martial ethics such as loyalty, honour and generosity, and demonstrate how an apparently similar ethos in the two cultures was inflected differently by their respective social, political and economic contexts.

Gina Marchetti, Martial Arts, North and South: Liu Jialiang's Vision of Hung Gar in Shaw Brothers Films

As one of Hong Kong's most prolific martial arts directors/choreographers, Liu Jialiang has been drawn to stories concerning Hung Gar history—particularly involving the system's roots in the Shaolin Temple. Four of Liu Jialiang's Shaw Brothers films highlight different periods in the history of Hung Gar, the Shaw Brothers studio, and popular Chinese-language cinema. *Executioners from Shaolin* (1977) deals with the family melodrama/ romance at the root of Hung Gar's origins. *Challenge of the Masters* (1976) takes up Huang Feihong's career as an apprentice practitioner, and *Martial Club* (1981) continues Huang's development as a young martial artist. *The Lady is the Boss* (1983) brings Hung Gar into the 1980s with a cross-cultural story of the Chinese diaspora. Blending Shaw Brothers' pan-Chinese style, use of Mandarin, and studio personnel with Liu's immersion in a specifically southern, Pearl River Delta-developed traditional art form, these films address an audience that may be moving between, within, or around various formulations of Chinese ethnicity, language, and national identity.

Lindsay Steenberg, A Dream of China: Translation and Hybridisation in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

In order to explore the tensions between surface forms, this essay approaches Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as a transnational generic hybrid, rather than as a "pure" example of the *wuxia* genre. This article interrogates issues of translation, gendered violence and excess to explore the fracturing and subversive potential of the film. Rather than seeing *Crouching Tiger* as a window into the spiritual and martial truths of ancient China, the paper examines it as an amalgam of genres and (national) identities recognises its status as part of a global cinematic imaginary.

Sabrina Yu, Can A *Wuxia* Star Act? Martial Arts, Acting and Critical Responses to Jet Li's *Once Upon A Time In China*

This essay, through examining Hong Kong critical responses to Jet Li's *wuxia* classic *Once Upon a Time In China* (1991), explores how Li negotiates between two traditions of *wuxia* stardom, which respectively focus on martial arts/the body and acting/performance in the genre. It argues that by introducing theatricality and technology into his fighting, Li places a greater emphasis on the performativity, rather than authenticity, of martial arts and foregrounds martial arts as a powerful way of portraying a character; thereby demonstrating that rather than being split, martial arts and acting can complement one another perfectly within a *wuxia* star's performance.