

The Representation of Women/Women Warriors in Zhang Che's Wuxia pian

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Abstract

Zhang Che, the late master of Hong Kong action cinema, has been seen as an important industrial player that influenced the landscape of popular cinema in negotiating, redefining and constructing the representation of gender identity since the 1960s. The achievement of Zhang has always been associated with his portrayal of male heroism in action films. However, the industrial circumstances for his films to thrive were forced to engage with the notion of 'women as spectacle would guarantee box-office successes' in those days. It is within such a background, this article examines the cinematic figuration of women and women warriors in a couple of Zhang's seminal films produced during the late 1960s in order to reveal the underpinning ideology of patriarchy within these films through the mechanism of representation. This study will use the framework of feminist film theory to critically analyze the representation of women in Zhang's films in order to demonstrate that the mode of narration in these film plays a great role by restricting the portrayal of women/women warriors within the lines of domestic relations such as daughter, wife and mother, or in a sexually defined role such as prostitute, mistress and lover.

Introduction

Hong Kong action cinema with its origin of *Wuxia pian*¹ genre has always been associated with two great film directors, namely King Hu and Zhang Che (Bordwell, 2000, Teo, 2003). Hu's films center around female warriors or *Nüxia*² (hereafter *Nüxia*) whereas Zhang's films are predominantly focused on male heroism. King Hu displayed the *Nüxia* in a relatively realist style emphasizing the notion of 'women as spectacle' by incorporating female's capacities of executing actions and swift movements through editing.³ This dimension of visual exhibition at the same time obscured the line between the mythical imagery of the *Nüxia* and the realist status of the physical body. Zhang Che's creation of the *Nüxia*, on the contrary, is more controversial from a gender perspective. His portrayal of *Nüxia* is reduced to a figure who engages in minimum fighting, less motivated action and, more often than not, is sensualized and sexualized. In Zhang's films, on the one hand, the *Nüxia* finds herself in a lower position compared with her male counterparts, as exemplified by Zheng Peipei's role as *Nüxia* in *The Golden Swallow* (1968). On the other hand, the portrayal of female domination in the domestic arena is evident in the *One-armed Swordsman* (1967) and the *Return of the One-armed Swordsman* (1969). All of the above-mentioned films will be taken up for textual analysis in this article.

Stephen Teo argues that Zhang Che's *Wuxia* films are a self-fashioning project, notably associated with his strong role in masculinizing the Hong Kong cinema of the 1970s (2003). Teo also sees Zhang's portrayal of women has added a precarious balance between *yin* and *yang* to the *Wuxia pian*'s heroes (2009). Teo provides a brief account of how the *yin* presence in sexual form is embodied in the representation of wives, prostitutes, or courtesans. I find them worthy of detailed analysis, particularly in light of questions raised by feminist film theorists about the relationship between gender and genre. Reflecting on this aspect, this article positions Zhang's films in a different context than that in which it is commonly placed. That is, while the usual framework for interpretation is that of understanding masculinity and muscularity of his self-fashioned film aesthetics, I will analyze his films through a close examination of the representation of women, especially the archetypal role of *Nüxia*, within a cinematic contour of questions of female and feminist representations.

¹ The term *Wuxia* is the Mandarin phonetic translation of two Chinese characters: *wu* and *xia*. Literally, *wu* is used to describe things to do with martial arts, weapons, or the military. The second character, *xia*, according to *The Pinyin Chinese-English Dictionary*, refers to "a person adept in martial arts and given to chivalrous conduct in olden times". The compound word *Wuxia* combined with *pian*, which means movie or film, encompasses any film that involves martial arts and the spirit of chivalry in the broadest sense.

² The term *Nüxia* is coined from two Chinese words. The first character, *Nü*, means woman or female. The second character, *xia*, as discussed above. The compound term *Nüxia* refers to the female warrior existed in *Wuxia* genre who execute social justice with martial arts skills and a strong sense of chivalry.

³ King Hu's story has been widely written about, and will not be covered here further in detail as this study solely focuses on the Shaw Brothers and its *Wuxia pian*. For further references, see HUANG, R. (ed.) 1999. *King Hu's World (Hu Jinqun de Shijie)*, Taipei: Yatai Tushu chubanshe.; BORDWELL, D. 2000. Richness Through Imperfection: King Hu and the Glimpse. In: FU, P. & DESSER, D. (eds.) *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.; RODRÍGUEZ, H. 1998. Questions of Chinese Aesthetics: Film Form and Narrative Space in the Cinema of King Hu. *Cinema Journal* [Online], 38. Available: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225736> [Accessed 02 February 2010].

King Hu's *Nüxia* Priority versus Zhang Che's *Yanggang* Movement

In Zhang's memoir, he complains about the Shaw Brothers Studio as a "Kingdom of women" (*Nuer Guo*) in which only female-centered films were being produced (Chang, 2004). What Zhang was attempting to say is that in the early 1960s, it was difficult to convince the studio authorities to invest in male-centered films, simply because the mainstream industrial practice favored a female star as a marketing point to guarantee box office receipts. The *Wuxia pian* of Zhang Che, however, are also vital to the questions of construction or reproduction of a notion of male supremacy in line with traditional patriarchal ideology. This entire masculinized cinema episode has to be comprehended against the dominance of female lead roles in Hong Kong cinema. In the late 1950s to the early 1960s, the two biggest studios in Hong Kong at that time, namely the Shaw Brothers and Motion Picture & General Investment (later Cathay) were competing with each other in the production of women-centered films (Chung, 2004).

Under such circumstance, that the budding director King Hu cast a 19-year old female actor, Zheng Peipei, in the lead role of *Come Drink with Me/ Da Zuixia* (1966) was actually a common practice in Hong Kong cinema in the 1960s. The image of a strong woman warrior was created by King Hu with the character of Golden Swallow, played by Zheng Peipei. *Come Drink with Me* has its heroine battling to rescue her brother from a band of kidnappers, in a role that set the mould for subsequent *Wuxia pian* with a strong female presence. King Hu wrote in his memoir, he had Zheng Peipei in mind before casting the film. Other than the unquestionably artful cinematography, this, perhaps, explains why King Hu's *Come Drink with Me* not only made its star, Zheng Peipei, one of the studio's major celebrities of the mid 1960s, but in her career defining role, also established her as a popular *Nüxia*. The box office success of this film not only convinced producers of the popularity of the *Wuxia pian* genre at this particular point in time, but also promoted the fighting actress or woman warrior in the action genre.

In the mid 1960s to the late 1970s, the female martial arts stars that played *Nüxia* became dramatic fodder for a number of other Shaw Brothers' films. During this time, many films featuring *Nüxia* were mass-produced and released by the Shaw Brothers. Other than Hu's *Come Drink with Me/ Da Zuixia* (1966), Zheng Peipei also played the lead role as *Nüxia* in *The Thundering Sword/Shenjian Zhen Jianghu* (1967, dir. Xu Zenghong), *Golden Swallow/Jin Yanzi* (1968, dir. Zhang Che), *The Flying Dagger/Feidao Shou* (1968, dir. Zhang Che), *That Fiery Girl/Hong Lajiao* (1968, dir. Yan Jun), *The Jade Raksha/Yu Luocho* (1968, dir. He Menghua), *Lady of Steel/Huangjiang Nüxia* (1969, dir. He Menghua), *The Golden Sword/Longmen Jinjian* (1969, dir. Luo Wei), *Raw Courage/Hu Dan* (1969, dir. Luo Wei), *Brothers Five/Wuhu Tulong* (1970, dir. Luo Wei) and *The Shadow Whip/ Yingzi Shenbian* (1970, dir. Luo Wei).

Such industrial development disappointed directors like Zhang Che (Chang, 2004). Although a prominent male director at the Shaw Brothers Studio during the 1960s, Zhang found it difficult to pursue his personal interest in promoting the macho masculine role on the screen. In 1966, when King Hu first released the now classic *Come Drink with Me*, Zhang's male-centered *Wuxia pian*, *The Magnificent Trio/Bian Cheng Sanxia* offered a stark contrast. Featuring violence, bloodshed and virile-masculinity, Zhang created an alternative spectacle through the three male lead roles.

Yanggang, which literally means virile masculinity, describes a movement or change of sexual priority within the industrial culture of the Shaw Brothers Studio during the 1960s and 1970s. Zhang repackaged *wu* masculinity in his movies and maneuvered Hong Kong action cinema closer to the idea of *yanggang*, especially in the development of the *Wuxia pian* genre. As a result of Zhang's effort, Hong Kong action film becomes a male-dominant genre. The term has also become a popular discourse in film magazines referring to any films that were inspired by Zhang's *Wuxia pian* that featured potent masculinity.

The Problems of Women's Representation in Zhang Che's *Golden Swallow* and *The Flying Dagger*

Golden Swallow/The Girl with the Thunderbolt Kick (1968) was the ninth film directed by Zhang. According to Zhang's memoir, he enjoyed a great deal of autonomy making this film after his *One-Armed Swordsman* grossed over one million Hong Kong dollars in 1967. The *One-Armed Swordsman* became the top grossing Chinese-language film of the year. It was within this favorable industrial environment that Zhang did his level best to "redress" what he called "the unhealthy feminine ethos" of *Wuxia pian* by putting forward his proposition of masculinization in the *Golden Swallow* (Chang, 2004).

Golden Swallow's English title was *The Girl with the Thunderbolt Kick*. Apparently, the Chinese title was used to mislead audiences into thinking that the film was a sequel of King Hu's *Come Drink with Me*, in which Zheng Peipei gained her stardom. However, the English title is even more misleading since this is a film meant to uphold male heroism instead of portraying a girl's power. It was a normative attitude reflecting the Shaw Brothers publicity mechanism, within which women usually received top billing despite their supporting and limited role in a film. More so in the case of Zheng Peipei, who had been granted the title of the queen of *Wuxia* by the Shaw Brothers and enjoyed the top-ranking position in the star system. A contemporary in-house publicity article states: "We can't wait to see Zheng Peipei in *Wuxia pian*, simply her portrayal in *Come Drink with Me* has a great impression on us. Now that "Golden Swallow" is coming, it will fulfill our craving (1967). What had been suggested in this publicity statement is the popularity of the strong screen presence of female heroism, nevertheless, I will demonstrate in the following how the representation of strong fighting women in Zhang's films is eventually naturalized by the mode of narration and visual organizations.

Golden Swallow begins with the female lead, Golden Swallow (played by Zheng Peipei), who is performing a chivalrous undertaking by distributing silver nuggets to the poor; she is quickly wounded by a poison dart and soon needs rescuing by the male hero. Her rescuer, Iron Whip (played by Luo Lie), the secondary male lead, brings her to a mountain retreat for recuperation. Within two minutes of the establishing scene, the strong *Nüxia*, Golden Swallow, is placed within a passive, unambitious safety zone - a reclusive life, which traditionally belongs to women. From this initial point onwards, this film introduces a lack in the narrative structure, which invites the involvement of the male lead, Silver Roc (played by Jimmy Wang Yu), to reinstates the male domination through various cinematic mechanisms that occupy the

position of the paternal authority like voyeuristic and sadistic mechanisms which were employed to convert the excessive nature of the female representation into a traditional patriarchal gender configuration.

Silver Roc, unlike Iron Whip, is arrogant, powerful and ruthless. He is a skilled fighter who only kills alleged villains that deserved to be punished. Every time he kills; he leaves a golden dart to incriminate Golden Swallow in order to lure her to look for him for old lover's sake. This creates troubles for Golden Swallow, as she becomes a target of vengeance by many. First and foremost, the male protagonist - Silver Roc, who functions as the iconography of violence, fits in well with the narrative sadism, predefining an active and progressive male power in terms of narrative logic to demystify *Nuxia's* power by the re-enactment of the original trauma - the fear of castration posed by her. The concept of castration complex in psychoanalysis is not about the psychological effects of an anatomical organ being cut off, but about the unconscious ideas or fears of such an event that people hold and live by within the order of patriarchal society (Mitchell and Rose, 1982). According to Mulvey's seminal paper, the male character within a diegesis (the fictional world created within a film) is often structured as active agents who can make things happen and control the events in the story (Mulvey, 1975). As exemplified in the character design for Silver Roc, the spectatorial desires of voyeurism towards women within the film have associated with him in order to move the narrative forward while engaging with scopophilia (the act of seeing) pleasure which is sexist in nature.

We can see this clearly in the scene in which Golden Swallow ends up in a bedroom with Silver Roc. The narrative of the film puts the woman warrior in her own powerful yet fragile position. She is structured as a capable woman warrior who wants to stop the rampant murders by advising the male lead role, and yet she is put to sleep by him. In this bedroom scene, Silver Roc wants her to unveil her true feminine look by removing her male attire. She obeys him. With the aid of soft lens and close-up shots, Golden Swallow rests her long hair on her shoulders and serves as a beautiful woman to-be-looked-at or exhibited in front of the silver screen. This particular filming technique is typical and widely criticized by feminist film theory. Accordingly, Golden Swallow is now structured as the object of fixation associated with fetishism which originally refers to the Freudian doctrine of "the traumatic moment of the look at the mother's castrated body, which initiates a process of simultaneous affirmation and denial of the possibility of the subject's own castration, and hence the manufacture of a substitute maternal phallus in the form of the fetish" (Doane, 1987). This is done in cinematic ways by turning a powerful woman into a fetish with the physical beauty of the object. The transparent curtain in the bedroom functions as soft lens to soften the image of a *Nuxia* and the use of close-ups to show her face is to suggest that the exhibition of Golden Swallow as a strong visual icon now works as the mechanism of cinematic fetishism, functions to reassure the male subject. That the woman lacks nothing and is available for the gaze and enjoyment of the male instead of the castration threat that she originally signifies (Mulvey, 1975). Such a viewing position created by the dominant cinema is necessarily masculine as it is ordered by the sexual imbalance that emphasizes the active male gaze versus the passive female object of desire that excludes female gaze or a female viewing position. That is to say, the underlying structures in cinema, particularly in this film, is seen as the work of representation which reflects the all-pervasive power of patriarchy by creating an unconscious spectatorial position that is active, male and phallic in essence. Flaunting

her femininity in a bedroom setting allows the spectator a moment of traditional objectification of a woman as sexual object. Moreover, given the erotic context of these scenes, the subject of desire is the male and the female is the object of desire.

This objectification of Golden Swallow actively disrupts the generic conventions of *Wuxia pian* that gives priority to action sequences. The narrative logic in the following scenes reveal the intention of Zhang Che by reinstating the virtue of being a *Nüxia* is no different from being a woman in traditional society. In the case of this film, female morality is maintained in the convention of the genre by limiting women's bodily performance to become powerful martial artist. In a few fighting scenes, she is either given some reasons to leave the scene or play secondary roles to stage minor fights. Consequently, the film explicitly downplays the role of Golden Swallow in order to contain the overpowering figure of women warrior.

Besides Golden Swallow, another supporting female role also serves as a significant figure for us to understand Zhang's treatment of women in *Wuxia pian*. The representation of Mei-niang (played by Chao Hsin-yen) - a pretty prostitute who serves as entertainer to Silver Roc's voracious sexual appetite - is to portray an ideal of heroism by Zhang Che. A great hero is not only defined by his physical muscularity, but also deserved to be worshiped by women. The narrative function of Mei-niang actually demonstrates another mode of problematic looking for the film spectator, associating with the subjugated position of female within the imbalance heterosexual relationship between men and women within a typical patriarchal society. In the final sequence, for instance, Mei-niang is structured in line with the camera gaze witnessing the heroic death of Silver Roc. In this two and a half minutes battle, hand-held camera work is employed to reveal how the badly wounded hero is physically tortured by a group of bandits and yet he manages to kill them all. After the bloodshed, two kinds of subjective point-of-view shots construct two different worldviews. First, Mei-niang witnesses Silver Roc's heroic moment as he kills all the bandits. Then, the hand-held camera takes Silver Roc's shaky point-of-view looking down at the dead bodies scattered on the floor. The camera shifts back identifying with Mei-niang's point-of-view as she gazes proudly as her badly wounded hero as he opens his arms and claims, "I still reign as the supreme swordsman!" This final battle appears to take place not only so the hero can defend his reputation as the supreme swordsman, but also, more importantly, to reveal how it is seen through the eyes of his female counterpart.

Zhang's *yanggang* approach has gone to the extreme where only men can convincingly perform the "real fight". By showing the muscular body of the male hero on the screen, suggests that the once powerful *Nüxia* had to give way because women's body could never be seen without clothes. So, where did the women warriors stand in relation to the lavish bloodshed, exposed viscera during the impending death of the male hero? The aesthetics of the action-body eventually signifies sexual difference. Female bodies, including *Nüxia*, at best, represent conservative moral values. At worst, these female bodies are fragile and wounded; creating a curiously passive feminine position that demands further protection from the male hero. Furthermore, in opposition to the bodily performance of the male *xia* in *Wuxia pian*, *Nüxia* specificity is thus confined by the traditional morality. As we shall see from the location in the early scene where Golden Swallow has been retreated with Golden Whip and the very last scene where she and Mei-niang are seen in their

mourning dress in front of Silver Roc's tombstone – same location has been used to symbolize a safe zone where women belong to in a traditional society. Both of the women are represented as the traditional widows who keep their vow of chastity to the great hero by remaining unmarried for the rest of their life in order to honor the invincible male hero.⁴ More importantly, the powerful *Nixia* is now restored to her traditional female role as a wife that serves as symbol to safeguard the ancient/traditional role of being a woman in a patriarchal Chinese society.

The Alternative Representation of Women's Domination in the *One-armed Swordsman* (1967) and *Return of the One-armed Swordsman* (1969)

The *One-Armed Swordsman* is arguably a historical turning point in the *Wuxia pian* genre, altering female domination of the genre. In other words, when the masculinized *Wuxia pian* came to dominate Hong Kong screens, Zhang Che's *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) and its sequel the *Return of the One-armed Swordsman* (1969) were significant in setting new standard for generic *wuxia* hero. By closely analyzing these two films, this section hopes to contribute to text's multiple interpretations in the rise and decline of the female *Nixia* figure and the re-masculinisation of the *wuxia* hero. This section focuses on the representation of Xiaoman (played by Jiao Jiao aka Chiao Chiao) in light of her supposedly marginal, and yet dominant parts in terms of narrative drive.

In both the *One-armed Swordsman* and the *Return of the One-armed Swordsman*, even though Xiaoman's role is not of the same magnitude as Zheng Peipei's *Nixia* in some *Wuxia pian*, her dominance is represented by the strong presence of her characterization within the narrative structure. Although she is portrayed as a much-respected wife, the following section will illustrate how such a representation could be seen as a symbolic gesture that can be interpreted as an undertone of economic pragmatism in support of capitalist ideology. The plot of the *One-armed Swordsman* (1967) opens with a narration that introduces Xiaoman as the saver to Fang Gang when his right arm is chopped. She subsequently becomes his wife and helps him to regain power in martial arts by giving him a half-burnt *kung fu* manuscript that was left behind by her late father. Even though the remnant of the old *kung fu* manuscript is incomplete, it suits Fang perfectly as he has only one arm. Because of her father's misfortune, Xiaoman is anti-*wuxia*'s world. To please his wife, Fang promises to live a quiet farming life throughout the narration. This promise is carried over from the prequel to the sequel. As the narrative unfolds in both films, the constant conflict for Fang's characterization is structured between his dilemmas: "to fight or not to fight".

To fight is to fulfill the generic obligation of a *xia* who should place the righteous cause before his own life. Not to fight is to keep his promise to his wife as a *xia* should always be a man of his words. The logic of these films suggests that women are the key figure in determining the choice of the male hero. This is a crucial point

⁴ It is worth mentioning that practice of polygamy was still intact in Hong Kong society during this period. The Chinese traditional family laws that allowed concubines have been abolished in the Chinese Republic in 1911 and the People's Republic of China in 1949. However, it was upheld by the British colony in Hong Kong until 1971. For more details, see CHEUNG, F. M., LAI, B. L. L., AU, K.-C. & NGAI, S. S. Y. 1997. Gender Role Identity, Stereotypes, and Attitudes in Hong Kong. In: CHEUNG, F. M. (ed.) *EnGendering Hong Kong society: a gender perspective of women's status*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

for a feminist reading of Zhang Che's *One-armed Swordsman* series because the emphasis shifts from the powerful generic women warrior to strong presence of women in a different light. Xiaoman, in this case, served as an embedded enunciator: the narrative of anti-*wuxia* in this case is a gendered rhetoric that engages with reality by emphasizing self-advancement in terms of pragmatic needs such as economic gains and living secure lives. In contrast, Fang Gang emerged as the intra-diegetic narrator through his figurative mode of representation in the fighting scenes. By acting out the emotions of angst and the spirit of fighting in a chivalric mode, the representation of strong masculinity through the aggression of physicality of the male protagonist empowered the traditional Chinese patriarchal ideology.

While Zhang's films had been central to the promotion of staunch masculinity, the representation of Xiaoman may be comprehended through the typical portrayal of the wife, a woman who embodies domesticity and carries with it the traces of Confucianism, which mirrored the condition of most working class Chinese women. In the *One-armed Swordsman*, the strong presence of the female protagonist in a domestic role becomes the crux of the main plot. The construction of sexual difference in Zhang's *One-armed Swordsman* and *Return of the One-armed Swordsman* is not merely a question of binary opposition between male active gaze versus female passivity. It explores the discursive issues such as feminine dominance via narrative structure. Both films include an illustration of how an anti-*wuxia* worldview is structured through the characterization of the female lead role, namely Xiaoman, into the cinematic narration as a balance to Fang's struggle between the home and *wuxia*'s world. Both involve the private and the public spaces juxtaposed against Chinese patriarchal morality. It is "man" that has to provide for and take care of his family members, who are usually women and children. It is also the responsibility of a man to uphold the world of chivalry within which an imaginary *xia* activity is inscribed. This is best exemplified in one melodramatic scene in the *Return of the One-Armed Swordsman*, in which Fang is daydreaming of a happy life with Xiaoman. In Fang's imagination, Xiaoman is running towards the camera (or Fang) from a blurry to clear medium shot. Then a facial close-up reveals the contentment of Fang. The camera then pans left to capture Xiaoman and pulls back to show them walking forward together. The next shot sees them strolling in a beautiful garden. They smile at each other while the camera slows to zoom in on their faces, and ends with Xiaoman's face in extreme close-up. Every movement of this sequence is shot in slow motion and accompanied with soft music to create a sense of peace and happiness. Much later in the film, similar shots, movements and music are used to capture Xiaoman with a baby in her arms and during the time, Xiaoman informs Fang Gang about her pregnancy. Both of these scenes are taken from the male protagonist's point-of-view. Perhaps most important though is the sense of ambivalence that has been shown by the character of Fang who is searching for his own identity by attempting to balance his desire for a peaceful life with his wife and the inevitable struggle against injustice in *wuxia*'s world. This type of feeling recalls the anxious memories of the "displaced situation" for those who long for a stability which can only be achieved via the mode of a nuclear family. On the other hand, the concept of stability was constantly challenged by the chaotic situation within the diegetics. This is best exemplified in the following shot after the happy dreaming scene in which a scream is heard before the audience see a man in white shirt is being disemboweled by his enemy. What follows is another series of fighting and killing. Such visual manipulations were designed to intrigue the spectatorship as they reflected on the

relationship between their daily struggle for a normal family life and the use of violence as a means to maintain such normality.

It might also explain why these films were particularly popular to the mass audiences, pandering to their desire to have materialistically fulfilling lifestyle in the rapidly developing industrialized city - Hong Kong in the 1960s. Zhang's *One-armed Swordsman* series reflects just such a paradox, for this is a typical problems faced by men of Chinese background in Hong Kong. While searching for new identities as modern subjects, the men's multiple identities were also characterized by ancient Chinese patriarchal values and, at the same time, challenged by the rise of women's rights in general. In other places, I have argued that the imagery of *Nüxia* serves as a symptomatic site of contestation between Confucian patriarchal ideology and the visual culture of modernity within a highly industrial and political, historical moment in the formation of what is commonly referred to as "Hong Kong local identity".⁵

The focus here is to point out that the anti-*wuxia* attitude of Xiaoman is shifting in both films. In the *Return of the One-Armed Swordsman*, while one group of juniors persuades Fang into joining them to fight against the villain, another junior member kidnaps Fang's wife in order to threaten him for his aid. Ironically, Fang has already agreed to help without knowing that his wife (Xiaoman) has been kidnapped. As a result, the event of kidnapping enrages Fang and he now refuses to provide help. This narrative organization then allows Xiaoman to step in to ask her husband to help, largely because of being touched by the sacrifice of a fighter who loses his own life in order to protect hers. Out of a desire for justice, and for the first time in the *One-armed Swordsman* series, Xiaoman wants her husband to become involved in *wuxia*'s affairs. While the domination of woman is evident through this influential narrative logic, the exclusion of women from fighting (physically) for righteousness, along with their confinement to the domestic and sexual spheres is a subversive strategy to deal with the powerful position of women within a symbolic arena. The symbolism that is encapsulated by the characterization of Xiaoman is both the anxiety and aspiration of a "Chinese man" in terms of his dominance within a patriarchal context and economic status in his everyday struggle within a capitalist society.

Conclusion

This article addresses the question of how the cinematically popular *Nüxia* in the 1960s' *Wuxia pian* that were produced and distributed by the Hong Kong based Shaw Brothers Studio has been displaced by Zhang Che's *yanggang* movement, which perpetuated the message that a local identity was to be rebuilt according to Chinese men's *wu* masculinity. Questions of subjectivity and ideology that are derived from Zhang's representation of women/women warriors have been examined in light of theories of sexual difference, which conclude that the overwhelming sense of a strong anti-*Nüxia* sentiment developed in the Shaw Brothers Studio of the 1960s is evidently shown in both the formal and narrative elements in Zhang's films. Significantly, the narrative dimension of the selected *Wuxia pian* serves as a key analytical element to engage with the complexities of women's representation as symbolic negotiation for the emerging "local identity" of Hong Kong, which underwent its own trajectory of

⁵ See NGO, S. S. 2009. *Nüxia (Women Warriors) in the Shaw Brothers' Wuxia Genre: The Modern Imaginary of Hong Kong and Malaysian Chinese Diasporas*. Melbourne: La Trobe University.

modernity in response to the emerging capitalist society vis-à-vis the traditional Chinese patriarchal order. I have shown in both the *One-armed Swordsman* and the *Return of the One-armed Swordsman* that the dominant presence of the female lead role in an alternative way is crucial to uncovering the multidimensional interpretations of these subjectivities.

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