



2018

From Fact to Fiction: The Wuxia Experience and the Wushu Practice

Kadien S. Hill

Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses>

 Part of the [Asian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hill, Kadien S., "From Fact to Fiction: The Wuxia Experience and the Wushu Practice" (2018). *University Honors Program Theses*. 352.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses/352>

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

From Fact to Fiction: The Wuxia Experience and the Wushu Practice

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the
Department of History

By
Kadien Hill

Under the mentorship of
Juanjuan Peng

ABSTRACT

Since its beginnings in China, martial arts have intrigued people with its mastery over mind and body, from the Shaolin monk practices of hand-to-hand combat and body conditioning to folktales of martial heroes with their mastery of swordplay and their almost superhuman-like fighting abilities. Martial arts have fascinated and astonished people in China for centuries, and since their introduction to the West they have captivated other cultures the world over. Their intrigue has caused them to penetrate entertainment circles through novelization early on. Chinese classics such as *Water Margin* and *The Seven Heroes and the Five Gallants* solidified martial arts as a readable genre, then eventually martial arts were assimilated into modern cinema during the twentieth century. We have been accustomed to viewing Chinese martial arts, or *wushu* (武术), and the fantastical stories of martial heroes called *wuxia* (武侠) together through famous movies such as *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, *Iron Monkey*, and *Hero*. To many, the two concepts are synonymous due to their exhibitions in modern entertainment and cinema. Although they are integrally related, the two are not the same. So what differentiates them? Through sources signifying real Chinese martial practice dating back to the Han dynasty, and more modern examples from novelization, the paper will trace how *wushu* and *wuxia* emerged and evolved. It will also reveal the realities of their almost symbiotic relationship through the lens of novelized entertainment and cinema during the modern age.

Thesis Mentor: _____

Dr. Juanjuan Peng

Honors Director: _____

Dr. Steven Engel

April 2018
Department of History
University Honors Program
Georgia Southern University

Li Mubai the master swordsman and owner of the stolen Green Destiny came to the aid of his friend Yu Xiulian. Rather than face him, the thief Yu Jiaolong fled. The woman retreated with Li Mubai in pursuit, each of them creating but a single ripple as they glided across the pond. She thought to stand her ground in the bamboo forest, where she could possibly escape among the seemingly endless greenery. A split moment between them passed, and CLANG, CLANG, CLANG! Their swords met as they shot past each other. The chase began again, and Li Mubai began to wear her down; once again she eluded him and flew to another bamboo stalk. This time he was waiting for her. Their dichotomy was apparent: her instability and constant efforts to gain an adequate footing and he the master that had perfect balance and steadiness. Despite her efforts, she could not shake him off the tree. He found her attempts laughable, and this time made her chase him. Gliding through the forest down to the waterfall, the master and the prodigy stood ready to engage once more.

This is a scene from one of the most popular martial arts movies to ever be released, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. It was a joint venture film that Chinese, Hong Kong and American film companies contributed to, and the movie was hailed by critics and movie-goers alike for its superb visuals, intimate drama and epic martial arts scenes. Its positive reception consequently led to an increased interest and popularity in martial arts films by the Western public and facilitated a healthy market for future films that utilized its archetype. The movie itself was based on a novel of the same name—the fourth book from the *Crane-Iron Pentalogy* by Wang Dulu.¹ Martial arts films are commonplace in American cinema today. However, is this movie and others that

¹ Wang Dulu (王度庐) was his pen name; his real name Wang Baoxiang (王葆祥)

followed in its footsteps truly about martial arts otherwise called *wushu*? Simply put, no they are not. Both the novel and its subsequent movie adaptation are part of the genre of Chinese entertainment called *wuxia* (武俠). So then what is real Chinese martial arts? To many, Chinese martial arts or *wushu* and the fantastical stories of *wuxia* are synonymous. But the two concepts are not the same, although they are integrally related. So what differentiates them? Through sources signifying real Chinese martial practice dating back to the Han dynasty, and more modern examples from novelization and cinema, this paper traces how *wushu* and *wuxia* emerged and evolved. It also reveals the realities of their almost symbiotic relationship through the lens of novelized entertainment and cinema.

Lost in Translation—Real Martial Arts

The identification of true Chinese martial arts must begin with its namesake, which itself has had its own identity crisis in the West. Western culture, especially American, has used the title of Kung Fu as an umbrella term to distinguish whatever the West has viewed to be or be in relation to Chinese martial arts. However, the term Kung Fu is an erroneous misnomer. It only recently became widespread in the Chinese community during the late twentieth century as movie culture and the subsequent martial arts movies became more prevalent under people like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan. Kung Fu is the Chinese compound word *gongfu* (功夫), loosely translated into “achievement of man,” which consequently alludes that Kung Fu can be used as an adjective to describe one’s training process or cultivation of virtue. The spelling and pronunciation

come from the classic Wade-Giles² pinyin; the term is distinct and can be attributed to practices outside of Chinese martial arts, namely anything that pertains to a process. However, its usage will be explained much later. So if Kung Fu is not the actual term, then what is? The correct designation for Chinese martial arts is *Zhongguo wushu* (中国武术), or simply just *wushu* (武术), literally meaning “martial skill.” *Wushu* has enjoyed a deep-rooted history within Chinese culture since its beginning, creating a unique identity for itself even to modern times.

Wushu Development and the Conception of the *Yingxiong*

Martial skill filled an important niche in Chinese military culture predating the Qin dynasty and further still to the quasi-legendary dynasties of the Xia and Shang. At the time of the Spring and Autumn and the slightly later Warring States periods, one thing propelled the early evolution of proto-*wushu*: war. Early examples of this was the Chinese wrestling art of *jiaoli* (角力), which focused on grappling and throws. *Jiaoli* was a standard for the military and would eventually evolve to become the modern *wushu* art officially known as *shuaijiao* (摔跤).³ With the Zhou Dynasty falling into disarray and war between the dukedoms raging, as well as civil unrest from the commoners caught in between the constant fighting during the Warring States period, the evolution of the proto-*wushu* forms continued. A major component of this era became swordplay as the ushering of the Iron Age led to advancements in weapon

² Wade-Giles pinyin was the first attempt to Romanticize Chinese for English speakers. It was named after Thomas Wade and Herbert A. Giles, two Englishmen who taught at Cambridge University.

³ "History of Shuai Jiao," Chinese Kuoshu Institute. Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://www.kuoshu.co.uk/History%20-%20SJ.htm>.

forging. Therefore, “This new orientation in weapons design must have reflected new martial arts.”⁴ Proto-*wushu* became essentially defined by weaponry. Indeed, even Confucius was trained in the six arts that the Chinese believed was supposed to compose the ‘superior man:’ these were music, ritual, calligraphy, mathematics, archery, and charioteering. And “...his familiarity with the classical traditions, notably poetry and history, enabled him to start a brilliant teaching career in his 30s.”⁵ Archery and charioteering of course were military skills. The conclusion can be made that proficiency in proto-*wushu* forms were also considered to be exceptional. Weaponry, notably swords, began to see their use more frequently while their wielders gained names for themselves acting as either agents of justice on the peoples’ behalf or simply to satisfy their selfless interests. Throughout Chinese history this would come to be a recurring point of intrigue during the fall of the dynasties. Unfortunately most, if not all, of these early warriors were lost to history. Even Sima Qian, a Chinese historian and the father of Chinese historiography, lamented this detail.

About the plebeian knights-errant of antiquity, we have no means of obtaining information...As for the knights-errant who came from humble alley...what they did was truly difficult. However, both the Confucians and the Mohists rejected them as being unworthy of mentioning. Consequently, the names of plebian knights-errant who lived before Qin times have vanished—a fact that I deeply regret.⁶

⁴ Peter A. Lorge, *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press), 37.

⁵ Roger T. Ames, *Confucius* (July 31, 2014). Accessed November 2, 2017. <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Confucius>.

⁶ Sima Qian edited and translated by James J. Y. Liu. *Record of the Grand Historian from “The Chinese Knight-Errant,”* ed. and trans. James J. Y. Liu (University of Chicago Press, 1967), 16.

It was from individuals like these that fought against the imperial bureaucracy that the first recorded *wuxia* stories were told, as will be discussed a bit later.

Political and civil unrest led to the rise of the swordsman in China during the Spring and Autumn as well as the Warring States periods. This was important to many aspects of Chinese culture. Regarding the proto-*wushu* systems being utilized at that time, emphasis on swordsmanship added another dynamic facet to the systems of the period. However, swordsmen also aided in the facilitation of other life aspects of the time, not just *wushu*. Professor Feng Yulan surmised, which was affirmed by James Liu, that the Mohist School (墨家), which was one of the prominent Schools of Thought during the Spring and Autumn Period, was created by or at least shared similar ideologies of the ‘knights-errant’, a loose translation of *wuxia* in its original literal, not literary, sense. James Liu summarized Feng Yulan stating the following:

After the collapse of the autocratic government about the time of Confucius...a new class of professional men came into being, known as the *shi*...those who specialized in ritual, music, and education were the ‘scholars’ (*ru*), of whom Confucius was one... [and] Those who specialized in warfare were the knights (*xia*) and their moral code developed into Mohism.⁷

Despite the point made, James Liu qualified this conclusion deducing that, “Although we cannot accept that the Mohists originated from the knights-errant, we can still acknowledge the similarities between the two. Both were inspired by altruistic spirit and had a strong sense of justice, and both acted on a universalistic principle...”⁸ It is

⁷ James J. Y. Liu, *The Chinese Knight-Errant* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 10.

⁸ Liu, 11.

apparent here that the historical *wuxia* warriors, which were referred to as *yingxiong* (英雄) or *xiake* (俠客), had begun to cement themselves in the minds of the everyday Chinese masses, acting as protectors of virtue and righteousness even prior to the imperial era of Chinese history.

As their legends grew so did the martial arts practices. There were many others of the proletariat that could not afford weaponry and had to rely on defending themselves with their bare hands.

Unlike other cultures, the practice of [*wushu*] was not for the privilege of special groups in Chinese society. Tenants, craftsmen, merchants, and monks, as well as soldiers, members of the nobility, and scholars practiced them...one can also find numerous examples of female fighters skilled in different forms of martial arts.⁹

Here another school of thought, Daoism (道教), assisted in the evolution of Chinese *wushu*. Daoist doctrine taught of oneness and cyclical flow of all things, which was also attributed to the human body. The circulation of internal elemental energy, or *qi*, became an important element in both *wushu* and religious practices in Daoism and the nurturing of *qi* with breathing exercises and body posturing called *Qigong* (气功), allowed for extensive physical cultivation and fitness.

⁹ Kai, Filipiak, "From Warriors to Sportsmen: How Traditional Chinese Martial Arts Adapted to Modernity," *Revista De Artes Marciales Asiáticas*, 5 no. 1 (2012): 19. *Directory of Open Access Journals*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 25, 2018).

The Dynastic Definition

The Qin and especially the Han dynasties brought considerable peace to the state of China in their respective times, but this was ominous for the *yingxiong* because they were suppressed as dissenters of authority. Some of which, such as Guo Xie and Zhu Zhang¹⁰ who operated in their respective spheres during the Han dynasty, were executed. But this did not stop the development of *wushu*, as forms like *jiaoli* were still being practiced by imperial soldiers and Qigong was adopted by both Confucians and Daoists alike. The Han emperors promoted the proficiency of both *jiaoli* and swordsmanship within the military, which ultimately spread to the everyday commoners through their new method of having a standardized and conscripted standing army.

By the middle of the Han period, the Chinese people had been exposed to various forms of proto-wushu, both empty handed techniques and techniques utilizing weaponry, and they had taken on a mostly militaristic image although some fundamental characteristics had developed from other aspects of their culture. The first comprehensive definition of Wushu was written in the *Book of Han*¹¹ summarized as, "... 'skills' or 'techniques' to practice use of the hands and feet, and to facilitate the use of weapons to gain victory through offense or defense..."¹² which included, "...archery, fencing, boxing, and even an ancient game of football [soccer]...for agility and maneuver in the field. The entry of boxing...appears to be the earliest identifiable reference to

¹⁰ These were two examples of chivalrous men who were considered 'knights-errant' and were thus executed to prevent rebellious dissent to the regimes they lived under. Liu, 37-41.

¹¹ The *Book of Han* or *Book of Former Han* was a history written on the Western Han dynasty from Liu Bang the first emperor to the fall of Wang Mang. It is often one of few resources that possess details about this period in Chinese history, sometimes being the only one.

¹² Stanley E. Henning, "The Chinese Martial Arts in Historical Perspective," *Military Affairs* 45, no. 4 (December 1981): 173-78.

Chinese boxing.”¹³ Previously there was no conclusive denotation; but *wushu* was important enough to the culture for them to include it within the records of the imperial annals. However, a new wave was to soon propel ancient *wushu* into many of the recognizable forms that people see practiced today. The introduction of the religion called Buddhism via the Silk Road from India was its catalyst.

The Shaolin Incubation

The supposed origin of recognizable *wushu* practice began with Shaolin, which was brought about by Mahayana Buddhist monks. To properly understand the effect Buddhism had on Chinese *wushu* we must understand the historical context in which it was able to penetrate Chinese culture in the time that it did. Early Buddhist diffusion came in the Later Han some time during the first century. However, it progressively gained traction toward the end of the dynasty and into the Three Kingdoms period due to its teachings of withdrawal and its ideology of all desire leads to suffering. With the demise of the dynasty and constant war afterward these ideologies brought many converts into the fold because it gave the people a means to escape the harsh realities that were currently set upon them. Many of these converts included military men and people of renown. This would make *wushu* development highly plausible as it had converts that specialized in the various forms, and *wushu* now had the means to be properly incubated outside of the Chinese militaristic sphere.

Throughout the period between the fall of Han and the Northern and Southern dynasties, many Buddhist missionaries ventured to China to spread the new religion,

¹³ Ibid.

even converting Emperor Wencheng of Northern Wei to the faith, and in 453 he lifted the prohibitions that were set against Buddhism by his grandfather Emperor Taiwu. However, there is no significant evidence of *wushu* practice among Buddhist monks until the advent of the Shaolin Monastery which was built in 495 by Emperor Xiaowen of Northern Wei.

There were two Buddhist monks that were credited with the beginning of *wushu* at the Shaolin Monastery: Buddhahadra and Bodhidharma. Buddhahadra, known simply as Batuo (跋陀), was a Nikaya Buddhist and the first abbot of the temple. Although he himself was simply a monk who hailed from the West—either from India or possibly Central Asia—it was documented in Buddhist lore that his disciples Huigang and Sengchou, both military men, were highly proficient in *wushu* prior to their conversion to Buddhism. Bodhidharma, known in Chinese as Da Mo, has traditionally been considered to be the father of Shaolin *wushu*; however, several historians dispute the validity of these claims citing forgery and illegitimacy from the sources that ascribe this. Nonetheless, his legend presides heavily over the origins of Shaolin *wushu*. He taught Chan Buddhism, which focused on meditation and the way to achieve an enlightened state through personal insight, and possibly allowed for *wushu* practice when other sects of Buddhism did not. It is said that he was concerned about the poor health of the monks at Shaolin, so he taught them various means of exercise and possibly a form of Qigong. It is also supposed that he taught them the Arhat hands, known as Luohan quan (罗汉拳), which ultimately became both an umbrella term for all its successor derivatives as well as a Shaolin *wushu* style in its own right. Another legend attributed to Da Mo was upon his departure from the Shaolin Monastery he left his

disciples with two scrolls hidden within the monastery; the Yijin Jing (易筋经), or the Muscle Change Classic, and the Xisui Jing which has since been lost. The former was a manual of exercise that facilitated strength and conditioning. Scholars debate the validity of this story with the earliest copy of the Yijin Jing being published in the nineteenth century. Despite the skepticism the document would come to have major significance in the development of Shaolin *wushu*.¹⁴

From Shaolin martial arts derived many future forms. Indeed, “Shaolin’s fame rests on the martial arts, for many traditions of Chinese fighting consider this monastery their birthplace.”¹⁵ It can be definitively stated that *wushu* today would not be as prevalent if it had not been for its cultivation by the Shaolin monks at the monastery, and as monasteries spread so did their *wushu* styles; Shaolin especially flourished under the ensuing dynasties of the Sui and Tang. On several occasions the Shaolin monks were called to aid the dynasty, one of which was supporting the first Tang emperor to legitimacy of the throne. During the Song Dynasty Emperor Taizu was said to have formed Changquan (长拳), or Long Fist, into its first official incarnation. It had existed to some degree prior to Taizu, but it had strong roots in the *wushu* practiced both within Shaolin and Daoist temples.

Although the Shaolin *Wushu* flourished during these dynasties it was not until the Ming that explicit evidences of their martial practices being extensively documented.

¹⁴ William Hu, “The I-Chin Ching, Fact or Fancy?” *Black Belt Magazine* (November 1965), 28-30.

¹⁵ Meir Shahaar, “Ming-Period Evidence of Shaolin Martial Practice,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61, No. 1 (December 2001), 359. (accessed January 17, 2018) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3558572>.

Their phenomenon was the intrigue of many military officials and, “By the mid-sixteenth century military experts from all over the empire had been traveling to the Shaolin Monastery to study its fighting techniques.”¹⁶ During the Ming dynasty, numerous military encyclopedias and writings became available that often mentioned the *wushu* at Shaolin temple.

References to the Shaolin martial arts appear in a variety of late-Ming Literary genres: military encyclopedias, martial-arts manuals (of the Shaolin school as well as its rivals, which defined themselves in opposition to it), geographical compositions...historical writings...epitaphs (of Shaolin fighting monks) and even fiction (in classical and vernacular idioms)...The Shaolin martial arts figured in the writings of generals, government officials, scholars, monks, and poets.¹⁷

But the monks were not just recognized by notary individuals of the elite and warrior classes, everyday laymen also conferred with the monks and studied their techniques; “...they...associated with the emerging community of martial artists that did not belong to the military.”¹⁸ It is here the transfusion of *wushu* was at a crossroads, with the temple at Shaolin serving at its cultural center. The Shaolin temple became almost synonymous with Chinese *wushu* from then on.

There was a period where *wushu* styles increased exponentially, and their geneses seemed to be in and around the temple of Shaolin. Many of the modern martial

¹⁶ Shahar, 364.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Shahar, 378.

arts that are known today were formed to some degree in this time because of socio-economic conditions such as violence and poverty, especially in the South.

It is noteworthy that beginning in the late Ming and all through the late Qing, Henan served as a hotbed for martial arts. The world renowned Taijiquan emerged...at Chenjiagou village some thirty miles north of the Shaolin Monastery, and Chang Naizhou compiled his martial arts manuals nearby at Sishui. Baguaquan likewise originated in Henan...and Xingyiquan, which emerged in nearby Shanxi, was practiced there as well. Similarly, Bajiquan originated either in Henan, or in... Hebei. The Shaolin Monastery was situated therefore in a region where many of the late-imperial fighting techniques emerged.¹⁹

Many other forms were created as well, namely the famous animal styles²⁰ and Hung Ga, a style made famous by one of the Ten Tigers of Guangdong Huang Qiyong²¹ and his son the folk hero Huang Feihong during the late Qing dynasty. Numerous regional forms of *wushu* emerged due to the Southern Shaolin temple in Fujian, which essentially composed the bulk of the Chinese Nanquan, or ‘southern boxing/fist’ forms, some of which are totally unrelated to their northern counterparts such as Shequan (蛇拳), or ‘Snake Fist’, and Southern Praying Mantis. One of the most famous styles derived from

¹⁹ Shahar, 389.

²⁰ The Animal Styles, otherwise known as the Five forms (五形) were *wushu* styles that derived from animal mimicry. The five styles include Tiger, Crane, Leopard, Snake, and Dragon. Another commonly used set are Tiger, Crane, Snake, Monkey, and Mantis. They are found primarily within the Southern *wushu* disciplines.

²¹ The Ten Tigers of Guangdong were ten of the most famous Wushu practitioners from Canton. There is a misconception that Huang Feihong was one of them although his father was. Huang Feihong was a Cantonese physician and Wushu practitioner who became a folk hero during the late Qing dynasty.

the Nanquan branches include Wing Chun (詠春) which was made famous by one of its practitioners, Ip Man. With the relative popularity in the hotbed of Southern China, *wushu* witnessed its most exponential growth in terms of diversity in this period. It was also at this time that *wushu* manuals were frequently published. Books like *A Study in Taijiquan* by Sun Lutang found reception among the people within China and the select few from the West that were able to ascertain them.

The *yingxiong* throughout the dynastic periods did not disappear. They were active throughout the dynasties after the Han. Indeed, many of the layman *wushu* practitioners, particularly toward the end of dynastic cycles, can be considered as *yingxiong*. The problem that arose for them was with each new dynasty that came to power, renewed civil stability came along with it. Just as before they would go through systematic purges by the new authorities and be forced into submission or be executed. These men then lived out their days practicing *wushu*. Some of their stories were immortalized while others faded with time. Another kind of *yingxiong*, rebels and warriors fighting against the authoritarian government, came cyclically just as the dynasties they fought against. However, during the last two imperial dynasties, the Ming and Qing respectively, the *yingxiong* evolved. There was no longer a need for sword-wielding warriors but instead revolutionaries that could insight change.

...During the [Qing] dynasty...knight-errantry declined, though it never died out completely. For instance, two of the leaders of the [Taiping] revolution...are described by the recent compilers of the *History of the Qing*

Dynasty...as knights-errant. But on the whole we find few knights-errant of the traditional type in [Qing] history.²²

The age of the traditional *yingxiong* had ended as the transition from physical resistance to ideological and political resistance caused a paradigm shift. But *wushu* practice flourished even to the twentieth century.

Origins of *Wuxia*

Just as its progenitor, *wuxia* had an origination point. *Wuxia*, or the fantastical tales of the *yingxiong*, was formed as the reputations of these chivalrous individuals grew over the course of time. Many of the *yingxiong* were *wushu* practicing swordsmen whose prowess became the stuff of legend. These legends began as oral histories. The exploits and adventures of the many *yingxiong* and *wushu* artists alike formed the bases for many *wuxia* legends that came to circulate in entertainment circles. Indeed, “the dramatic careers and colourful personalities of the knights-errant not unnaturally gave rise to legends, which exaggerated their exploits and sometimes credited them with supernatural powers. In this way, knight-errantry passed from the realm of fact to that of fiction,”²³ such as the biography of old man Zhou Tong who factually was an instructor of archery for Yue Fei, the renowned Song Dynasty general. He went from actually being a local hero of Hunan to a legendary teacher of the fictional characters Lu Junyi and Lin Chong, a sworn brother of Lu Zhishen, and a scholar of the eighteen arms of *wushu*. As such his storytellers later gave him supernatural martial skills and the nickname ‘Iron Arm.’ There is no historical evidence of Zhou Tong ever possessing any

²² Liu, 53.

²³ Liu, 81.

of these qualities or experiences beyond his tutelage of Yue Fei, however his transition from history to lore stands as one of the many examples of *yingxiong* and martial artists evolving along the journey from reality to fantasy.

Many stories of folklore and quasi-legends like that of the Yellow Emperor²⁴ were not uncommon before it was considered a genre of fiction. “Chivalric tales flourished for the first time towards the end of the Tang dynasty, in the ninth century A.D., though their prototypes can be traced to many centuries earlier.”²⁵ Many of the stories were, “written by literary men, in classical prose,”²⁶ but were not limited to the learned scholars. The *yingxiong* were men from all walks of life, scholars, soldiers, monks, laymen and women alike, many of which had little to no legitimate literary training and therefore were heroes of the common people. Consequently, “... [the] chivalric tales and ballads... existed in an oral tradition. The texts of these were written by men of little learning, in colloquial or semi-colloquial prose, often mixed with doggerel verse.”²⁷

Wuxia was spread easily through the illiterate masses by way of traveling folk storytellers, and “...as early as the Song dynasty storytellers already entertained urban crowds with lively renditions of vernacular tales...”²⁸ The value of storytellers grew exponentially because the interest in stories was great. It is clear that “...storytellers were patronized by all, from the court to the man in the street, and storytelling became a

²⁴ The Yellow Emperor, or Huangdi (黄帝) is the quasi-mythical cosmic monarch in Chinese mythology.

²⁵ Liu, 81.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Paize Keulemans, *Sound Rising from the Paper: Nineteenth-century Martial Arts Fiction and the Chinese Acoustic Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U Asia Center, 2014), 38.

highly specialized profession, members of which included women.”²⁹ Storytelling became so prevalent that the profession allowed for individuals to specialize in specific story types, most of which to some degree involved chivalrous, fantastical heroes with superhuman *wushu* skill. It was here that *wuxia* began taking on its most primitive form as a genre, although there were stories that were told prior to this that shared the same elements. The storytellers entertained the people, and so did the theatre.

Theatre and opera was another avenue that *wuxia* ventured into quite frequently, especially during the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, “...not only did martial arts fiction have strong connections with contemporary opera performances in terms of plot, but it also shared with Beijing opera the convention of transcribing action sequences...”³⁰ and these stage plays drew much from the Chinese stories; from as little as inspiration to as much as entire stories were used as material for ‘live action’ exhibitions of the classics and contemporary *wuxia* lore. Many people came to know the *wuxia* stories in large part because of theatre. It acted as a medium for the illiterate in much the same way as the traveling storytellers. In fact, “The theatre was one of the most potent agencies for popular education...”³¹

Storytellers were a commodity for a while, but it was not until the evolution from oral narration to novelization that *wuxia* began its ascent to prominence over its counterpart in *wushu*, who was originally its only running fuel. Novelization to some degree had occurred at least since the Song dynasty. However, one example that stands

²⁹ Liu, 107.

³⁰ Paize Keulemans, “Listening to the Printed Martial Arts Scene: Onomatopoeia and the Qing Dynasty,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 67, No. 1 (June 2007), 67. (accessed 26-09-2017) http://www.jstor.org/stable/25066838?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents.

³¹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Chinese, Their History and Culture* (n.p.: New York, Macmillan, 1964), 590.

to highlight *wuxia* development, and perhaps the most famous, was *Water Margin* (水滸傳) or *Outlaws of the Marsh* supposedly written by Shi Nai'an during the late Yuan and later edited by subsequent authors. The story itself was based upon a theme: it originally recounted the story of Song Jiang and his thirty-six rebels, who all were considered *yingxiong*, that fought against the establishment in the last days of the Northern Song. They won several battles against the imperial army and resisted pressure until they were ultimately forced to capitulate. However, as the legend grew with time so did the number of the rebels, ultimately being numbered at 108. The tale of the *Outlaws of the Marsh* is considered the first of its kind in terms of the *wuxia* genre. It set a precedent for future Chinese *wuxia* stories with both the characteristics that would ultimately become staples of the genre: heroic warriors possessing almost supernatural skill and social critiques of not only the period it was set in but sometimes even the era in which it was published. In the case of *Water Margin*, the call of duty for rebels against a corrupt and merciless government could draw parallels with the Han Chinese people against their Mongolian oppressors.

Stories like this grew in popularity during the storyteller period and increased further during the process of their novelizations in the middle Qing. By the “Late...Qing Dynasty a large number of novels about chivalrous heroes and complicated legal cases appeared in Chinese literature,”³² many of which lifted elements from other examples like *Water Margin* and shorter stories like *The Kun'lun Slave*. One such novel was *The*

³² Yukun Shi and Yu Yue, *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*, trans. Shouquan Song, and ed. Esther Samson and Lance Samson (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2005), 13.

Tale of Loyal Heroes and Righteous Gallants, known modernly by its two reprint names *The Three Heroes and Five Gallants* or *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*.³³

Although the history of the story's evolution from the oral tale told by Shi Yukun to printed novel is poorly known, scholars generally accept... some time in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Shi Yukun became famous in Beijing for telling a tale entitled *Bao gong' an*... (The cases of Judge Bao). Using these oral performances as their foundation, local entrepreneurs began to circulate a series of handwritten manuscripts...³⁴

This one was a *wuxia gong' an*, or detective story, also set in the Song dynasty and based on the ascent of reputable Judge Bao Zheng and his handling of various cases in the interest of peace and righteousness. He enlisted the help of several *yingxiong* in the fight against corruption, and their exploits compose the bulk of the story. This book too was an indicator of the evolution of *wuxia* because it was considered the first story to fuse the two genres of *wuxia* and *gong' an* to the degree it had. It also garnered much viewership and critical acclaim like its predecessor. The story of Judge Bao and his *yingxiong* assistants also served as a standard for future authors to aspire to because, "The features of story-telling [faded] while [the novel gained] quality as a literary work."³⁵

³³ The novel was edited several times and with each edition, the name changed to better fit the new formatted novel.

³⁴ Keulemans, "Listening to the Printed Martial Arts Scene," 69.

³⁵ Yukun Shi and Yu Yue, 17.

Wuxia as an Imminent Genre

What made novels so popular were their ability to allow readers to virtually have a storyteller in hand without having to wait for the orators to return with a new story to tell; “...the storyteller’s figure in printed vernacular and his host of rhetorical clichés should be understood as a remnant of those popular storytelling origins.”³⁶ The novels were just as captivating as the narrators themselves. An interesting element that these *wuxia* novels possessed were their usage of onomatopoeia to convey a level of realism to the reader. This was what captivated the reader and made them feel as if a live storyteller was narrating. Indeed, “the most likely source for the onomatopoeic noise of the nineteenth-century martial arts novel, however, is found in the rhetorical device of the storyteller. As early as the Ming dynasty, authors had incorporated a storyteller figure into their vernacular tales to address the readers as if they were members of a live audience.”³⁷ This feeling of being immersed within the pages of a book as if it came to life was the captivating element of the *wuxia* novels. Therefore it would be understandable if the reader to a degree felt like the stories were factual and real, whether it had supernatural themes or not. *Wuxia* novels married these elements and it was well-received by the readers. In fact,

The association between martial arts action and the use of acoustic elements [was] so strong that martial arts novels often self-consciously [commented] on their use in meta-fictional fashion... the sounds in the late nineteenth-

³⁶ Keulemans, *Sound Rising from the Paper*. 38.

³⁷ Keulemans, “Listening to the Printed Martial Arts Scene,” 67.

century martial arts novel [overwhelmed] the reader with a sense of physical spectacle.³⁸

Wushu and *wuxia* to this point were now both integrally related and heavily embedded in the cradle of Chinese culture. But what caused *wuxia* to outgrow its counterpart and progenitor? People in China were aware of the differences between the two; they understood that *wuxia* is a matter of fiction and *wushu* practice is a matter of fact. However the popularity of *wuxia* novelization among the common people, *wushu* practitioners alike, appealed far more than any *wushu* manual to individuals outside the martial realm. Stories that were published in various places, namely newspapers and magazines, were more accessible to a broader audience at that time. They still drew on the classical literature for material, and so tales centered on *wushu* practitioners transferred directly from traditional into the contemporary forms of fiction.³⁹

Rather than be an outsider to the intricacies of the many *wushu* styles and take many years to train to even a decent level of proficiency, it was much easier to read the legends of great *yingxiong* and righteous *youxia* and feel as if the reader was one of them; be immersed in the story of the *Outlaws of the Marsh* and feel as if the reader was fighting alongside Lin Chong and Lu Zhishen against Gao Qiu, or act as a fellow detective alongside the *yingxiong* enlisted by Judge Bao Zheng. *Wuxia* novels gave the readers a sense of belonging in a world that was all-inclusive. That is not to say the *wushu* realm was not inclusive. On the contrary, *wushu* was a means to bring together many walks of life. However, *wushu* takes discipline and many years of practice to truly cultivate. Therefore, to read *wuxia* was to be tapped into a realm not your own and still

³⁸ Keulemans, "Listening to the Printed Martial Arts Scene," 57, 59.

³⁹ Lorge, 219.

feel as if it were. It also gave the readers a means to a cultural nostalgia; the Qing dynasty just like its predecessors was faced with a steady decline in governmental authority which coupled with numerous other factors ultimately led to its collapse. The effects of its decline were seen and felt by its people. These novels served as looking glasses to the golden ages of Chinese culture, or quite simply, better times than the period they were living in at that point.

Wuxia as a genre grew exponentially toward the late Qing and into the twentieth century, further supplanting its counterpart. Until about the middle to late twentieth century *wuxia* reached new heights in popularity because of cultural exposure that was transfused to the West by way of Hong Kong. Western, namely European, and Japanese influences had descended on China prior to the turn of the century. Japan had already been exposed to Chinese writings since the Tang dynasty, many of which are still preserved there today, but Europe had yet to taste the exoticism of China to any great degree. Those that were able to understand the language and ascertain the classics became enamored with the novelized stories and began to build interest in the *wuxia* genre for the first time outside the Chinese culture.

Transition to the Silver Screen & The Uncertainty of the 21st Century

Western audiences were beginning to gauge *wuxia* from novelization and *wushu* from relative exposure via expatriates who were settling outside the borders of China. The advent of film brought its popularity to new heights. The *wuxia* genre was the first one seized by the new Chinese film industry headquartered in Shanghai during the 1920s, and “From about 1927 onwards, the Shanghai film industry began to take a leaf

out of the publishing world's practice of serialising *wuxia* novels by adopting the same practice for the cinema, effectively 'picturising' *wuxia* novels."⁴⁰ One of the first movies produced was *The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple*, a silent film that was supposedly adapted from a *wuxia* serial that was published in the newspapers. The movie itself is now lost; however, critic Mao Dun best described his critique of the movie: "To them, the film is real, not a play of shadows on the screen. If you must cite an example of a Chinese film that can affect an audience's emotions, then cite The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple."⁴¹ Many more early films would be made in the *wuxia* mold.

Movies after this were mostly produced in Hong Kong and later Taiwan since mainland China had been subdued by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949; thus, they focused mainly on pro-communist propaganda for their new government. Because of this, "...following the end of the Second World War, virtually the whole Shanghai film industry was transplanted into Hong Kong,"⁴² with the majority of the filmmakers emigrating to the colonial area. One of the most notable early film companies to pioneer the new *wuxia* films was Shaw Brothers Studios who moved from the mainland to Hong Kong during the 1950s. They were instrumental in the production and initial push of *wuxia* in cinema. It is at this critical juncture that the relationship between *wushu* and *wuxia* entered another paradigm shift; *wuxia* began to create a stereotype for itself in the film industry. Most of the *wuxia* films at this time exhibited what historian Lu Xun coined '*shenmo xiaoshuo*' or 'gods and demons' fiction.⁴³ It succumbed to almost

⁴⁰ Stephen Teo, *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The Wuxia Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 23. *eBook Academic Collection*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 22, 2018).

⁴¹ Teo, 38.

⁴² Teo, 50.

⁴³ Xun Lu, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2000).

cartoonish effects and development. And many intellectuals at that time began to view the, “genre as morally corrupt. Not only did the genre deal in superstition, it also purveyed ‘yellow’ (huangse) culture, meaning pornography...Generally, the outcry against [*wuxia*] centred on the genre’s supposed propensity to poison the minds of the young with superstition and cult worship of imaginary heroes possessing supernatural powers.”⁴⁴ Because of the outcry against it, *wuxia* for the first time began to wane despite the production of several movies now widely considered to be some of the best *wuxia* works. *Wushu* once again stepped to the forefront, this time under the guise of the Kung Fu film craze. These had been around about as long as the *wuxia* films; the earliest precursor film *Adventures of Fong Sai-yuk* and movies about the exploits of Huang Feihong helped usher in this new movie genre to audiences. These appealed to the masses because stories about individuals like, “The real-life hero Wong Fei-hung [shared] the same trait of knight-errant chivalry, using his martial prowess to help the needy and the oppressed, thus he [had] the same concern for the underdog as the traditional *wuxia* hero drawn from fiction.”⁴⁵

The Kung Fu film craze effectively supplanted the *wuxia* film interest. The first phase of these films reached an apex during the 1970s with the rise of Bruce Lee to stardom. Himself being a practitioner of *wushu* as well as the creator of the hybrid art he called Jeet Kune Do, he believed that cinema should exemplify the realism of the Chinese martial arts. The release of his first official movie *The Big Boss* solidified the genre among the Chinese in Hong Kong, and his future releases *Fist of Fury* and *Enter*

⁴⁴ Teo, 38-39.

⁴⁵ Teo, 57.

the Dragon opened the floodgates of the Kung Fu film craze to urban America, who had been exposed to him as an actor in light doses on various shows during the 1960s.⁴⁶ His influence and the emergence of other notable martial arts actors captured much of the American pop culture of the 1970s, creating a new market for *wushu* interest and in many ways gathered almost a cult following. He was a polarizing figure because:

Lee's significance as a martial arts icon has relied on his charismatic ability to cross over from East to West... Lee's 'nationalism' [was] multi-faceted and [revolved] around issues of decolonisation struggles, postcolonial or subaltern identity, ethnic pride, civil rights activism, [and appealed] not only to Chinese communities, as his primary audience, but also other minority communities in the West... the star's philosophy of fighting with one's bare hands inspired a generation of African-Americans and Asian-Americans to take up the martial arts in order to bolster the anti-racist movement in the United States... Lee's nationalism however would amount to nothing if not for the fact that he was responsible for revivifying kung fu as a genre in the Hong Kong cinema... [Consequently] it must be said that the genre's appeal would not have had as great an impact without Bruce Lee.⁴⁷

Unfortunately, Bruce Lee's premature death led to a decline in the *wushu* intrigue once again in Hong Kong audiences as movie studios clamored to find martial arts actors to utilize his success. However, it was the Western markets who absorbed the culture and

⁴⁶ Bruce Lee played the sidekick Kato in the action television series *The Green Hornet* and had cameos in various other shows such as *Blondie*, *Ironside*, and *Longstreet*.

⁴⁷ Teo, 73-76.

began to be ever more intrigued. Bruce Lee's book *The Tao of Jeet Kune Do* was released posthumously. It was not necessarily a *wushu* manual in a traditional sense, but instead a collection of his philosophies concerning his art. Regardless, the book garnered interest and just like his movies led individuals to look about studying Chinese *wushu*.

From the late 1970s into the 1980s Kung Fu films digressed into satirical comedies with overt *wushu* themes. Movies like *Drunken Master* starring Jackie Chan as Huang Feihong, which was a satirical bow to the early stories set on the silver screen about the Cantonese folk hero, became the standard for the Kung Fu genre. *Wuxia* on the other hand was reinvented and found itself once again battling for supremacy, and during this period we see the two continue to be muddled especially among the Western spectators. *Wuxia* seemed to be on the rise again because of the ground it gained through the 1980s and well into the 1990s; not just among the West but back at home on the Chinese mainland. Movies such as *Last Hurrah for Chivalry*, *The Swordsman Trilogy*, and *Ashes of Time* were some examples of films that were part of the new *wuxia* cinema tradition. However, *wushu* was not without its heavy hitters that essentially relived the glory days of the Kung fu craze, such as *Once Upon a Time in China* that retold the story of Huang Feihong, *Fist of Legend* a remake of Bruce Lee's *Fist of Fury*, and *The Legend* which was another retelling of the life of Fong Sai-yuk.

The twenty-first century finds *wushu* and *wuxia* at a crossroads; both genres have created a significant foothold in popular interest in both China and abroad. The early 2000s found *wuxia* once again at its finest with the blockbuster releases of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* which was released in 2000 and Jet Li's *Hero* which was released in 2002. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was an international box office success, won

several film awards, and came to be hailed as one of the greatest *wuxia* films to ever hit American theatres. Its blend of plotline and visual spectacle made it a crowning achievement for the genre. *Hero* also did extremely well in the international market, surpassing the records held by the aforementioned film. However, it was also the first *wuxia* film to obtain an official stamp of approval from the Chinese Communist government:

The blockbuster mode of production... entrenched *wuxia* as a staple genre in the Chinese film industry. More specifically, it... legitimised the genre in the eyes of the Chinese political establishment...*Hero* was given a premiere at the Great Hall of the People, the seat of the central government, and... The trend of the *wuxia* blockbuster was thus initiated. ⁴⁸

We find that at this point *wushu* to some degree had been incorporated into American action films since the Kung Fu craze. One of the most notable was *The Matrix* trilogy which is hailed as a classic of American cinema. The movies incorporated many martial arts cues that the directors borrowed from the two genres and the choreography for the movies was overseen by Yuen Woo-ping, a major Chinese film director that had worked on many of the films that shaped both genres. The Western film industries adopted the idea of utilizing martial arts in action movies, and thus elements of both genres began to be incorporated. It is at this point *wuxia* and *wushu*, at least in the Western perspective, were indistinguishable.

⁴⁸ Teo, 193.

To Western audiences the umbrella term of the martial arts movie encompassed the two, leaving little distinction. *Wushu* and *wuxia* simply became two of its subgenres. Now the two find themselves in a precarious position; they currently fill an important niche in both the Chinese and Western film industries. This is evidenced by the unprecedented amount of films that are released under the martial arts discipline every year. Movies such as *Ip Man*, a period piece starring Donnie Yen about the life of the titular character and his prowess in Wing Chun, and *The Forbidden Kingdom*, a fantasy *wuxia* film that brought together the *wushu* giants Jet Li and Jackie Chan for the first time in a loose adaptation of the story *Journey to the West*, exhibit that both genres by themselves are very much alive and thriving. However, their integral relationship finds the two in an almost harmonic existence. The two found a way to coexist, and they have for many years. In the twenty-first century and beyond they will only continue to evolve as new ideas make their mark on the two, whether it be through the *wushu* practice or the *wuxia* fantasy. Although they can inhabit certain contexts together such as cinema, each one commands a certain niche; *wuxia* is purely an entertainment genre whether oral storytelling, literary or cinematic. It is mythical in nature even though it finds its origins in *wushu* oral histories. *Wushu* is the real Chinese practice of internal and external Martial Arts and its many styles. Therefore, it can be found in both literary and cinematic spheres as well as the physical one.

Conclusion

Since their beginnings *wushu* and *wuxia* have been joined at their core to some considerable degree. *Wushu* had existed in various forms for nearly the entire duration of Chinese written history. It evolved and adapted throughout the dynastic cycles and created mighty men of valor that would be remembered forever in Chinese legends and folktales. *Wushu* and its practitioners for millennia were an integral part of the Chinese cultural identity and were instrumental in the inception of *wuxia*. *Wuxia* was built around the progress of *wushu* and the *yingxiong* it produced, as storytellers spun their tales for the entertainment and intrigue of the Chinese masses. As *wushu* evolved, *wuxia* evolved along with it. In peaceful times *wuxia* acted as both a loose oral history and a nostalgic gateway for audiences to tap into the eras of *yingxiong* and their fascinating adventures. Although we find that at several points one was at the forefront throughout the histories, neither could truly exist without the other. Each facet found its apexes, and when one declined the other was there to replace it. Their popularity only grew as times changed and new individuals brought a new intrigue to them; through novelization and eventually cinema. Just as before, each found its highpoint while adapting to the new audiences, namely Western, in the twentieth century. *Wuxia* could not exist without the practice of *wushu*, and *wushu* cannot stand on its own because its history is riddled with *wuxia* lore. *Wushu and wuxia*, in practice, novelization and films, have a working syncretism that makes their future uncertain; but new ideas and innovations will undoubtedly continue to make their relationship unique.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Cheh, Chiang, dir. *One-Armed Swordsman*. Shaw Brothers Studio, 1967. DVD. Shaw Brothers Studio, 1967.

Clouse, Robert, dir. *Enter the Dragon*. Warner Bros and Concord Production Inc, 1973. Golden Harvest, 1973.

King, Hu, dir. *Dragon Inn*. Union Film Company, 1967. DVD. Union Film Company, 1967

King, Hu, dir. *A Touch of Zen*. Union Film, International Film Production, 1971. DVD. Union Film Company, 1971.

Lee, Ang, dir. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Columbia Pictures Film, 2000. Film. Sony Pictures Classics, 2000.

Lee, Bruce. *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*. Burbank, CA: Ohara Publications, 1975.

Minkoff, Rob, dir. *The Forbidden Kingdom*. Casey Silver Productions, 2008. DVD. Lionsgate and the Weinstein Company, 2008.

Shi, Nai-an. *Water Margin (水浒传)*. Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1975.

Shi, Yukun, and Yue Yu. *The Tale of Loyal Heroes and Righteous Gallants* (忠烈俠義傳), 1879.

Song, Shouquan, trans, and Esther Samson and Lance Samson, eds. *The Seven Heroes and Five Gallants*. Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press, 2005.

Sun, Lutang. *A Study of Taijiquan*. Translated by Tim Cartmell. Berkeley, CA: Blue Snake Books, 2003.

Yip, Wilson, dir. *Ip Man*. Mandarin Films, 2008. DVD. Mandarin Films, 2008.

Secondary Sources

Ames, Roger T. "Confucius." Britannica. July 31, 2014. Accessed March 23, 2018.

<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Confucius>.

Broughton, Jeffrey L. *The Bodhidharma Anthology: The Earliest Records of Zen*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Filipiak, Kai. "From Warriors to Sportsmen: How Traditional Chinese Martial Arts Adapted to Modernity." *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 19, no. 1 (2010): 30-53. SPORTDiscus with Full Text, EBSCOhost. Accessed February 9, 2017.

Henning, Stanley E. "The Chinese Martial Arts in Historical Perspective." *Military Affairs* 45, no. 4 (December 1981): 173-178.

Hu, William. "The I-Chin Ching, Fact or Fancy?," *Black Belt Magazine*, November 1965.

Keulemans, Paize. "Listening to the Printed Martial Arts Scene: Onomatopoeia and the Qing Dynasty," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 67, No. 1 (June 2007): 51-87.

Keulemans, Paize. *Sound Rising from the Paper: Nineteenth-century Martial Arts Fiction and the Chinese Acoustic Imagination*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U Asia Center, 2014.

Latourette, Kenneth Scott. *The Chinese, Their History and Culture*. n.p.: New York, Macmillan, 1964.

Liu, James J. Y. *The Chinese Knight-Errant*. University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Lorge, Peter A. *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-first Century*. Cambridge University Press.

Lu, Xun. *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2000.

Shahar, Meir. "Ming-Period Evidence of Shaolin Martial Practice," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 61, No. 1 (December 2001): 359-413. Accessed January 17, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3558572>.

Shuai Jiao (摔跤). "History of Shuai Jiao." Chinese Kuoshu Institute. Accessed December 18, 2017. <http://www.kuoshu.co.uk/History%20-%20SJ.htm>.

Teo, Stephen. *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The Wuxia Tradition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. *eBook Academic Collection, EBSCOhost*. Accessed February 22, 2018.