

# On the Martial Aesthetics of Shaolin Baton Technique in Wuxia Films

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## Abstract:

This paper adopts the documentary method, logical analysis method and scientific induction method to conduct the research. It mainly explores the aesthetics of martial arts through the presentation and interpretation of Shaolin stick fighting in six Chinese martial arts films between 1982 and 1992. In addition, when summarising the aesthetic characteristics of Shaolin stick fighting in martial arts films, this paper identifies the phenomenon of the “beauty” of Shaolin stick fighting and seeks to prove the reasons and roots of this phenomenon, which lies in the everlasting spirit of classical Chinese aesthetics and the excellent traditional martial arts culture.

**Keywords:** shaolin wushu, stick fighting, martial arts film, aesthetics

## 1 Preface

Hong Kong cinema entered the “Golden Age” in the 1980s and 1990s, and one of the most important genres of Hong Kong cinema in the Golden Age was martial arts films. Shaw Brothers Hong Kong brought martial arts films into a glorious period in the mid- to late-1960s, and this kind of splendour continued until the end of the 1980s, and after that Tsui Hark’s new martial arts films made Golden Harvest become the most influential film

company in the Golden Age of Hong Kong cinema. After that, Tsui Hark’s New Wuxia films made Golden Harvest the most influential film company in the golden age of Hong Kong cinema. The Shaolin martial arts elements presented in the six Wuxia films listed in this paper (Table 1) are also different from each other in time, which intuitively reveals that the aesthetics of Shaolin stick fighting between the martial arts directors of Mainland China and Hong Kong are of very different styles.

**Table 1 six kinds of Wuxia films**

Year	Region	Film title	director	starring
1982	Mainland China	The Shaolin Temple	Zhang Xinyan	Jet Li
1983	Hong Kong, China	Iron Fingers of Shaolin	Tang Jia	Er Dongsheng, Xu Xiangdong
1984	Mainland China	The Holy Robe of Shaolin Temple	Xu Xiaoming	Yu Hai
1986	Hong Kong, China	Martial arts of Shaolin	Gordon Liu	Jet Li
1991	Hong Kong, China	Once Upon a Time in China	Tsui Hark	Jet Li
1992	Hong Kong, China	Once Upon a Time in China 2	Tsui Hark	Donnie Yen

## 2 Aesthetic Characteristics of Martial Arts in Film and Television

The aesthetic characteristics of traditional martial arts in film and television can be divided into the beauty of rehearsal and technical combat, the beauty of rehearsal refers to the beauty of the form expressed by the martial arts actor in the characterisation of the use of wushu sets of single rehearsal, such as the proportion of the posture of the proportion of harmony and proportionality, the rhythmic changes in the movement of the static and static, the use of strength in the use of the rigidity and flexibility

of the light, the use of the pendant, the movement of the form of the attack, defence, retreat and the undulation and twists and turns, the shape of the spirit, gas and force inside and outside of the combination of the structure of the whole set of In the structure of the whole set of structures, the changes in the structure of the virtual and the real, the layout of the back and forth, etc., all of them have harmony and unity in the changes, which can be called one of the models of the beauty of the form.

The aesthetics of martial arts is determined by the essential attributes of martial arts - attack and defence, and in the vast majority of films and TV shows, this kind of mar-

tial arts aesthetics is accompanied by the aesthetics of violence, which brings the audience a different visual impact and sensory experience from other genres of films. In the seven martial arts films listed by the author of this paper, the aesthetics of Shaolin Baton Technique are included in the aesthetics of rehearsal and technical strikes, and the martial arts director brings Shaolin Baton Technique to the screen, which is not only to promote the excellent traditional Chinese culture, but also has a great help to the spreading of the culture of martial arts.

### **2.1 Origin of Shaolin Baton Technique**

Shaolin stick art occupies an important position in Shaolin Wushu, and it has been said that “stick is the first of Shaolin Kungfu”. Shaolin stick art began in the Northern Wei Dynasty, and became famous in the Tang Dynasty because of the story of “Thirteen Shaolin Stick Monks Saving the King of the Tang Dynasty”, and flourished in the Yuan Dynasty and the Ming Dynasty, where Yu Dayou, a famous anti-Japanese general and martial artist of the Ming Dynasty, visited Shaolin Temple in person when he was ordered to go on a southern expedition in 1561. Yu Dayou, a famous anti-Japanese general and martial artist of the Ming Dynasty, was ordered to go on a southward expedition in the 40th year of the Jiajing period (1561), and he took a special route through Henan Province to visit the Shaolin Temple, which had long been famous for its martial arts. After observing him personally, he found that the Shaolin monks’ stick skills “had been passed down for a long time, and the true techniques were all lost.” He then took the two monks and disciples south with the army, and within three years, Yu Ta-You personally taught them the real stick skills that would be effective in fighting the enemy. The two monks brought back the stick skills passed on by Yu Dayou to Shaolin Temple and taught them widely, and in the long run, there were nearly a hundred people who had attained a high level of attainment. This shows that the Shaolin Baton Technique, which was spread by the Shaolin monks outside the temple in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, actually originated from Yu Dayou. After the Qing Dynasty, Shaolin stick skills began to decline. The seven martial arts films listed by the author of this article include the beauty of the Shaolin Baton Technique’s drills and techniques, and the fact that martial arts directors have put the Shaolin Baton Technique on the screen is not only to promote China’s excellent traditional culture, but also to help the spread of martial arts culture.

#### **2.1.1 Highlights of Shaolin Baton Fighting**

Wude four years (621 AD) Qin King Li Shimin and Zheng King Wang Shichong in Dongdu war, the key moment Shaolin Temple to Tuan Zong, Zhi Cao, led by thirteen

monks on horseback waving stick, in the er Cenkou ambush, to defeat the Zheng army, won the Li Shimin commendation, which is the famous “thirteen Shaolin stick monks to save the king of the Tang Dynasty,” the story. Legend has it that at the end of the Yuan Dynasty, when the Red Turbans were travelling along Songshan Mountain, the fire-burning monk Tightrope held a fire-burning stick, and pushed back the Red Turbans by displaying his skills in the clouds. Ming Dynasty Shaolin Zhi Shan Monk’s stick skills can also be a single stick to win a hundred strong, lonely pole battle a hundred knives, which left Shaolin in Gansu Qitian Temple after the transmission of Shaolin stick, known as “Tianqi stick”, is now the first of the Northwest four famous stick, is still widely circulated.

#### **2.1.2 Characteristics of Shaolin Baton Technique**

Shaolin Baton Technique is simple and simple, with a risky posture, “a line on a piece of fighting, dancing flowers to protect the body as dense as a rain, forward poking stick such as a gun through”, and also said Shaolin Baton Technique “three parts of the Baton Technique and seven parts of the gun method” characteristics. Shaolin stick art for generations out of the protection of the yard and should be imperial decree to kill the enemy, Shaolin stick art in the set of moves potential only talk about the effect of actual combat, do not talk about the appearance of beauty. Shaolin stick in the use of the actual combat for the standard, into the front to stab stick, fierce and hard, fast and accurate; left and right good blocking fight, such as the sudden wind backward, more than the root of the stick pummeled; such as on the inverted shuttle, downward fight, more than the chopping pressure smashed; under the anti-upward more than picking, avalanche method, unloading step turn around and go, stick stick sticking to the body and dance flower. The Shaolin stick is tightly structured and fierce. Starting like a flash, travelling like a dragon, closing like electricity, potential like a thunderbolt, endless changes, attack and defence, unique.

### **2.2 The Shaolin Temple - China’s most successful Shaolin martial arts film**

The film “Shaolin Temple” is about the cause of Shaolin stick skills, the film has a section of the Sekong Master (Sun Jiankui) in the woods after drunkenly practicing a set of Shaolin drunken stick (Figure 1), although the drunken stick is not in the Shaolin monks in the daily practice of the stick discipline, but Shaolin drunken stick in the film exercise reveals that the role of the character has a very strong martial arts fundamentals, the combination of the practice of people and the stick, the step of the step of the advancement of the move, the rhythmic changes, and

the use of strength, rigid and flexible, let a breathtaking. The combination of the man and the stick, the steps, the changes in rhythm, and the use of strength and flexibility are breathtaking. After seeing the Shaolin Drunken Stick's moves, the lead actor Xiaohu (played by Jet Li) uses it in a duel with Wang Renze (played by Yu Chenghui) - a wonderful Shaolin Drunken Stick vs. Drunken Sword fight, where Xiaohu holds the stick and Wang Renze, who uses the sword, fights back and forth, and a few rounds of Wang Renze, who is good at using the sword, is not able to take advantage of Xiaohu, and in turn, is overpowered by Xiaohu with the Shaolin Drunken Stick. At the end of the film Shaolin monks and Zheng army duel, a monk in the high walls and Zheng soldiers to stick against the lance, the director used the camera back to make the audience feel that the duel is very thrilling, Shaolin stick "a line on the fight a piece of, forward poke stick such as a gun through the" characteristics of the techniques in the narrow high walls were presented.



Figure 1 Shaolin Drunken Stick

### 2.3 "Shaolin Heir" - Shaolin in the Eyes of Gold Medal Wushu Instructor Tang Jia

The Shaolin Baton is used most by Dillon as Dao Xing in The Legend of Shaolin. Although Dillon's martial arts skills are not as good as those of Jet Li, who is a professional martial arts athlete, Dillon, who has been in the industry for more than ten years, used the Shaolin Baton to fight the villain in the film with a very clear movement. Tang Jia used a hanging wire to shoot the big scene of "stacking Luohan" and presented the martial arts action to make people feel very shocked. In the film, the monks in the Eighteen Luohan Formation formed a huge attacking machine (Picture 2) holding an enlarged version of Shaolin's Ruyi Circle to fight with Dao Xing (played by Dillon) and Zi Zitai (played by Er Dongsheng), and in the end, Dao Xing and Zi Zitai attacked the lower road of the Eighteen Luohan Formation and the lower road of the Eighteen Luohan Formation respectively. The Eighteen Luohan Formation is cracked by Tao Xing and Prince Tai attacking the lower and upper paths of the formation respectively.



Figure 2 Shaolin Eighteen Luohan Formation

### 2.4 The Cottonwood Robe - Contemporary Eagle Claw Fist Dana's Shaolin Stick Technique

Firstly, there is a sequence in Cotton Robe in which Shaolin monks practise their kung fu in unison that is surprisingly similar to 1982's Shaolin Temple, and quite borrowed from it. The film stars Xu Xiangdong, a national champion of Eagle Claw Boxing in the 1980s, and the villain is Yu Rongguang, a Peking Opera martial arts student. In the film, Monk Huineng (Xu Xiangdong) doesn't have a lot of footage to show off his Shaolin martial arts skills, but director Xu Xiaoming gives him a lot of chances to show off his specialised Eagle Claw Boxing (Picture 3), and the final sparring match between Huineng and the villain, Qi Tianyuan (played by Yu Rongguang), features Huineng's use of the Wudang sword technique, and Qi Tianyuan's use of Shaolin's stick technique, which is a great example of how Shaolin monks practice martial arts together. But because of Yu Rongguang's birth as an opera martial artist, the lead actor's sparring is always tinged with opera stances and figures, taking the Shaolin stick fighting out of its own technical beauty.



Figure 3 Xu Xiangdong Eagle Claw Fist

### 2.5 North and South Shaolin - The Grandmaster of the 1980s

North and South Shaolin" is the third Hong Kong and mainland co-produced Shaolin film after "Shaolin Temple" and "Shaolin Kid", which can be regarded as the final chapter of the Shaolin series played by Jet Li, director Liu Jia Liang's master is the master of Hung Gar master Wong Fei Hung, who has always been a famous school of thought, in addition to the story behind the film than

the film itself is wonderful, it is the huge difference in the treatment of mainland and Hong Kong actors and actresses, which has also led to Jet Li! After completing the film, Jet Li remained silent for some time, until five years later when he starred in Tsui Hark's "Wong Fei Hung" series of films. In the "North and South Shaolin" there is a group practice Shaolin stick skills in the clip is very classic, in the film Shuo Ninja master (Yu Hai played) led a group of Shaolin disciples to practice stick skills, teaching Shaolin stick secrets (Figure 4), in the crowd ZhiMing (played by Jet Li) to practice especially hard and practice method of cruelty, in the ZhiMing to listen to Shuo Ninja masters taught the "force sent in the stick after one-third of the place, hurt people are not heavy, the stick away from the body the further, the stronger the force, the non-toxic The farther the stick is from the body, the stronger the force is, and it will either kill or injure." After the practice of the stick more vicious, which also reflects the Shaolin stick "fierce and ruthless, fast and accurate" usage characteristics, compared with the current martial arts film, "North and South Shaolin" starring mainly for the then mainland's outstanding athletes, It is these outstanding athletes excellent martial arts background, in order to play in this stick art practice in the dance flower sticking body Dense as rain, forward poke stick like a gun through the Shaolin stick art characteristics.



**Figure 4 The master teaches the secrets of Shaolin Baton Technique**

### 2.6 Wong Fei Hung - Shaolin Wushu in Tsui Hark's New Wuxia Film Series

Wong Fei Hung, a martial arts master and famous Chinese surgeon in the late Qing and early Ming dynasties, who was actually a direct descendant of Shaolin Kung Fu. Wong Fei Hung's father Wong Ki Ying is one of the ten tigers of Guangdong, and Wong Ki Ying's master Lu A Cai is one of the five tigers of Shaolin, Lu A Cai from the South Shaolin Master Zhi Shan, follow the Master Zhi Shan seven years of martial arts and then get one of the five tigers of Shaolin Hong Xiguan instruction, making the art of martial arts to a higher level, so that the Wong Fei Hung is the master of Zhi Shan's fourth-generation disciples, so Wong Fei Hung from childhood with his fa-

ther Wong Ki Ying martial arts training, learning a body of orthodox Shaolin kung fu. The film is a great example of this. In Tsui Hark's "Huang Feihong" film series in the Huang Feihong by the mainland national martial arts champion Jet Li, Jet Li since 1982, starring in the "Shaolin Temple" in the eyes of the audience carved a deep impression of martial arts, but Huang Feihong is a master of the Southern School of Boxing and Jet Li practiced mostly for the Northern School of Martial Arts, as the saying goes, the Chinese martial arts division of the Southern Fist and Northern Legs, but Tsui Hark still use Jet Li, and find the most good masters of the Liu Jiarong, a seventh-generation disciple of Master Zhi Shan, to be the martial arts director in Wong Fei Hung's Magnificent Cloud. Tsui Hark used Jet Li to fight with a stick in Wong Fei Hung's The Greatest Showman, in which Wong Fei Hung uses one stick to fight with several knives, and uses the Shaolin stick techniques of hitting, picking, chopping, blocking, poking, flipping, and pressing to break down the machete-wielding assassins one by one. In "Huang Feihong's Men of the World" Huang Feihong has two classic stick fighting, the first one is a stick fighting with Yuanshu Nalan played by Donnie Yen (Picture 5), and the martial arts director of this film is the famous martial arts director Yuan Woo-ping. Yuan Woo-ping uses rattan rods in this fight in order to make the audience see the superb stick fighting skills of Yuanshu Nalan and Huang Feihong. The curvature of the stick becomes bigger, which can highlight the character has certain martial arts skills. Huang Feihong's last stick hit the wooden stake bound with hemp rope, although the surface of the wooden stake does not move, but when Yuanshu Nalan's subordinate touches the stake, the hemp rope wrapped with the stake has been broken into two halves, which shows that Huang Feihong's Shaolin stick art is ferocious and healthy. Xu Hark uses the breakage of the wooden stake, the selection of stick, and the design of the action of Yuen Woo-ping's swift and fast-paced, which highlights the Shaolin stick art. Tsui Hark's use of the broken stake, the selection of the stick, and Yuen Wo Ping's design of swift and fast-paced movements highlight the ferocity of Shaolin stick fighting, its infinite variations, and its uniqueness in attack and defence. The second section is in the final duel Yuanshu Nalan use "cloth stick" (Tsui Hark's new martial arts equipment innovation) against Huang Feihong's Shaolin stick, who knows in the two after a few strokes of Huang Feihong's bamboo stick was Yuanshu Nalan's cloth stick was broken in one quarter, which the bamboo stick became a kind of long arm of the northern martial arts - tingzi-sticks (Figure 6), Huang Feihong's bamboo stick is broken by a quarter. (Figure 6), Huang Fei-hung used the unique attacking characteristics of the Tip Stick to defeat

Yuanshu Nalan.



**Figure 5 Huang Fei-hung and Nalan Yuan shu's stick fighting**



**Figure 6 Shaolin Baton Technique changed to Tip Baton Technique**

### 2.6.1 Behind “Men of Wong Fei Hung” is a secret rivalry between two periods of martial arts representation

The “Wong Fei Hung’s men when strong” in the role of Nalan Yuan Shu’s Donnie Yen’s stick skills on the screen so out of the ordinary visual tension is very strong not only to attribute to the action of Yuen Woo-ping’s guidance, but also because of Donnie Yen came from the United States to Shaanxi Provincial Wushu Team in 1987 to worship the then-famous Wushu Champion Zhao Changjun as a teacher, Zhao Changjun’s sword, stick, ground lying fist in the 80’s to fight the whole country in China at that time the Chinese Wushu Circle rumours It was rumoured in Chinese martial arts circles that “the 70s was Jet Li’s world, but the 80s was Zhao Changjun’s world”. Since this film, Donnie Yen’s theatre and resources have gradually opened up, and he has been working as an action actor and action director in the film and television industry until today. At that time, people could not help but compare Zhao Changjun with Jet Li, but Zhao Changjun’s own ambition in the promotion and development of Chinese martial arts, when Jet Li became an international superstar in the 1990s, Zhao Changjun continued to plough the path of martial arts education. As a martial arts person looking at these two champions, I believe that both of them are in their own field of expertise to promote the development of the Chinese martial arts, there is no right or wrong and high or low.

## 3 The “Hazy Beauty” of Shaolin Baton Technique in Wuxia Films

This article lists six Chinese martial arts films with Shaolin elements in the ten years from 1982 to 1992. They have different reputation, different shooting styles, and present different aesthetics of Shaolin stick fighting. In my eyes, in addition to the “beauty of form” and “beauty of meaning” that Mr. Qiu Pi-sang considered, I saw in these six films the aesthetics of Shaolin martial arts full of curiosity caused by the ancient and simple beauty of Shaolin stick fighting as well as the mystery of Shaolin martial arts itself, the “Thousands of Dragons Wrapped Around the Waist” practiced by Master Shi Ninh with Shaolin disciples in North and South Shaolin, and “The Qin Sword and Sword” practiced by Master Shi Ninh. In “North and South Shaolin”, Master Shi Neng practiced the “Thousand Dragons Wrapped Around the Waist” with his Shaolin disciples, and in “QIN JIAN LU Wushu Literature”, there is a song of “Night Fork Stick”, which reads, “The night fork comes out of the Shaolin field, and the first one hits the Goddess of Mercy sitting down upside down, the second one hits the Night Fork patrolling the sea, the third one hits the four seals and four closures, and the fourth one hits the wind demon with eight sticks.... ..the twelve sticks are all used up to defeat the first strongest in the south of the Yangtze River.” These Shaolin stick art songs and secret recipes are precisely a kind of mystery and curiosity for the world to feel the “hazy beauty”.

## 4 Conclusion

The martial arts aesthetics of Shaolin martial arts in martial arts films include the beauty of the Shaolin martial arts exercises, the beauty of the techniques, the beauty of the director and the martial arts director presenting the Shaolin martial arts of the simple and ancient beauty of the Shaolin martial arts, and Shaolin martial arts itself to bring the outsiders who do not understand the martial arts of the “haze of beauty”, we can understand the haze of beauty as the depth of the traditional martial arts culture, the traditional martial arts culture, although it is not high up and inaccessible, but it will always bring those outsiders a sense of mystery. Although the traditional martial arts culture is not inaccessible, but it will always bring those outsiders a sense of mystery, through the medium of martial arts films to cause outsiders to explore the curiosity of traditional Chinese martial arts culture, to achieve the dissemination of martial arts culture, to promote China’s excellent traditional culture, will be the fundamental purpose of the development of the Chinese martial arts.

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