

## Wushu and Literatures, Films and TV

Wushu is a quintessence of China, which is closely connected with Wushu and Chinese people's knight-errant complex. Over two thousand years, from the Pre-Qin period to the Republic of China era, there have been numerous legends about knight-errant, and history abounds in many examples of this kind. Therefore, Xia Culture, developed from Xia people (a person adept in Wushu and given to chivalrous conduct), was specially developed. The core of the culture is the sagas of the knight-errants, while the knight-errant complex is the psychosocial basis of this culture.

Most people like reading swordsmen novels. However, they tend not to focus on the inconceivable Kungfu, but the charm of personalities, such as braveness and magnanimousness, courage and determination, promises that cannot be counted on and self-sacrifice. Under the pens of the authors, the knight-errants with swords travel around on an unrestricted base. They break the bondage of mundane regulations and laws—and never bend to nobility. They dare to reveal corrupt officials. Often, they live in the mountains and ancient temples, or appear in restau-



Woodcut of Shui Hu Ye Zi: Song Jiang and Shi Jin by Chen Hongshou in the late Ming Dynasty



Chivalrous complex of the Chinese people  
 Chivalrous complex falls basically into the scope of folk culture. It is ordinary people's imaginary resistance against the prevailing order, and also longing for perfect heroic character. The so-called "where there is injustice, there will be an outcry." Social injustice is the root cause of the violations by force, and the historical root of the chivalrous complex of the Chinese people. As is described in the Water Margin, "The Buddhist monk's staff cleared the dangerous road, and Buddhist monk's knife removed all the injustice." The chivalrous complex of the Chinese people also contains a persistent psychological prayer that is the longing for that tremendous personality power. Cultural history research shows that in the historical development process of a nation, a kind of mass character that the nation lacks most usually becomes the lasting spiritual pursuit of quite a few individuals of the nation. In China, the most desired is a healthy and complete personality free from servility and obsequiousness.

rants, where they hold big feasts and drink and spend money recklessly. There are beautiful ladies and nice wines. The cold swords contrast with the light the moon. They fight hard against adversity and destiny. They never show their love, or enmity. They live a magnanimous life and choose to die solemnly. The authors show the real degage lives to the readers.

The knight-errant complex can be reflected in poems and operas. For example, excellent Kungfu and errantry have been mentioned in the White Horse (Baima Pian) by Cao Zhi (192–232), Knight-errant on Travel (Xiake Xing) by Li Bai (701–762), Farewell to Liang Huang (Bie Liang Huang) by Li Qi (690–751 (indeterminate)) and A tale of a Girl from Lanling (Lanling Nüer Xing) by Jin He (1818–1885) later in the Qing Dynasty. These works have been widely read. Tracing back to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when films and TV programs were being developed, many characters of these swordsmen novels began to appear on-screen.

It should be noted that swordsmen novels do not reflect the reality of the life, but rather the fantasy world. They present a world that common people dream about and what ordinary people want in their hearts. In China, these novels may become the permanent fairy tales of the nation while the knight-errant complex has been integrated into the historical psychological accumulation of the nation as a special element of Wushu. Therefore, it is seen as a permanent retrospection in the history of the development of the internal spirit of the Chinese nation.



### **New-style swordsmen novels**

Louis Cha (Jin Yong, 1924–present) brings new vitality and perfection to Chinese swordsmen novels. Therefore, masculinity and gentleness become two new characteristics of Chinese literature works. It means Chinese swordsmen novels have entered a new era.

It seems to be a historical opportunity. In the 1950s, due to political reasons, swordsmen novels disappeared rapidly on the Chinese mainland. Meantime, some famous authors also disappeared from the literature world. However, it was at that time, Louis Cha became a success in Hong Kong, and made his way to the top among the other swordsmen authors.

Except Louis Cha, the authors who wrote swordsmen novels during the period also included Liang Yusheng, Gu Long (Xiong Yaohua), Dongfang Bai and Wolongsheng (Niu Heting) in



Hunting drawing of Emperor Xuande, the Ming Dynasty

The drawing illustrated Emperor Xuande (1426–1435) in garments of the Tartars as he went hunting at the countryside.



Hong Kong and Taiwan. These authors and Xiao Yi, an overseas Chinese in the United States, made up a new author group, and their novels were called the “new-type swordsmen novels.”

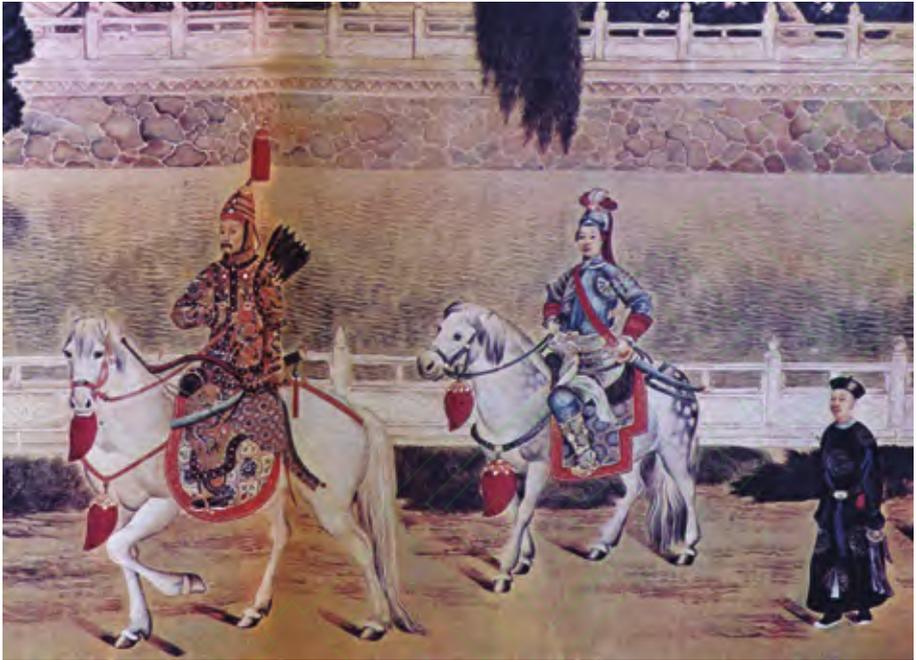
The new-type swordsmen novels are recognized as fairy tales for both adults and children. On the basis of inheriting the artistic traditions of the existing excellent works, the new-type novels focus on bringing out the inner spirit of human beings and creating vivid characters with distinctive personalities. The characters created in these works usually have the emotions and desires of common people, but at the same time, each of them are endowed with some kind of superb Kungfu skill, which makes them seem god-like. Therefore, these novels tend to be fiction novels. The new-type novels also integrate characteristics of both fairy tales and myths. In this sense, the new-type novels lead a new path into the literature world.

The new-type swordsmen novels, in fact, are combinations of romantic novels and swordsmen novels. They formally talk about Wushu, but actually talk about emotions. Meanwhile, these novels are written by referring to the techniques used in Western literatures and films for expression. In these novels, emotions are highlighted, while Wushu is indulgently exaggerated upon.

Each author has a special artistic pursuit, so their works are of different styles. Among these authors, Louis Cha, Liang Yusheng and Gu Long are the most distinguished and influential. At least a hundred million people on the Chinese mainland have read the works of Louis Cha, and there are few Chinese who are unfamiliar with this man.

The charm of Louis Cha’s novels comes from the author’s understanding of life, his deep insight to history, well-arranged plots and unique writing style. His choice of words and plot are basic skills that ensure the high quality of work by any author. However, without a deep understanding of life and insight to history, the work lacks vigor of life and profound history.





Procession of Emperor Qianlong with Fragrant Imperial Concubine by Giuseppe Castiglione of the Qing Dynasty

Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), Italian, came to China to preach his religion in 1715 and served as the imperial painter and left many paintings. *The Book and The Sword*, written by Louis Cha, has mentioned the story between Emperor Qianlong and Fragrant Imperial Concubine.

The works of Louis Cha often surround a theme of conflict between personality and destiny. The characters in his books pursue two states of perfection: the perfection of Wushu and life. And nearly all of them attain a good understanding on life during the process of pursuing the perfection of Wushu. As a result, their splendid lives become more admirable under the foil of their excellent Kungfu. The novels of Louis Cha are also seen as historical records of the characters, which document how they grow up to be mature, how they exercise Kungfu and what they experience in their lives. Louis Cha is also known for creating tragic atmospheres, where his characters grow up and experience





Cosmic iron sword, August, 2004, Beijing

Cosmic iron refers to iron from cloud stone and also known as "Xuan Tie" in ancient times. In fact, it is permenorm alloy. In Gaocheng of Hebei province, a bronze Yue with iron blaze made by cosmic iron was unearthed, which belonged to the mid-Shang Dynasty. The sword in picture is made in recent years and is 100 cm long and weighs four kilograms. The sword is sparkling and sharp with special patterns of cosmic iron. In the Return of the Condor Heroes by Louis Cha, Yang Guo used such a cosmic iron sword.

many difficulties. Many of these characters, such as Xiao Feng, Zhang Wuji, Hu Fei, Yang Guo, Chen Jialuo, Yuan Chengzhi and Di Yun, have lives with irreparable regret with unrealized aspirations. They often do not have the chance to put their excellent skills to use.

Heroes are born from tragedies. How many heroes have come forth through the history of war for the Chinese nation? Louis Cha understands the rules of history. He concentrates on the tragedies of history in his books and his characters shoulder the heavy loads of both history and their lives, which highlights their personalities.

But the use of emotion is what really draws the readers in, allowing them to resonate with the characters in the story.

Wushu is similar to the art and philosophy under the pen of Louis Cha. For example, the Baihuacuoquan of Chen Jialuo in *The Book and the Sword*, Tangshi Jianfa in *A Deadly Secret*, Shufaquan of Zhang Sanfeng in *The Heavenly Sword and the Dragon Saber*, Luoyingshenjian Zhang of Huang Yaoshi in *The Legend of Condor Heroes* and Anranxiaohun Zhang of Yang Guo in *The Return of the Condor Heroes* are all sublimed Wushu that are similar to the arts and lack no philosophical speculation. While other authors pale



in comparison to Louis Cha, there are a few that must be mentioned when discussing Wushu literature.

Liang Yusheng (1924–2009) has 40 works, the most outstanding one of which is Ping Zong Xia Ying, Romance of the White Haired Maiden and Heroes of the Tang Dynasty. His works are full of literary characteristics. Most of them are classically elegant, and consist of excellent artistic conceptions and descriptions of women in these works. But some of Liang's works lack authenticity while others are excessive and lack appeal.

Gu Long (1936–1985) leads another way. He references many Western whodunits and uses a lot of montage skills adopted from films. Therefore, his works are “westernized” and cater to the interests of young people. Gu Long has more than 80 works, including Handsome Siblings, The Sentimental Swordsman, Chu Liuxiang and The Legend of Lu Xiaofeng. The characteristics of Gu Long's works include modern and sharp words, mysterious style, more cool tones than warm tones, and more sorrow than pleasure. In his works, there are speculations on the philosophic theories of life, profound conclusions on life experience, wonderful profiles of lives and vivid characters. However, carelessness and negligence are reflected in his works, resulting in overall mediocrity, where peals and stones, sagaciousness and superficiality coexist in the same works. The works of Gu Long are weird, but that also spurs his success. However, the characters



Nan Jiyun from China's Scenery by Okada Gyokuzan published in AD 1802.

Nan Jiyun was born in Dunqiu (today's Xun County of Henan) in the Tang Dynasty and was good at archery. He resisted the troops of An Lushan, then was captured after the county fell into the enemy, and finally died.



in his works lack improvement and the proper connotations of history and life.

Gu Long led a miserable life. For a long time, he lived alone and drank heavily. He died in his forties. It is said that Li Xunhuan, the famous “Xiao Li Fei Dao”—a character in *The Sentimental Swordsman*, who also lives a lonely life and drinks everyday—is the epitome of the life of the author himself.

### Action Film and TV

In the 1960s, knight-errant film became popular in Hong Kong. Famous action star Bruce Lee (Li Xiaolong) (1940–1973) conquered people of all colors. Thanks to him, people all over the world knew “Chinese Kungfu.”

Bruce Lee was a master in Kungfu. His original name was Li Zhenfan, and Xiaolong was his stage name. At age of 13, he



Film still from *Burning Honglian Temple* (1928–1930)



Film still of Wu Lizhu from *Guan Dong Da Xia* (1930)





Photo of performers and clerks from Shanghai Mingxing Company (1934)

Xia Peizhen (1908–1975) (the first one on the front row from the right), Hu Die (the third one on the front row from the right), the director Zhang Shichuan (1889–1953) (in the middle of the back row)



Movie Queen Hu Die (1908–1989) in 1933

became a student of Ye Wen, a Hong Kong master in Yongchunquan, and then went on to become a student of Shao Hansheng to learn Luohanquan and Tanglangquan. At age 18, he went to the United States to study philosophy at Washington State University. In 1965, he established the first school of Chinese Kungfu in the US. In 1967, he named the Wushu he created “Jeet Kune Do,” which made Chinese Kungfu schools more complete.

In 1971, Bruce Lee became famous overnight by playing a leading role in



Huang Liushuang (1907–1961, the first one), the famous Chinese-born actress performing martial arts at Hollywood in 1930

Huang Liushuang, whose ancestral home was Taishan of Guangdong province, was born in Los Angeles. She became famous overnight by acting as a Mongolian bondmaid in the *Thief of Baghdad*. She came back to China many times for shooting movies.



the film named *The Big Boss*. He then played the lead actor in the *Fist of Fury*, before taking a role in *The Way of Dragon* and *Enter the Dragon*. But, in both films, he not only acted, but also directed. On July 20, 1973, Bruce Lee died suddenly while filming the *Game of Death*. He died in acute brain edema and was buried at a memorial park in Seattle.

Bruce Lee played the roles of heroes who were masters at Kungfu dedicated to safeguarding the dignity of the Chinese nation. In each film, Bruce displayed his excellent Kungfu skills. *The Way of Dragon* included the most wonderful action shots of his films. This film has been made into an introduction film for learning Jeet Kune Do. In addition, it provides an example of competition between Chinese Kungfu and Karate.

Five years later after the death of Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan (Cheng Long) became widely famous in Hong Kong.



Film still of Bruce Lee from *Way of the Dragon* in 1973



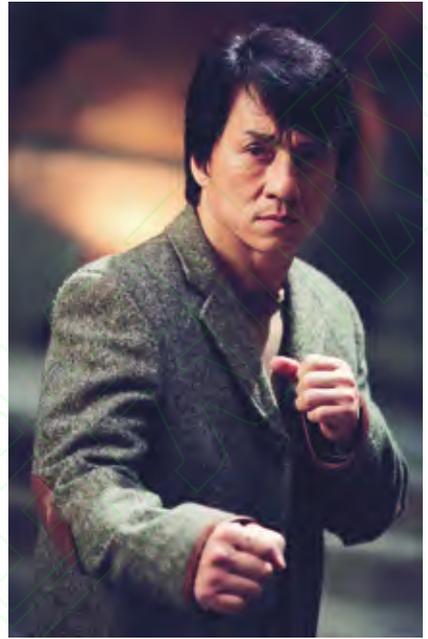
## CHINESE KUNGFU

Jackie Chan was originally named Chen Gangsheng. He was born in 1954 in Hong Kong though his ancestral home is Shandong. Because he lived a poor life when he was young, he was sent to the Peking Opera School run by Master Yu Jim Yuen. Ten years later, he became a master in Kungfu. At the age of 17, he became a stunt man and acted in Bruce Lee's films. After that, he changed his name to Chen Yuanlong, and then to Cheng Long in 1976.

In 1978, Jackie Chan played the leading roles in the *Eagles Shadow* and *Drunken Master*, but he did not gain much success from these films. However in 1985, Jackie Chan directed the film *Police Story*, consolidating his dominance as an action star. Jackie Chan then went to Hollywood and became popular for his role in *Rumble in the Bronx*. Later, he directed *Rush Hour* and the *Highlanders*, becoming the most popular Chinese star with the highest box office value in Hollywood.

After the success of Jackie Chan, Jet Li (*Li Lianjie*), another man from the Chinese mainland, rose to action movie stardom.

Jet Li is a Beijinger. He started to learn Kungfu when he young. From 1974 to 1978, he topped five consecutive National Wushu Championships and participated in performances abroad several times. In 1982, when he was 19, he played the leading role in the film *The Shaolin Temple*,



Film still of Jackie Chan from the *Medallion* in 1982



Film poster of *Shaolin Temple* in 1981



which was backed by Chung Yuen Motion Picture Co. The film, made on the Chinese mainland, included a number of national Wushu champions, and demonstrated the real Kungfu of China, surprising the world soon after its release. It set record box office returns in Hong Kong and was widely popular in both Asian and Western countries. It directly raised the enthusiasm for learning Chinese Kungfu around the world. The film essentially paved the road to fame and Hollywood for Jet Li.

In 1983, action films *Wulin Zhi* and *The Undaunted Wudang* were produced on the Chinese mainland. The leading actor of the former one was Wu Bin, then coach of the Beijing Wushu Team, and the leading actor of the latter one was Zhao Changjun, a national Wushu champion. Both films were instantaneously popular.

In 2000, the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, directed by Ang Lee, caused a huge international response, creating a martial arts film craze across the world. The film is based on the story of the same name written by Wang Du Lu. Ang Lee incorporated in



Hong Kong film director Lau Kar Leung directing actors during movie making in the 1970s

Lau Kar Leung is a famous martial artist, action director and film director. He takes the real martial art route after Bruce Lee and is also the first film director from action director. The left photo illustrates Lau Kar Leung directing John Chiang mantis boxing, while the right one shows him teaching Chia Hui Liu to use three-jointed pike.



## CHINESE KUNGFU

the film the essence of Kungfu film and literary film, interpreting Chinese classical aesthetic tradition and emotional concepts from a new perspective. The film won many awards at international film festivals, and got the 73<sup>rd</sup> Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, gaining the highest international reputation in the history of Kungfu films. In addition, the film also had spectacular box office success, hitting more than \$200 million global box office revenues, the highest among the Chinese-language films ever. After that, *Hero*, directed by Zhang Yimou, and *Kungfu*, composed, directed, and starred by Stephen Chow, also met with great success, with a global box office hitting more than \$100 million.

As for the popularization of TV action series, Hong Kong played a major role. Many Louis Cha novels were adapted and made into TV series shows. The most popular TV series shows produced on the Chinese mainland include the *Swordsmen*, *The Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils (Eightfold Path of the Heavenly Dragon)*. All of these were met with a high audience rating. In fact, nearly all the actors played in these series were Kungfu laymen. But the popularity of these TV series did not last long. Because most of the actions were performed using stunt skills, the series lacked authenticity—a common weakness of TV action series. Meanwhile, other adapted works took quite a different approach to the characters and plots compared to the books, diluting the historical and cultural connotations of the original works. Poor actors and actresses also further diminished the attraction of the TV series shows.

