

Autumn 2005
CENTER FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES
FRIDAY NOON FILM SERIES
PRESENTS

Body, Technology, Allegory: Chinese Martial Arts Cinema, 1965-2005

Interest in the Chinese martial arts film has been growing in the West in recent years, thanks in large part to the successes of such transnational productions like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000), *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, 2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang, 2004), and most recently, *Kung Fu Hustle* (Stephen Chow, 2004). These films, with their display of almost superhuman acrobatic skills and gravity-defying flights, represent for many people something utterly original and new. Yet it is important to note that they do not arise out of a vacuum; on the contrary, they are rooted in a long tradition of cinematic practice that displays more diversity and subtlety than is generally assumed. In this series, we are going to watch some of the most significant films from this tradition, by such famous directors like King Hu, Zhang Che, Tsui Hark, and Wong Kar-wai. Through them, it is hoped that we are able to get a better sense of the range and scope of the martial arts film; in particular, we shall focus on a number of recurrent themes and questions, including the idea of chivalry; the play between body and technology (cinematic techniques, special effects); the martial arts film as a form of cultural nationalism; and so on.

This series will be presented by Yip Man Fung, Ph.D student in the Committee of Cinema and Media Studies.

ALL FILMS ARE SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

October 7: *Come Drink with Me* (Da Zui Xia)

King Hu, 1965, 91 min.

In 2001, we had director Ang Lee, heroine Zhang Zhiyi, and Oscar-winning hit *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. 35 Years before there was King Hu (*A Touch of Zen*), to whom Ang Lee's film was meant as a homage; Cheng Pei-pei (who also appears in *Crouching Tiger*); and this path-breaking effort which inaugurated the Shaw Brothers' "new-style" martial arts film. Here Cheng is Golden Swallow, who teams with swordsman Drunken Cat to battle with a corrupt Buddhist monk with mystical martial arts powers. The film set a new standard for Hong Kong (and Asian) action movies, and was so successful that a sequel (*Golden Swallow*), by another legendary martial arts film director Zhang Che, was made in 1968.

October 14: *The One-Armed Swordsman* (Dubi Duo)

Zhang Che, 1967, 110 min.

Star Jimmy Wang Yu and director Zhang Che broke box office records across Asia and propelled the "new-style" martial arts genre to new heights with this brilliant action epic. Unlike King Hu, whose martial arts films often put great emphasis on female warriors, Zhang Che was famous for his representation of masculinity (here personified in the unforgettable character of the one-armed swordsman) and his so-called yang-gang (macho) style. Tsui Hark (*Peking Opera Blues*; the *Once upon a Time in China* series) was to remake the film, with great success, in 1995 (*The Blade*).

October 21: *King Boxer, aka Five Fingers of Death* (Tianxia Diyi Quan)

Cheng Chang-ho, 1972, 97 min.

Months before Bruce Lee burst onto the international scene with *Enter the Dragon*, this powerful story of torture, redemption, and revenge had premiered across America under the title *Five Fingers of Death*, going on to become the first international martial arts movie hit and launching the spectacular but short-lived "kung fu" craze in the West. Looking at it nowadays, the film remains exciting and powerful, despite a rather traditional storyline. One more thing to note about this film is the Korean director Cheng Chang-ho, who was one of the foreign, both Asian and Western, film talents imported by the Shaw Brothers in the 1960s and 1970s.

October 28: Dirty Ho (Lan Tou He)

Lau Kar-leung, 1979, 97 min.

By the late 1970s, the "new-style" martial arts film had itself become obsolete and efforts to renew and rejuvenate it had begun to emerge. One such attempt, and the most successful perhaps, was the so-called "kung fu comedy," best exemplified in the West by the early films of Jackie Chan. Not as well-known as the latter but arguably better made, Dirty Ho represents one of the supreme masterpieces of this genre. Combining laughs and thrills, and incorporating some of the most brilliantly conceived and executed fight sequences ever captured on celluloid, the film continues director Lau Kar-leung's vision to use genuine kung fu, and indeed, to appropriate film as a medium to preserve the tradition of Chinese martial arts.

November 4: The Dead and the Deadly (Ren Xia Ren)

Wu Ma, 1981, 99 min.

With the success of kung fu comedy in the late 1970s, filmmakers began to expand further the scope of the martial arts movie by combining it with other genres, including the ghost film. Wu Ma's The Dead and the Deadly was one of the earliest, and most successful, examples of this trend, prefiguring in many ways Tsui Hark's more technology-intensive efforts in the late 1980s (e.g., the A Chinese Ghost Story series). Set in early twentieth-century China, the film is about the story of Gee (the incomparable Sammo Hung), whose spirit is forced to separate from his body as a result of a revenge intrigue of his friend Ma, and the subsequent attempt of Gee's fiancé and uncle to reunite his body with his soul.

November 11: Once upon a Time in China II (Huang Feihong zhi Nan'er Dang Ziqiang)

Tsui Hark, 1992, 107 min.

The first installment of this series was made in 1991, two years after the Tiananmen Incident, and constituted in part a reflection on the future of China (and Hong Kong) through its troubled past, specifically the times of slave and opium trade during the late Qing. This sequel is set in the subsequent period of the White Lotus Cult and the Boxer Revolution and continues the first film's themes of nationalism, foreign invasion, and the Chinese's blind obsession with the occult. Apart from that, both films (and others in the series) are also united by a retelling of the legend of Wong Fei-hung, whose stories have already been used in another series of almost 100 films made between 1949 and 1970, and, of course, by the imaginative action choreography and the ingenious combination of authentic kung fu and thrilling special effects.

November 18: The Legend of Zu (Shu Shan Zhuan)

Tsui Hark, 2001, 104 min.

Tsui Hark, nicknamed the "Stephen Spielberg of Hong Kong," has been at the forefront of Hong Kong cinema for over 20 years. When he made Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain in 1983, he created quite a stir with his bold and pioneering attempt to incorporate Hollywood-style special effects into a story of mythical heroes and heroines. In its sister film (not exactly a remake, and definitely not a sequel) made 18 years later, his penchant for speed and spectacle was no less evident; indeed, the film marked an altogether new stage in visual pyrotechnics, using computerized special effects to an extent that had never been attempted in the history of Hong Kong cinema. The result was a seemingly endless succession of dazzling, comic-strip imagery, at times even overwhelming the narrative which disintegrates into a montage of "attractions."

November 25: NO SCREENING, THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

December 2: Kung Fu Hustle (Kung Fu)

Stephen Chow, 2004, 103 min.

For Roger Ebert, Kung Fu Hustle is "like Jackie Chan and Buster Keaton meet Quentin Tarantino and Bugs Bunny." Others saw in it a colorful montage of martial arts classics, Tex Avery and Chuck Jones Cartoons, and films as diverse as The Matrix, Gangs of New York, and even Jean Renoir's Rules of the Game. Yet, despite its ingenious and at times hilarious cross-references and parodies of almost a century of global popular film and

culture, you don't really have to be a film buff to enjoy this movie: its sheer imagination and kinetic energy transcend all such extra-textual connections and turn them into a mayhem of relentless entertainment.

ALL SCREENINGS ARE FREE AND TAKE PLACE IN JUDD 302, BEGINNING AT 12:40 PM. FEEL FREE TO BRING YOUR OWN LUNCH TO EAT WHILE WATCHING THE FILMS!