

# **KING HU'S A Touch of Zen**

**Stephen Teo**

**HKU**  
**PRESS**  
香港大學出版社

Hong Kong University Press  
The University of Hong Kong  
Pokfulam Road  
Hong Kong  
[www.hkupress.org](http://www.hkupress.org)

© Hong Kong University Press 2006

ISBN 978-962-209-815-2

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound by Condor Production Ltd., Hong Kong, China

# Contents

Series Preface	ix
Acknowledgements	xiii
1 Introduction	1
2 Pu Songling and the Spider	17
3 Ghosts and the Desire to See	29
4 Seduction and Politics, Fight and Flight	51
5 The Battle of the Haunted Mansion	77
6 The Zen Finale	91
7 Conclusion	107

<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Notes</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Credits</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Biography and Filmography</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>167</b>

# 1

## Introduction

*A Touch of Zen* is one of the essential films of the Chinese-language cinema. It achieved a “double first”: it was the first Chinese-language film to win an award at the Cannes Film Festival, in 1975, and the first *wuxia* (martial chivalry) film to do so at an international film festival. This success at the Cannes Film Festival signaled the rise of Chinese films as an aesthetic force in world cinema, demonstrating how Chinese filmmakers could make a world-class film in their own style and in a distinctively Chinese genre. Though principally shot in Taiwan for a Taiwan-based production company, its links with the Hong Kong cinema are unquestionable. In fact, the film is a model of a pan-Chinese production of its time, being directed by a native of Beijing based in Hong Kong, who expanded his career into Taiwan where he made the bulk of the film with Taiwanese and Hong Kong actors and crew members (the final sections of the film being shot in Hong Kong). Such a pan-Chinese production strategy allows one to claim that the film is a Hong Kong production as well as a Taiwan

production, and its legacy of a double heritage linking the Hong Kong and Taiwan film industries is one of the significances of *A Touch of Zen*.

The achievement of *A Touch of Zen* was a personal milestone for its director King Hu who represented the older guard of directors working in the Hong Kong film industry — directors born in China who had migrated to Hong Kong in the postwar period, either to build new careers or to continue careers that were begun in the Shanghai film industry. Hu was among the youngest of this old guard, and as such, he provided an intermediate link to the New Wave directors of the Hong Kong cinema who emerged in 1979. Indeed, the success of *A Touch of Zen* at the Cannes Film Festival provided the impetus for the rise of this New Wave. Many of its key directors, such as Ann Hui and Tsui Hark, were great admirers of King Hu: Ann Hui even worked for Hu as his assistant on *The Valiant Ones* (1975), and Tsui Hark produced *Swordsmen* (1990), originally planned as Hu's comeback film but which turned out to be more of a tribute to Hu's *wuxia* films (Hu eventually walked out of the film but he is still credited as one of its directors).

For a film already thirty-five years old at the time of writing, *A Touch of Zen* still rebounds strongly on the contemporary cinema. It stands as an early blueprint for the transnational, pan-Chinese “cross-over” productions which recently won popular success in the West, such as Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004). Aesthetically, these films owe much to Hu's film: the key textual indicators of this influence are the bamboo forest fight sequences in *Crouching Tiger* and *House of Flying Daggers*, both directly inspired by Hu's seminal bamboo forest sequence in *A Touch of Zen*. Generally, Hu's film set the paradigm for the martial arts art film: its phantasmagoric fight sequences and focal point on an enigmatic female knight set the pattern for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*; its nationalistic concern and theme of

political intrigue as an allegory of modern Chinese politics was echoed by *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers*.

In this detailed and concentrated study of *A Touch of Zen*, I want to show why I consider it to be an essential film, and why it is Hu's masterpiece and how it is quite unlike other *wuxia* films that came before or after. It is certainly his most personal film — one that is also historically important in the modern development of the Hong Kong cinema as well as the Taiwan cinema. I will argue that its key significance, and the reason its resonance lasts to this day, is its subversive portrait of the female hero, and a concomitant sexual ambiguity infecting both the male and female protagonists. The film is a feminist text structured like a Brechtian didactic play in which the actors and the spectators alike partake in a psychoanalytical narrative about sexuality and desire, moving on to scenes of martial arts action and Beijing Opera-style acrobatics, and finally progressing to a stage of spiritual transcendence. The play features a preoedipal female hero and a male hero burdened with oedipal anxieties. In the course of the narrative, both characters form a union of mutual accommodation that reverberates with contemporary lifestyle implications of single parenthood, bisexuality, and uncertainty in gender roles; concurrently bringing up, in the Chinese socio-cultural context, questions of free choice (being true to oneself) versus social obligations (the need for role playing) and the *wen-wu* (civil-military) dichotomy — all of which bear on the development of a civil society in authoritarian China today. Such themes are extraordinary enough in a martial arts movie, but additionally, the film promotes a philosophical-religious view of action at a time when the martial arts genre was purveying routine violence. Its psychic ending remains an unprecedented and as yet unsurpassed transcendental experience in the Chinese-language cinema.

This book realizes a dream of mine to write a monograph on the film ever since I was involved in editing a catalogue on a King

Hu retrospective organized by the Hong Kong International Film Festival in 1998, in memory of Hu's passing the year before (Hu died in Taipei in January 1997).<sup>1</sup> At the time, I was struck by the fact that no major study had ever been written on the film, and nine years on, this is still the case. This film-specific monograph is therefore the response to a need for a definitive scholarly analysis of an important film, but it is also a tribute to the brilliant auteurship which Hu put on display in the making of the film. Hu's auteurship results in a magisterial cinematic text of interpretation and commentary on the *wuxia* genre, and a personal exegesis of a classic story taken from a famous anthology of ghost stories, Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi* (translated by Herbert A. Giles as *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*<sup>2</sup>), which, I will demonstrate, is a source that is indispensable to the narrative of the film. This book is therefore a textual analysis of the film; it provides a detailed description of the narrative as the basis on which to deconstruct the film in terms of its feminist text and highly symbolic and subversive portrayals of male and female sexuality. The archetypes of the female knight (*xia nü*, which is the Chinese title of the film) and the Confucian male scholar and knight aspirant (*ruxia*) are metaphors of desire and repression. Underlying that basic text is the psycho-religious theme of Zen, a difficult conceit to realize but one that is remarkably consistent with the unconventional and subversive nature of the work. For Hu, working with the concepts of Zen was improvised artistry that turned into an impassioned plea for universal transcendence.

The ultimate aim of the book is to produce a total analysis as far as possible in the sense of an objective and subjective *recapitulation* of the film — an imperative suggested by the film's relative rarity and its historical distance (it is a work of the early 1970s, is not often revived, and until fairly recently was not available in English-subtitled DVD versions) and, as I have already pointed out, not much has been written about it either in Chinese or English.

Such a structure attempts to appropriate the actual achievement of *A Touch of Zen* as a total experience inasmuch as the film is an objective and subjective interpretation of a classic Chinese ghost story, meaning that Hu had respected the historical objectivity of the source while expanding on the short story and transforming it into a three-hour martial arts epic, delivering a psychic rendition of Zen at the last moment. The film is above all a landmark work in terms of its multi-faceted themes and inter-weaving story lines. It combined martial arts action with political allegory, a ghost story, a love story, and indeed a treatise on Chinese culture, referencing Chinese poetry, painting, philosophy, music, and history. Above all that, it achieved a universal, transcultural quality that it is the aim of this book to illuminate with references to both Western and Chinese writings dealing with the conceptual subjects the film contains.

The film's narrative structure is obviously complicated, and the design of the book as a literary recapitulation of the film is an attempt to reproduce it on paper as a permanent record, so that the reader can more easily engage with its narrative form and its many levels of complexity. On the other hand, the book's descriptive-objective structure is suggestive of the primacy of form in Hu's work. The reader should gain an impression of the film's form as an elaborately planned and skillfully executed narrative. Hu's touch of genius was to achieve fully and unreservedly within the mores of his time, a *formal* exploration of his characters and their obsession, employing Zen as a means of formal exploration as well as a subject — from its form, a river of themes and meanings flowed. The book attempts to replicate the form as well as the content, but since Zen itself defies description and is at best an unwieldy vessel, its form cannot be replicated in full, if in fact it is possible to replicate it at all. There are certainly moments in the film which go beyond description despite one's best efforts to describe them, and here, I am referring to those moments of martial

arts action in several dazzling set pieces that simply have to be seen and experienced for their visceral quality and choreographic beauty. Such moments are pure cinema that no book can substitute. The conceit of *Zen* as form is to allow the reader at least a *perception* of such moments through the discovery of form — as if participating with Hu in his process of *discovering* a form for his narrative as he set about making the film, utilizing the idea of Zen as both organization and spontaneous, opportunistic improvisation (all indications were that Hu quite plainly had all his concepts but finding the right form to express them was the difficulty). If readers gain such a sense of organization and improvisation as they read the book chronologically, that is part of the design. If it is too much to ask that readers should feel like they are watching the film as they read the book, at the very least, it is hoped that he or she will immediately recall the film as a vivid screen memory.

I first saw *A Touch of Zen* in 1980 which was also the year when I first met King Hu. He was to me already a near-legend at the time, having then completed not only *A Touch of Zen* but a series of notable films including *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973), *The Valiant Ones* (1975), *Raining in the Mountain* (1979), and *Legend of the Mountain* (1979). Hu's career declined sharply in the 1980s until his death in 1997, despite several attempts at comebacks; but it always seemed to me a matter of high neglect that no critic or scholar had written a book on Hu or his body of work that had achieved recognition.<sup>3</sup> Several short articles have been published on *A Touch of Zen* in the 1970s and 80s and this book pays certain homage to those scholars (particularly Chinese scholars) who have written on Hu's work by citing them quite extensively (Vicki Ooi, Huang Ren, Ma Guoguang, Sek Kei). Hu was then, as now, remembered by critics and scholars for a handful of classic *wuxia* films (which today would of course include *A Touch of Zen*). He was recognized as one of the founding masters of the so-called "new school" movement in the *wuxia* film genre.<sup>4</sup> *Come Drink with Me*

(1966) was the director's first *wuxia* picture, produced by the Shaw Brothers studio, which established the modern "new school" norms of the genre. In particular, Hu refreshed the archetype of the female knight figure (*xia nü*) which he would go on to develop in a series of *wuxia* films: *Dragon Inn* (1967), *A Touch of Zen*, *The Fate of Lee Khan*. This archetype was recognizable even in films where the focus was not on the *xia nü*, as in *The Valiant Ones*, *Raining in the Mountain*, and *Legend of the Mountain*.

*A Touch of Zen* marks the apex of Hu's work in the genre. Indeed, I assert that it is the finest work in the genre during the period of the development of the "new school" of *wuxia* films from 1965 to 1971. Why has such a key and significant film not been given its dues in the academic publishing world, at least in so far as monographs on King Hu and his films have not been forthcoming up to now? Perhaps part of the answer is that *A Touch of Zen* was initially regarded as a failure, and despite its status as a classic in latter years, it remains something of a *film maudit*, an ambivalent and idiosyncratic work that is simply too cultish or marginal to be considered seriously. If one were to see it purely as a *wuxia* action film, it is far too slow and unconventional in its intricate attention to detail and narrative digressions into other generic traditions. The film's initial failure was compounded by the fact that it was released in Hong Kong just as the popularity of the *wuxia* genre was waning and a new martial arts genre, the kung fu fist-fighting movie, was on the rise. Hu was himself regarded as a maverick, someone who craved academic respectability while engaging in a profession within a crassly commercial film industry.<sup>5</sup> He was a difficult, perfectionist filmmaker who could not fully belong in the system. *A Touch of Zen* was the culmination of his perfectionism and the enduring symbol of his maverick nature. Although Hu continued to make several more films after *A Touch of Zen*, including films of the same *wuxia* genre, he never quite touched again the same heights and epic dimensions of creativity.

\* \* \*

The first task of the book is to provide the reader with information about the historical context of the film's production in the late 1960s to the early 1970s before undertaking the extended textual analysis of the film's narrative. The film had a long and difficult production history, which was quite unprecedented up to that point in the post-war development of both the Hong Kong and Taiwan film industries. Hu had begun work on the film as far back as 1968, and he would spend the next three years working on and off on the project. In fact, according to Sha Yung-fong, the film's producer and chief executive officer of the Taiwan-based Union Film Company (Lianbang) which produced *A Touch of Zen*, the film actually took some five years to make, from conception to the release of the final episode of the two-part film (Hu was still shooting Part 2 after Part 1 had been released in Taiwan in 1970).<sup>6</sup> This meant that Hu had already conceived the project and begun work on it right after completing and releasing *Dragon Inn* (aka *Dragon Gate Inn*) in 1967, his first picture for the Union company undertaken after *Come Drink with Me*.

The success of *Come Drink with Me* came after Hu had already left Shaw Brothers, unhappy with his experiences at the studio. Run Run Shaw was not enamored of Hu's slow and fastidious working methods and had pressured him to finish the film quickly, advising him to learn from and follow the example of Xu Zenghong, one of the studio's fast and proficient directors entrusted by Shaw to spearhead the newly emerging movement in the martial arts genre.<sup>7</sup> Han Yingjie, Hu's martial arts director on *Come Drink with Me* and his subsequent films (including *A Touch of Zen*), tells the story of why Hu quit Shaws. Run Run had given Hu three days to finish the film instead of the ten originally allocated. Hu asked for a week but Shaw refused and said that if he could not finish the

film, another director would — at which Hu snapped back, “In that case, I’ll finish the film in two days.”<sup>8</sup>

After finishing the film, Hu unceremoniously left Shaws and Hong Kong to join Union, a distribution house of long standing in Taiwan which was venturing into film production.<sup>9</sup> As a fledgling production company, Union benefited from Hu’s expertise garnered from his career at Shaw Brothers as a director, actor, writer and production assistant. Hu virtually built the Union studio in the making of *Dragon Inn* as its first production, and then followed that up with *A Touch of Zen* made largely by the same cast and crew of the first film. Union had bought a large piece of land in Danan, Taoyuan County, southwest of Taipei, on which to build its studio in order to execute the production of *Dragon Inn*. After the success of *Dragon Inn*, the company proceeded to construct a permanent exterior set for Hu’s next film.<sup>10</sup> Construction was under Hu’s supervision, acting as his own art director and set designer. The building of such a large, permanent set was an unprecedented move in the annals of Taiwan’s filmmaking history. The whole set was a virtual town of ancient China, and included a gate tower, a fort, drum and bell towers, an army general’s mansion, a backyard garden, a water pavilion, a terrace, a tavern, a teahouse, a dyeworks factory, a temple, a jeweler’s shop, and various other shops and government offices, all properly ringed by avenues and back alleys, surrounded by arches and the authentic scenery of the Chinese landscape south of the Yangtze.<sup>11</sup>

The construction of the set was given the go-ahead without Hu having written his script, as Hu himself claimed in an interview in 1974 with the French critic Michel Ciment.<sup>12</sup> It was nine months before Hu set about writing his script of *A Touch of Zen*,<sup>13</sup> drawing inspiration from the set itself. The bulk of the action was to be concentrated in two areas of the set: the fort and the general’s mansion, which were to lie in ruins, overgrown with weeds and plants. Hu then demanded that these sets be appropriately

destroyed and aged. A flamethrower was used to scorch the wooden exteriors, which were then polished by sandpaper or brushed by steel wire several times over.<sup>14</sup> The same process was applied to all the furniture. Hu himself used rather more colourful language to describe the process in his interview with Ciment. “I had a portion of it set on fire to give it an ancient look and was hoping that the rain would give it an even more authentic appearance. During all that time, I was writing the script.”<sup>15</sup> Hu also stated that the whole set was built on cement so that it would not be blown away by typhoons.



**Still 1.1** The outer gate of the general's mansion

The general's mansion and the water pavilion were the centerpieces of the virtual Ming dynasty town, meticulously built by engravers and master craftsmen. This set alone took four months to build, and according to Sha Yung-fong, Hu planted wild grass and reeds to add to the atmosphere he wanted, halting the shooting of the film for one full season to wait until the reeds would turn into flowering goldenrod.<sup>16</sup> However, Hu maintained that this was a myth put out by Sha, inflating the scale of the production and the problems the studio encountered for publicity purposes.<sup>17</sup> The

fact was, Hu said, the grass and the goldenrod were transplanted onto the wooden floor of the set such that they could be moved whenever he changed his camera angle, more difficult to do if real grass and reeds were planted. Hu also maintained that it was Sha's idea to age the set by waiting for the rains in the typhoon season and the moss to grow. But rather than wait for the rain, Hu applied a treatment of salt and vinegar on the walls to give them the seedy look he wanted. All the aging effects were artificially manufactured once the set was constructed, which did not take too much time, Hu claimed.<sup>18</sup>



**Still 1.2** Goldenrod everywhere: a view of the deserted fort

Stories of Hu being difficult and of his troubles with the top Union brass began circulating in Hong Kong. One such story, published in 1970, claimed that Hu was possessive of the outdoor set wherein he was shooting *A Touch of Zen*, and had ordered that it was not to be used for other films during the period of his production, causing the studio to put a halt to its list of other productions.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, the director's meticulous ways did not go down well with the studio bosses. They were adamant that Hu had caused the studio to become a losing venture. To his credit, Sha

supported Hu as much as he could through the ups and downs of the film's long production schedule, insisting at first that the film ought not to be broken up into two parts when the suggestion was put to him. From his experience as a distributor, Sha knew that this would make the film commercially untenable, but he eventually relented, even agreeing to pay Hu for two films instead of one.<sup>20</sup>

The film was released in Taiwan as a two-part film; Part 1 was put out in 1970 and Part 2 in 1971, an interval of a year. Hu had returned to Hong Kong after the release of Part 1 and was prevaricating on the completion of Part 2 because he could not think of an ending for the film, but perhaps there were other reasons relating to Hu's unhappiness with the Union bosses. The film was only completed, in Hong Kong, with the intervention of Raymond Chow, head of Golden Harvest, who acted as virtual completion guarantor — effectively an intermediary between Union and Hu.<sup>21</sup> As the studio had anticipated, it was not a commercial success. In Hong Kong, the film was cut into a single shorter version and released on 18 November 1971, apparently to take advantage of a new craze in the martial arts genre precipitated by the huge box-office success of Bruce Lee's *The Big Boss*, which had come out just two weeks before. Within three days of its release, *The Big Boss* had grossed one million dollars, a new record.<sup>22</sup> Unable to compete on its own terms as a work more attuned towards the “descriptions of details”, as Hu himself put it,<sup>23</sup> *A Touch of Zen* was an immediate failure, running for only one week at the Roxy cinema in Causeway Bay and the Sands cinema in Kowloon before it was replaced by a European film *The Miracle of Life*, an “educational documentary” on childbirth and sex. In his interview with *Cahiers du Cinema* published in 1984, Hu offered the explanation that the film failed because of its length.<sup>24</sup> Since the original long version was never released in Hong Kong, on Hu's explanation it appears that the public in Hong Kong who saw it found even the shorter two-and-a-half-hour version too long. In

my view, the film's commercial failure cannot wholly be attributed to length but in general to its ambivalence which would have been intensified by the cutting. The film might simply have been too subtle for an audience tuned to the simple "black is black and white is white" entertainment ethos of the newly emerging male-dominated kung fu cinema. The central focus on the female knight-figure and the theme of ambiguous sexuality, though crucial to a successful viewing of the film, were clearly untenable in the new environment and would have been judged too subversive by the audience.

The film's failure raises the question of the type of audience the film was targeting. The focus on the *xia nü*, signaled by the Chinese title, points to women as the target audience. Hu conceivably saw the film as a feminist *wuxia* film though his distributors would have other ideas, seeing the film as merely an action piece that could attract both sexes. This could explain its failure since the audience at the time expected the martial arts genre to be one controlled and dominated by the male look. A comparison of the film's feminine heroic image with that of Bruce Lee who had been pulling in the crowds with *The Big Boss* would have compounded the perception of *A Touch of Zen* as a highly unconventional work at the time, which, as it turned out, failed to pull in even the female audience.

The film disappeared for several years before it resurfaced again in its original form, at the Cannes Film Festival in 1975. Hu was persuaded by the French critic Pierre Rissient, who had seen the shorter version in 1973, to re-assemble his master work and enter it for competition at Cannes.<sup>25</sup> The film was shown in a single three-hour version rather than a two-part film, and it eventually won the Grand Prix for technical achievement (in this monograph, my discussions will allude to the two-part version that was originally shown in Taiwan and now fully restored in a print available at the Hong Kong Film Archive, rather than the single-cut version generally shown in the West).<sup>26</sup> The film's success at Cannes led to

its distribution in art-house cinemas throughout the West, and there the audience reception of the film tended to be the inverse of its reception in the East. What is thought unconventional about the film in the East, such as its focus on the female knight, the ambiguous sexuality, the mysticism of Zen, were regarded as refreshing qualities in the West, particularly following the masculine ethos of the kung fu cinema that had invaded screens in Europe and America since 1972. However, the West's understanding of the film was hindered by its lack of contextual references and analyses (at the time, the Chinese-language cinemas of Hong Kong, China and Taiwan were still, in the main, undiscovered territory), and probably a superficial grasp of the conceptual issues of sexuality, desire, and repression, as well as the theme of Zen contained in the film. That this is the case is proven by the dearth of scholarly monographic materials on the film in the years since its distribution in the West.

The success at Cannes and its eventual exposure in the West nevertheless vindicated Hu's work on the film, and he was forgiven by Sha Yung-fong and his partners for inflicting on them a huge commercial failure, which Sha alleged was the source of the company's troubles in later years (leading to the sale of the Danan studio in 1978 and the winding down of Union in 1987).<sup>27</sup> In his memoirs published in 1994, Sha stated that he adopted a philosophical attitude towards Hu, being so overawed by Hu's energy and talent that he and his partners did not legally pursue the director for the financial troubles and losses he allegedly caused them.

For his part, Hu left Union under a cloud of acrimony and never made another film for the studio.<sup>28</sup> Sha maintained that his relationship with Hu was always civil and that he remained friends with the director until he died. Sha underscored the point that Hu had made the correct decision to go to Taiwan to pursue his career with Union. If Hu had remained at Shaw Brothers, he would not have made *Dragon Inn* or *A Touch of Zen*, or works comparable.

“No company, big or small, in Hong Kong or Taiwan would have allowed King Hu to make one film over a three-year period with the budget of three films put together. Only Union could let him do it,” Sha wrote.<sup>29</sup> Hu’s friend, the director Song Cunshou, with whom he had sworn a pact of brotherhood in their early days in Hong Kong, fundamentally concurred with the view that Hu needed Union and Union needed Hu. In Song’s view, the Union studio never made better films than *Dragon Inn* or *A Touch of Zen* after Hu left; and Hu’s own efforts after he left Union were also not up to these first two productions.<sup>30</sup> In his chapter on Hu, Sha concluded with the following words: “Since he was a student of Buddhism, why did King Hu not believe in *karma* (or predestined fate)? This is a matter of eternal regret.”<sup>31</sup>

In the next chapter, I will proceed to the formal analysis of the film’s narrative by discussing the symbolic motifs which Hu embedded within the film in order to interpret and build on the original story in *Liaozhai zhiyi*, a vital source of the narrative. Chapter 3 will dwell on the matter of ghosts and the psychological illusions preying on the mind of the male hero as the narrative progresses into the realm of the ghost story. Chapter 4 concerns the allegorical nature of the piece, the *xia nü*’s plight as a political refugee, and the sealing of her predestined union with the male scholar hero. Chapter 5 describes a key battle scene during which the heroes employ stratagems, bluff and dummies: a theme that reinforces the male hero’s attachment to illusionary endeavors and the female hero’s quest for karmic destiny. Chapter 6 focuses on the final Zen climax and its psychic inferences. Chapter 7 wraps up the discussion with several conclusions on the film’s lasting value and influences. Appendices at the end of the book provide a synopsis of the original story in *Liaozhai zhiyi* which readers are advised to read before venturing into chapter 2, and a narrative and thematic chart designed to give an overall picture that will enable the reader to gain a foothold at any point of the complicated narrative.

# 7

## Conclusion

I began by suggesting that *A Touch of Zen* is a subversive work because of its feminist sensibility and sexual ambiguity. But by delivering a fantastic-marvelous conclusion that exposes us to the supernatural, the film appears to override the earthly human concerns of our sexual roles and directs us to transcend them. But



**Still 7.1** The transfiguration of Hui Yuan

if the message of the Zen conclusion is, as Vicki Ooi suggests, that through the supernatural contents of the psychic process, we remain entangled with worldly matters until we have fulfilled our pre-given roles as a “fundamental law of karmic birth”,<sup>1</sup> then far from diluting the film’s subversive essence, the conclusion induces its reverberation in the mind. The Zen conclusion states a transcendental truth, which in Jungian terms, is its own critique: it states at the same time that it is possibly untrue.<sup>2</sup> It is untrue not only because man cannot reach for absolute truth but also because our subjective egos (the conscious part of our egos) are not sufficiently trained to accept the transcendentalism of the Zen conclusion, and we must therefore continue to exert our egos towards transcending the entanglements of our sexual selves. The subversive nature of feminism and sexual ambiguity in *A Touch of Zen* reminds us of the requisite of transcendental truth.

One of the enduring conceits of the film is that Zen is basically identified as a feminine inspiration, symbolized in the form of the *xia nü*. Hu had been reminded of Zen when he read the original story in *Liaozhai*, and this was a crucial inspiration. He then re-created the *xia nü* as Yang Huizhen and having been inspired by her into thinking about Zen, Hu turned her into a more inspirational, earth-bound warrior figure (as signified by her tendency to dive down) — one caught in the web of mortal sin and guilt. Through Zen, Hu approximates the original vision of the *xia nü* as a wishful, spectral, female warrior. Zen, or Buddhism (as a counterforce against Confucianism), allows Yang to be as independent and as non-conformist as she seeks to be. Thus we have the idea of *A Touch of Zen* as a feminist *wuxia* phantasy. Yang incarnates the feminist ideal with an ambiguous sexuality: in some ways, she is the forerunner of the transsexual Dongfang Bubai (Asia the Invincible), the Brigitte Lin character in Tsui Hark’s *Swordsman II* (1991) and *Swordsman III: The East is Red* (1993). On the other hand, her deference to the patriarchal order and the

prevailing social norms betrays an element of Confucian conservatism that contradicts her feminist ideal. In this respect, she is the cinematic predecessor of Jen, the Zhang Ziyi character in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* who rebels against the patriarchal order of *xia* or knight-errantry and yet seeks its approval.

The figure of the *xia nü* is the single, most memorable *subject* and *object* of the film. She encapsulates Zen as feminine inspiration, feminist phantasy, and existential rigor (from martial arts action to Zen transcendence). She epitomizes action and this is contrasted with Gu Shengzhai, the male scholar, who epitomizes the thought behind the action. Gu was an effective strategist but a failure at fighting. Whenever the *xia nü* springs into action, Gu is always seen at the margins, perennially a distant observer, and often utterly helpless (remember that he passed out in the first conflict between Yang Huizhen and Ouyang Nian).<sup>3</sup> At best, the Gu-Yang relationship is ambivalent, showing that the *wen-wu* dialectics in their relationship are antithetical. Gu may have had his moment of glory as a military thinker and strategist — the Battle of the Haunted Mansion being his *tour de force* — but following that victory, he is brought down to earth by the reality of slaughter. Gu after all is a painter who “maintains in his work, a natural distance from reality”, to quote Benjamin.<sup>4</sup> Yang Huizhen may be compared to the cameraman who “penetrates deeply into its web”.<sup>5</sup> Personifying the spider symbol at the same time, Yang is forever spinning the web of reality — and as a human object in her own right, she sometimes appears caught in the web (that being spun by the cosmic spider).

The reality principle, which is that of human suffering and death, leads us to the Buddhist theme of redemption and transcendence. The subject of Zen has the effect of showing that Gu holds on to the experiential realm “like a blind cat guarding a dead rat”<sup>6</sup> because of his ambition to become another Zhuge Liang,

while Yang subjects herself to the revolving flow of birth and death according to her karmic destiny. Though Yang is marked by the hand of predestiny that makes her seem immortal, it is an illusion. Hu gives many hints of her vulnerability in the action sequences: to cite just two examples, after her wondrous vaulting movement in the Battle of the Bamboo Forest, an exhausted Yang careens towards a tree, almost at the point of collapse; and in the final battle with Xu Xianchun after he has stabbed Hui Yuan, Yang barely survives Xu's frenzied assaults. Thus, even in the fantastic-marvelous realm of action, the reality principle does not entirely escape the *xia nü* either.

Zen is thus manifested as the imposition of the reality principle on its protagonists (and us), by reminding all of their mortality and guilt. The concluding scenes show that Yang has yet to achieve her own state of transcendence and that she is not invulnerable. In other words, her final role is that of a human being, and she is denied the fantastic-marvelous role of the female knight-errant with the ability to vanish into thin air, as the *xia nü* does in the original story. Thus while the film delivers the Zen closure of a fantastic-marvelous acceptance of Hui Yuan's transfiguration, the revelation that Yang Huizhen is human and mortal is a remarkable antithesis to the generic tradition of heroism in the genre. While the final Zen epiphany is meant to provoke us into a philosophical understanding of man and his or her limitations, it is also Hu's way of delivering the ultimate critique of the genre's *raison d'être*: the audience's wish-fulfilment for heroes to save them from their own vulnerability and weaknesses. In Hu's *wuxia* cinema, heroes die no matter how preternaturally strong they are, or how disciplined and well trained in the martial arts. The heroes, and therefore we the audience, are mortal, and we must all do our best to achieve transcendence ourselves.

As if touched by its own sense of mortality and fatalism, there was always a tinge of Buddhistic regret that followed *A Touch of*

*Zen* in the aftermath of its release in 1970–71, and its subsequent success in winning a prize at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival. The film was a commercial failure in Hong Kong and Taiwan and I argued in the introduction that the film failed because of its focus on the female hero and the ambivalence of the themes (contrary to some opinions, the film is not clear cut in its depiction of a struggle between good and evil). As a result of this commercial failure, its status through the years of Hu's life was essentially relegated to that of a *film maudit*, despite the critical acclaim it accumulated. Hu himself seemed cursed by his achievement, and he would not make another film of its dimensions and depth. *A Touch of Zen* was really the last studio film that Hu made as he reached the peak of his career — his subsequent films in the 1970s were made independently for his own production company. The film therefore marks the culminating experience in Hu's career not only because he could never recover the same mental energy in making his subsequent films but also the same studio conditions that allowed him the means to display his talents. In this sense, *A Touch of Zen* is the *Citizen Kane* of the Chinese cinema: a film exemplifying the wondrous display of auteurial showmanship backed up by a studio which encouraged and tolerated the excesses of talent. Like *Citizen Kane*, *A Touch of Zen* is a one of a kind experience imbued with a certain Messianic fervor that retains the ability of seeming fresh and urgent through time. While it draws on "a touch of Zen" for inspiration, Zen itself is the symbol of the film's endurance and of its maverick nature. Zen also points to the quality of elusive universality — an imponderable object yet always striven for.

The enduring Zen-like quality of *A Touch of Zen* does not of course exempt it from the verities of distribution fate — and it did not preclude Hu from doing what is commercially necessary in the industry. The historical significance of the film is its propensity to comment on its time and the patterns of change within the genre,

in particular the changes of fighting styles. At the time it was released in Hong Kong in 1971, the *wuxia* genre had declined and was in the process of being replaced by the kung fu genre, emphasizing fist-fighting instead of swordfighting. The rise of kung fu was in fact pre-empted in *A Touch of Zen*, by showing Hui Yuan using only his hands in his confrontation with Xu Xianchun. In 1971 when Hu was completing Part 2 in Hong Kong, kung fu was already a set trend, and Hu lost no time incorporating it into *A Touch of Zen*. By the time he made *The Fate of Lee Khan* and *The Valiant Ones*, which were shot back-to-back in 1972 (Hu continued shooting *The Valiant Ones* after completing *The Fate of Lee Khan*, released in 1973; *The Valiant Ones* was released in 1975), Hu elaborated a formula that mixed swordfighting with fist-fighting, adhering to the classical idea that unarmed combat was the highest form of fighting and that practitioners of the martial arts who had acquired such skills were people of high rank, if not of high character: a theme already employed in *A Touch of Zen*.<sup>7</sup> Thus Hui Yuan uses only his bare hands to ward off Ouyang Nian and Xu Xianchun in his respective encounters with them, which shows the Zen Patriarch as a man of Buddha bound by the commandment against killing (the combat between Hui Yuan and Xu in the final battle scenes is fought in the main without weapons; but ultimately, Xu stabs Hui Yuan with a dagger — the weapon revealing his treacherous character). Thus the Mongol chieftain Lee Khan (played by Tian Feng) in *The Fate of Lee Khan*, and the pirate chieftain Xu Dong (played by Han Yingjie) in *The Valiant Ones* are fighters who have achieved the highest skill: they do not need to use swords in order to prevail over those who do. In this way, Hu's incorporation of kung fu styles became better integrated with character portrayals and the action assumes multi-dimensionality.

The highly charged presence of Sammo Hung in *The Valiant Ones* (he appears as the Japanese pirate Hakatatsu) and the martial arts directing credit that he received on that film, was Hu's

recognition of the newly emerging kung fu trend. Apart from Sammo Hung, Hu also employed Jackie Chan, who appeared in various unrecognizable bit parts throughout the film, and Yuan Biao. In employing these younger talents, Hu was forging a continuity of martial arts choreography between the “new school” *wuxia* and the kung fu cinema of the baby-boom generation. For his part, Hung was consciously aware of Hu’s operatic combat style, thus Hakatatsu’s somersaults, leaps into the air, and subsequent diving tactics in the last desperate stages of his final combat with Wu Jiyuan (played by Bai Ying) in *The Valiant Ones* are evocative of Yang Huizhen’s leaping and diving tactics in the Bamboo Forest sequence in *A Touch of Zen*. The choreography there was the work of Han Yingjie who appeared in *The Valiant Ones* as Xu Dong. Han Yingjie’s trademarks are evident in the action choreography of *The Valiant Ones* though Sammo Hung received the credit.<sup>8</sup> These two sequences were the inspirational blueprints for action sequences in two key *wuxia* films of the postmodern era in the Hong Kong cinema: Tsui Hark’s *The Blade* (1995), with its tribute to the final sequence of *The Valiant Ones*; and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*’s tribute to the Bamboo Forest sequence.

*The Valiant Ones* was King Hu’s last full-length *wuxia* picture.<sup>9</sup> As such, it is his swan song to the genre, a haunting work so resonant of the theme of mortality that it should rightly be seen as the final testament of Hu’s *wuxia* cinema. The picture ends in mourning and a note of emotional burn-out following the climactic battle (a particularly touching moment is Xu Feng’s death, accidentally caused by her husband Bai Ying’s Wu Jiyuan, when he deflects a dart thrown by Sammo Hung, demonstrating the principle of mortality and fate even where the heroes are expert martial artists). Unlike *A Touch of Zen*, there is no Zen transcendence at the closure, but rather a sense of utter loss. *The Valiant Ones* was released a few months before Hu’s success in the 1975 Cannes Film Festival with *A Touch of Zen*. The victory at

Cannes did not prompt Hu to make more *wuxia* pictures. Instead, he diversified his range — although it is important to note that his range was still limited to the historical period drama (*guzhuang pian*), a form that remained basic to Hu's career.<sup>10</sup> *The Fate of Lee Khan* and *The Valiant Ones* are therefore important films in the post-“new school” *wuxia* context of Hong Kong cinema and are worthy follow-ups to *A Touch of Zen*, but they also showed how Hu had to compromise with the system rather than the system having to adapt itself to Hu's methods as in the making of *A Touch of Zen*.

The two pictures that he made following *The Valiant Ones* were *Raining in the Mountain* and *Legend of the Mountain*, both released in 1979, and both shot back-to-back on locations in South Korea. Though they contained martial arts choreography, they were neither *wuxia* nor kung fu films. *Raining in the Mountain* deals with a power-struggle in a Buddhist monastery triggered by the retirement of the abbot who has to choose his successor. The plot is faintly reminiscent of the succession of Hui Neng as the Sixth Patriarch of Zen, as told in *The Altar Sutra*. The action in the film stems from the sub-plot where rich lay patrons of the monastery have gathered to preside over the selection of the new abbot but actually to plan to steal a valuable sutra. *Legend of the Mountain* is a ghost story, not taken from *Liaozhai zhiyi* (the script was an original written by Hu's then wife Zhong Ling). Hu gave full rein to his fantastic imagination that was present but controlled in *A Touch of Zen*. The film tells the story of a scholar (again played by Shi Jun, the scholar in *A Touch of Zen*) who is seduced by female ghosts seeking the path of reincarnation through the secrets of a sutra that is being copied by the scholar. In some respect, both films illustrated the decline of Hu. The emphasis on religion and *shenguai* fantasy appeared regressive and unbalanced. As Hu's career declined, he seemed to retreat more and more into the superstitious world of the ghost story. This was indicated by his last film *The Painted*

*Skin*, adapted from a *Liaozhai* story entitled *Hua pi*, but the adaptation contained none of the subtleties and complexities of Hu's adaptation of *Xia Nü* and is now largely ignored.

King Hu died on 14 January 1997. His legacy of action and transcendence is best exemplified by *A Touch of Zen*. It is his sole masterpiece because Hu never quite recovered that unique creative impulse that he called “a touch of Zen” in his subsequent works — and that, as his former boss Sha Yung-fong (the producer of *A Touch of Zen*) might have said, invoking Buddhist fatalism, is a matter of eternal regret. King Hu claimed not to be a Buddhist and perhaps he never believed in karmic destiny. *A Touch of Zen* was, in any case, the first internationally recognized prototype of the martial arts “art film”. Its influence since has been considerable, proving Benjamin's truism that a work of art is the “creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later”.<sup>11</sup> It paved the ground for the likes of Chor Yuen's series of dark *wuxia* films based on the novels of Gu Long, including *The Killer Clans* (1976) and *The Magic Blade* (1976).<sup>12</sup> The New Wave followed next, with Tsui Hark's *Butterfly Murders* (1979), Patrick Tam's *The Sword* (1980), Johnnie To's *The Enigmatic Case* (1980), Tsui Hark's *Swordsman* series (1990–92), Wong Kar-wai's *Ashes of Time* (1994). But it was Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) that resuscitated memories of Hu's masterpiece and somehow ensured that it would endure into the new millennium.

At the time of its release, *Crouching Tiger* seemed like a distant cousin of *A Touch of Zen*. Both films were lauded at international film festivals and subsequently distributed in the West — *Crouching Tiger* winning a spectacular success: at the time of writing, it holds the record as the most commercially successful foreign subtitled film in the United States. Comparisons between the two are mainly unfair to Ang Lee's film (and the point should be made here that *A Touch of Zen* hardly seems outmoded when comparisons are made) but their points of similarity — principally the striking use of the

female warrior figure and the religious-metaphysical overlay (Zen in the case of Hu's film, and Dao in the case of *Crouching Tiger*) — are more an illustration of the enduring value of the earlier film.<sup>13</sup> In fact, more than *Crouching Tiger* could ever be, Hu's film remains a broad and comprehensive treatise of Chinese history, philosophy, poetry, and culture. In the years following *Crouching Tiger* there has even been talk of a remake of *A Touch of Zen*, which has so far not materialized.<sup>14</sup>

While it was the global success of *Crouching Tiger* that sparked such follow-ups as Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), the influence of *A Touch of Zen* is palpable in the historical-political framing of the two films and the casting of the *wuxia* genre as modern allegories. In this respect, Zhang Yimou is the follower while King Hu was the master. As I have noted in chapter 4, Hu's Taiwan-made *wuxia* epics *Dragon Inn* and *A Touch of Zen* were essential allegories of the Cold War conflict between the CCP and GMD; but they are perhaps best seen in the long term as commentaries of modern China and its dilemmas of politics. The allegorical assessment of contemporary politics, all along implicit in the historical *wuxia* genre, depends no doubt on the exigencies of the moment but the principle of allegory in the genre is the correct identification of history and the historicist thrust (Gu Shengzhai instinctively knows which side to stand on despite the criticism of his moral imperatives). *A Touch of Zen* ultimately stands on the right side of history with its portrayal of upright officials and heroes acting not only on a thesis of anti-authoritarianism but on their natural instincts against political oppression, while *Hero* looks like an apology for authoritarianism; and *House of Flying Daggers* buries its allegory in the mushy snow of the Ukraine (where it was shot) as the whole film descends into a senseless romance, in comparison with the way the love story in *A Touch of Zen* ascends to the level of feminist-libertarian principles and Zen transcendentalism.

In the final analysis, Hu's work on *A Touch of Zen* will endure because it is a commentary on genre traditions. Actually, it is really a film about two traditions: *shenguai* and *wuxia* (both fantastic genres, and both overlapping the uncanny and the marvelous in the terms as defined by Todorov). Since the 1920s, these two traditions were joined in the Chinese cinema, perhaps to the detriment of the genre. As a result of the *shenguai* tradition, *wuxia* films were despised, condemned and prohibited (in the Chinese film industry centered in Shanghai from 1931 onwards). The early banning of the genre under the GMD regime based in Nanjing was undertaken on grounds of superstition, but though it remained proscribed in China right until the late 1970s, the genre flourished in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Like the *xia nü* whose mission on earth is marked by destiny, an element of destiny brought Hu into Hong Kong where his career as a film director took off — and in a genre deemed illicit for its propensity for superstitious thinking and generating phantasy, though by the time Hu became one of its key players, the genre was derided more for its depictions of gratuitous violence.

Hu's premise in making *A Touch of Zen* was to seek to answer the question of how one tradition informed the other, how superstition or phantasy and militaristic violence could be harnessed to energize the genre with questions of universal application. He addressed the issue of superstition and phobia of ghosts, and probed into the nature of human behavior as characters play out their predestined roles. His quest was to find out what ultimately governs the nature of *xia*; and in his line of inquiry, he came up with a complex, labyrinthine web of responses, from revenge motives to chivalric instincts, from politics to military strategy, from an aesthetic desire for war (as in Gu Shengzhai's masterpiece *Battle of the Haunted Mansion*, complete with mechanized, reproductive effects) to a justification of war for just causes, from the narcissistic to the heroic instincts.

Hu defined *xia* as a “form of behaviour” and “a mode of survival”.<sup>15</sup> Yang Huizhen displays the typical characteristics of *xia* behaviour: she is spare with words, preferring to act rather than speak; she is mindful of her duties and obligations; she lives plainly and works hard. Yang is also a formidable warrior — a requisite for survival. In the first part of the film, Hu dwells on Yang as a survivor preparing herself for the struggle ahead, such as forging her own weapons in a makeshift foundry. In both senses of Hu's definition of *xia*, Yang is a conventional *xia* character. What makes her different from the classical type is her female sex combined with her ferocity as a fighter. For instance, Yang is a more skilful fighter than Hu's previous female knights Golden Swallow (of *Come Drink with Me*) or Zhu Hui (of *Dragon Inn*). Her ferocity stems from the fact that her motive is to exact vengeance rather than to do good deeds.

*A Touch of Zen* contains a critical discourse on the Confucian scholar-*xia* (*ruxia*) which can be viewed as a response to the martial arts cinema's tendency to emphasize male heroism since the beginning of the “new school” *wuxia* campaign forged by the Shaw Brothers Studio (under the slogan of a “new *wuxia* century”). Hu's manifestation of the scholar-*xia*, in the person of Gu Shengzhai, is a far cry from the machismo of Zhang Che's heroes who typify the concept of *yang gang* (masculine firmness) that became the standard in the genre at the time. The *yang gang* heroes in Zhang Che's cinema were more a Chinese response to the Western trend of macho heroes, while Hu's heroes are more classical, responding to Chinese tradition and historicist models. As a scholar-*xia*, Gu strives to combine civilian (*wen*) and military (*wu*) traits in the manner of Zhuge Liang, and the character presents an alternative role model for the study of male heroism in *wuxia* film. In effect, Zhang's heroes strive to be heroic by simply dying for their ideals. Hu's heroes strive to be heroic by merging their idealism with the reality of the social conditions they find themselves in and therefore

become more vulnerable (Gu of course is a non-fighter, which even in King Hu's own *wuxia* films, is a novelty).

Above all, Hu sought to undercut our expectations of *wuxia* heroics even as he indulged mightily in the action form of the genre. He turned the action of *xia* (both male and female) into denominators of cultural traits: action as *cinema opera*, i.e. specifically cinematic choreography of action scenes based on Beijing Opera conventions; action as strategy and tactics; and above all, action as epiphany — the aim of examining the moral character of *xia* whose resort to violence is offset with the idea of Zen enlightenment. By invoking Zen, Hu might have clouded the issue with a “touch” of religious and metaphysical ideas. But the spirit of the creative muse was what he called Zen. Cinema would have been poorer if he had not invoked Zen in the first place.

The Zen ending of *A Touch of Zen* is a truly epic ending which reaches for that elusive object of universality, making the end section a highly subversive sequence if only in the visual sense by offering a patchwork of psychedelic-like scenes in colour negative and positive scenes of human suffering and transfiguration, demonstrating the aura of Zen but also at the same time the tragedy of mankind who must persist in politics and war. The ending is tragic-didactic in the Brechtian manner in that it stirs the audience to move onto the plane of the stage which has become a dais, as Benjamin describes Brecht's Epic theatre<sup>16</sup> — and there on the dais we sit together as Hui Yuan transfigures, not so much to mourn as to ponder over the question of universal transcendence.

# Notes

## Chapter 1 Introduction

1. The HKIFF catalogue is *Transcending the Times: King Hu and Eileen Chang*, edited by Law Kar (Hong Kong International Film Festival: Provisional Urban Council, 1998).
2. Giles's translation of selected stories from the sixteen volumes of the *Liaozhai* anthology, was first published in 1880. This translation is available in various reprints and revised editions, authorized or otherwise.
3. For more on King Hu, see the HKIFF catalogue *Transcending the Times: King Hu and Eileen Chang*. See also Stephen Teo, "King Hu", in the "Great Directors" section, *Senses of Cinema*, [www.sensesofcinema.com/](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/). Two books, in Chinese, offer good resources on Hu's career and films: *The World of King Hu (Hu Jinquan de shijie)*, edited by Huang Ren (Taipei: Asia-Pacific Press, 1999), and *A Touch of King Hu (Hu Jinquan wuxia dianying zuofa)* an interview book containing Hu's last interview with two Japanese critics Koichi Yamada and Koyo Udagawa, originally published in Japanese and translated into Chinese by Lai Ho and Ma Sung-chi (Hong Kong:

- Zhengwenshe, 1998). For French-language resources on Hu, see Olivier Assayas, “King Hu, Géant Exilé”, *Cahiers du Cinema*, Special Issue “Made in Hong Kong”, No. 360–361 (September 1984), pp. 15–19; and Charles Tesson, “Entretien avec King Hu: Calligraphie et Simulacres”, *ibid.*, pp. 20–24. See also the articles on Hu published in *Positif*, no. 169 (May 1975), and no. 257–258 (July–August 1982).
4. The “new school” (*xinpai*, sometimes also translated as “new style”) is a term generally applied to the *wuxia* literature of authors such as Jin Yong, Liang Yusheng, Gu Long, et al. The cinematic movement appropriated this label by adapting the books of “new school” authors, beginning in the late 1950s with a number of Cantonese-language adaptations in multi-part form of Jin Yong’s and Liang Yusheng’s novels. In 1965, the Shaw Brothers studio launched its own Mandarin-language movement in the *wuxia* genre, and publicized it as a “new action era”, or in Chinese, *xin wuxia shiji* (meaning literally “new *wuxia* century”). Some critics have preferred to use this term to refer to the same phenomenon. My preference for the term “new school” is based on the generic usage for the movement as a whole in cinema and literature while the term “new *wuxia* century” is studio publicity to describe those films produced by Shaws.
  5. Hu always fancied himself something of an academic, and indeed performed in this capacity to write a treatise on his literary idol Lao She, published as *Lao She he ta de zuopin* (Lao She and his works) (Hong Kong: Culture-Life Press, 1977). Hu had vast contacts within the academic fraternity, and one of his friends in the academic world, Professor Joseph Lau Shiu-ming, organized the premiere showing of *Dragon Inn* in the United States in 1968 during an academic conference and invited Hu to attend. In part, *A Touch of Zen* came about because of Hu’s extensive discussions with academics such as Joseph Lau and Leo Lee Ou-fan. In a sense, *A Touch of Zen* is Hu’s most “academic” feature film in that it is his most ambitious work, almost like a doctoral thesis, evinced in its inter-disciplinary reach — its touches of philosophy, history, and religion.
  6. Sha Yung-fong (Sha Rongfeng), *Binfen dianying sishi chun* (Forty springs of cinema glory) (Taipei: National Film Archive, 1994), p. 97.

7. See *The World of King Hu (Hu Jinquan de shijie)*, p. 158. Xu Zenghong was an ex-director of photography who was assigned the direction of *Temple of the Red Lotus* (1965), one of the first pictures in Shaws' campaign to launch the new "action era" of *wuxia* pictures in 1965. Xu directed many routine *wuxia* films and is basically forgotten today.
8. See Charles Tesson, "Han Yingjie, The Big Boss", *Cahiers du Cinema*, Special Issue "Made in Hong Kong", p. 56.
9. Hu's departure led to legal consequences whereby Shaws would hound Union over his employment, maintaining that Hu was still contractually bound to them. Union eventually settled the problem by giving Shaws the rights to distribute *Dragon Inn* in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Author's personal interview with Sha Yung-fong, San Francisco, 24 March 2001.
10. The Danan studio was bought under the name of the International Film Company which became a production company in 1966. The logo on *A Touch of Zen* actually names the studio as "International Film Production". Thus there is some confusion about the name of the Union studio. The production company was officially registered as the International Film Company, an offshoot of the Union Film Company. The International Film Company started life as the distribution arm of Union and was registered in 1956, the name being associated with the Cathay Organisation's International Film Company in Hong Kong, the predecessor of the MP and GI (Motion Picture and General Investment) Company. See Sha Yung-fong, *ibid.*, p. 162. In 1973, Sha also established the International Film Laboratory, Ltd.
11. Sha Yung-fong, *ibid.*, p. 50.
12. This interview, taped in Paris, October 1974, is published in French in *Positif*, no. 169, May 1975. The original English transcript was privately circulated and in the possession of the author. All references to this interview are from the English transcript, hitherto designated "Ciment interview, English transcript".
13. *A Touch of Zen* was not the English title originally ascribed to the script of *Xia Nü*. That title was not given until very much later. At various periods, the film went under tentative English titles *The Swordswoman* (see *Yinhe huabao [Milky Way Pictorial]*, no. 128 [September 1968], p. 39), and *Lady Knight* (see *Yinse shijie*

- [*Cinemart*], April 1970, p. 62): both titles being more or less literal transliterations of the Chinese *Xia Nü*.
14. See Hua Huiying, “Xingjian guoji dianying zhipian chang shimo” (“Building the international studio: Its beginning and end”), in *Lianbang dianying shidai* (Union and its film era), ed. Huang Ren (Taipei: National Film Archive, 2001), p. 69.
  15. Ciment interview, English transcript.
  16. Sha Yung-fong, *ibid.*, p. 96. In my interview with Sha Yung-fong, 24 March 2001, Sha said that Hu decided to plant real reeds because transplanted goldenrods withered under the effects of lights. The irony was that Hu was shooting mostly night scenes when the goldenrod started acting up on him.
  17. See *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 121.
  18. *Ibid.*
  19. Liu Yimin, “Hu Jinquan de gongguo” (“King Hu’s merits and demerits”), *Yinse shijie* (*Cinemart*), April 1970.
  20. Sha Yung-fong, *ibid.*, p. 96.
  21. Interview with Sha, 24 March 2001, San Francisco.
  22. See Jack Moore, “The Boss Packs a Punch at the Box-Office”, *Sunday Post-Herald*, 7 November 1971; and also Jack Moore, “Almost Two for the Price of One”, *Sunday Post-Herald*, 21 November 1971, p. 23. Moore states that *A Touch of Zen* ran for two and a half hours, which would mean that at least half an hour’s running time was shorn off its original length.
  23. See “Entretien avec King Hu: Calligraphie et Simulacres”, *Cahiers du Cinema*, Special Issue “Made in Hong Kong”, p. 23.
  24. *Ibid.*
  25. Rissient remarked to me that the film was “critically disliked by everyone in Hong Kong” when he first saw it. The version that Rissient saw was the cut version released in Hong Kong. Liking what he saw, he convinced Hu to restore the cut scenes, including the opening spider sequence. Author’s interview with Rissient, 19 April 2001, Hong Kong.
  26. The single-cut version seen in the West excises the repetition at the opening of Part 2 (after the credits) of the bamboo forest battle sequence that ends Part 1. The two-part version is now available on DVD in the United States, published by Tai Seng in 2002.

27. Interview with Sha Yung-fong, San Francisco, 24 March 2001. The permanent set that was so assiduously built according to Hu's design was demolished when the studio was sold to building developers in 1978. See Huang Ren (ed.), *ibid.*, pp. 48–49.
28. The story at the time was that Hu left the Union studio because it had reneged on its promise to share the profits of *Dragon Inn*. See Liu Yimin, *ibid.* In his memoirs, *Binfen dianying sishi chun* (Forty springs of cinema glory), Sha Yung-fong wrote: “*Dragon Inn* established box-office records in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, accidentally delivering profits of millions of Hong Kong dollars to Shaw Brothers. We made money in name only but in reality the profits were not ours. This caused King Hu to misunderstand that Union had made money and that we did not give him his bonus as promised. Thus he adopted a negative, non-cooperative attitude towards us. On the surface, he never talked it over with us.” See Sha, *ibid.*, p. 92.
29. Sha, *ibid.*, p. 97.
30. See Song Cunshou, “Hu Jinqun yu lianbang” (“King Hu and Union”) in Huang Ren (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 75.
31. Sha, *ibid.*, p. 98.

## Chapter 2 Pu Songling and the Spider

1. Lu Xun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1982), p. 411. The book is an English translation, by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, of Lu Xun's *Zhongguo Xiaoshuo Shilüe*, first published in 1923.
2. *The Enchanting Shadow* set a generic pattern of cinematic adaptations of Pu Songling ghost stories in the 1960s which obviously influenced King Hu while he went about making *A Touch of Zen*. For instance, Hu adhered to the pattern of the central relationship between the male scholar and a beautiful female ghost and there is a scene in Li's film — that of the scholar meeting the ghost in a mansion as she plays the *qin* and recites a poem — which is virtually repeated in *A Touch of Zen* (see chapter 4). The scholar in *The Enchanting Shadow* also shares an interest in military strategy with the scholar-character Gu

- Shengzhai in *A Touch of Zen*. Both are poor and they both quote Zhuge Liang's maxim about not seeking fame and achievement in turbulent times but to preserve one's life at all costs (see chapter 3), which they put into practice.
3. King Hu, "Cong xia nü dao kongshan lingyu" ("From *A Touch of Zen* to *Raining in the Mountain*"), in *Lianbang Dianying Shidai* (Union and its film era), ed. Huang Ren (Taipei: National Film Archive, 2001), p. 71.
  4. Joseph Lau Shiu-ming (Liu Shaoming), "Yihua yu jiaohua: Zhongguo dianyingye de jiong jing" ("Art and education: The dilemma of Chinese films"), *Ming bao yuekan* (*Ming Pao Monthly*), vol. 3, no. 6 (June 1968), p. 71.
  5. Through his social contacts with academics and intellectuals, Hu would have been aware that they generally despised the *wuxia* film at the time, being particularly repelled by the emphasis on violence. Hu would have sought to make something more culturally defined and to reshape the *wuxia* genre in the image of an art cinema, but this had never been done before: perhaps the closest attempts during the height of the "new school" *wuxia* movement were Zhang Che's *The Assassin* (1967) and *The Golden Swallow* (1968), but Zhang's efforts remained generally unrecognized by the same academics and intellectuals who were far closer to Hu than to Zhang (in fact, Zhang was often their target of criticism).
  6. King Hu, "Cong xia nü dao kongshan lingyu" ("From *A Touch of Zen* to *Raining in the Mountain*"), *ibid.*
  7. Ciment interview, English transcript.
  8. King Hu, *ibid.* According to Hu, the stories were allegories of the author's personal disappointments and acrimony towards traditional society because of his own failure to attain the heights of academic achievement. The author's failure as an academic might have resonated with Hu in that it also reflected Hu's own lack of academic qualifications and the depth of his own feelings as a frustrated academic. Hu was very much an autodidact and bookworm, leaving behind crates of reading materials and books after his death.
  9. Ciment interview, English transcript.
  10. This is the view of the British film critic Tony Rayns, expressed during

a King Hu seminar organized by the Puchon Fantastic Film Festival, South Korea, held on 15 July 2001. I was present in this seminar as a panellist.

11. Ciment interview, English transcript.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Giles followed the original story up to the point just after Gu's homosexual lover is decapitated and revealed as a fox-spirit. The next day, Gu and the girl meet again. He asks the girl about her "knowledge of the black art" and is told "not to trouble himself about such affairs." Gu then asks the girl to marry him; she turns him down. When Gu tries again the next evening to persuade her, "the young lady had disappeared and was never seen again." Here, the story as rendered by Giles in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* ends.
15. Herbert A. Giles, "Introduction", *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (Hong Kong: Kelly and Walsh, 1968 reprint), p. xxi.
16. On homosexuality in medieval China, Julia Kristeva informs us that homosexuality was not isolated as a "deviation" or "sexual peculiarity" but was rather "incorporated into an erotic practice where whatever is pleasurable is considered 'normal', provided that the pleasure includes, at one point or another in the process, *both sexes*". She continues: "One can *engage* in homosexual, sadistic or masochistic practices; one *is not defined* as a sadist, a masochist, a homosexual" (emphases hers). See Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), p. 63. Thus, in the film, Gu Shengzhai can be regarded as a practising homosexual without being *defined* as one, consistent with the social norms of the period.
17. Personal interview with Rissient, 19 April 2001, Hong Kong. Rissient's reaction to the spider appears to prove Karl Abraham's truism that "The spider is one of those dream symbols whose meaning we know ... without knowing the reason why it has that meaning." See Abraham, "The Spider as a Dream Symbol (1922)", *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham MD*, trans. Douglas Bryan and Alix Strachey (London: Maresfield Library, 1988 reprint), p. 326 (326–332).
18. Abraham, *ibid.*, p. 331.
19. On the father as sun symbol, see Karl Abraham, "Restrictions and

- Transformations of Scopophilia in Psycho-Neurotics; with Remarks on Analogous Phenomena in Folk-Psychology (1913)", *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham MD*, pp. 231–233 (169–234).
20. Karl Abraham, "The Spider as a Dream Symbol", p. 331.
  21. See Carl Gustav Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky* (London and New York: Routledge, 1959), p. 48.
  22. See David Adams Leeming, *The World of Myth* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 36. Leeming was referring to the creation myth of Hopi Indians. See also David Leeming and Jake Page, *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 29–31. Cf. the myth of the spider woman among Navajo Indians in Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), pp. 69–71.
  23. Sigmund Freud, "Femininity", *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and edited by James Strachey (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 579 (576–599). To this observation, Abraham adds that "the female spider is far superior in size and power to the male, and during copulation the latter runs a very great risk of being killed and devoured by her" ("The Spider as a Dream Symbol", p. 332). The symbolism of the female devouring the male during copulation is the underlying principle of the *femme fatale* in a number of films noirs some of which actually invoke the spider symbol: the films of Paul Verhoeven (*The Fourth Man*, *Basic Instinct*) will suffice as the most remarkable examples in the contemporary noir genre. (Teresa de Lauretis makes the point that the spider woman is a "noir icon par excellence": see de Lauretis, "Guerrilla in the Midst: Women's Cinema in the 80s", *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 1, Spring 1990: 6–25, p. 20). In the horror genre, spiders are seen in magnified and massified terms, the easier for them to devour humans, as Noël Carroll enunciates in *The Philosophy of Horror: or Paradoxes of the Heart* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990): "The spider, already a phobic object in our culture, exceeds in horribleness not only because of its supernatural provenance and unearthly abilities but especially because of its increase in size beyond the normal" (p. 49). For an example of the devouring spider woman in the anime genre, see Yoshiaki Kawajiri's *The Wicked City* (1987).

24. The French writer and critic Frédéric Vitoux quotes a passage from Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery* to stress the association with Zen that Hu makes of his film. The quotation goes: "The spider dances her web without knowing that there are flies who will get caught in it. The fly, dancing nonchalantly on a sunbeam, gets caught in the net without knowing what lies in store. But through both of them, 'It' dances, and inside and outside are united in this dance. So, too, the archer hits the target without having aimed – more I cannot say" (Herrigel: p. 80). See Frédéric Vitoux, "L'araignée sans stratégie" ("The Spider without Stratagem"), *Positif*, no. 257–258 (July–August 1982), p. 69. Vitoux writes that he does not know whether Hu had this particular text in mind when he was conceiving his film. I would surmise that it is not improbable that Hu would have known of Herrigel's book since it was hugely popular in the 1950s and might have referred to it in his research, as he might have referred to other English-language sources by D. T. Suzuki, Christmas Humphreys, or Alan W. Watts, on the subject of Zen.
25. The spider as a Zen symbol can be regarded as an anti-Oedipal "body without organs", after Deleuze and Guattari, a kind of narrator who "sees nothing, hears nothing ... or like a spider poised in its web, observing nothing, but responding to the slightest sign, to the slightest vibration by springing on its prey". See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 68.
26. Vitoux discerns three levels to the film: the first level being a slow exposition introducing the chief characters and the theme; a second level being longer, focusing on the action-adventures of Yang Huizhen and her allies as they flee from and struggle against the *dongchang*; and the final third and briefest level is the Zen climax, the transfiguration of violence into a vision of "Buddhist wisdom", as Vitoux puts it. See Vitoux, "L'araignée sans stratégie" ("The Spider without Stratagem"), pp. 71–72. While Vitoux's analysis can be accepted as an overview of the film, I think *A Touch of Zen* contains far more complex dimensions, particularly in terms of its generic transitions and transformations, which should be made clear in a micro-study of this kind and which I will attempt to do in the following chapters.

### Chapter 3 Ghosts and the Desire to See

1. See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland and London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), p. 25.
2. Todorov, *ibid.*, pp. 41–42.
3. The French critic Hubert Niogret describes Zen as the “philosophical idea” which Hu attempts to embody through the gestures and the actions of the characters: Zen as a means to determine the rigour of precision, self-control, asceticism, effectiveness and the loyalty of the protagonists. See Hubert Niogret “Introduction à King Hu”, *Positif*, no. 169 (May 1975), p. 27. But in terms of the structure of the film, Zen is the end-point in which the fantastic (or the supernatural) is accepted.
4. See Walter Benjamin, “What is Epic Theater?”, *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 150.
5. See Benjamin, *ibid.* p. 151.
6. In psychoanalysis, the spider represents the angry or wicked mother who is “formed in the shape of a man, of whose male organ and masculine pleasure in attack the boy is afraid – just as young girls are timid in regard to men” (the hanging spider and the threads represent the male genital organ of the mother). See Karl Abraham, “The Spider as a Dream Symbol”, *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham MD*, p. 329–330.
7. This was the inscription that Zhuge himself hung on the wall of his thatched cottage where Liu Bei visited him three times and persuaded him to organize a large army and found a dynasty. Zhuge is a central figure in the military romance, *Sanguo yanyi* (The romance of the three kingdoms), where he is portrayed as “being able to control the wind and foretell the future” (see entry in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, under “Chu-ko Liang”).
8. *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 101.
9. Cited in C. G. Jung, *Flying Saucers*, p. 48.
10. The script of *The Battle of Ono* was made available to me by Professor Dominic Cheung, head of the King Hu Foundation in Los Angeles.
11. See Madelon Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism*,

and *Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 5.

12. As Sprengnether explains, the word “spectral” is “derived from the latin verb *specere*, to see, to look at, ‘specter’ is related to ‘spectacle’, ‘speculation’, and ‘suspicion’, while its immediate source is the Latin *spectrum*, meaning, simply, an appearance.” See Sprengnether, *ibid*. My preference for the term “spectral mother” as opposed to other terms of the mother-figure (such as the “castrating mother”, invoked by Barbara Creed in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine*) rests on this motif of seeing. The “spectral mother” functions to curb the scopophilic instinct but for the purpose that she desires the son to procreate, rather than to “castrate” him, though the spectral mother strikes fear in the preoedipal sense of castration anxiety in the male. Thus the “spectral mother” in Hu’s film functions as the watchful all-seeing mother who seeks the self-preservation of the son in order to fulfil maternal desire and consolidate her own feminist stance which she sublimates in the social context of feudal China: both these concerns, the mother transfers to Yang Huizhen, and in a sense she is watching over Yang as well in a spectral mother-daughter relationship which ensures that Yang can fulfil for her the role of pre-oedipal mother through marrying Gu Shengzhai. On the “castrating mother”, see Creed’s analysis of *Psycho* in *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 139–150.
13. Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 14.
14. Karl Abraham, “Restrictions and Transformations of Scopophilia in Psycho-Neurotics; with Remarks on Analogous Phenomena in Folk-Psychology (1913)”, *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham MD*, p. 220.
15. See Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, p. 65.
16. Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, *ibid*.
17. The appearance of the spectral mother in this sense has no effect on the son: the role of the spectral mother perhaps lies elsewhere other than to repress; she seeks the self-preservation of both her son and her maternal desire, as I have suggested in note 12 above.
18. *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 99.
19. Verse 20, chapter 7 of *The Analects*.

20. Huang Ren, "Xia Nü" ("A Touch of Zen"), *Yinse shijie* (Cinemart), September 1970, p. 71. This article is a short review of Part 1 of *A Touch of Zen* originally published in Taiwan's *Minzu wanbao*, an evening newspaper, and reprinted in *Cinemart*.
21. The American critic Elliott Stein describes the first hour of *A Touch of Zen* as a bit plodding "in the process of getting some low comedy out of the way and clarifying the lines of combat". See Stein, "Festival Reviews: Hit and Myth", *Film Comment* (November–December 1976), p. 35.
22. Huang Ren, *ibid.*
23. Vicki Ooi, "Jacobean Drama and the Martial Arts Films of King Hu: A Study in Power and Corruption," *Australian Journal of Screen Theory*, no. 7 (1980), p. 114.
24. See Karl Abraham, "Manifestations of the Female Castration Complex (1920)", *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham MD*, pp. 338–369. On the fixed stare as an expression of masculinity, see p. 352.
25. Freud, "Female Sexuality", *Collected Papers*, Vol. V (London: Hogarth Press, 1956), p. 268 (252–272).
26. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975), p. 12.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Mary Ann Doane, "Technology's Body: Cinematic Vision in Modernity", in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 541 (530–551).
29. Julia Kristeva, "Ellipsis on Dread and the Specular Seduction", in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Phil Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 240. Kristeva states that the specular, as a "visible sign which calls on the fantasm" is "chronologically and logically anterior to the famous 'mirror phase'" (p. 237). With its repression of the scopophilic instinct signalled by the spider sequence in the opening, *A Touch of Zen* virtually functions as a pre-mirror phase horror movie, or from another point of view, one could call it a feminist *wuxia* phantasy.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 240–241.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

32. *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 97. Yang's silence can be interpreted psychoanalytically as the prelinguistic semiotic process of the preoedipal female guarding herself against the advances of the predatory Oedipal male (in this instance, a male agent of the authoritarian state effectively under the rule of the *dongchang* dominated by eunuchs: hence Ouyang is most likely castrated, which reinforces his resentment against the pre-oedipal female).
33. The Freudian implications of the spider symbol together with the appearance of the monk and their combined repulsive effect on Ouyang Nian suggest that the spider, like Medusa's head, has displayed its genitals to arouse horror in the enemy, and thereby precipitate an apotropaic act, though such a reading may seem somewhat enforced since Ouyang does not see Yang Huizhen hanging on the ceiling. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Ouyang's horror at the sight of the monk is equivalent to his having seen the spider through the spider-woman's magic in casting a trick effect of a monk's shadow (this is after all the only credible explanation for why the monk should suddenly appear out of nowhere). On Medusa's head, see Freud "Medusa's Head", *Collected Papers*, Vol. V, pp. 105-106.
34. A more plebeian explanation of Yang's male disguise is so that she can go outside the fort to warn Dr Lu about Gu Shengzhai. A young woman of her status cannot simply be seen to walk into town unescorted. However, the psychological ramifications of disguise seem to me quite overwhelming and transparent in the symbolic imagery of the whole sequence, culminating in the smoke steaming out of the earth.
35. Cuncun Wu asserts that a woman who dresses up as a man in Chinese fiction is "a purely aesthetic shift" insofar as the female was "already the ornament of the male and existed in an aesthetic register". While I see the shift as more psychological, I take Wu's point about the aesthetics of cross-dressing, though her arguments seem to me a bit syllogistic: the man who dresses up as a woman regards femininity as a means of being appreciated aesthetically and accordingly attracts the female who then dresses up as a man, emphasizing the aesthetic nature of femininity and showing her appreciation of the male. Gu Shengzhai is nowhere seen in the film as a cross-dresser, but in

dressing up as a man, Yang Huizhen acknowledges Gu's femininity, and assumes the aesthetic significance as well as the identity of a feminine male to seduce Gu. See Cuncun Wu, "Beautiful Boys Made Up as Beautiful Girls': Anti-Masculine Taste in Qing China", in *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, ed. Kam Louie and Morris Low (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 32 (19–40).

36. Abraham, "Manifestations of the Female Castration Complex (1920)", *ibid.*, p. 347 (338–369).

## Chapter 4 Seduction and Politics, Fight and Flight

1. From *100 Tang Poems*, trans. by Bruce M. Wilson and Zhang Tingchen (Commercial Press, Hong Kong 1988), p. 59.
2. As I mentioned in chapter 2, this scene was heavily influenced, visually and conceptually, by Li Hanxiang's *The Enchanting Shadow*, on which Hu had worked as assistant director. See note 2 in chapter 2.
3. Ma Guoguang, "Xie liu cheng shi hua xia nü" ("A Touch of Zen: Blood draining into poetry"), *Zhongguo shibao (China Times)*, 30 August 1975. My translation is taken from *Transcending the Times: King Hu and Eileen Chang* (22nd Hong Kong International Film Festival: Provisional Urban Council, 1998), pp. 65–67.
4. Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theater?", *Illuminations*, p. 151.
5. According to Hu, there were altogether three props made of the same weapon: one fastened around the waist, and two for use in actual combat scenes (one of which was a false sword made of bamboo that was used in more risky situations). Such a weapon may be regarded as a conventional bit of business in the genre, possibly influenced by mid-1960s Italian westerns with a predilection for sporting technological gadgets as part of the entertainment (cf. Sergio Leone's *For a Few Dollars More* [1965]). However, the *wuxia* genre has its own tradition of *shiba ban wuyi* (the eighteen kinds of traditional weapons), with the hero demonstrating skills in using each weapon, but then going on to specialize in only one weapon. Hu insisted that his bendable sword really existed, citing its entry in the Chinese classic

*Wujing beiyao* (Book of armaments) as his source. See *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 99.

6. David Bordwell, "Richness Through Imperfection: King Hu and the Glimpse," in *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*, ed. Poshek Fu and David Desser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 118 (113–136).
7. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
9. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *Illuminations*, p. 228.
10. The actor Bai Ying revealed this to me in an interview in Hong Kong, April 1998.
11. C. G. Jung, *Flying Saucers*, p. 55.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
13. See Alan W. Watts, *The Spirit of Zen* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958), p. 26.
14. *Ibid.*
15. For more on *wen* and *wu*, see Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
16. Kam Louie's historicist thesis on the *wen-wu* dyad highlights the fact that *wen* and *wu* can apply only to masculinity and not to femininity, which is corroborated by the title of his book *Theorising Chinese Masculinity* (the emphasis on masculinity). He points out that *xia nü* are "usually fantasies more than reality for most of Chinese history" (p. 12). But if we follow Jung's tenet, "The feminine, like the masculine, demands an equally personal representation", there is a psychological basis for applying the *wen-wu* dyad to Chinese femininity. As a female *wu* archetype, Yang Huizhen exemplifies *wu* femininity even in the form of an unconscious "reality" with its basis in fantasy (or to use the psychoanalytical parlance, *phantasy*). This is a legitimate basis of assessing how the Chinese female shapes and constructs femininity on the principles of *wen* and *wu* as opposed to how women shape and transform masculinity, or how men appear to shape and transform femininity as a trait of masculinity, either through the practices of cross-dressing, bisexuality or homosexuality. The quote from Jung is

- taken from “Answer to Job”, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 465 (355–470).
17. Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, *Illuminations*, p. 237.
  18. The historical Yu Qian (1348–1457) was the minister of war when Emperor Yingzong was taken prisoner by the Mongols in 1449. Fearful that the Mongols would overrun the country by propping up Yingzong’s son as emperor, Yu Qian threw his support behind Yingzong’s brother, who became emperor, known as Jingdi. After a year, Yingzong was freed by the Mongols. Political intrigue followed for several years as Yingzong strived to restore himself as emperor, succeeding in 1457 through a coup. Yu Qian was executed, apparently on the order of the eunuch Cao Jixiang on whom the character of Cao Shaoqin was modelled. In the film, Yu Qian’s execution results in his children being banished, and Cao Shaoqin dispatches his agents to kill the children, who are saved by the loyal supporters of Yu Qian.
  19. It is not known why Hu decided to throw the focus on Men Da, a surrogate, fictional figure, instead of on the figure of Wei Zhongxian. As the chief villain, Wei is completely absent from the film (he does not even turn up in the final combat scene featuring the Zen patriarch Hui Yuan). This lapse is totally unaccounted for, unless one were to speculate that Hu wanted to stay true to history where his real historical figures were concerned (historically, Wei killed himself and did not die at the hands of Yang Lian’s supporters avenging his death).
  20. In my interview with Sha Yung-fong, he revealed that one of the canards which the executives of Shaw Brothers threw against Hu in their contractual dispute with the director (and therefore with Union) during the making of *Dragon Inn* was that Hu was a leftist and communist sympathizer. This charge forced the Union Studio to settle with Shaw Brothers, finally selling all overseas rights of *Dragon Inn* to Shaws.
  21. See *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 128.
  22. I have not dwelt as much on the character of Shi though he occupies a role of some substance in the narrative. Essentially, he personifies the selfless and asexual *wu* hero with some *wen* attributes, in the

tradition of Guan Yu, the God of War. As a loyal soldier and ally of Yang Lian, he seems to be a “blind” follower, and indeed plays this role throughout the film, only occasionally providing some military insight. His “blindness” conditions his character psychologically such that his behaviour appears chaste in relation to Yang Huizhen, whom he is charged to protect. However, from a psychological standpoint, he may well desire Yang Huizhen, and their fates appear intertwined, particularly at the end where they are the only survivors in the conflict that precipitates the Zen conclusion. Shi and Yang certainly seem a great deal more compatible than Yang is with Gu – in terms of their fighting skills and their support of each other during fight and flight sequences. Hu later paired the same actors playing Shi and Yang (respectively Bai Ying and Xu Feng) in *The Valiant Ones* (1975) where they do play a married couple expertly complementing each other in battle scenes (and in a scene set in the pirates’ lair where they were required to show off their skills). On Guan Yu, and the psychological nuances of his sexuality (contrary to the general perception of the character as asexual), see Kam Louie “Portrait of the God of War Guan Yu: Sex, Politics and *Wu* Masculinity” in *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, pp. 22–41.

23. Sek Kei, “Xingzhe de guiji” (“The path of a traveller”), *Dianying shuangzhou kan (Film Biweekly)*, no. 13 (5 July 1979), p. 47.
24. See D. T. Suzuki, op. cit., p. 31.
25. See Kam Louie and Louise Edwards, “Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing Wen and Wu,” *East Asian History*, no. 8 (December 1994), p. 141 (135–148). Louie and Edwards are referring to male disguise as a historicist practice. Louie, subsequently in his book *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, gives the example of the historical-mythical figure of Hua Mulan, a woman who disguised herself as a male in order to join the army, rising to the rank of a general. Having received credit for her accomplishments, she returns to civilian life and puts on female attire again, whereby all her “wen-wu attributes disappeared”. Though Yang Huizhen does not put on male disguise in her role as *xia nü*, we should remember that she had dressed as a man in order to seduce Gu Shengzhai; but once Yang had given herself to Gu, the need for disguise is overridden by deference to Gu’s status as a scholar and military

- strategist. Disguise therefore implies that the female, historically, can have access to *wen* and *wu* realms but that once such access is achieved, the female returns to being herself and defers to the male. See Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*, p. 46. On Hua Mulan, see also Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, p. 93.
26. See Paul S. Ropp, “The Seeds of Change: Reflections on the Conditions of Women in the Early and Mid Ch’ing”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1976), p. 11 (5–23). In this article, the author points out that the women in *Liaozhai* “are generally portrayed as stronger-willed, more intelligent, and more courageous than their husbands”, which is roughly the line that Hu conforms to in his portrayal of Yang Huizhen and Gu Shengzhai. The rise of feminism in the West equally influenced the cinemas of the West, as Yvonne Tasker has shown in her book *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). Tasker made the point that “the female fighter as centre of the action” was long an important figure in Hong Kong “action traditions” (p. 15), implying at least that feminist ideas are intrinsic to this tradition. The figure of Yang Huizhen of course stems from this tradition but I think Hu was in turn conscious of modern progressive ideas that were in fashion at the time (feminism in the West, as well as the notion of revolutionary feminism as heralded in China by the Cultural Revolution). However, Hu was also bound by the traditional Confucian precepts of womanhood, and I consider that this factor is caused by his respect of and his being faithful to the original story in *Liaozhai* (and thus to its subversive feminist implications inherent in the story). Yang Huizhen’s “feminism” is seen in the perspective of traditional China, and since feminism cannot be accepted by traditional society, Pu Songling had resorted to viewing the girl’s unconventional behaviour as being touched by an enigma of dark, mysterious proportions — a line followed essentially by Hu.
27. Interview with Sha Yung-fong, San Francisco, 24 March 2001.
28. Sek Kei, *ibid.*, p. 46.
29. David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 2.

30. The way Shi and Yang complement each other throughout the battle suggests a metaphoric sexual union or a kind of lovemaking.
31. Bordwell, *ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. See *Transcending the Times: King Hu and Eileen Chang* (22nd Hong Kong International Film Festival Catalogue: Provisional Urban Council, 1998), p. 101.
35. Interview with King Hu, *Cahiers du Cinema*, no. 360–361 (September 1984).
36. See Stephen Teo, “Only the Valiant: King Hu and His Cinema Opera”, in *Transcending the Times: King Hu and Eileen Chang*, 22nd HKIFF Catalogue (Hong Kong: Provisional Urban Council, 1998).
37. *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 104.

## Chapter 5 The Battle of the Haunted Mansion

1. This title is missing in some prints which simply displays the title “Xia Nü: Part 2” (see the Tai Seng DVD edition, for example).
2. David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong*, p. 257.
3. Wei Yi, “Zouma kanhua ping Hu Jinquan” (“A cursory critique on King Hu”), *Yinse shijie* (*Cinemart*), no. 70 (October 1975), p. 55.
4. From Chen Shou, *Sanguo zhi* (Records of the Three States), fascicle 39, commentary by Pei Songzhi (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), p. 983.
5. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, *Illuminations*, p. 263.
6. Interview with Leo Ou-fan Lee, Madison, Wisconsin, 2 March 2001. The multiple-screen technique was also popularized in another Hollywood film, Richard Fleischer’s *The Boston Strangler*, also released in the same year as *The Thomas Crown Affair*.
7. D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), p. 33. In *Come Drink with Me*, the character of the Drunkard Beggar (played by Yue Hua) acquires magical powers from a master who has passed onto him a bamboo pole (the equivalent of a staff), which was

Hu's first use of a religious insignia taken from Buddhist mythology. The beggar possesses the bamboo pole in trust, denying it to the errant monk Liao Kong (played by Yang Zhiqing) who wants to own it. In the beggar's eyes, Liao Kong is not fit to possess the bamboo pole, since it signifies that the recipient has the power to see into the nature of his own being. In *A Touch of Zen*, Yang Huizhen is given no such insignia. Rather, her power is signified through the weaving motif of the spider.

8. Benjamin, "What is Epic Theater?", *Illuminations*, p. 152.
9. On Kristeva's concept of *jouissance*, see her interpretations of feminist theory in the framework of Judaeo-Christian traditions in the first part of *About Chinese Women*. See also the extracted chapters from *About Chinese Women* in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, trans. Seán Hand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 139–159. On the concept of "drives", see the chapter "The Semiotic Chora Ordering the Drives," in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 25–30.
10. Walter Benjamin, "Fate and Character", *Reflections*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p. 306.

## Chapter 6 The Zen Finale

1. Vicki Ooi, *ibid.*, p. 115.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
4. In her critique of Freud's bias towards Oedipalism and the patriarchy, Madelon Sprengnether states that the presence of mother-figures in Freud's texts is subversive, "unsettling the smooth system of hierarchies which maintains the superiority of patriarchy to matriarchy, and Oedipal to pre-oedipal development, as reflected in the ascendance of civilization over nature". See *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*, p. 118. Similarly, the presences of Gu's mother and of Yang Huizhen in Hu's text are subversive within the Symbolic Order of Ming Dynasty China. The subversiveness of

Yang Huizhen and Gu's mother lies in their "spectral" appearances and subtle defiance of the Confucian symbolic system (the mother's spreading of superstitious gossip about ghosts, for example, and Yang Huizhen's unorthodox sexual behaviour). In addition, Yang's adherence to Buddhism is also a mark of subversion since it allows her to detach herself from society and the Confucian patriarchal order (to abandon her baby to Gu Shengzhai and withdraw from the rigors and hardships of motherhood to devote herself to spiritual endeavours). As Yang Huizhen goes on to fulfil her karmic destiny, she detaches herself from Confucian society, essentially achieving her independence on the pretext of achieving Buddhist transcendence. The "touch of Zen" is therefore the mark of the subversive feminist and pre-oedipal quality of Yang Huizhen's character over the text. For more on the subject of feminism and the pre-oedipal matriarchal tradition in the Chinese context, see Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, particularly the chapters "The Mother at the Centre" and "Confucius — An Eater of Women", pp. 45–99.

5. See Kristeva, *ibid.*, p. 61.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
7. *Ibid.*
8. See *Yinse shijie (Cinemart)*, November 1970.
9. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 52.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
11. Ooi, *ibid.*, p. 116.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
14. C. G. Jung, "Psychological Commentary on 'The Tibetan Book of the Dead'", *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, p. 513 (509–526).
15. See D. T. Suzuki, *ibid.*, p. 79.
16. There is an interesting parallel between the monk figures in Hu's first *wuxia* film *Come Drink with Me* and in *A Touch of Zen*. In *Come Drink with Me*, the renegade monk Liao Kong (Yang Zhiqing) is stabbed by the drunkard beggar (Yue Hua) at the end of their climactic battle. Liao Kong bleeds real blood in contrast with Hui Yuan's bleeding of gold, showing that Liao Kong is no more than a mortal and that Hui Yuan is a reincarnation of the Buddha. Earlier in

- Come Drink with Me*, Golden Swallow (Zheng Peipei) stabs Liao Kong with a short sword but the sword does not penetrate his body — a touch of Zen magic that proves ultimately to be illusionary in the case of Liao Kong (significantly his end comes from being stabbed by the staff that he aspires to own left by his master). Hu repeats in *A Touch of Zen* the monk's technique of disarming the short swords wielded by Golden Swallow in *Come Drink with Me*: in *A Touch of Zen*, Xu Xianchun at one point attacks Hui Yuan with short swords which the monk easily grabs away from Xu and splits the blades.
17. See Master Nan Huai-chin, *Working Towards Enlightenment: The Cultivation of Practice*, trans. J. C. Cleary (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1993), p. 215.
  18. C. G. Jung, *Flying Saucers*, p. 97. In his fascination with UFOs, Jung wrote that the “opposition between the human world and the higher world is not absolute; the two are only relatively incommensurable, for the bridge between them is not entirely lacking” (p. 118). Though Jung had numbers in mind as the bridge, Hu is effectively saying that Zen can function as such a bridge between the human world and the higher world, a notion that Jung would not be opposed to. In his psychological approach to religion and mythology, Zen, and its concept of *satori* (enlightenment), are regarded as a psychic process, or what Jung calls a “psychic reality”. See Jung, “Foreword to Suzuki’s ‘Introduction to Zen Buddhism’”, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, p. 544 (538–557).
  19. Joseph Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss: Mythology and Personal Transformation* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2004), p. xvii.
  20. For a fuller description of the scenes of Hui Yuan's transfiguration, see Mary Farquhar, “A Touch of Zen: Action in Martial Arts Movies”, in *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, ed. Chris Berry (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 172–173 (167–174).
  21. Ooi, *ibid.*, p. 117.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
  23. D. T. Suzuki, p. 83.
  24. Jung, “Psychological Commentary on ‘The Tibetan Book of the Dead’”, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, p. 514.

25. Jung, "Foreword to Suzuki's 'Introduction to Zen Buddhism'", *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, p. 556, p. 557.
26. See Ma Guoguang, "Xie Liu Cheng Shi Hua Xia Nü" ("A Touch of Zen: Blood draining into poetry").

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

1. The quote is taken from Joseph Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss: Mythology and Personal Transformation*, p. 71.
2. See C. G. Jung, "Jung and Religious Belief", *Psychology and Western Religion*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 255–256 (255–297).
3. Kristeva makes the point that men are "distant observers" because of their fear of women — women, being less bound by Confucian hypocrisy, and therefore more capable of "channelling themselves into merciless aggression and into intrigues of astonishing complexity". See Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, pp. 77–78.
4. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *Illuminations*, p. 233.
5. Ibid. Benjamin also uses the comparisons of magician and surgeon. The former heals a sick person "by the laying on of hands", maintaining a safe distance, while the surgeon "cuts into the patient's body". Gu of course is the magician and Yang the surgeon.
6. See Nan Huai-chin, *Working Towards Enlightenment*, p. 213.
7. See Dong Yan, *Jian han qing nuan du wuxia* (Cold blade, warm emotions: A reading of wuxia) (Beijing: Central Broadcast Television University Publishing House, 1993), p. 105.
8. See *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 142. Whether or not Han Yingjie was ever involved in the choreography of the final sequence is not recorded. When I interviewed Wu Mingcai (April 1998, Hong Kong), Wu claimed to have choreographed all the fight sequences set in the forest as well as the final fight sequence. Wu was of course a classmate of Hung and Jackie Chan when they were studying under Yu Zhanyuan in his Peking opera school and joined the child acting troupe known as "The Seven Little Fortunes".

9. Hu contributed a *wuxia* segment to *The Wheel of Life* (1983), made in Taiwan, and, though he received a credit on *Swordsman* (1990), he walked out of the picture (Hu was one of five directors credited on the film).
10. His one foray into the contemporary period setting, *The Juvenizer* (1981), made in Taiwan, was a disaster.
11. Benjamin, *ibid.*, p. 237.
12. Chor Yuen himself was a key *wuxia* director whose *Confessions of an Intimate Courtesan* (1972) is a major work in the genre. His Gu Long series revived the *wuxia* genre from 1976 onwards and while he had his own distinctive style, the series came on the heels of *A Touch of Zen*'s international success in 1975, and the whole mood of the series seems to rededicate the genre in terms of a darker, more arty and more New Age atmosphere.
13. Comparing the two films by comparing the bamboo forest sequences is most likely a superfluous exercise. What seems important is the way that King Hu and Ang Lee have both attempted to "rewrite" the genre but that Hu's contribution seems greater and more permanent while still being generally unacknowledged in comparison. Sheldon Lu makes the point that *Crouching Tiger* "amounts to a rewriting of the martial arts genre by way of a Taoist sensibility", and that the film "embodies the Taoist ideal/idea of personal and spiritual liberation". See Sheldon Lu, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Bouncing Angels" in *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*, ed. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), p. 225. Hu had in fact done much the same thing and with a more comprehensive application of Chinese universality. Though Hu's film emphasizes Zen, his universal predisposition allows him to rewrite the genre with the same Daoist sensibility and ideal, and his creative effort seems more inspirational. Furthermore, *Crouching Tiger* follows the narrative paradigm of *A Touch of Zen* in its long exposition followed by a cathartic fight scene leading on to a flashback sequence, a bamboo forest sequence, more fight scenes, and a metaphysical climax.
14. The director Fruit Chan told me in July 2005 that he had been approached by Xu Feng, the star of *A Touch of Zen* now turned

producer, to direct the remake but gave up on the project when she could not secure the rights.

15. *A Touch of King Hu*, p. 96.
16. Benjamin, "What is Epic Theater?", *Illuminations*, p. 154.

## **Appendix 1**

1. I have followed the story as published in *Wenbai liaozhai zhiyi* (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 188–191.

# Index

- Abraham, Karl, 23–4, 37, 49,  
139–40
- Altar Sutra, The*, 114
- Analects, The*, 39
- Art of War, The*, 66
- Asia the Invincible, 108
- Ashes of Time*, 115
- Assassin, The*, 138
- Bai Ying, 32, 45, 61, 113, 149
- bamboo forest sequence, 2, 70, 72,  
80, 84, 97, 110, 113, 136, 156
- Basic Instinct*, 140
- Battle of Ono, The*, 36, 142
- Battle of the Haunted Mansion, 77,  
79–82, 89–91, 97, 109, 117
- Beijing Opera, 3, 64, 73, 97, 119
- Benjamin, Walter, 31, 57, 60, 81,  
88, 89, 109, 115, 119, 155
- bian* (iron staff), 85
- Big Boss, The*, 12, 13
- bisexuality, 3, 21, 37, 43–4, 49, 147
- Blade, The*, 113
- Bordwell, David, 56–7, 71–2, 77,  
104
- Boston Strangler, The*, 151
- Brecht, 119
- Brechtian didactic play, 3
- Brechtian interruption, 31, 45,  
54
- Brechtian structural motif, 38
- Brechtian touch, 88
- epic theatre, 119
- Buddha, 59, 70, 97, 100, 112, 153
- Buddhahood, 101–2
- Buddhism, 67, 108, 153
- Buddhism, Zen, 22
- Buddhist, 104, 115
- Buddhist fatalism, 103, 115

- Buddhist hell, 89  
 Buddhist idea, 59, 67  
 Buddhist metaphysical sense,  
     100  
 Buddhist non-attachment, 99  
 Buddhist pre-destiny, 69  
 Buddhist theme, 109  
 Buddhist transcendence, 77, 88,  
     153  
     Buddhist wisdom, 141  
*bukuai* (constables), 64  
 Burmese sword, 55, 146  
*Butterfly Murders*, 115  
*Cahiers du Cinema*, 12, 15, 73  
 Campbell, Joseph, 101  
 Cannes Film Festival, 1–2, 13, 18,  
     78, 111, 113–14  
 Cao Jixiang, 148  
 Cao Shaoqin, 61, 86, 148  
 Carroll, Noël, 140  
 castrating mother, 143  
 Cathay Organisation, 135  
 CGI technology, 73  
 Chan, Fruit, 156  
 Chan, Jackie, 113, 155  
 Chiao, Roy, 67  
*China Times*, 52  
 Chinese Communist Party (CCP),  
     62–3, 116  
*Chinese Ghost Story, A*, 18, 20  
 Ching Siu-tung, 18  
 Chor Yuen, 115, 156  
 Chow, Raymond, 12  
*cinema opera*, 73, 97, 119  
 Ciment, Michel, 9, 10  
*Cinemart*, 77, 136, 144  
*Citizen Kane*, 111  
 Cold War, 116  
*Come Drink with Me*, 6, 8, 18, 118,  
     151, 153–54  
*Confessions of an Intimate  
     Courtesan*, 156  
 Confucius, 39, 41, 69  
     Confucian codes of loyalty, 69  
     Confucian conservatism, 109  
     Confucian ideals, 69  
     Confucian morality, 69  
     Confucian puritanism, 21  
     Confucian repression, 40  
     Confucian *xia*, 70  
     Confucianism, 108  
 Coppola, Francis Ford, 78  
 cosmic spider, 58, 67–8, 75, 91, 93,  
     95, 98, 109  
 Coup of the Force-Open Door, 61  
 Creed, Barbara, 143  
 cross-dressing, 145, 147  
*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*,  
     2, 73, 87, 109, 113, 115–16, 156  
 Danan, 9  
 Danan studio, 14, 135  
*dao*, 71, 116  
     Daoist exorcist, 59  
     Daoist parlance, 87  
     Daoist sensibility, 156  
     Daoist talismans, 39  
 Deleuze, Gilles, 141  
 Didacticism, 32, 34  
 Doane, Mary Ann, 37, 42  
*dongchang*, 48–9, 54, 61–2, 64,  
     67–8, 72, 79, 89, 92, 98–9,  
     103, 145  
 Dongfang Bubai, 108  
*donglin*, 62, 64–5, 79–80

- Dragon Inn*, 7–9, 8, 14–15, 18, 35,  
61–63, 66, 86–87, 116, 118,  
134–35, 137, 148
- Drinking Alone under the Moon*,  
51, 96
- duomen zhi bian*, 61
- Edwards, Louise, 69, 149
- Enchanting Shadow, The*, 18, 137,  
146
- Enigmatic Case, The*, 115
- fantastic, 29, 99, 117
- fantastic-marvelous, 30, 73, 91,  
    107, 110
- fantastic-uncanny, 29, 30, 38
- Fate of Lee Khan, The*, 6–7, 63, 87,  
112, 114
- female castration complex, 41
- female creative principle, 25
- feminine role, 49
- femininity, 23, 46, 145–47
- feminism, 23, 46, 69, 88, 96, 108,  
150
- feminist, 69, 153
- feminist drive, 89
- feminist ideal, 109
- feminist inspiration, 109
- feminist phantasy, 109
- feminist theory, 152
- feminist wishful thinking, 23
- feminist *wuxia* film, 13
- feminist *wuxia* phantasy, 108
- feminist *wuxia* wish-fulfillment,  
    96
- femme fatale*, 26, 140
- Fleischer, Richard, 151
- For a Few Dollars More*, 146
- Fourth Man, The*, 140
- fox spirit, 18, 23, 25, 43, 139
- Freud, 25, 42, 152
- Freudian, 23–4, 33, 37, 49, 145
- Freudian uncanny, 23–4, 33
- furen zhi ren*, 52, 87
- Giles, Herbert A., 4, 17–8, 21, 25,  
55, 133, 139
- glimpse (defined by Bordwell), 56,  
73
- glimpsing effect, 57
- Godfather, The (Part II)*, 78
- Golden Harvest, 12
- Golden Swallow, The*, 138
- Golden Swallow (character), 118, 154
- gongxin weishang*, 80
- Gu Long, 115, 134, 156
- Gu Shengzhai, 21–6, 30–40, 42–3,  
45, 47–9, 51–4, 57–61, 64–6,  
68–70, 77, 79–82, 86–8, 91–7,  
99, 102–3, 109, 116, 118–19,  
121–23, 137–38, 143, 145–46,  
149–50, 153, 155
- Gu Shengzhai's mother, 22, 32–3,  
36–7, 40–1, 43, 45, 47–8, 64,  
82, 94–5, 121–23, 152–53
- Guan Yu, 149
- Guattari, Felix, 141
- Guomindang (GMD), 62, 63, 116, 117
- guzhuang pian*, 114
- Hakatasu, 63, 112
- Han Fei Zi, 65, 69
- Han, Yingjie, 8, 73, 75, 89, 97,  
112–13, 155
- Hark, Tsui, 2, 18, 29, 108, 113, 115
- Hero*, 2–3, 116

- Herrigel, Eugen, 141  
 hesitation, 42, 45, 58, 87, 93, 80  
 hesitation effect, 38, 58, 7, 80, 87  
 historical period drama, 114  
 historicism, 81–82, 92  
 homosexuality, 21, 41–4, 139, 147  
 Hong Kong International Film Festival, 4  
 Hopi Indians, 140  
*House of Flying Daggers*, 2–3, 116  
 Hu, King, 2–22, 24–6, 29–36, 38, 46–7, 53–4, 56–7, 61, 63, 65–7, 69–73, 75, 77–80, 82, 84, 86, 88, 91–2, 94–101, 103–05, 108, 110–18, 134–39, 141, 146, 148–50, 152, 154, 156  
 Hua Mulan, 149–50  
*Hua Pi*, 115  
 Huang Ren, 6, 39, 41–42  
 Hui, Ann, 2  
 Hui Neng, 114  
 Hui Yuan, 22, 26, 58, 67–8, 75, 78, 89, 90, 94–5, 97–105, 107, 110, 112, 119, 148, 153  
 Humphreys, Christmas, 141  
 Hung, Sammo, 97, 112–113, 155  
 International Film Company, 135  
 Jen, 87, 109  
 Jewison, Norman, 82  
 Jia Lushi, 62  
*jiguan*, 35–36, 79  
*jinyiwei*, 61, 97  
 Jin Yong, 134  
*jouissance*, 88, 96, 152  
 Jung, 24, 58, 100, 101, 104, 140, 142, 147, 154  
*kami*, 67  
 Karma, 15, 69  
   karmic affinity, 97–8  
   karmic birth, 108  
   karmic destiny, 15, 110, 115, 153  
   karmic forces, 69  
   karmic retribution, 84  
 Kawajiri, Yoshiaki, 140  
*Killer Clans, The*, 115  
 koan, 68  
 Kristeva, Julia, 37, 42, 88, 96, 139, 144, 152, 155  
 kung fu, 112–13  
*Lady Knight*, 135  
 Lao She, 134  
 Lau, Joseph Shiu-ming, 18, 134, 138  
 Lee, Ang, 2–3, 72, 87, 115, 156  
 Lee, Bruce, 12  
 Lee, Ou-fan Leo, 82, 134, 151  
*Legend of the Mountain*, 6–7, 29, 67, 114  
 Leone, Sergio, 146  
 Li Bai, 51–2, 96  
 Li Hanxiang, 18, 137, 146  
 Lianbang, 8  
 Liang Yusheng, 134  
*Liaozhai gothic*, 36  
*Liaozhai zhi yi*, 4, 15, 17–20, 22–3, 26, 30, 36, 69, 77, 82, 108, 114–15, 121, 123, 133, 150  
 Lin, Brigitte, 108  
*Lingshan jianying*, 77  
 Louie, Kam, 69, 147, 149  
 Lu, Dr., 31–32, 70–2, 79–80, 83, 86, 89–90, 48, 65–6, 145  
 Lu, Sheldon, 156

- Lu Xun, 17, 137
- Ma Guoguang, 6, 52–4, 105, 146, 155
- Ma Su, 80
- Magic Blade, The*, 62, 70, 115
- Magic Sword, The*, 18
- Magnanimous Girl, The*, 17, 21
- manmen chaozhan*, 63
- marvelous (defined by Todorov), 117
- Medusa's head, 145
- Men Da, 36, 62, 68–70, 77–90, 148
- Mencius, 65
- Messianic time, 81
- Miao Tian, 83
- Milky Way Pictorial*, 135
- Miracle of Life, The*, 12
- mo*, 71
- mother attachment, 41
- MP and GI, 135
- multiple screen technique, 82, 151
- Navajo Indians, 140
- neo-conservative, 81
- New School (*xinpai*), 6–7, 18, 113–14, 118, 134, 138
- New Wave, 2
- New *wuxia* century, 118, 134
- Nie Qiu, 82–5, 88
- Nie Xiaoqian*, 18
- nieyuan*, 69
- Niogret, Hubert, 142
- Oedipal, 3, 33, 95, 145, 152
- Ooi, Vicki, 6, 40–1, 91–3, 96, 99, 102–4, 108
- Ouyang Nian, 22–4, 31–2, 38–9, 44–7, 54–6, 58, 60, 64–8, 70–1, 79, 87, 89, 109, 112, 145
- Painted Skin, The*, 114–15
- pan-Chinese production, 1–3
- pan-determinism, 99
- Petition to the Emperor before the Military Expedition, A*, 34
- pifu zhi yong*, 65
- preoedipal, 3, 95, 152
- preoedipal female, 3, 145
- preoedipal matriarchal tradition, 96
- preoedipal mother, 36, 95
- preoedipal stage, 41
- psychoanalysis, 23, 42, 61, 99, 142
- Pu Songling, 4, 17–8, 25–6, 44, 62–3, 95, 137, 150
- Puchon Fantastic Film Festival, 139
- qi gong*, 47
- Qian chushi biao*, 34
- qianhu*, 64
- qin*, 51–2, 137
- Raining in the Mountain*, 6, 67, 114
- Rayns, Tony, 138
- Rissient, Pierre, 13, 22, 23, 136, 139
- Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, 34, 81, 142
- Roxy cinema, 12
- ruxia*, 4, 35, 54, 61, 63, 70, 81, 118
- Sands cinema, 12
- satori*, 154
- scopophilia, 37
- scopophilic drive, 37
- scopophilic instinct, 24, 37, 40, 49, 95, 143–44
- Sek Kei, 6, 67, 70
- Seven Little Fortunes, 155
- sexuality, 4, 21, 23, 34, 42
- sexual ambiguity, 3, 108

- Sha Yung-fong, 8, 10–1, 14–5, 21,  
115, 136–37, 148
- Shaw Brothers, 8–9, 14, 18, 118,  
134–35, 148
- Shaw, Run Run, 8
- shenguai*, 29–30, 73, 84, 114, 117  
*shenguai*-fantastic, 27  
*shenguai* fantasy, 114
- Shi, General, 22, 32–3, 45, 48,  
64–6, 70–3, 75, 80, 83, 89,  
97–8, 102, 148–49, 151
- Shi Jun, 30, 33, 114
- shiba ban wuyi*, 146
- Shing Mun Reservoir, 97
- Shinto, 67
- shusheng*, 70
- Song Cunshou, 15
- spectatorial fetishism, 37
- spectral mother, 36–37, 41, 82, 94,  
95, 143, 152–53
- specular, 42–43, 144
- spider, cosmic, 8, 67–68, 75, 91,  
93, 95, 98, 109
- spider sequence, 78, 144
- spider symbol, 22–6, 31, 35, 37,  
41, 47, 49, 58, 78, 87, 89, 109,  
140–41
- spider woman, 140, 145
- spider's web motif, 27
- Sprengnether, Madelon, 36, 143, 152
- staff, 85, 151
- Stein, Elliott, 144
- Strange Stories from a Chinese  
Studio*, 4, 21, 139
- su yuan*, 97
- sun symbol, 24–5, 58, 61, 68, 95,  
98, 100, 102, 139
- Sun Yat-sen, 62
- Sun Zi, 65–66
- Suzuki, D. T., 85, 141
- Sword, The*, 115
- Swordsman*, 2, 156
- Swordsman II*, 108
- Swordsman III*, 108
- Swordsman* series, 115
- Sword's Shadow on the Divine  
Mountain*, 77
- Swordswoman, The*, 135
- Tam, Patrick, 115
- Tasker, Yvonne, 150
- Temple of the Red Lotus*, 135
- Tian Feng, 112
- Tian Peng, 45
- Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 100,  
153–54
- To, Johnnie, 115
- Todorov, Tzvetan, 29, 99, 117
- Touch of Zen*, A, 1–15, 17–21, 23–5,  
29–30, 32, 36, 47, 49, 52,  
61–4, 66–7, 69–70, 75, 77–9,  
85, 87, 89, 101, 103–5, 107–8,  
110–17, 134–38, 141, 144,  
152–54
- theriomorphic symbol, 58–59
- Thomas Crown Affair, The*, 82, 151
- transcendental truth, 108
- trompe l'oeil* effect, 47
- Tung Wai, 73
- UFOs, 101, 154
- uncanny (defined by Todorov), 117
- Union Film Company, 8–9, 12,  
14–5, 17, 69, 135, 137, 148
- Valiant Ones, The*, 2, 6, 63, 87,  
112–14, 148

- Verhoeven, Paul, 140  
 Vitoux, Frédéric, 141  
 Wang, Rui, 62  
 Watts, Alan W., 59, 141  
 Wei Yi, 77–8, 97, 151  
 Wei Zhongxian, 61–2, 66, 148  
*wen*, 60, 69, 81, 118, 147–50  
*wen-wu*, 3, 69–70, 109, 147–50  
*Wicked City, The*, 140  
 Wong Kar-wai, 115  
*wu*, 60, 69, 81, 118, 147–50  
 Wu, Cuncun, 145  
 Wu Jiguan, 113  
 Wu Mingcai, 155  
*wuxia*, 2–4, 6–7, 13, 18–9, 27, 63,  
 69, 83–6, 96, 98, 108, 110,  
 112–19, 134–35, 144, 156  
*Xia*, 61, 70, 109, 117–19  
*Xia Nü* (the story in *Liaozhai*),  
 17–21, 25, 62, 77, 96, 115, 121  
*Xia Nü* (Chinese film title) 20,  
 135–36  
*xia nü* (female knight), 4, 7, 13,  
 15, 18, 21, 23, 26, 29, 40–2,  
 44, 53, 55, 60, 69, 87–8,  
 90–1, 95, 99, 104, 108–10,  
 117, 147, 149  
*xian*, 87  
*xinpai*, 134  
*xin wuxia shiji*, 118, 134  
 Xu Dong, 112–13  
 Xu Feng, 40, 46–7, 149, 156  
 Xu Xianchun, 75, 89, 97, 100, 101,  
 110, 112, 154  
 Xu Zenghong, 8, 135  
 Xue Han, 31  
*yang gang*, 118  
 Yang Huizhen, 21–6, 33, 40–8,  
 51–8, 60–2, 64–6, 68–75, 77,  
 79–80, 82–3, 85–91, 93–9,  
 102–3, 109–10, 113, 141,  
 143–47, 149–50, 152–53  
 Yang Huizhen's mother, 41, 21  
 Yang Lian, 45, 61–2, 66, 89–90,  
 148–49  
 Yang Zhiqing, 152–53  
*Yinhe huabao*, 135  
*Yinse shijie*, 77, 135  
 Yu Dayou, 63  
 Yu Qian, 61, 66, 148  
 Yu Zhanyuan, 155  
 Yuan Biao, 113  
 Yue Hua, 151  
*Yuexia duzhuo*, 51, 96  
 Zen, 4–6, 14–5, 19, 22, 25–7, 30,  
 32, 53, 58, 67–8, 77–9, 84,  
 87, 89–91, 97–101, 103–5,  
 109–11, 113, 119, 141–42, 154,  
 156  
 Zen Buddhism, 22, 154  
 Zen fantastic imagery, 98  
*Zen in the Art of Archery*, 141  
 Zhang Bingyu, 33  
 Zhang Che, 118, 138  
 Zhang Yimou, 2, 116  
 Zhang Ziyi, 87, 109  
*zhengguo*, 97  
 Zhong Ling, 114  
 Zhou Yexing, 97  
 Zhu Hui, 118  
 Zhu Yuanzhang, 63  
 Zhuge Liang, 34–6, 59, 68–9, 80–2,  
 86, 92–3, 109, 118, 138, 142  
*Zuohua*, 102