

Sounds, Swords and Forests: An Exploration into the Representations of Music and Martial Arts in Contemporary Kung Fu Films

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Abstract

In the Wu Xia film *Hero* (Yimou, 2002), Jet Li's character Nameless ponders mid-combat the connection between the martial arts and music, stating that both wrestle with 'complex chords and rare melodies'. There have been various articulations of the Chinese equivalents to the Medieval Quadrivium, whereby the cultured person is expected to be competent in a select number of artistic and intellectual disciplines. Rather than the four disciplines of this particularly western approach, several Chinese equivalents have been based on the number five, a significant number featured in the I Ching, whose articulation of the Five Elements (Fire, Metal, Wood, Water and Earth) can be found throughout traditional Chinese medicine, cosmology, and martial arts. One such articulation expects the cultured martial artist to be competent in the disciplines of calligraphy, music, healing (acupuncture, Chinese medicine), cosmology, and of course, kung fu. My interest in this article is to explore the ways in which the philosophical connections between music and martial arts have been represented and articulated in contemporary kung fu films.

Keywords: Martial arts cinema, music, Kung Fu, interdisciplinary arts practice

Introduction:

The desire to articulate a synthesis between what may be conceived of as the disciplines of the body and those of the mind, attaining to an imagined ideal of the complete human through complementary artistic and physical disciplines, has been expressed in a variety of cultural contexts. In Ancient Greece for example, this ideal is expressed through the concept of *arete* (Levine 1984, p. 213). In some societies at certain points in time, the disciplines of the body were separated from the disciplines of the mind, such as the 6th century idea of the Trivium, where the complete person was educated in logic, grammar and rhetoric, or the Pythagorean Quadrivium - arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music (Levine 1984, p. 214). In this article, I wish to take these ideas of the complete individual as it has been expressed in Chinese philosophy (particularly Confucian ideas), and explore its articulation in contemporary kung fu films.

I should acknowledge at the beginning of this article that my approach to this topic is as a musician and martial arts practitioner, an interest fuelled by practical and personal concerns as to how these disciplines have been framed in complementary discourses of human learning. As a musician, I have been a student of Egyptian *oud* player and Australian Record Industry Awardee (ARIA) Joseph Tawadros since 2009, and I have been studying various martial arts since 2002, focusing in Yong Chun Pai (Southern mainland style of Wing Chun) under Sifu John Brixey since 2010 (Brixey 2013). During lessons with my Sifu, it is common that musical analogies are used in order to explain martial concepts and applications. I discovered that in some contemporary martial arts manuals, competence in a range of artistic practices as well as the martial arts, are still encouraged. For example, one Qigong Master instructs his students, ‘in my Qigong, martial arts, Chinese astrology, music and calligraphy practice, I remember what my masters told me, ‘No rush. Slow down. Take your time.’” (Wu 2006, p. 5)

For Sinologists, it would come as no surprise to find a martial artist competent in a range of artistic and scholastic disciplines, including the study of music. Levine (1984, p. 216) has noted that the development of the education curriculums from the Chou (or Zhou) Dynasty (1027 to 221 B.C.) onwards often involved the study of music in addition to martial training. Levine writes that the educational aims to create the cultivated person in the Chou Dynasty involved competency in six subjects: rituals, music, archery, charioteering, writing and mathematics (Levine 1984, p. 216). In this article, it is not my purpose to affirm or justify any one of these configurations concerning the complete individual; rather I wish to explore how these ideas, particularly as they relate to the complementary relationships between music (in particular) and the arts (more generally), with the Chinese martial arts as it is represented in film.

As a western consumer of Chinese martial arts films, it should be acknowledged that this study is part of a much broader process of intricate, asymmetrical and complex global cultural flows between diverse territories. I do not have the space here to recount the subtleties of the debates concerning the cultural aspects of globalization (for further discussion see Isar 2012; Wu and Chan 2007), however for the purposes of this paper I embrace the position forwarded by scholars such as Chan and Wu (2007, p. 195) who position martial arts films as part of the counter-flows from ‘East’ to ‘West’.

Additionally, as a western consumer, I am reliant on the translations provided in the subtitles of many of the films used in this analysis. Of course the lack of linguistic capability in Mandarin or Cantonese is a limitation in this analysis; however, rather than attempting to accurately represent the subject position of a consumer with those capabilities, this paper is more reflective of the kind of subject position and hermeneutical readings performed by

growing numbers of western audiences for Chinese film. The advantage I have writing in this moment, is that many of the actors themselves, directors, and the people employed in the production process, also do not have the cultural capital and linguistic competencies one might expect (see Wu and Chan 2007, pp. 201-202). These film texts are increasingly being produced through inter-cultural processes for transnational audiences and thus require a critical approach that engages with the nuances and complexities of global/local circulations.

In this paper therefore, I shall explore the representation of the arts and the martial artist in four sections: firstly, the representation of the complementarity of martial arts with other artistic disciplines; secondly, the connection between arts and the cultivation of a virtuous character; thirdly, the connection between villainy, the arts and the martial artist; and finally, the effects of modernity and representations of complementarity. In considering a wide range of martial arts films, here I argue that there is a distinction between the representation of the relationship between the arts and the martial arts in mythical and historical/epic characters, as opposed to films set from the time of modernity. The former case appears to revel in the idealism of the martial artist as artist, while artistic practice for the latter is absent, where the disjuncture of sound from sound source brought about by the machines of modernity (Feld 1994) are reflected in the cultural disjunctures between artist and martial artist.

Hard Work Over Time To Accomplish Skill

‘Let the character be formed by the poets; established by the laws of right behaviour; and perfected with music.’ Confucius, *Analects*, 8/8. (Confucius 1995, p. 42). This quotation from Confucius reflects his high view of music in the completion of one’s character. Steben (2010, p. 2) explains that for Confucius, noble and spiritual music was seen to be able to complete a person’s character due to its ability to draw the mind to a point of ‘tranquil inwardly-centred absorption, opening the heart to deep transformative spiritual energies’. Steben notes here that the laws of ‘right behaviour,’ (or in the translation he was using, ‘ritualized action’) can also be seen as ritualized movement, including dance. It is possible to see how this maxim may be applied to the martial arts as a form of ritualized movement. The first theme that I wish to explore in this article is the idea that artistic pursuit is complementary with the martial arts in the formation of the complete individual. In martial arts film, this idea is often expressed by demonstrating complementarity between martial and artistic disciplines. It is also expressed by demonstrating that the master of a martial art is also competent in other scholastic and artistic disciplines.

In the film *Hero* (Yimou, 2002), music and martial arts are depicted as disciplines with shared principles and teleologies. Early in the film, Nameless (Jet Li) performs his first re-telling of his efforts to subdue the assassins threatening the Qin Emperor. Nameless, armed with sword, duels with the assassin Sky (Donnie Yen), armed with spear. The battle is conducted as a battle amongst two equally skilled martial artists. Their first encounter results in a draw, at which point the visual cuts to an old blind man making his way through the chess house with a *guqin* wrapped under his arm. Nameless pays the old man and asks him to play a tune for the combatants. The old man begins playing, while the combatants regroup and formulate their battle plans in the depths of their minds. The narrative voice of ‘Nameless’ informs the Emperor: “Music and Martial Arts share the same principles: both wrestle with complex chords and rare melodies” (Yimou, 2002).

Music here is seen to be complementary to the mental preparation needed to formulate their battle strategy. Beginning slowly, the music matches the movements of the combatants, fighting in the depths of each other’s minds. As the combatants’ fight intensifies, so does the

music. This intensity reaches a peak at which the old man's plucking breaks the strings of the *guqin*, and the dream fight vanishes. Nameless launches at Sky and defeats him swiftly.

In this momentary pause in the battle, there are three elements in Nameless's reflection that are worthy of note. Firstly, the comparison between music and martial arts here reveals that both disciplines require some form of struggle and hard work. Expertise in either discipline cannot be achieved without sustained and focused effort. Secondly, these disciplines are characterised by complexity and rarity. Even a cursory glance at the world's music cultures demonstrates the huge variety and complexity of humanly organised sounds (see for example Titon 2009). In addition to familiar structures, the creative impetus in many sonic cultures drives people to search out those rare melodies; the rarest and most beautiful are sounds unheard (Rowell 1984, p. 74). The 'chords' mentioned here also resonate with the vertical and horizontal structures of play in the martial arts, the complexities of movements, damage and repair, and the architecture of bodies involved. Like music, the martial arts have often been characterised by the search and development of new moves, styles, expressions, that reflect both the creative impulse of its practitioners and the necessity to gain an advantage over one's opponent. Thirdly, there is an implied sense of teleology and purpose in this statement; that one struggles with the complexities and rarities of these disciplines for a purpose, an end goal, some form of attainment or pursuit.

This goal is more clearly articulated in *Forbidden Kingdom* (Minkoff, 2008) starring Jet Li and Jackie Chan. Chan's character Lu Kang and Jet Li's character, who is simply referred to as Monk, are presiding over the training of The Seeker – American born Jason Tripetakis. This name is derived from Buddhist master Tripetika from the Monkey King story (Ting 1988, p. 19), who has been transported through time and space to return the sacred staff of the Monkey King. Lu Kang explains the nature and teleology of kung fu:

Kung fu: hard work over time to accomplish skill. A painter can have kung fu, or the butcher who cuts meat every day with such skill that his knife never touches bone.... A musician can have kung fu, or the poet who paints pictures with words. Formless, nameless, the true master dwells within (Minkoff, 2008).

Lu Kang's definition of kung fu presents a much broader application of the term than simply referring to the martial disciplines. It is a level of accomplishment and mastery that can be achieved in almost any form of work or cultivation.

The accomplishment of the martial adept is often demonstrated in martial arts films through their accomplishment in another field of artistic and scholastic endeavour, including music. Calligraphy as an artistic discipline historically has a close relationship with both music and the martial arts. Stock (2009, p. 396) has noted that the performance techniques of the *guqin* (or *qin*) and the specific forms of notation used were directly derived from the brush strokes of calligraphy. Stock further draws connections between these arts forms with respect to their shared philosophical and aesthetic sensibilities (ibid.). Calligraphy also has a strong history of association with the martial arts and martial practitioners (see for example Oh and Ching 2012, pp. 39-46), thus in addition to music, proficiency in calligraphy is often used to suggest martial prowess. In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee, 2000), Michelle Yeoh's character Shu Lien is subtly interrogating the female protagonist Jen, played by Zhang Ziyi, who has been suspected of stealing the Green Destiny Sword. Shu Lien visits Jen as she is in her father's house practicing calligraphy, and she comments:

I never noticed that my name looks like the word for sword. You write gracefully. Calligraphy is so similar to swordplay (Lee, 2000).

The connection of swordplay and calligraphy is more overtly displayed in the film *Hero* (Yimou, 2002). In this film, Nameless goes in search of the two assassins Broken Sword and Flying Snow, who have taken refuge in a calligraphy school in the state of Zhou. Nameless's strategy is to discover the true source of Broken Sword's skill with the *jian* (sword) in order that he may defeat him in battle; Nameless believes this secret is contained in his calligraphy. Nameless manages to coax this secret out of Broken Sword by requesting a rare variation of the Chinese character for sword. This scroll becomes a pivotal and powerful symbol in the movie, ultimately directing the fate and lives of the people of China.

As with calligraphy, proficiency in dance is also used to suggest martial ability. In *House of Flying Daggers* (Yimou, 2004), Mei (Ziyi Zhang) is first introduced as a blind, but gifted dancer in the visually stunning Peony Pavillion. She begins by singing and dancing for Jin (Takeshi Kaneshiro). An ensemble of *pipa* and *erhu* musicians is ushered into the room to accompany Mei. When the song is finished, Jin attempts to take advantage of Mei by force, but is interrupted by the local police who arrest him. The police captain Liu (Andy Lau) arrests Mei, but is persuaded by the matron of the Peony Pavillion to witness her rare ability as a dancer. The scene is lavishly prepared, additional musicians (particularly percussionists) are introduced, and all the guests and the women of the Peony Pavillion gather to the balconies in order to savour the event. The captain instigates the 'echo' game by flicking stones at a set of freestanding drums that have been arranged in a circle around Mei. As the game plays out, she performs with great skill and accuracy. The game intensifies as the captain launches the entire bowl of stones at the drums. She responds by hitting each drum with her 'flying sleeves', and the true nature of her athleticism is fully realised. As the time between hits is shortened, the drumbeats become louder and denser, and her flowing sleeves like snakes flash mesmerizingly before the Captain, take hold of his sword from out of its sheath and attack him. It is at this climax of music and dance that the hidden martial skill of this blind performer is finally revealed.

Music, Martial Arts and Virtue

'Virtue is the strong stem of human nature and music is the blossoming of virtue.' Confucius, *Li Ki*, 17/2/21. (Confucius, cited in Dawson, 2005, p. 255). In Confucian thought, the ideal of the complete person (in this case, the martial adept) is strongly connected to ideas of what it is to be virtuous. This idea is often utilised to establish the virtue of martial arts characters in film. In the film *Iron Monkey* (Woo-Ping, 1993), the virtuous character of protagonist Dr. Yang (Yu Rong Guang) is represented in the memory of Miss Orchid (Jean Wang), as she remembers him redeeming her from a life of prostitution. The memory segues to the present day, as she looks out on a solitary Dr Yang playing *erhu*, while his voice recites a poem emphasizing the virtue of the health practitioner. Competency in music, martial arts, and knowledge of the healing arts coalesce to form the firm foundations of the virtue of this 'Robin Hood-like' character.

In the films *The Battle for Red Cliff* (Woo, 2008/2009), music and the arts were used as a means of distinguishing between the virtue of the Southern army viceroy Zhou Yu (Tony Leung) and the invading General Cao Cao (Zhang Feng Yi). His virtue is revealed through music when the viewer is first introduced to Zhou Yu presiding over the training of his forces. Amid the noise of soldiers training, Zhou Yu's keen ears detect someone playing the flute nearby. He commands the training to stop and he leaves to investigate. Zhou Yu comes face to face with

the musician – a small boy, sitting up on a hill. The commanding viceroy gestures with his hand and demands the boy hand over the flute. Zhou Yu pulls out a knife that he acquires from an old man standing with the boy. The virtue, or lack thereof of Zhou Yu's character is determined in this moment, where the face of the old man and the boy are filled with dread over what Zhou Yu might do with the knife and the boy. Instead, Zhou Yu uses the knife to carve out the mouthpiece of the flute to facilitate the clearer articulation of the pitch of the instrument and hands the flute back to the young boy. The young boy begins playing (this time the pitch is significantly improved), and the image of Zhou Yu is blended with images of the picture-esque Southlands and the Yangze river – whose beauty, people and lands Zhou Yu will very soon be defending. The strategist Zhuge Liang, the subtitles of the film translate the character's name as 'Kongming', shows admiration for Zhou Yu and the army of the Southlands, praising them that 'these soldiers can fight and appreciate music' (Woo, 2008/2009).

In the very next scene, Zhou Yu is featured playing the *guqin*. The height of Zhou Yu's virtue and completeness with regards to music and martial strategy occurs in this moment. In this scene, he avoids making the crucial decision as to whether he will join forces with Liu Bei and fight Cao Cao's invading army. Though pressed to discuss matters of war, he dismisses this discussion, opting instead to engage in a musical dialogue with the military strategist Zhuge Liang. In this encounter, Zhou Yu invites Zhuge Liang to engage in a dialogue on the *guqin*, and assumes that Zhuge Liang is also learned in music. Through a series of close-ups, the individuals communicate without words their intentions for battle. It is through this musical dialogue that Zhou Yu agrees to form an alliance with Liu Bei. Zhuge Liang comments after this encounter, that 'his (Zhou Yu) answer is in his music' (Woo, 2008/2009). Zhou Yu's wife Xiaoqiao (Lin Chi-ling), an artist in her own right, is also depicted as perceiving the weighty implications of this encounter; that her husband has decided to pursue a course of war in defence of the Southlands.

Another musical dialogue between Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang reveals both the power of music to communicate the unspeakable depths of emotion and their virtuous concern for Xiaoqiao. Xiaoqiao has secretly left the safety of the Southlands encampment in an attempt to stall the launch of Cao Cao's military campaign. The frenetic dialogue on the *guqin* between Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang expresses their righteous fear for Xiaoqiao, who has made herself vulnerable and exposed before a ferocious opponent. The musical dialogue in this instance allows Zhou Yu in particular to emotionally express his fears for his wife, a fragility that cannot be expressed in any other context from this Viceroy of the Southlands army.

Like music, calligraphy is also utilised to express the virtue of the martial artist in film. In the film *Hero* (Yimou, 2002), the ultimate virtue that a martial artist should be aspiring towards is reflected and perceived through calligraphy. The scroll commissioned of Broken Sword by Nameless becomes a focal point of the movie, a hinge upon which the narrative course turns. When the scroll is revealed in the palace of the Emperor of Qin, the Emperor asks Nameless whether he can understand the true meaning and therefore the source of Broken Sword's martial skill. In the course of their dialogue, Nameless admits that he does not fully perceive the meaning of the scroll. At the climax of the film, where Nameless prepares to implement his unstoppable lethal technique, the Emperor perceives the true meaning of the scroll. It is upon meditation on this scroll that the Emperor of Qin's life is spared by Nameless, as he perceives the highest ideal of the warrior embodied in Broken Sword – that is, when the 'sword disappears altogether...[and] the desire to kill no longer exists. Only peace remains' (Yimou, 2002).

Music, Martial Arts and Villany

A man who is not virtuous, what has he to do with the music of the temple? Confucius, *Analects*, 3/3. (Confucius, 1995, p. 11). The idea of virtue in connection to music appears to be so strong that it has been articulated in many different cultural and temporal contexts. The sentiment in Confucius' hypothetical question here is also expressed in Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, where Lorenzo corrects Jessica's melancholy at the sound of music:

The man that hath no music in himself, nor is moved with concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; the motions of his spirit are dull as night, and his affections dark as Erebus let no such man be trusted (The Complete Works of Shakespeare, 1958, p. 206).

However, while the connection between music and martial arts is often depicted in terms of completeness and virtue, there are times when this connection is actually made with regards to the villain in the film. In *Kung Fu Hustle* (Chow, 2004), a pair of blind, hired killers are enlisted to quell some local (and competent) resistance to the Axe Gang. As they are being interviewed for the job, the killers are asked:

(Gangster) So you're the top killers now?
(Assassin 1) Strictly speaking, we're musicians. [Recites Poem] *A song that wrenches the heart, O where do I find a knowing ear?* (Chow, 2004)

The potency of these assassins is not so much in their martial prowess, but in the deadly power of their music. In order to assassinate their victims, the killers perform music on the *guzheng*. In the course of the performance, a vast array of swords, bullets, and fists fly out of instrument. This reaches a crescendo when an army of dead, pirate-looking soldiers are launched out of the instrument at their martial foes.

In the more historically situated film *Three Kingdoms: Resurrection of the Dragon* (Lee, 2009), music is also strongly connected with the villain. Here it is the daughter of the great military General Cao Cao, Cao Ying (Maggie Q), who's martial and military prowess is depicted through her mastery of the *pipa*. Her playing is at times subtle, at times furious, and provides a sonic narrative to the ebb and flow of battle. In the standoff between Cao Ying and Zhou Zilong (Andy Lau) she loses the fight. As she regains her position at the head of the army, her *pipa* is immediately returned to her. In the final battle scene of the film, the *pipa* is pictured and heard more prominently than the sounds of the drums of war, and provides the soundtrack to the commencement of battle. The ruthlessness with which Cao Ying's character is portrayed in this film is vastly different to the graciousness of a character such as Zhou Yu in *The Battle for Red Cliff* (Woo, 2008/2009), and so music here cannot be a representation of moral virtue. Instead, it seems more likely that the *pipa* functions as a symbol of her mastery of military strategy, of martial skill, and as a means to focus her formidable mind as a military commander.

The villainy of Cao Cao in the *Battle of Red Cliff* (Woo, 2008/2009) is the embodiment of the Confucius citation above. Cao Cao is a military commander *without* music. The representation of artistic practice with Cao Cao is always depicted as marred by his lack of moral character. When he recites poetry, it is self-aggrandising; it is about conquest in the pursuit of self-interest. Sixty minutes into the film, the virtuous Zhou Yu is contrasted with the corrupted Cao Cao. Zhou Yu is pictured practicing his sword form; Xiaoqiao is practicing the tea ceremony and recites from the Art of War, while *guzhin* music plays in the background. Cao Cao in contrast

is pictured boasting of his inevitable victory of Zhou Yu and plans to use an outbreak of typhoid to his advantage against the Southern armies. In a revealing dialogue between Zhou Yu and his wife Xiaoqiao (Lin Chi-Ling), Xiaoqiao longingly wishes they could invite Cao Cao over for tea, ‘forget the war and just enjoy the scenery’ to which Zhou Yu replies, ‘I doubt he appreciates the art of tea’ (Woo, 2008/2009). It is his lack of appreciation of the art of tea, and his misplaced desire for Zhou Yu’s wife that in the end costs Cao Cao the victory at Red Cliff.

The modern martial artist: a (wo)man without music?

Several martial arts movies set from the early 20th century to the present, seem to demonstrate a shift in the perception of the relationship between the martial artist and the arts. The impacts of modernity, colonialism, trade, Western influence and technological change seems to have impacted on the perception of the complementarity of the arts with the martial arts, and it is this theme that I wish to explore here.

Though removed somewhat from the subject area of Chinese film, the absence of the arts in the life of the martial artist is particularly evident in Hollywood style action movies. In some of Jet Li’s more popular films such as *Kiss of the Dragon* (Nahon, 2001), *Romeo Must Die* (Bartkowiak 2000), and *Cradle to the Grave* (Bartkowiak 2003), competency in music and the arts is absent in connection to the martial artist. Similarly, in *The One* (Wong, 2001) starring Jet Li as both villain and hero, there is no connection made between the martial artist and the arts. While the final battle is an homage to the legendary confrontation between two great martial arts masters - Tung Hai-ch’uan and Kuo Yun-shen of the internal martial arts of Pa Kua and Hsing-I respectively (Smith 1967: 15-16) - neither character is depicted as competent in the arts.

This disjuncture between the modern martial artist with the arts is often present in movies set in China in the early part of the 20th Century. The successful series of films concerning the life of Wing Chun Grandmaster Ip Man (*Grandmaster Ip Man*, Wilson, 2008; *Ip Man 2*, Wilson, 2010; *Ip Man – The Legend is Born*, Yau, 2010) present examples of the absence of the arts in connection the martial artist. In these films, Ip Man is depicted as a man of virtue, who embraces the Confucian ideals of benevolence, resists the Japanese occupation of China, seeks the honour of China, and prioritises and protects his family and students. Despite these virtues, he is not depicted as competent in any of the other artistic disciplines previously mentioned. He does observe ritual, particularly the rituals associated with the martial schools and funeral rituals; but those traditional artistic pursuits are not evident in these representations of his life.

Similarly, in Wong Kai Wai’s (2013) depiction of Ip Man, music and the arts are more or less absent. In this film, Ip Man appears to indulge his wife’s love of Chinese Opera, however, he is not himself depicted as a practitioner of any of the arts previously mentioned. In this film, Chinese Opera is utilised as a metaphor for life, but is also used to articulate the anxieties of Ip Man’s (Tony Leung) rival Gong Er (Ziyi Zhang). The dialogue between these two martial artists presents a very different view of the relationship between music and the martial arts. As they attend a performance of Chinese opera, Gong Er states;

Gong Er: No instrument is as beautiful as the voice. Words always sound better sung.

Ip Man: Has Miss Gong studied Opera?

Gong Er: Just the basics. Back then, if I had put my mind to it, I’d be an Opera star...

Ip Man: You have performed well in the opera of life. You have both timing and skill. Unfortunately, you never saw your role.

Gong Er: I had no idea you watched me like an Opera. This opera of mine, applauded or not, will play on to the end (Wai 2013).

In this scene between Ip Man and Gong Er, the relationship between music and the martial arts is not depicted as one of complementarity, or virtue, or villainy; here it represents for her a fork in the road, nostalgia for a life that might have been. Gong Er's life has been characterised by the disjunctures of the Japanese occupation of China, opium addiction, and by the desire to seek revenge against her father's killer.

Ip Man is in some ways emblematic of a martial arts master living in an age of modernity (Wilson 2008, 2010; Yau 2010). The technologies of war have developed beyond the sword and the bow; now it is the Japanese tanks and firearms that threaten the honour and quality of life for the Chinese. The technologies of music themselves have also developed. In Yau's (2010) biopic of the young Ip Man, the only time music features as a prominent motif in Ip Man's life is when he meets his future wife in a market place, listening to a gramophone recording of Greensleaves. The contrast between this musical encounter and the previous examples I have been discussing are evident; sound in this moment is not created by the musician/martial artist – it has become disembodied through an act of schizophonia (Feld 1994), and afforded the possibility of new social life through the mobility of the record. Furthermore, this is Western music – a symbol of colonial disjunctures, of Western values and influence, operating at period of instability in China's history.

Conclusion

The makers of contemporary martial arts films appear to have played with the various philosophical and historical configurations of the connection between martial arts and artistic endeavours. In general, it appears that this connection is more strongly associated with mythical or historical figures as opposed to contemporary ones. The observations that I have made in this paper however are not to be considered comprehensive, but descriptive of certain representations of the martial artist with respect to the arts, as it is being expressed in contemporary film.

I have observed that this complementarity has been represented in a variety of ways, across different genres and narrative contexts. Firstly, it appears that some films have expressed the Confucian idea that an artistic endeavour such as music demonstrates completeness in an individual. The idea of completeness is very closely tied to that of virtue, in that the complete martial artist and arts practitioner is very often a virtuous person as well. A range of artistic endeavours – from dancing, to tea ceremony, to calligraphy, and music – have been used in connection with martial prowess.

Conversely, proficiency in an artistic discipline has been utilised to demonstrate some form of villainy. The connection of music to villainy is diametrically opposed to Confucian ideals, but nevertheless provides for interesting character development. Variations on this theme have included depicting the villain playing a musical instrument, or in the case of *The Battle for Red Cliff* (Woo, 2008/2009), where the villain has no appreciation of the arts whatsoever. *Kung Fu Hustle* (Chow, 2004) has perhaps the most humorous (and ridiculous) association of music with the villain, where the power of music is exaggerated to the point of becoming itself a lethal weapon.

Perhaps one of the most interesting observations from this comparative study is the lack of artistic practice associated with the modern martial artist. It is very possible that films such as

The Battle for Red Cliff (Woo, 2008/2009) and other such films highlighting the glories and tragedies of China's history, present a romantic view of the martial artist, one who is in tune with the natural world, has attained scholarly and artistic pursuits, wisdom, virtue and completeness. Irrespective of the veracity of such depictions, the contrast between the idealic warrior of the past and the warrior of the present is notable. Why is it that the modern martial artist is without music? Is it that he/she has lost a vital aspect of the disciplines contributing to the complete individual? Is it that time and technology has so compressed human existence in modernity that it has successfully squeezed out everything that is unnecessary to survival in the modern world? Or perhaps, the invention of recording technologies has contributed not only to a split of sounds from musicians, but a split in the imaginary and perception of what it is to be a martial artist? This is not to say that contemporary martial artists do not pursue artistic disciplines in addition to their martial training; what is most significant here is the contrast between cinematic representations of complementarity in older and mythical characters, as opposed to disjuncture and absence in characters of modernity. It is as though these complimentary disciplines, which were once so entwined, are now only a thing of legend, a pursuit of the great masters of the past, but unattainable in the present.

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