

The martial arts film

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This review paper is on an article written by Stephen Teo entitled “ The Martial Arts Film in Chinese Cinema: Historicism and the National” where he advances or posits his idea that Chinese filmmakers use the cinema as a way to promote Chinese nationalism, particularly by depicting specific genre called as shenguai wuxia pian (roughly translated as “ demons and dragons”) to showcase ancient Chinese history and its glorious traditions. This genre survived in later form as a shortened version called wuxia only that uses swordplay, martial arts such as kung fu, and takes place in ancient historical periods but also uses fantasy, the supernatural, and the mythical to further embellish its screenplay (Teo 99). Wuxia is the antecedent genre of the modern martial arts film and plays a significant part in channeling a sense of nationalism in Chinese diasporic audiences worldwide, together with the guzhuang (old costume) genre.

The wuxia genre evolved over the years due to politics: first, when it was banned by the KMT government for portraying feudalism and superstition (Teo 100), and then secondly, by the Communists when they thought this genre was mired in the past, again ostensibly for promoting both feudalism and superstition. The old gudao filmmakers who were experts in the wuxia films soon transferred to Hong Kong from Shanghai and continued this tradition of making wuxia films to satisfy Chinese audiences' need for a sense of nationalism. Hong Kong at this period in time became the de facto national center of Chinese cinema. Teo argues that a further evolution of the wuxia genre into the kung fu films of today reflects the injection of a new realism into this film genre. But he says in his essay that wuxia differs from

kung fu films as wuxia is a legitimate Chinese national cultural form that signifies Chinese national identity through historicism because wuxia exists in history books and in popular literature (Teo 106). The concept or ideal of xia, a knight-errant, is embedded in Chinese history and culture.

Work Cited

Teo, Stephen. "The Martial Arts Film in Chinese Cinema: Historicism and the National." *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*. Eds. Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen. Aberdeen, HK: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. 99-109. Print.