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This essay was presented at the 2016 Martial Arts and Society Conference in Cologne, Germany.

SYNTHESIZING ZHENSHI (AUTHENTICITY) AND SHIZHAN (COMBATIVITY)

REINVENTING CHINESE KUNG FU IN DONNIE YEN'S IP MAN SERIES (2008-2015)

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KEYWORDS

shizhan, zhenshi, wen-wu, kung fu cinema, martial arts action, authenticity, action aesthetics.

CITATION

ABSTRACT

This article argues that Donnie Yen's *Ip Man* series (2008-2015) synthesizes two predominant unarmed, hand-to-hand combat traditions of Hong Kong martial arts cinema – what I call *zhenshi* (真實; authenticity) and *shizhan* (實戰; combativity), represented by the series of kung fu films featuring Kwan Tak-hing as the legendary Wong Fei-hung and the martial arts action films of Bruce Lee respectively. Despite kung fu cinema's claim to 'realism' since its conception in the 1949, there is a strong suppression of *wu* (武; the martial) in the genre's action aesthetics due to the elevation of *wen* (文; the literary and the artistic) in traditional Chinese culture. By exposing the inherent contradictions within kung fu cinema and incorporating of combative action aesthetics derived from Bruce Lee's martial arts philosophy and wing chun principles – what I call *kuai* (快; speed), *hen* (狠; brutality), and *zhun* (準; precision), the series presents new possibilities of wu and offers a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese kung fu.

Ip Man / 葉問 [2008-2015] is a series of films starring Donnie Yen based on the life of world famous wing chun grandmaster Ip Man [1893-1972].[1] Part of his fame comes from the fact that he is the celebrated *shifu* (師傅; master) of Bruce Lee. As Paul Bowman pointedly argues, 'both Ip Man and wing chun are now world famous solely because the most famous student was Bruce Lee' [Bowman 2013: 179]. Granted, Lee played a huge role in thrusting the style and its grandmaster into the limelight (the series has certainly capitalized on Lee since the first *Ip Man* film). The success of the series, however, is due to more than Lee's posthumous influence.

This article argues that Donnie Yen's *Ip Man* series synthesizes two predominant unarmed, hand-to-hand combat traditions of Hong Kong martial arts cinema. The first tradition I call *zhenshi* (真實; authenticity) and it is exemplified by the mid-20th century films featuring legendary Wong Fei-hung as played by Kwan Tak-hing. The second tradition I call *shizhan* (實戰; combativity)[2] and it is exemplified by the films of Bruce Lee. Despite kung fu cinema's claims to 'realism', historically there has been a strong suppression of *wu* (武; the martial) in the genre's action aesthetics due to the elevation of *wen* (文; the literary and the artistic) in traditional Chinese culture. By exposing the inherent contradictions within traditional kung fu cinema and the incorporation of combative action aesthetics derived from Bruce Lee's martial arts philosophy and wing chun principles – what I call *kuai* (快; speed), *hen* (狠; brutality), and *zhun* (準; precision) – Yen's *Ip Man* films rejuvenate the combative dimension of Chinese kung fu and advocate a well-balanced reconciliation of the *wen-wu* dyad through the character of Ip Man.

Before proceeding to discussion of the *Ip Man* films, however, it is worth mentioning that, as a genre, Hong Kong martial arts cinema is not monolithic; rather, it is incredibly diverse in terms of its themes and its action aesthetics.[3] Despite the terminological ambiguity and

complexity,[4] there are primarily two subgenres: *wuxia*, which refers to martial arts films that center on 'a cult of the sword', and kung fu, which refers to martial arts films that emphasize 'the art of fist-fighting' [Teo 2009: 4].

In this article, the intrinsic and complex linkage between kung fu and authenticity/realism/the 'real' will be examined in detail. Although the term kung fu has been used to encompass all kinds of unarmed combat [Sek 1980: 32; Bordwell 2011: 27; Desser 2000: 463; Hunt 2003: 21; Teo 2009: 81], this article will focus more specifically on Southern Chinese kung fu styles, Confucian humanism, and Cantonese culture. These are the three pillars constituting traditional kung fu cinema since Kwan Tak-hing's Wong Fei-hung films (1949-1981). To designate martial arts films not sharing the above three characteristics, a third subgenre which I will refer to as martial arts action needs to be formulated. While 'martial arts action' is often used as a generic term indicating 'any type of motion picture containing martial arts' [Teo 2009: 2], in this article, it is used to indicate films in the *shizhan* tradition, a crucial concept that I will elaborate in detail.

Under this new classification, Bruce Lee's films in the early 1970s should be placed *outside* the lineage of kung fu cinema proper. Although the early Wong Fei-hung films and Bruce Lee films are conspicuously at variance in terms of their themes and action aesthetics [Teo 2009: 75; Bordwell 2011: 32], a clear distinction between the two has never been made. It is not my intention to suggest that Kwan and Lee share nothing, as Kwan may be considered a 'precursor' to Lee's emergence in the 1970s [Teo 2009: 75]. However, it is crucial to separate the two in order to address the often-ignored nuances/differences within the unarmed combat tradition of Hong Kong martial arts cinema.

Despite their common emphasis on 'realism', a convoluted term that I will elucidate later, there are key differences between zhenshi and shizhan. The shizhan tradition is derived from Bruce Lee's martial arts philosophy. Jeet Kune Do (JKD), or the Way of the Intercepting Fist,[5] privileges practicality over intricacy, efficiency over complexity, quick fights over extended dance-like performances [Li 2001: 527; Anderson 2009: 192]. As this relates to genre, the shizhan paradigm can often be

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1 Wing chun, as a part of the **nanpai** (南派; The Southern School) Chinese martial arts circulating in Southern China after the burning down of the Shaolin temple in the Qing Dynasty, is said to originate from Yim Wing Chun (嚴詠春), a female student of Ng Mui (五枚), a Buddhist Nun.

2 In his theorization of Chinese film theory, Victor Fan uses the term **bizhen** (approaching reality) to describe the notion that 'cinema, in its state of imperfection, is a potentiality that can approach reality but never fully actualize it' [Fan 2015: 9]. While bizhen is insightful in the context of Shanghai cinema in the 1930s, zhenshi and shizhan are specifically developed for Hong Kong martial arts cinema, which addresses the divergent yet interconnected genres of kung fu and martial arts action.

3 Action aesthetics here refers to different representational strategies of choreographing/filming/editing martial arts performances, such as David Bordwell's ideas of 'expressive amplification', the 'pause-burst-pause pattern', and the 'glimpse', etc. [Bordwell 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2011]. For a more elaborate discussion of action aesthetics, see Barrowman [2014].

4 Especially in early studies of martial arts cinema, there was no clear distinction between **wuxia**, kung fu, and Hong Kong martial arts cinema [Lau 1980: 3; Sek 1980: 29; Hong Kong Film Archive 1999: 9]. In a more recent study, Stephen Teo considers the kung fu film 'as a part of the tradition of **wuxia**' (Teo: 2009: 6). For further debate, see Hunt [2003: 4], Li [2001: 530], and Teo [2009: 4-5].

5 Jeet Kune Do is a concept of fighting that 'utilizes all ways and is bound by none and, likewise, uses any techniques or means which serve its end' [Lee 1975: 12]. A perfect example of Lee's philosophy is the fight scene between Lee and Robert Baker in **Fist of Fury** / 精武門 (1972) in which Lee bites Baker's leg as a way to escape from an arm lock.

identified in martial arts action films, in particular Bruce Lee's films and Donnie Yen's Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) trilogy [*Killzone* / 殺破狼 (2005), *Flash Point* / 導火線 (2007), and *Special I.D.* / 特殊身份 (2013)].[6]

The zhenshi tradition, as mentioned before, is archivally, philosophically, and regionally specific. Originating from the Wong Fei-hung films, it highlights unarmed, authentic hand-to-hand combat and 'realist' representations of traditional Chinese martial arts [Chiao 1981: 33; Teo 2009: 71; Bordwell 2000a: 203]. The concept of 'realism', unfortunately, carries with it tremendous theoretical baggage linked to Western film theory, particularly the writings of André Bazin. It would require a different article to articulate its complex application to martial arts cinema [Barrowman 2014]. In the context of kung fu cinema, however, 'realism' can be understood as the genre's need to differentiate itself from 'the fantastic and stage-derived elements of earlier martial arts films' [Sek 1980: 28] such as *shenguai* wuxia (神怪武俠; strange and bizarre wuxia films with gods and spirits) [Teo 2009: 71].

In the Chinese language, both zhenshi and shizhan highlight the concept of *shi* [實, as in '*shi*'-zhan and zhen-'*shi*']. It literally means concreteness and solidity. These are the vital qualities differentiating kung fu and martial arts action films from the abstract, fantastical wuxia cinema. The key difference between the two is that zhenshi highlights the notion of *zhen* (真; authenticity/reality), thus stressing faithful representation of kung fu, as opposed to its fantastical counterpart. Shizhan, on the contrary, accentuates the idea of *zhan* (戰; combat/war), hence prioritizing practicality and lethalness in real combat.[7]

In addition, given traditional kung fu cinema's connection with Confucianism [Sek 1980: 29], zhen has a humanistic connotation. In the *daxue* (大學; The Great Learning) chapter of *liji* (禮記; The Classic of Rites), seeking what is truthful through *gewu* (格物; careful investigation of things) is a means to *mingde* (明德; illustration of virtue). Transcending the external forms of martial arts, the ultimate intent of pursuing zhen is to develop virtuosity. In other words, practicality has not been the primary concern of traditional kung fu

cinema according to the Confucian code. Conversely, the emphasis on *zhan* in Lee's films does not necessarily signify the truthful or the virtuous.

Rather than adopting existing terms such as authenticity and realism, zhenshi and shizhan can better address different dimensions of wu in the context of Hong Kong martial arts cinema. It should be noted that both paradigms, similar to Hunt's notion of authenticity, are guiding principles delineating different components of 'the real' and should not be used interchangeably with kung fu and martial arts action genres (i.e., 'zhenshi films' *or* 'shizhan films') [Hunt 2003: 21].

By synthesizing the two traditions, the *Ip Man* series makes three contributions to the development of the kung fu genre. First, it challenges the enduring stereotype that Chinese kung fu is 'chop-socky' [Teo 1997: 110; Fore 1997: 241; Desser 2000: 40; Yau 2001: 11; Yu 2015: 21]. Based on the straight-line and center-line principles, wing chun is represented as a swift, robust, and practical martial art in the series. The series addresses the combative dimension of Chinese kung fu, which has long been suppressed by the *zhongwen qingwu* (重文輕武; place greater value on wen than wu) stigma in traditional Chinese culture [Louie and Edwards 1994: 145]. I will elaborate on this later in the first section.

Second, it problematizes conventional definitions of kung fu cinema exemplified by Bruce Lee.[8] Followed by the 'kung fu craze' in the 1970s, it has been taken for granted that Bruce Lee is synonymous with the term 'kung fu' [Louie 2002: 146]. However, a closer examination of his films and his philosophy reveals incongruities between Lee and his predecessors.

Third, it elucidates the complexity of Leon Hunt's tripartite framework of 'authenticity', which includes the archival (real technique), the cinematic (unmediated performance), and the corporeal (physical risk) [Hunt 2003: 29]. While Hunt's framework has been frequently deployed in analyses of Hong Kong martial arts cinema, specific issues of kung fu cinema and martial arts action cinema have not been adequately addressed. The zhenshi and shizhan paradigms add specificity and clarity to the unarmed, hand-to-hand combat tradition for which the notion of authenticity fails to account.

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6   As a conglomeration of different martial arts styles, MMA incorporates virtually all forms of striking, wrestling, and submission grappling and allows practitioners to utilize almost every single part of their body to attack their opponent.

7   Kyle Barrowman developed the concept of 'combative realism' for the purpose of 'assessing the degree of realism … in a given cinematic fight scene'. According to Barrowman, whether a fight scene appears 'real' depends on more than merely the presence of 'really existing martial arts' or 'the bodily presence of actual combatants'; it also depends on, among other things, the particular historical context of the film/story, the skills of the particular characters, and the situational variables of the particular scene [Barrowman 2014].

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8   In his pioneering study of Hong Kong martial arts films, Lau Shing-hon notes that the term 'kung fu films' came into 'general use' in the 1970s, 'with the appearance of Bruce Lee's unarmed combat films, and it spread as the films themselves were distributed around the world' [Lau 1980: 3].

Despite Lee's incorporation of wing chun principles into his martial arts philosophy in JKD, his films seek to deviate from, rather than to reproduce, traditional kung fu cinema. Although the scope of this article does not allow me to examine the differences between Lee's films and the earlier Wong Fei-hung films in great detail, three major points deserve attention.

First, traditional Chinese martial arts are basically absent in Lee's films. As Lee candidly expresses: 'I've lost faith in the Chinese classical arts – though I still call mine Chinese – because, basically, all styles are a product of "land swimming", even the wing chun school. So my line of training is more toward efficient street-fighting with everything goes' [Lee quoted in Logan 1995: 11]. Although he learnt wing chun from Ip Man, Lee was highly critical of martial arts orthodoxy and his own art of JKD represented a radical challenge to it.[9]

Second, although Lee's films contain the 'characteristics of loyalty, righteousness, and mateship' [Louie 2002: 145],[10] which bear some resemblance to traditional kung fu films, there are notable differences between them. As I will further elucidate in the discussion of the notion of hen, Lee's aggressiveness, brutality, and sexuality differentiate him from the scholarly persona of traditional kung fu masters, such as Kwan's (as well as Jet Li's) Wong Fei-hung and Donnie Yen's Ip Man, who are chiefly tranquil, tolerant, and pedagogical. Although Lee has been 'recast as a philosopher and teacher', his scholarly presence is less explicit when compared with Wong Fei-hung.[11] In fact, his multiple 'affairs' in real life are plainly contradictory to Confucian values such as loyalty and righteousness [Louie 2002: 148].[12]

9　　When he taught wing chun in the U.S., he greatly reduced the number of wing chun sticking hand techniques to 'less than ten' moves and told his students that 'all the lines that wing chun mentioned were not necessary and that violations of them could be used effectively against the wing chun style' [Glover 1976: 56].

10　　In **Fist of Fury**, for example, Lee demonstrates the Confucian notion of **xiao** (孝; fidelity) when he mourns and sets out to avenge his master, Huo Yuanjia. This demonstrates his respect for the traditional hierarchy. However, Lee in his later films is more subversive and possesses a more defiant attitude towards authority and fatherly figures [see Bordwell 2011: 32].

11　　In **Enter the Dragon** / 龍爭虎鬥 (1973), Lee is portrayed as a Shaolin martial artist who excels in both wu and wen. This is most evident in the beginning of the film when he articulates the philosophy of JKD with his master. Even though this is an explicit reference to his fighting philosophy, it is different from the teaching of martial virtue in traditional kung fu cinema, which I will explain later in the article.

12　　Actors who successfully portray traditional kung fu masters usually have positive star personas. From Kwan Tak-hing to Jet Li to Donnie Yen, they all embody certain dimensions of martial virtues in real life. Yen, for example, presents himself as a caring husband and father through social media in a fashion that is strikingly similar to his Ip Man character.

Third, the distinctive Cantonese flavor of kung fu cinema is almost totally absent (e.g. lion-dancing, Chinese New Year customs, vernacular language). For instance, the setting of *Fist of Fury* is in the early republican period of Shanghai where the city was colonized by Western powers. *The Big Boss* / 唐山大兄 *(1971)* and *The Way of the Dragon* / 猛龍過江 *(1972)*, meanwhile, deal with diasporic Chinese and their alienating experiences in foreign lands. Although Lee is mainly characterized as a martial artist from Hong Kong (with the exception of *Fist of Fury*), there is no explicit connection to Southern Chinese culture or customs in his films (except for a few shots showing Lee conversing with some Shaolin monks in the beginning of *Enter the Dragon*). Lee's films are more international in scope and Guangdong culture does not receive the same attention as it does in the Wong Fei-hung films.

This differentiation is significant as kung fu cinema, insofar as the term 'kung fu' refers to unarmed combat, has been considered a unified genre.[13] However, it is crucial to acknowledge that not *all* unarmed martial arts represented on the screen can be categorized as 'kung fu' if it is defined as a geographically, culturally, and philosophically specific style. Although the term kung fu (功夫) in the Cantonese vernacular can refer to the general accumulation of skill [Teo 2009: 4], which certainly includes different martial arts styles, a more specific definition is needed to make it academically useful.

Contrary to Bruce Lee's subtle internationalization of kung fu in his films, *Ip Man* demonstrates a strong emphasis on combativity while maintaining a concrete link to the Chinese tradition. On the one hand, by featuring wing chun as an archival kung fu system in Foshan (a town in Guangdong province) and characterizing Ip Man as a scholarly and parental figure, the series preserves the zhenshi tradition. On the other hand, the practicality and efficiency of wing chun in the series is redolent of the shizan tradition.

Although Jet Li's *Fearless* / 霍元甲 [2006] largely incorporates the shizan paradigm into its action aesthetics, it is less focused on the Southern tradition or *nanpai* (南派). As a Northern master, Huo Yuanjia (Jet Li) demonstrates extensive knowledge of weaponry and acrobatic movements, both of which are characteristic of *beipai* (北派; the Northern school) [Cao 1996: 271-273]. The difference between nanpai and beipai will be further examined in the section where I explicate the theatrical linkage of kung fu cinema. Despite the overall increase in combativity, the film's accentuation of spectacular

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13　　Kung fu cinema is conventionally used to encompass Kwan Tak-hing's Wong Fei-hung series in the 1950s and 1960s, Bruce Lee's JKD martial arts action films in the 1970s, Jackie Chan's comedic kung fu action films in the 1980s, Jet Li's 'wire-fu' films in the 1990s, and Donnie Yen's **Ip Man** series in the 2000s.

movements connects it with the New Wave martial arts cinema of the 1990s and such films as *Once Upon a Time in China* / 黃飛雄 [1991].

Addressing the Southern tradition, I have selected the *Ip Man* series rather than *Fearless* as the focus.[14] The intention of this article is not to promote a conservative, orthodox concept of kung fu cinema. Rather, it is to posit that, by understanding the internal differences within the unarmed combat tradition between zhenshi and shizan, one can better understand and analyze the latest development of kung fu cinema.

So far there have been six Ip Man biopics made. In addition to the Donnie Yen films, there have also been Herman Yau's two films, *The Legend is Born: Ip Man* / 葉問前傳 [2010] and *Ip Man: The Final Fight* / 葉問: 終極一戰 [2013], as well as Wong Kar-wai's film, *The Grandmaster* / 一代宗師 [2012].[15] These films cover different periods of Ip's life, which can basically be divided into three parts: luxurious days in Foshan before the Second World War, difficult times during the Japanese invasion in the 1940s, and relatively steady life as a wing chun master in Hong Kong after the 1950s.

Although there are other kung fu films featuring wing chun in the genre – most notably *Shaolin Martial Arts* / 洪拳與詠春 [1974], *Warriors Two* / 贊先生與找錢華 [1978], *The Prodigal Son* / 敗家仔 [1981], and *Wing Chun* / 詠春 [1994], which I will discuss later in this article – Ip as a key figure in the development of wing chun was not previously emphasized. Rather, the focus in these films was on Ip's masters and grandmasters such as Chan Wah-shun, Ng Chung-so, Leung Chan, and Yim Wing-chun. Additionally, the wing chun in these earlier films is blended with other styles and 'only survive[s] in fragments' [Hunt 2003: 35]. As Hunt astutely points out, 'Hung [in *Warriors Two*] never lets wing chun orthodoxy get in the way of his performers' talents – Casanova Wong's taekwondo kicking [or] his own flips and somersaults' [Hunt 2003: 35]. Lastly, previous wing chun films highlighted the zhenshi tradition more than the shizan tradition. Influenced by the popularity of kung fu comedy in the late 1970s [Sek 1980: 33-34], they feature slapstick fight scenes which counteract combativity.

For as many interesting elements as there are to discuss in relation to the many Ip Man films that have been made to this point, this article focuses on the films starring Donnie Yen. When compared with, Dennis To (*The Legend is Born: Ip Man*), Anthony Wong (*Ip Man: The Final Fight*), and Tony Leung (*The Grandmaster*), Yen best encapsulates the idea of shizan due to his diverse martial arts background.[16] While traditional kung fu stars and authentic martial arts performances are present in other Ip Man films, such as Sammo Hung (as Chan Wah-shun, the first master of Ip Man) and Yuen Biao (as Ng Chung-so, the second master of Ip Man) in *The Legend is Born*, they bear closer resemblance to the zhenshi tradition.[17]

As mentioned earlier, Yen's early filmography in the late 1980s follows the shizan tradition. He is known as 'a favorite of genre purists for no-nonsense martial arts skills' and a critic of 'the "old school" of martial arts filmmaking that spends a lot of time and money on choreographing movements' [Stokes and Hoover 1999: 134-135]. Despite his training in traditional Chinese kung fu,[18] Yen is not keen on showcasing complex wushu forms and styles [Chan 2006: 157]. In terms of his filmography, Yen's introduction of MMA into his choreography since the mid-2000s was a milestone in the industry. As demonstrated in films such as *Killzone* and *Flash Point*, Yen carries on Bruce Lee's shizan vision.[19] Truly, these films have constructed Yen's shizan star persona, which in

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14   There are other films that link kung fu with the shizan tradition, such as **Man of Tai Chi** / 太極俠 [2013] and **Kung Fu Killers** / 一個人的武林 [2014]. These films deserve closer examination than can be provided in this article, but it is worth mentioning that both films feature traditional Chinese martial arts techniques while at the same time demonstrating a high degree of combativity.

15   It is reported that a seventh Ip Man film (the fourth in Donnie Yen's **Ip Man** series) is coming in 2017 with Yen reprising his role [Donnie Yen Official].

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16   Admittedly influenced by Bruce Lee [Lau 2013: 157], in addition to traditional kung fu training, Yen was also coached in other non-Chinese martial arts disciplines including, among others, taekwondo (6th Dan), karate, judo, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, muay thai, wrestling, kickboxing, and boxing [Stannard 2014; Donnie Yen Offical 2016].

17   In 2010, Donnie Yen was criticized by the producers and actors of **Ip Man: The Legend is Born** for his 'inauthentic' representation of wing chun as part of their marketing campaign [Apple Daily 2010]. This 'lack' of authenticity is evidence of Yen's unique synthesis of zhenshi and shizan, as well as evidence of the difficulties in apprehending the nature of his synthesis.

18   From his birth Yen received traditional martial arts training from his mother, Bow-sim Mark (麥寶嬋), who was a renowned taijiquan grandmaster [Stokes and Hoover 1999: 134]. Following in the footsteps of Jet Li, Yen was sent by his father to the Beijing Wushu Academy at 15 [Stokes and Hoover 1999: 135]. He is the first non-PRC Chinese to be admitted to the Beijing Wushu Academy [Stannard 2014].

19   These films aim at maximizing the shizan impact of the fight scenes. In **Killzone**, for example, there is a scene where Donnie Yen and Wu Jing fight without a preset choreographed sequence. Yen reveals in an interview, '[it is] more of a freestyle, realistic fighting … I'm gonna come at you like, say, 20 to 30 moves … and I want you to do something in return and attack me'. When Wu heard of the idea, he exclaimed, 'That's almost like real fighting' [Yen 2013].

turn contributes to the combativity of the *Ip Man* series. However, these dimensions require a separate discussion.[20]

Apart from Yen's stardom, another key area constituting the shizhan dimension of the series is the narrative. Wing chun is consistently portrayed as a practical style. In addition to the conventional nanpai vs. beipai conflict,[21] which Ip Man intends to transcend,[22] wing chun is compared with styles known for their practicality, such as Muay Thai and Western boxing in *Ip Man 3*, as a strategy to reinforce the shizhan image of the art.[23] Furthermore, the protagonist's pragmatism in teaching and practicing wing chun is also highlighted in *Ip Man*, when he instructs his students to stop reciting slogans and start learning how to hit their target.

For a complete analysis of the series' synthesis of the zhenshi and shizhan traditions, it is important to consider not only the action aesthetics but also the narrative and Yen's stardom. In terms of genre, the primary concern here is kung fu cinema, but not wuxia or martial arts action. Undoubtedly, there are *xia* (俠) elements in the series, which denotes 'chivalry, gallantry, qualities of knighthood, and heroism' [Teo 2009: 2]. Yet its emphasis on Southern kung fu styles differentiates the series from the swordplay tradition of wuxia films and the multidisciplinary techniques of martial arts action films. Also, while the shizhan tradition can be identified in other martial arts action films in Hong Kong (as well as in Hollywood), the primary goal of this article is to explore how the *Ip Man* series merges the zhenshi and shizhan traditions, offering a new vision of wu in kung fu cinema.

The next section of this article will examine key frameworks of kung fu cinema and discuss how wu has been suppressed in the zhenshi tradition. Then the concepts of kuai, hen, and zhun will be introduced alongside Bruce Lee's JKD philosophy and the principles of wing chun in order to address the shizhan dimension of kung fu cinema.

PROBLEMATIZING WU IN THE ZHENSHI TRADITION
WEN-WU, AUTHENTICITY, AND EXPRESSIVE AMPLIFICATION

Kung fu cinema is built on 'the spirit of realism' [Sek 1980: 28]. However, the connections between the concepts of the 'real' and the 'martial', or wu, deserve further scrutiny. First, the concept of wu is an 'ambiguous' concept. Kam Louie and Louise Edwards define it 'as a concept which embodies the power of military strength but also the wisdom to know when and when not to deploy this strength' [Louie and Edwards 1994: 142].[24] The ideal figure of wu masculinity is Guang Yu, a major character in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* [1522]. Louie later applies the term to Bruce Lee and his films as a way to demonstrate how wu has been 'transformed [by] Western (Hollywood) constructions of masculinity' [Louie 2002: 141]. Although wu can be applied to all kinds of martial arts films, it is crucial not to neglect the uniqueness of different subgenres. First, wu in Kwan Tak-hing's kung fu cinema is more restrictive than that of Bruce Lee's martial arts action films. Second, concerning action aesthetics, wu has disparate representational strategies in different subgenres, which I will explicate later in the essay.

With Hong Kong's unique political situation after 1949, Sek Kei points out that Hong Kong filmmaking in the 1950s 'retained close links with traditional Chinese culture'; in particular, kung fu cinema 'promulgate[s] the traditional Chinese martial arts, together with a distinctively Chinese philosophy' [Sek 1980: 28]. In other words, the virtuous dimensions of wu – the concept of *wude* (武 德; martial virtue)[25] – are transferred to the cinematic representation of kung fu.

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20   Studies of Yen have focused on his early filmography in the 1980s and 1990s [Stokes and Hoover 1999: 134-138], imitation of Bruce Lee [Li 2001: 526], and transnational stardom in Hollywood [Hunt 2003: 179; Lo 2005: 132; Gateward 2009: 52]. In most cases, Yen's name is only briefly mentioned as an additional example alongside stars like Jackie Chan and Jet Li, as he was not considered a prominent martial arts star before the **Ip Man** series. There has been increasing attention on Yen in recent studies of stardom. For examples, see [Hunt 2014] and [Funnell 2013].

21   In **Ip Man 2**, for example, when Ip is challenged by other masters in Hong Kong on a round table, he simply walks and jumps up there without any acrobatic movements. This creates a stark contrast with Northern masters who get on the table with specular somersaults.

22   In **Ip Man**, when Jin Shanzhao, the Northern master, announces that the Northern fist is defeated by the Southern one, Ip immediately replies, 'It's not the matter of the fist; it's a matter of the person'. This statement has two levels of meaning. First, Ip wants Jin to humbly accept his defeat and not find a pretext for it. He understands that Jin is not a representative of the Northern Fist, nor does Ip represent the south. Second, the Southern-Northern division is not important to Ip. What he values is **how** a person practices his martial arts, be it Southern kung fu or Northern wushu.

23   It is worth noting that the selection of non-Chinese martial arts disciplines is pertinent to the level of combativity. The selected disciplines have often been portrayed in the martial arts genre as the **opposite** of kung fu in their forms and application. Western boxing is associated with physical prowess, masculinity, and efficiency, which is the opposite of the kung fu represented in cinema (e.g. weak, feminine, and ornamental). On the other hand, Muay Thai has a connotation of brutality due to its lethal knee and elbow techniques. This image has been reinforced by the rise of Southeast Asian martial arts action films such as the **Ong Bak** series [2003-2010] and **The Raid** series [2011-2014].

24   Specifically, it embodies the 'seven virtues', which are: 'Suppressed violence, gathered in arms, protected what was great, established merit, gave peace to the people, harmonized the masses and propagated wealth' [Louise and Edwards 1994: 142].

25   **Wude** 'epitomize[s]... the traditional Confucian virtues' including **li** (禮; Propriety), **yi** (義; Righteousness), **ren** (忍; perseverance), **shu** (恕; forgiveness), **renai** (仁 愛; charitable love), and **heping** (和平; peace) [Yu 1980: 83].

Although kung fu cinema is meant to be set apart from the fantastical wuxia and to emphasize instead 'real' fighting techniques, conflict is not resolved through the brutal killing or open humiliation of one's opponent. It is not about martial prowess or winning street fights. At a deeper level, it accentuates philosophical and moral enlightenment through repetitive kung fu learning/practice [Sek 1980: 28].

As suggested by the Cantonese vernacular, the term 'kung fu' refers to an accumulation of skills through a long process [Teo 2009: 4]. It is not a shortcut that guarantees immediate results, but a persistent journey that a practitioner undertakes to expand their physical and mental limits while becoming a more 'cultured' person. In other words, kung fu not only inherently suppresses wu by highlighting the didactic dimension, it also features the promotion of wen as a strategy to further mitigate the emphasis of wu in kung fu cinema [Lau 1980: 3; Louie and Edwards 1994: 145].

Wen refers to 'genteel, refined qualities that were associated with the literary and artistic pursuits of classical scholars' [Louie and Edwards 1994: 141-142]. When translated to kung fu cinema, it constructs the literati persona of traditional kung fu masters. Contrary to Lee's bold display of his kung fu body, a traditional kung fu master is more conservative in attire. These characters often wear plain *changshan* (長衫; long gown), covering the body, as a way to demonstrate modesty and humility (as opposed to Guang Yu's wu warrior appearance).

The ideal wen role model is Confucius [Louie and Edwards 1994: 142]. Such a persona is literally transplanted into the original archetype of the kung fu master, from Wong Fei-hung and Huo Yuanjia to Ip Man. Along with poetry and calligraphy, the 'literary pursuit' of kung fu masters is reflected in their martial arts philosophy – the teaching of wude. As Louie states, 'although manifestations of power such as physical size, martial skills and sheer brutality are indicators of wu masculinity, in themselves they are not sufficient to make the "real" *yingxiong*' [Louie 2002: 29]. A 'real' kung fu *yingxiong* (英雄; hero) should be able to teach wude through his kung fu.

Although Confucian humanism is present in Louie's original formulation of wu [Louie and Edwards 1994: 142], the fostering of wen constructs the scholarly presence of a kung fu master and further restricts the wu dimension of kung fu cinema. Undoubtedly, Wong Fei-hung is a pioneering kung fu hero that attempts to merge wu with

wen,[26] which is considered 'the masculine ideal' [Louie and Edwards 1994: 141-142]. However, the wu dimension in the Wong Fei-hung films has largely been restrained and displaced inasmuch as zhongwen qingwu ('place greater value on wen than wu') is the prevalent ideology in Chinese culture [Louie and Edwards 1994: 145]. In other words, the concept of wu in Wong Fei-hung's kung fu cinema (the zhenshi traditon) is different from that in Bruce Lee's martial arts action cinema (the shizan traditon) in which the former is more restrictive in demonstrating martial prowess and physical strength.

Apart from the traditional stigma, the shift from the martial to the metaphysical is also a result of the decreasing usefulness of kung fu in modernity. Viewing the 'kung fu imaginary' in Hong Kong cinemas as a 'self-dismantling operation that denies its own effectiveness in modern life' [Li 2001: 515], Siu-leung Li argues that kung fu shifts its focus from the martial to the art [Li 2001: 523]. This 'artistic turn' not only satisfies the demand of wen scholars and the suppression of wu, but it can also be considered as an approach to justify the teaching and learning of kung fu in the modern era where artillery predominantly replaces martial arts as the most effective way of killing.

Second, wu in the zhenshi tradition is problematized by the slippery notion of authenticity/realism, which has been the core of the study of kung fu cinema since the Wong Fei-hung series [Sek 1980: 28; Teo 2009: 70; Bordwell 2011: 129-130].[27] In this, a number of frameworks have been formulated in the past four decades. In 1980, for instance, Tony Rayns argued that 'it is imperative to show protagonists full-length if their movements are to constitute the dynamics of the [martial arts performance]' [Rayns 1980: 112]. Rayns's idea of 'full-length movements' has become the basis for later scholars' emphasis on the importance of long takes. Two decades later, Siu-leung Li proposed that authenticity is the central motif differentiating martial arts from other genres in Hong Kong cinema, which:

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26   It should also be noted that wu and wen are not mutually exclusive. As Louie astutely points out, Confucius was 'a proponent of archery and charioteering and encouraged the development of these wu arts in his students' education' [Louie and Edwards 1994: 143]. Thus, the issue is one of degree.

27   Apart from martial arts performance, the notion of 'authenticity' can also be approached from the perspective of identity [Hunt 2003: 22]. This reading focuses on the ideological and political connotations of kung fu cinema [Lo 2005: 81; Abbas 2006: 83]. The use of long takes and full-body framing in Bruce Lee's films, for example, is read as a triumph of Western 'realism' over 'Oriental fantasies' [Chiao 1981: 33]. This kind of allegorical reading of kung fu cinema is particularly common in the late 1990s when Hong Kong was influenced by its reunification with China.

relies to a great extent on 'accurate and faithful'
representations of the 'authentic' performance of kung fu itself
on screen, and on the extent to which dangerous stunts in
kung fu-action films are to be performed real with no cheating
camera work.
[Li 2001: 522]

In addition, of course, there is also Hunt's aforementioned tripartite
scheme of authenticity. However, the notion of authenticity in kung
fu cinema has been questioned by scholars. Stephen Teo questions
the epistemological validity of the term. He asserts that the idea
of 'real kung fu' is only a fantasy – a 'representation […] involving
different forms of resemblance and performance and a high degree
of choreography' [Teo 2009: 70]. He also contends that the illusion
is not solely created by filmmakers, as moviegoers are 'complicit in
their expectation that what they are seeing is real' [Teo 2009: 70].
Gina Marchetti, on the other hand, questions the idea of 'pure style'
in martial arts cinema [Marchetti 2014: 1]; she pointedly argues that
the so-called 'kung fu' of Bruce Lee is a mixture of Japanese/Korean
kicking techniques and Western boxing footwork rather than a faithful
representation of wing chun or of any other Southern Chinese martial
arts schools [Marchetti 2014: 2]. Her critique demands a clearer
definition of different unarmed combat traditions – zhenshi and shizan
– within Hong Kong martial arts cinema. In short, the ambiguity and
complexity of authenticity/realism have been the center of the debate
for more than two decades.

Rather than rejecting 'real kung fu' as a cinematic illusion at the outset,
it is more constructive to explore the relationship between authentic
kung fu performance and its representations on screen.

As the latest reinvention of kung fu cinema, the *Ip Man* series
problematizes existing frameworks insofar as the shizan dimension of
kung fu performance is not sufficiently addressed. First, while all real
kung fu techniques are archivally authentic [Hunt 2003: 29], they are
not equally efficient in demonstrating combativity. There is a martial
hierarchy in kung fu cinema (and in martial arts cinema at large)
structured by the practicality of the styles represented. Techniques with
higher combative values often receive more attention in the genre.
In Lau Kar-leung (Liu Chia-Liang)'s works in the 1970s, for example,
external hard styles (e.g. Shaolin) are more frequently and positively
represented than internal soft styles (e.g. taijiquan). Moreover, priority
is also given to Southern styles with clear, straightforward attacks rather
than to Northern styles with symbolic and ornamental forms. This
nanpai vs. beipai discourse is present in *Ip Man 2*, where it is arranged
for Ip Man to fight with Northern masters from *bagua zhang* (八卦;
eight trigram palm) and *tanglang quan* (螳螂; praying mantis fist).

Furthermore, Hunt's notion of archival authenticity is more applicable
to kung fu cinema than to other subgenres, such as martial arts action.
In Bruce Lee's films and in Jackie Chan's crime thrillers, such as the
Police Story series / 警察故事 [1985-2013], the represented martial
arts techniques are often multidisciplinary. Although there has been
a revival of archival authenticity since the 2000s in martial arts action
films such as Muay Thai in *Ong Bak* [2002] and MMA in *Killzone*
[2005], the pursuit of archival authenticity has been kung fu cinema's
primary obsession for more than half a century.[28] In other words, the
idea of 'authenticity' is a relative concept that is historically, culturally
and genre specific, which I will further elaborate along with the notion
of hen.

Second, while traditional filmmaking methods that guarantee 'cinematic
authenticity' in kung fu cinema such as the use of long takes are present
in the *Ip Man* series [Hunt 2003: 35], it has a different emphasis. Rather
than featuring extended and highly complex fight sequences, often
combined with manipulation of surrounding objects in the mise-en-
scène, fight sequences and action choreography in the *Ip Man* series are
more direct and lethal in the context of kung fu cinema. In other words,
the long take itself should not be the focus; rather, what is included in
the long take is crucial in the formulation of the *shizhan* paradigm.

Third, the *Ip Man* series has a different approach towards 'corporeal
authenticity' [Hunt 2003: 39-41]. It is worth noting that the examples
Hunt uses in his formulation are not from the kung fu films of the 1950s
(e.g. Kwan Tak-hing) or the 1970s (e.g. Lau Kar-leung and Yuen Woo-
ping). They are mostly the martial arts action films of Jackie Chan and
Sammo Hung in the 1980s. This begs the question of what corporeal
authenticity means in kung fu cinema where there is less emphasis on
dangerous action replays and outtakes, and more on hand-to-hand
combat. It is crucial to clarify the specific ways that the kung fu genre
constructs corporeal authenticity when compared with martial arts
action films in general. As I will explain in the next section, corporeal
authenticity is a specific concept depending on the needs of different
martial arts styles and a new framework is required to account for the *Ip
Man* series' engagement with the *shizhan* paradigm.

The last aspect that problematizes *wu* in the *zhenshi* tradition is the idea
of 'expressive amplification' in its cinematic representation of kung fu
[Bordwell 2001: 75]. While the various notions of authenticity above

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28   Although there are plenty of films featuring different non-Chinese martial arts
styles in the 1970s, such as Muay Thai in Feng Huang's **The Tournament** / 中泰拳擊生死
戰 [1974] and Western boxing in Zhang Che's **Duel of Fist** / 拳擊 [1971], the represented
styles are a fusion of kung fu, boxing, karate, and taekwondo. Contrary to Lau Kar-leung's
kung fu films, archival authenticity in these works is questionable [Hunt 2003: 35].

advocate real-time performance with minimal technological mediation, David Bordwell takes a different approach and investigates how the cinematic apparatus plays a significant role in Hong Kong action cinema. Hunt's idea of 'transparent mediation' [2003: 35], therefore, should not be understood in absolute terms, as martial arts cinema is never 'transparent' from the beginning and involves 're-presentation' of real-time performance.

Hong Kong action cinema tends to 'expressively amplify' body movements with clarity and creates a strong sense of 'visceral arousal' among viewers [Bordwell 2001: 75, 90]. In other words, the authenticity in kung fu cinema is not merely an objective recording of real-time performance, but also involves a high degree of mediation or intervention. The key issue is *how* authenticity can be constructed through the cinematic apparatus.

Coining the term 'expressive amplification' as the underlying 'energy' of Hong Kong action cinema, Bordwell identifies several key film techniques that concretely amplify actions. These include the 'pause-burst-pause' pattern, rapid zoom, overlapping/repetitive editing, and the audio effects of fighting [2001: 80]. In brief, action aesthetics in the *zhenshi* paradigm are generally based on the interactive collaboration between Hunt's formulation of authenticity and Bordwell's notion of expressive amplification.

Although expressive amplification is useful in dissecting Hong Kong action aesthetics in general, it remains imperative that the specificity of different martial arts subgenres in Hong Kong cinema be addressed. Rather than a unified whole, *wuxia* in the 1960s (e.g. King Hu, Zheng Che), kung fu in the 1970s (e.g. Bruce Lee, Lau Kar-leung, and Yuen Woo-ping), and crime thrillers (e.g. Jackie Chan and John Woo) all have different conventions, developments, and aesthetic concerns. The notion of authenticity, as previously discussed, is especially crucial to kung fu cinema, in which unmediated performance of real kung fu technique is the top priority.

Wuxia cinema, by contrast, gives more room for imagination and highlights fantastical actions aided by somersaults and trampoline work [Teo 2009: 71]. For example, Bordwell argues that King Hu reconfigures *wuxia* actions in 'imperfect' ways that make them 'partially indiscernible'. This includes changing 'the opacities of the setting', playing with 'the bounding frame', and incorporating 'the over-informative long shots, the disorienting whip-pans, and the elliptical cutting' [2000b: 119]. In other words, the 'degree' of expressive amplification varies in different martial arts genres. Using the monolithic idea of 'expressive amplification' to encompass all cases is over-generalizing and omits the specificity of different subgenres.

Furthermore, Bordwell's framework is partly derived from the theatrical/operatic traditions, including Eisenstein's theories on theatrical performance as well as elements from *jingju* (京劇; Peking Opera) [Bordwell 2001: 73]. He traces Hong Kong action cinema's emphasis on the 'graceful body' to the soviet films of the 1920s, which were derived from the 'gymnastics of popular theatre', emphasizing the 'recoil' and 'expressivity' of acting [2000b: 78]. Similarly, the rhythmic 'pause-burst-pause' pattern is partly derived from the operatic ideas of *chang zuo nian da* (唱作念打; Singing, Acting, Recitation, and Acrobatics).

As I will elaborate further, two tendencies can be noticed in the *zhenshi* tradition – huge, fast movement such as continuous somersaults (later aided by undercranking in New Wave martial arts films) and clear, rhythmic movements (exemplified by Lau's works in the 1970s). These are methods that aid the audience's comprehension and apprehension of the performance in a theatre. The framework's intrinsic and intimate connection to the notions and practices of Chinese opera, however, is inherently contradictory to the *shizhan* tradition. The use of acrobatic techniques and rhythmic movements is more performative than combative. Accordingly, Bordwell's framework becomes inadequate for the *Ip Man* series, as it not only embodies the theatrical and operatic, but also the practical and the combative.

To further examine the relationship between theatricality and *shizhan*, it is crucial to consider the dialogical relationship of *jingju* and *beipai*. According to Lau Kar-leung, *beipai* is characterized by operatic elements, such as showcasing somersaults and leaps in 'dramatic lion dancing, a staple of folk ritual used to celebrate the Lunar New Year, bless new enterprises, and keep martial arts students in top shape without engaging in actual combat' [2009: 77-78]. Although this affiliation to operatic and performative arts can also be interpreted as the genre's inherent pursuit of the *wen* ideals, which highlights both 'literary achievement' and 'artistic grace' [Louie 2002: 17], the use of expressive movements largely downplays the combative side of kung fu performance.

This is not to say that *beipai* has no place in the *shizhan* tradition. In fact, Northern masters are invaluable assets for spectacular movements such as 'trampoline jumps and aerial somersaults' [Sek 1980: 35], which are employed in Bruce lee's films. Especially after the death of Bruce Lee, *beipai* started to gain prominence as kung fu cinema was seeking to reinvent itself by combining 'Northern opera techniques and acrobatics' with *nanpai* Southern kung fu styles [Sek 1980: 34]. This clarifies that the relationship between *nanpai* and *beipai*, *zhenshi* and *shizhan*, in martial arts cinema is not mutually exclusive, but a matter of degree.

The search for inspiration from within operatic traditions has had a huge impact to the development of the genre. Since the late 1970s, Yuen Woo-ping further reinvented the genre by experimenting with kung fu comedy, as exemplified by *Drunken Master* / 醉拳 [1978], which is characterized by 'slapstick' and 'the amalgamation of flowery kung-fu tricks' [Sek 1980: 35]. When compared with the early Wong Fei-hung series and Lau's kung fu films featuring Shaolin styles, Yuen's kung fu comedy has a higher degree of artificiality and theatricality, involving the complex use of props/weapons, acrobatic movements, dramatic facial expressions, etc.

Although Lau's *nanpai* kung fu films are considered the opposite of *beipai* due to his emphasis on authentic representations of Southern kung fu styles, such as those derivative of Shaolin martial arts in *The 36ᵗʰ Chamber of Shaolin* / 少林三十六房 [1978], he does not share the same *shizhan* ideals with martial arts stars such as Bruce Lee and Donnie Yen. First, despite his substantial knowledge of Hung Gar (a prominent Southern style), Lau was greatly influenced by the operatic tradition after his father's chorographic work in Kwan Tak-hing's Wong Fei-hung films [72]. This is not to disparage Hung Gar as an impractical style. Rather, it is to observe that operatic and performative contexts that gave birth to martial arts cinema have significantly influenced its cinematic representations.

Even though Lau's films are known for their 'authenticity' (especially the archival aspect) [Hunt 2003: 29], they are theatrically expressive and highly rhythmic in terms of choreography (i.e. the pause-burst-pause pattern). Furthermore, Lau clearly aims to preserve the region's martial arts heritage and traditions. Many of these traditions are performative in nature, such as lion-dancing. Another example is the five animal styles – dragon, snake, tiger, leopard and white crane – derived from Hung Gar, which are symbolically expressive. Therefore, despite the genre's stress on authenticity in general, expressivity and theatricality play a central role in traditional kung fu cinema, from Kwan Tak-hing, Lau Kar-leung to Yuen Woo-ping.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the *shizhan* paradigm remained marginal due to the emergence of Hong Kong New Wave cinema and the increasing reliance on technological mediation, such as explicit uses of undercranking and wirework. Films reflecting the *shizhan* ideals such as Donnie Yen's *Tiger Cage* / 特警屠龍 series [1988-1989], and *In the Line of Duty* / 皇家師姐4: 直擊證人 [1989] were overshadowed by New Wave kung fu films such as *Iron Monkey* / 鐵馬騮 [1993] and

Once Upon a Time in China / 黃飛雄 [1991].[29] This is not to mention the incorporation and digitalization of kung fu by Hollywood from the late 1990s onward through blockbusters such as *The Matrix* [1999]. In brief, Hong Kong martial arts cinema's emphasis on cinematic theatricality and technological mediation in the past few decades have limited the possibility of exploring the *shizhan* dimension of traditional Chinese kung fu [Hunt 2003: 24].

To address the combative dimension of kung fu cinema, the *Ip Man* series highlights three crucial dimensions of the *shizhan* tradition – *kuai*, *hen*, and *zhun*. As I will further unpack, these three concepts can best elucidate the connection between the principles of wing chun and Bruce Lee's martial arts philosophy, hence consolidating the synthesis between *zhenshi* and *shizhan* in the *Ip Man* series. Moreover, these three notions are key criteria in the Cantonese vernacular reflecting the idea of 'pragmatism'.

Similar to the word 'kung fu', which refers to accumulation of skills in everyday language, *kuai*, *hen*, *zhun* are a well-known tripartite scheme describing 'practicality' and 'efficiency' in Hong Kong. Commonly used in the Guangdong regions, these terms are evoked when one intends to highlight the execution of skills in a highly pragmatic manner. While they have been commonly used to describe the combativity of martial arts techniques within Chinese-language journalism and publications [Mak 2015: 146; Chen and Mai 2010: 31], systematic analysis of each of these concepts in relation to Hong Kong martial arts cinema has not yet emerged. As I will demonstrate in the following paragraphs, wing chun is exemplary for manifesting the above concepts, due to its preference for simplicity and efficiency.

It is worth noting that the notions of *kuai*, *hen*, and *zhun* are not mutually exclusive. In fact, one element often plays a key role in the execution of the other(s). For example, *zhun* (precision) supplements *kuai* (speed) in the sense that the pure pursuit of speed is futile. In the words of Barry Allen, it is 'mainly a matter of being able to perform complicated serial movements in one beat, one uninterrupted, interpenetrating measure, whose time is neither fast nor slow but *right*' [Allen 2015: 100, emphasis in the original]. To take down an opponent efficiently, the strike needs to be brutal, but also swift and accurate. The notions of *kuai*, *hen*, and *zhun* supplement each other in practice.

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29   The beginning of Yen's career was distanced from the **shizhan** paradigm that accentuates practicality and combativity. His debut in **Drunken Tai Chi** / 笑太極 [1984] is an imitation of Jackie Chan's kung fu comedy.

KUAI 快
REDEFINING THE SPEED OF KUNG FU PERFORMANCE

The concept of *kuai* highlights the crucial role that speed plays in combat. As Bruce Lee writes in the *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*: 'A good technique includes quick changes, great variety and speed' [Lee 1975: 3]. This is emphasized in *Ip Man 3* when Frank (Mike Tyson) alludes to a Chinese motto regarding real combat – 'Wai Faai Bat Po' (唯快不破; only speed is invincible). The fight between Ip and Frank is set up to discover 'whose fists are the fastest', those of wing chun or those of boxing.

This pursuit of speed is essential for real combat and has been exemplified by Bruce Lee himself. Lee's punches were around 50 milliseconds, compared to the 0.15 seconds of an average martial arts practitioner [Glover 1976: 54]. His movements were so fast that they can only be seen by 'viewing the film one frame at a time' [92]. In fact, speed is not merely about increasing the difficulty of blocking. As power equals force times speed, the damage a punch or a kick inflicts also depends on its velocity [57]. 'A powerful athlete is not a strong athlete,' Lee argued, 'but one who can exert his strength quickly' [1975: 46].

What makes wing chun stand out in *nanpai* is its particular emphasis on speed. The technique highlights directness in punching and takes the shortest travelling distance in attack [Glover 1976: 53; Ip, Lu, and Pang 2009: 50-51]. When compared with conventional boxing techniques such as the hook, cross, and uppercut, wing chun's straight punch from the central line of the body has a shorter travelling path, and hence a quicker delivery. In other words, the rapid hand movements on screen is not solely a result of cinematic effect, but reflective of the style's principles. According to Stephen Teo, wing chun is so 'short and abrupt' that it 'take[s] advantage of the tight, narrow streets and alleyways of Guangzhou where the martial art originated' [2009: 79].

Moreover, speed in the martial arts genre is often mediated to enhance the impact of a performance. However, it is pivotal to preserve the real speed of martial arts performance in the *shizhan* paradigm. While undercranking was commonly used in the 1980s and 1990s to increase the speed (hence apparent power) of body movements, it is not explicitly employed in the fight sequences of the *Ip Man* series.

Earlier kung fu films featuring the same style, such as *The Prodigal Son* and *Wing Chun*, replaced real-time fight scenes with undercranked motion at hyperspeed. By contrast, the *Ip Man* series aims to increase the real-time speed of the performance, so as to emphasize physical skill. For instance, at the start of *Ip Man*, Donnie Yen performs 13 moves in 3 seconds (in only two shots) during his fight with Jin Shanzhao.

Although conventional strategies of amplification such as constructive editing and slow motion have often been employed, there is little or no undercranking of action that makes Ip's hand movements visually faster on screen. Admittedly, earlier wing chun films in the 1970s, such as *Shaolin Martial Arts* and *Warriors Two*, place less emphasis on undercranking. Influenced by the performative tradition, their movements are more rhythmic and clear-cut. This creates a stark contrast with the *Ip Man* series' emphasis on real-time, high speed movements in fight sequences.

Additionally, the notion of *kuai* can also be complemented by wing chun's continuous yet subtle movements. Rather than showing clear-cut, one-by-one movement, like Hung Gar, wing chun is flexible, variable, and highly complex in attack and defense [Chow and Spangler 1982: 59]. In addition to continuity, the action choreography also accentuates the style's subtlety and refrains from showcasing spectacular movements, such as Jet Li's 'shadowless kick' that appeared in *Once Upon a Time in China*. As Bruce Lee argued: 'Except in rare cases, all movements should be made as small as possible, that is with the least deviation of the hand necessary to induce the opponent to react' [Lee 1975: 196]. Huge and clear-cut movements are technically inefficient as they would easily expose one's weakness in combat situations.

Furthermore, the series' emphasis of *kuai* advocates a consistency between martial arts style and choreography, as well as between the principles of a style and its cinematic representation. The former is relatively easy to follow, albeit not all kung fu cinema would take it seriously. For example, Jet Li's signature kung fu stance in *Once Upon a Time in China* bears greater resemblance to taijiquan than Hung Gar. In the case of wing chun, its representation relies on the intricacy of choreography and the performance of highly complex, continuous hand movements. In a sense, there is an argument here that martial arts styles should not merely serves as a signifier of difference in choreography (i.e. differentiating one style/film from another); instead, different styles require different representational strategies (e.g. fast and complex choreography for wing chun, birds-eye view for the circular movement of *bagua*).[30] In this regard, the success of the *Ip Man* series is that it showcases a traditional style that is inherently connected to speed and hence to combativity.

In brief, speed is the key motif enhancing the combativity of the *Ip Man* series. This emphasis on speed is embodied in the dexterity and intricacy of wing chun forms and attack patterns.

30　Barrowman's discussion of 'martial suture' with reference to the films of Steven Seagal is a relevant example here. He argues that the specificity of grappling techniques demands a new kind of action aesthetics [Barrowman 2014].

HEN 狠
RENEGOTIATING THE MARTIAL LIMITS OF KUNG FU CINEMA

The concept of *hen* (brutality) refers to a fighter's ability to 'give all he has, all the time' [Lee 1975: 69].[31] In real combat, *hen* can be understood as the use of the most brutal and lethal techniques, often combined with strong force/power to create 'devastating attacks' [Lee 1975: 69]. Cinematically, this idea is manifested through the lethality of wing chun in the series, where fight scenes are 'gritty and brutal, keeping special effects to a minimum' [Judkins and Nielson 2015: 4].

Before analyzing the series' fight scenes, the concept of brutality requires further scrutiny. It is a relative concept that needs to be read in the right context. When Wu Pang made *The Story of Wong Fei-hung: Part I* / 黃飛鴻正傳上集之鞭風滅燭 [1949], it was considered to be the most 'realistic' and 'authentic' representation of martial arts to date, as the film was contrasted with the fantastical *shenguai wuxia* of the 1920s [Teo 2009: 72]. Similarly, the 'new-style' Mandarin wuxia in the 1960s and 1970s could be considered more 'real' and 'brutal' than its Cantonese counterpart in that specific context. Examples include Zhang Che's *yanggang* (陽剛; staunch masculinity) and Mandarin *wuxia* films such as *The Assassin* / 大刺客 [1967] and *Vengeance* / 報仇 [1970], which are known for their 'spectacles of bloodletting and physical mutilation' [Yip 2014: 86].

Just as 'realism' is a relative concept [Barrowman 2014], there is no one single universal standard of 'brutality' applicable to all martial arts genres and contexts. *Wuxia*, kung fu, and martial arts action have different standards, understandings, and interpretations of violence. So the tension between theatricality and practicality, *zhenshi* and *shizhan*, authenticity and combativity, needs to be carefully examined.

The brutality of the *Ip Man* series, therefore should be read against other kung fu films (rather than *wuxia* and martial arts action) featuring traditional masters and Southern styles, produced from 1949 to the 2000s. The closest point of comparison is Wong Fei-hung and Hung Gar, from Kwan Tak-hing (*The Story of Wong Fei-hung*), Jackie Chan (*Drunken Master*), to Jet Li (*Once Upon a Time in China*).

As explained earlier, while kung fu cinema has highlighted concrete hand-to-hand combat since its conception, its goal is not to illustrate

the lethality of kung fu techniques. Rather, it seeks to promote moral enlightenment. In light of this, the *Ip Man* series also attempts to combine the combative dimension with the philosophical aspect of Chinese kung fu [Louie and Edwards 1994: 135]. While Wong Fei-hung has been considered an archetype of this ideal merger, there are certain limitations to his martial capabilities. An audience would never see Wong Fei-hung demonstrate brutal and lethal kung fu techniques, even in the name of the most just cause. Ip Man, by contrast, attempts to merge the seemingly irreconcilable.

Yet, at the same time, Ip is consistently portrayed as a traditional kung fu master, demonstrating wude. In *Ip Man*, when Master Liu, the Southern Chinese martial artist, comes to Ip's mansion and demands *biwu* (比武; a kung fu duel), Ip invites him to have dinner with his family and then arranges a 'closed-door match' so that Master Liu's reputation would not be tarnished by his defeat. This code continues to be featured in *Ip Man 3* when Ip Man teaches Bruce Lee (Chan Kwok-kwan) the importance of humility by opening the door as a gesture of acceptance (rather than rejection) or when he fights Cheung Tin-chi in his school without the presence of students and journalists. In the latter case, even Ip's wife, Cheung Wing-sing, has to wait outside during the duel. The only two witnesses of the duel are Ip and Cheung's sons, who are secretly watching from behind a staircase. They learn from their fathers the importance of wude in biwu, which is the core of the zhenshi traditon.

This is in sharp contrast with Jin Shanzhao in *Ip Man*, the Northern Chinese martial artist, who seeks to publicly humiliate other masters in front of their students. Violating the code of humility, he challenges kung fu masters in Foshan as a way to make a name for himself. He brutally smashes the forehead of a Dragon Fist master and uses the back of his sword to crush the head of a Choi Lee Fat master. In both cases, there is an explicit display of blood and injuries.

In traditional kung fu cinema, there is an implicit understanding that the martial dimension of kung fu needs to be suppressed and that the techniques used in combat should be not lethal. This is because the exhibition of violence contradicts the genre's inherent connection to *wude*, or Confucian humanism. This differentiates the genre from Bruce Lee's martial arts action films and Zhang Che's gory *wuxia* films. The purpose of *wu* is not to physically harm other kung fu masters, but to compete based on the code of honor and respect. Jin's violation of *wude* vicariously enhances Ip Man's persona as a respectful master following Confucian codes of conduct.

Against this backdrop, it is important to note that Ip is not reserved in using lethal techniques in combat situations. In *Ip Man*, he requests

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31   In Cantonese, the term can also refer to determination or firmness. To fully capture its meaning, it can be translated as 'brutal resolution'. When a person is described as being **hen**, it means that she demonstrates a strong will to achieve her goal, even through ruthless means. For the sake of simplicity and concision, I will use 'brutality' instead.

to challenge ten karate black belt masters in a dojo after witnessing the brutal murder of an honorable Chinese kung fu master. As a place containing Bruce Lee's 'spectre' [Bowman 2013: 171], the dojo reminds viewers of Lee's brutal battles with Japanese martial artists in *Fist of Fury* / 精武門 [1972]. Following Lee's nationalistic legacy, Ip not only reproduces the classic scene, but he actually escalates Lee's ferocity to another level. Instead of squawking in fury, the silent Ip unleashes his rage through brutal techniques: arm and hip dislocations, stamping on necks, breaking spines, punching throats, and smashing heads, etc. To amplify the impact of the strikes, the audience can clearly hear the sound of cracking bones and joints. The visual horror of a dislocated hip joint is shown in a frontal full-body medium shot.

In terms of action aesthetics, these ruthless representations offer a stark contrast to the harmonious tradition of the Wong Fei-hung films, where there was 'a noticeable absence of physical violence on the narrative surface' [Garcia 1980: 129]. Despite his demonstration of real techniques, Wong places more emphasis on Confucian humanism rather than on the effectiveness of his kung fu. But when Ip fights the last karateka in the dojo, he holds his head and keeps punching the forehead and nose until he dies. Even with the 'just' cause of avenging his comrade, this kind of brutality is rare in the history of kung fu cinema, in which the code of *wude* is the moral imperative. A traditional kung fu master should not be overwhelmed by rage and must always demonstrate restraint in combat.

Moreover, the notion of *hen* is not simply represented by visual gore, but also by aestheticized violence in the form of intellectual montage. In the last fight scene of *Ip Man*, Ip keeps punching Miura (Hiroyuki Ikeuchi) against a light post on stage and basically turns him into a wing chun wooden dummy. On the one hand, it is a violent scene because Miura at that point is already beyond his ability to fight back and his white uniform is increasingly soaked with his own blood. However, rather than showing mercy or ceasing the attack at the 'right moment', Ip keeps punching Miura until the back of his head smashes into the light post behind him and causes a concussion, which kills him on the spot.

At the same time, the screen is juxtaposed with flashbacks of Ip, in slow motion, practicing wing chun on a wooden dummy in an empty wing chun school. This montage is an aesthetic juxtaposition of violence and quotidian training. The tranquility and solitude of Ip in an empty school, as well as his elegant wing chun movements, are juxtaposed with Miura's agonizing, bloody face. The seemingly basic, routine wing chun forms are now imbued with a sense of ferocity and cruelty. Transcending mechanical amplification (e.g. close-up) and gory visuals of the injuries, the *Ip Man* series also stresses conceptual and

aestheticized violence through intellectual montage.

Granted, the narrative of *Ip Man* plays a key role in Ip's expansion of *wu* or 'violation' of *wude*. Apart from demonstrating the practicality of wing chun technique through violence, Ip's witnessing of a cold-blooded murder and the necessity of employing effective strikes in a 'one vs. ten duel' helps to justify the lethality of his attacks. While similar nationalistic narratives are not uncommon in previous kung fu films, such as *Once Upon a Time in China*, the deployment of *wu* is still very restricted. In that film, after Wong Fei-hung (Jet Li) witnesses the tragic death of Master Yim, who was shot down by American soldiers, he finishes off the captain, who ordered the killing, by 'firing' a bullet from his fingers (in a highly mythicized manner). In comparison, the amplification of violence associates Ip Man with the *shizhan* paradigm of Bruce Lee more than the *zhenshi* paradigm of Wong Fei-hung (both Kwan Tak-hing and Jet Li).

Although brutal scenes can be found in previous wing chun films, such as the endings of *Warriors Two* and *The Prodigal Son*, there are subtle differences. In these films, there is a deviation from the traditional master persona. Fei Chun (Sammo Hung) and The Cashier (Casanova Wong) in *Warriors Two*, as well as Leung Chang (Yuen Biao) in *The Prodigal Son* are portrayed as insurgent, impulsive, and immature adolescents, which in turn justify the films' demonstration of graphic violence.

Commenting on Bruce Lee's problematic and contradictory identity as a kung fu master, Cheng Yu points out that 'physical strength and violence gave [Lee] a separate code ethics' [Yu 1984: 25]. In other words, the protagonists in previous wing chun and martial arts action films require some distance from the traditional grandmaster persona. Ip Man is a rare case in that he is capable of demonstrating lethal combat techniques while maintaining the literati aura.

Simply put, the *Ip Man* series proposes that a traditional kung fu master, despite his scholarly presence, is also capable of brutal execution. As discussed in detail, this accentuation of *hen* needs to be read in the context of kung fu cinema where there is a denigration of *wu* (martial valour) and an accentuation of *wen* (cultural-attainment) [Louie 2002: 4]. Compared with Wong Fei-hung and Bruce Lee, Ip is a character presenting a well-balanced view of authenticity and combativity, *zhenshi* and *shizhan*, *wen* and *wu*. Hence he is becoming a key figure in the development of Hong Kong martial arts cinema.

ZHUN 準
RECASTING THE PERFORMATIVE AS THE PRAGMATIC

Although the literal translation of *zhun* is precision, its implication is to end a fight as quickly as possible by hitting the right targets at the right time. Bruce Lee stresses the importance of *zhun* in an interview,

> **In kung fu, it always involves a very fast motion… It's what we meant by simplicity, same thing in striking and everything. It has to be based on a very minimum motion, so that everything would be directly expressed. One motion, and he's gone… [Hong Kong Film Archive 1999: 46]**

In other words, every attack needs to be precise and effective. Rather than prolonging a fight, a better strategy is to create 'devastating attacks' through accurate movements and end the fight in a split second [Lee 1975: 69]. As mentioned before, the notions of *kuai*, *hen*, and *zhun* often combine to deliver the best result. Cinematically, the concept is translated as the deployment of brief and concise action choreography, manifesting the significance of efficiency in real combat.

Despite the popularity of Bruce Lee's *shizhan* martial arts action films in the early 1970s, the kung fu genre soon turned to comedic kung fu action after Lee's death. This was exemplified by the works of Yuen Woo-ping, Jackie Chan, and Sammo Hung. Imitating the movements of 'animals, outlaws, heroes, assassins, immortals, and deities', kung fu has been perceived as 'ornamental' and not 'functional' in real combat [Farrer 2011: 221]. Southern kung fu techniques such as the five animal styles of Hung Gar are highly stylized in form. Contrary to western martial arts, Chinese kung fu does not 'solely function for combative training' [2011: 221]. It is also part of the performative tradition in rituals and festive celebrations.

Aaron D. Anderson argues that Jackie Chan's kung fu performances should not be considered 'representations of actual physical violence, but rather as danced spectacles' [2009: 192]. Drawing inspirations from Charlie Chaplin, Chan himself describes his fighting philosophy as dance-like. 'I want to show audiences fighting is an art,' he stresses, 'It's not like, "I want to kill you". It's an art' [Chan 1998]. While Chan's unique choreography style has aesthetic and artistic value due to his creative interaction with the environment (i.e. another instance that transfigures *wu* into *wen*), it inevitably undermines its perceived combativity. With Chan's popularity in Euro-American markets, his complicated dance-like choreography and elaborate fight scenes reinforce the stereotype that Chinese kung fu is more performative than practical.

However, the Ip Man series turns this stereotype upside down and highlights the *shizhan* dimension of Chinese kung fu. Rather than showcasing fancy, ornamental techniques to extend the spectacle, Ip seeks to end every fight as soon as possible by deploying lethal techniques. Of the ten karateka Ip fights in *Ip Man*, he knocks out three in two seconds, one in three seconds, five in four seconds, and one in five seconds.

As argued, what differentiates the *shizhan* approach from the traditional *zhenshi* one is that fight choreography needs to be simple yet effective. One way to achieve this is to reduce the time spent on individual opponents in mass fight scenes. This can be achieved by the deployment of critical strikes combining *kuai* (speed), *hen* (brutality), and *zhun* (precision). Since wing chun does not involve large movement anyway, this increase in speed and repetition of punches is the style's unique method of demonstrating impact and power.[32]

The idea of *zhun* can be understood at the micro as well as at the macro level. Not only does the series have more incisive fight choreography, the fight scenes are also significantly shorter than in previous wing chun films. Except for the boxing match in *Ip Man 2*, other featured fights in the series are all around two minutes, such as Ip Man versus the ten karate masters (one minute 28 seconds) Ip Man versus Miura (two minutes 17 seconds), Hung Chun-nam (Sammo Hung – two minutes 15 seconds), and versus the Muay Thai assassin (two minutes nine seconds). By comparison, the ending of *Warriors Two* is composed of a series of fights whose total time is approximately 25 minutes. Even in terms of single fight scenes, previous wing chun films are also longer in comparison. The final confrontations of *The Prodigal Son* and *Wing Chun* are five minutes five seconds and four minutes ten seconds respectively.

In *Ip Man 3*, the duel between Ip and Frank (Mike Tyson) has been promoted as the spotlight of the film, overshadowing the last fight scene with Cheung Tin-chi (Max Zhang). When Frank sets the time of his fight with Ip as three minutes, it highlights the notion of efficiency. The fight sequence arguably becomes a miniature of real combat. But it is worth noting that at exactly three minutes, the fight is the length of a standard round in boxing.

This synchronization of cinematic time and real time is unusual in the genre. Not only can the scene differentiate from the usual extensive fight scenes common in traditional kung fu cinema, but it can also reduce the discrepancy between the cinematic and the 'real'. Surely,

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32   Although the variability and continuity of wing chun punches can be interpreted as ineffective, it is used only sparsely and can be read as a strategy to enhance the brutality (**hen**) of the technique (e.g. the dojo scene in **Ip Man**).

three minutes is a long time in a real fight, which may usually last only seconds, particularly perhaps between two well-trained martial artists [Barrowman 2014]. But in the context of kung fu cinema, three minutes is short, especially when the fight is the featured event of the film.

In sum, *zhun* (precision) is a crucial dimension in *shizhan* aesthetics. Even for the film's marque event, the guiding principle is to end the fight as soon as possible. Granted, the length of the fight scene is not the sole element demonstrating the notion of *zhun*. What makes the *Ip Man* series different from previous wing chun films is the brevity and effectiveness of fight sequences through precise action choreography.

This paradigmatic shift essentially echoes the idea of Bruce Lee's *cun jin* (寸勁; one-inch punch) – short but incisive, brief but powerful, hence redefining the formulation and meaning of the kung fu spectacle. Known as *changqiao fali* (長橋發力; releasing power through an extended arm) in wing chun [Ip, Lu, and Pang 2009: 50], the technique is featured in the last fight of the whole series in *Ip Man 3*. It is a powerful summary of the series' synthesis of the *zhenshi* and *shizhan* tradition.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are different degrees of *shizhan* among the three films. *Ip Man* places more emphasis on the *shizhan* tradition, while the *Ip Man 2* and *Ip Man 3* elevate the *zhenshi* tradition. One major difference between the three films is the degree of *hen* in the fight scene. The lethal techniques used in the dojo scene in *Ip Man* is not repeated in later films, in which the emphasis is placed on Ip's grandmaster image, martial virtue, and concern for his family. Also, with the introduction of Sammo Hung as a key character in *Ip Man 2* and Yuen Woo-ping as the choreographer in *Ip Man 3*, there is an increasing reliance on the *zhenshi* tradition in the sense that theatricality and trickery play a more prominent role in the action choreography.

In a personal interview with a member of the production crew, I was told by one of the fight choreographers that different wing chun consultant teams are used in the series.[33] In *Ip Man*, the team consisted of wing chun practitioners who have mixed martial arts (MMA) knowledge and are adept in merging *shizhan* techniques into wing chun. In *Ip Man 2* and *Ip Man 3* more traditional teams were used. While Sammo Hung is the named choreographer in *Ip Man*, his primary task was to communicate with the consultants and coordinate the cinematography according to their suggestions.

With the shift to more traditional consultation teams, there has been a decrease of combativity in later films. I was also informed that another major reason for the difference in choreography styles was that they had more time to design the action in *Ip Man*, as Donnie Yen was still a lesser star in 2008 and not as pressed with the production of different

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33 Interview with fight choreographer, December 2, 2016.

films as he was between 2010 and 2015. Furthermore, with the rise of the series' popularity in China, there may also be increasing difficulty in demonstrating *shizhan* due to tighter censorship.

Conversely, there is an increasing emphasis on trickery and mise-en-scène manipulation in the series (e.g. the table fight scene in *Ip Man 2* and the shipyard fight scene in *Ip Man 3*), bearing closer resemblance to kung fu films of the *zhenshi* tradition. Although there are individual fight scenes demonstrating the *shizhan* aesthetics (e.g. with Mike Tyson and the Thai assassin in *Ip Man 3*), the majority of fight scenes reflect a higher degree of staginess and theatricality.

Particularly in *Ip Man 3*, the final fight scene with Cheung Tin-chi is typical of Yuen's choreographical work – sophisticated use of weapons (e.g. pole and swords), multiple shooting angles (e.g. birds-eye, 360 degrees revolving shot), and constant interaction with the environment (e.g. staircase, columns). In addition, the fight scene features a considerable number of close-ups (e.g. clashes of the swords, facial expressions), which also undermine its *shizhan* value. This is because while these close-ups enhance the expressivity of the action, they also increase the scene's theatricality.

As the choreographer of Wong Kar-wai's *The Grandmaster*, Yuen may have incorporated Wong's aesthetics in *Ip Man 3*. However, this merge creates an uncanny outcome that fails to maintain the series' uniqueness as a synthesis of the *zhenshi* and *shizhan* tradition. By the same token, it also fails to reproduce Wong's art-house kung fu aesthetics.

Further examination of the films' differences would require a separate discussion. But, in brief, the *Ip Man* series' synthesis of the *zhenshi* and *shizhan* traditions might be said to be achieved on a macro level more than a micro one.

Overall, the *Ip Man* series has incorporated action aesthetics highlighting the notions of *kuai*, *hen*, and *zhun*, which are characteristic of Bruce Lee's *shizhan* ideals as well as wing chun's principles and philosophy. First, the use of real speed (rather than undercranking) in martial arts performance is crucial in preserving the texture of actual combat. Importantly, this emphasis on speed is inherently associated with wing chun's center-line principle and variability, thus reasserting the often-ignored link between martial arts style and the corresponding action aesthetics (i.e. that the latter should be an embodiment of the former). Second, the brutality of the series' fight scenes (especially in *Ip Man*) addresses the suppression of *wu* (the martial) within kung fu cinema. Contrary to Wong Fei-hung, Ip Man demonstrates the combativity and lethality of wing chun while maintaining his status as a traditional kung fu master. Third, the precision and efficiency of fight choreography in the series shifts the genre's focus from the elaboration of kung fu forms through extended fight scenes to their combative application in the blink of an eye.

CONCLUSION
SYNTHESIZING ZHENSHI AND SHIZHAN / WEN-WU
IN KUNG FU CINEMA

Despite kung fu cinema's attempt to merge *wen-wu* and create 'the masculine ideal', there has been a strong suppression of the martial dimension in the action aesthetics and an emphasis on theatricality and expressivity due to the elevation of *wen* (the literary and the artistic) and the denigration of *wu* (the martial) in Chinese culture. This is not to suggest that martial prowess should efface the virtuous or theatrical dimensions of the genre. Rather, the intention of this article is to expose the incongruity and complexity of *wu* as a key concept in Chinese masculinity as well as in kung fu cinema.

By synthesizing the *zhenshi* (authenticity) tradition of the Wong Fei-hung series with the *shizhan* (combativity) tradition of Bruce Lee, which embodies the notions of *kuai* (speed), *hen* (brutality), and *zhun* (precision), the *Ip Man* series presents new possibilities of *wu* and offers a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese kung fu. This redefinition of *wen-wu* not only reinvents kung fu cinema, but it also renegotiates the status and meaning of traditional kung fu practice – where kung fu should no longer be chopsocky, fragile, and ornamental, but solemn, practical, and efficient.

Last but not least, the series problematizes the idea of Bruce Lee's internationalization of the 'traditional art' and reinstitutes the specificity of Southern Chinese martial arts in kung fu cinema. Known as the master who inspired Bruce Lee, Ip Man is the perfect figure to rectify and reorient the development of kung fu cinema by synthesizing the two predominant modes of cinematic martial arts and the two paradigms of Chinese masculinities. After four decades of wandering following the death of Lee, kung fu cinema no longer needs to live under his shadow. Ip Man is the first, and probably the last, master that can embody Lee while upholding the value of traditional Chinese kung fu. The two seemingly irreconcilable masters, along with authenticity and combativity, *wen* and *wu*, the traditional and the modern, the inspirer and the inspired, have become one.

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Martial Arts Studies
Journal design and production by Hugh Griffiths