

CONTRIBUTOR

Tim Tausch is a research associate in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Cologne, Germany. His research focuses on Chinese media culture and aesthetics. Recent publications include *Affekt und Zitat: Zur Ästhetik des Martial-Arts-Films* [On the Aesthetics of the Martial Arts Film, 2017] and *Chinese Martial Arts and Media Culture: Global Perspectives* [2018].

MARTIAL ARTS & MEDIA CULTURE IN THE INFORMATION ERA: GLOCALIZATION, HETEROTOPIA, HYPERCULTURE TIM TRAUSSCH

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is derived from the Editor's Introduction to the edited collection *Chinese Martial Arts and Media Culture: Global Perspectives* [Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018]. The collection explores how narratives and aesthetics of the martial arts genre(s) are shaped and imbued with meaning in changing social, cultural, and media arrangements. Drawing from a range of recent media texts, this introductory chapter discusses the global circulation of signs and images of (Chinese) martial arts and their engagement with alleged national, cultural, textual, generic, and media borders. It argues that these texts reflect and (re)produce three paradigms of martial arts and media culture in the information age: glocalization, heterotopia, and hyperculture. What connects these three notions is that, rather than erase difference or establish it as something substantial and dividing, they engage with difference and otherness in inclusive and transformative ways.

In Square Enix and United Front's 2012 video game *Sleeping Dogs*, players can choose from a variety of costumes for their character, an undercover cop working the streets of a triad-ridden Hong Kong. Ranging from the iconic black and yellow Bruce Lee jumpsuit to the 'Bon Gak', a set of Muay Thai-themed clothing as worn by Tony Jaa in *Ong Bak* (2003), to downloadable 'Monkey King' and 'Movie Master' packs, the game assembles key visuals of martial arts in its costume selection. In addition to iconic outfits associated with martial arts cinema heavyweights such as Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan, *Sleeping Dogs* features at least one costume designed as a reference to the 2004 Stephen Chow comedy *Kung Fu Hustle* [*Gong fu*]. The costume, named 'Hog Pen Row' in an allusion to 'Pig Sty Alley' (one of the main locations in *Kung Fu Hustle*), condenses the film's plot in its tagline 'Discover your natural born genius' and is in turn easily connected to an outfit worn by Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon* (1973). The fact that this Canadian game is not only filled with references to the cornerstones of kung fu cinema and martial arts culture, but quotes from a film that is itself intended as an homage to, a parody, and a collection of references to the cinematic martial arts genre, is emblematic of a media culture that stresses the constant reassemblage of signs and images over the idea of singular original creation. This playful updating process, which always creates something new in its own right, exemplifies the cultural dynamics of the information era's glocalizing media world, in which alleged national, textual, generic, and media borders are increasingly renegotiated, transcended, and dissolved.

The appropriation of the symbols of Chinese martial arts in the polysemic media culture(s) of global information and network societies cannot be regarded in sharp separation from their multiple derivations and their respective transformations and mutual inscriptions. Neither the product of evolution nor of revolution, the martial arts nexus is shaped by its traces being perpetuated, transformed, and given new meaning under changing techno-economic and sociocultural dispositions. This collection brings together scholars from various disciplines in order to explore the guiding question of how the narratives and aesthetics of the martial arts genre have been shaped and imbued with meaning under the influence of these changing arrangements. It traces the symbolic communication of Chinese martial arts from local cinematic production in 1920s Shanghai to the transnational and transmedia circulation in today's global entertainment industries.

At the same time, this volume challenges the narrative of an apparently linear development via at least two additional dimensions. First, instead of proposing a linear, sequential pattern of new media replacing old media, this volume focuses on the complex repercussions and synergies that accompany any and all media upheavals. Second, it acknowledges that 20th century cinematic martial arts culture was already translocally

and transmedially connected, and that its 21st century post-cinematic imagination is not immune to a resurgence of (cultural) borders, as becomes apparent in the case of Chinese online *wuxia* role-playing games whose distinct, often literary-inspired virtual worlds and *language de facto* limit accessibility to certain communities. Especially since the significance of the nation-state as a model of order has been in decline, cultural production has become equally more engaged with the local and the global, an entanglement and process captured with the notion of *glocalization*. In turn, the new telecommunication and computer technologies that have decisively shaped cultural production since the end of the 20th century helped facilitate the decline of the nation-state in the first place. As martial arts and media culture exist in a glocalized world, the essays in this collection equally embrace the global(izing) flows of culture and their local origins, manifestations, effects, and transformations.

Research on Chinese martial arts and *wuxia* culture has been flourishing since the turn of the century, especially with regard to literature and cinema.¹ What this collection contributes to the existing body of literature is a combination of diachronic, transregional, and transmedia perspectives on different generic formations of martial arts. In addition, it embraces post-cinematic screen media and their repercussions with respect to previously established forms of representation, which decisively shape martial arts and media culture today but have not to this point been significantly studied in this context (notable exceptions include Leon Hunt's chapter on 'Martial Arts in the Age of Digital Reproduction' [Hunt 2003: 184-200]; the *EnterText* special issue *Wuxia Fictions: Chinese Martial Arts in Film, Literature and Beyond* [2006], which was edited by Hunt; and Chris Goto-Jones' *The Virtual Ninja Manifesto: Fighting Games, Martial Arts, and Gamic Orientalism* [2016]). The present study aims to add a media-conscious and cross-media perspective to East Asian Studies as much as it intends to add a specific cultural and regional perspective (especially where borders matter again in a seemingly borderless media world, as is the case with many a Chinese-language *wuxia* online role-playing game remaining largely inaccessible to users and researchers not trained in Chinese) to ongoing debates on intermediality and 'New Media' in an era of an increasing dynamic of the local and the global, in which these media themselves participate extensively.

1 See Hamm [2005], Wan [2009] and Altenburger [2009] on the martial arts novel; Chen [2005] and Jia [2005] for *wuxia*-focused histories of the Chinese martial arts film; Hunt [2003] and Teo [2009] on the subgenres of *wuxia* and kung fu respectively; Bordwell [2000] and Teo [2009] on martial arts within Hong Kong cinema; von Haselberg [2018] on constructions of identity in the *wuxia* genre; Yip [2017] on martial arts cinema in the context of Hong Kong modernity; Trausch [2017] on the changing aesthetics of the martial arts film in its transition to the post-cinematic era; Szeto [2011] on Chinese diasporic martial arts film; and Morris, Li, and Chan [2005] on transnational action cinema.

The burgeoning field (or non-field) of martial arts studies [Bowman 2015; see also Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 2011] has recently set out to connect hitherto disconnected scholarly engagements with the martial arts in all its different dimensions. If we regard martial arts studies as a network encompassing multiple aspects of martial arts (treated as institutions [cf. Bowman 2015]), including its myths, discourses, symbols, etc., the links to this collection become quite obvious; our point of departure, however, is a very specific link. For the purpose of this collection, we are less concerned with martial arts as embodied knowledge or practice and more concerned with narrative and aesthetic formations in which martial arts appear as a generic trope, a fabric, a topic, a sign, etc. Rather than saying there are no connections between these broad realms (instead, we can assume there to be numerous intricate links as well as clusters so inseparably interwoven that it would appear oversimplified to even speak of 'links'), this choice of focus is testimony to how the meanings of martial arts have come to be dominantly signified through semiotic webs of media texts. It is thus not the aim of this volume to separate representation from reality but to stress the role of the media as constitutive of culture and the fabric called reality. Instead of claiming authority over the definition of 'martial arts', this perspective is intended to highlight that the term carries different meanings and is multiply coded. Exactly because of this, it is important to keep an open dialogue, and keep testing different approaches to and notions of martial arts. Thus, this collection closes with an afterword by Paul Bowman, one of the driving forces of the (non-)field of martial arts studies. Rather than an actual closing, however, we intend this addition to be an extension, a point of transfer to yet another set of meanings, ideas, and questions.

The title of this volume is thus not to be primarily understood as representations of *the* martial arts in the media, but as the web(s) of significance [Geertz 1973] spun and transformed by an inseparable complex of martial arts culture and media culture. 'The tendency for academic work to subordinate or exclude the media supplement in studies of martial arts' [Bowman 2015: 2] has rightfully been pointed out, and an effort is being made to tackle it within martial arts studies. It is, in fact, against the proposition that the media is 'supplementary' that the present volume takes its approach. The question motivating this book is not so much how martial arts are represented, extended, or supplemented in the media, but how different human and non-human actors participate in the construction of martial arts as a network of narratives, signs, and images in shifting media arrangements and their symbolic regimes. In a similar vein, while embracing perspectives on body aesthetics as a central aspect of martial arts and media culture, we do not limit ourselves to observing martial arts as a body genre. As the essays in this collection remind us, martial arts can very well be signified by images of a teahouse or a black and yellow jumpsuit. Even

the 'Bruce Lee' edition of the Nike Zoom Kobe 5, a basketball shoe combining the color scheme of the jumpsuit from *Game of Death* (1978) with three parallel red lines in an allusion to the bloody scratches on Bruce Lee's face in *Enter the Dragon*, has to do with martial arts in this understanding. It is not only noticeable that a few lines and a certain color scheme act as signifiers for Bruce Lee and/or 'martial arts', or that a shoe combines signs from two Bruce Lee films, plus a third in its advertisement, which had Kobe Bryant posing as Lee with a pair of the shoes instead of nunchakus in an aesthetic reproduction of a poster for *Way of the Dragon* (1972). It is equally significant that these signs and images (while fans will not have a hard time naming their particular 'sources') have become key visuals [Kramer 2008] insofar as they circulate through various texts and media platforms relatively decoupled from their respective origins (and, often, from their 'original' meaning).

With the global rise of information and network societies in the late 20th century [Castells 1996], the martial arts have entered an age of hyperculture. In these newly emerging technical, economical, and cultural arrangements, the signs and images of martial arts increasingly participate in processes of perpetual de- and reterritorialization. They can no longer be regarded as the exotic Asian 'other' against which the 'self' is constructed, for they have already become part of the self in a global media culture which is constantly updating itself beyond fixed lines (on conceptualizations of self and other, see Baecker [2000], Kramer [2004], and Petrilli [2013]). In hyperculture, semiotic structures transcend alleged boundaries, are reassembled, and stand equally next to each other [Han 2005]. The new cultural and media arrangements are thus about both differentiation and connection.

Sleeping Dogs combines signs and images from multiple sources, rearranges and attaches new meanings to them, and makes generic tropes visible as such. While the collective symbolism of martial arts cinema forms one of the main points of reference in the game, it equally draws on other images of social memory. The symbolic realm of the martial arts thus stands as one among many. Instead of a closed text, *Sleeping Dogs* becomes a hyperspace of culture(s) in its multiply coded references and its subsequent add-ons (and *their* respective references). Whereas hegemonic European and Northern American conceptions of the 'East' have for the longest time been marked by either utopian or dystopian visions (in which the martial arts have very well played their part) according to the respective needs of their own communities [see, for example, Zhang 1988], this product of the information age and globalized network societies presents a step towards a cultural heterotopia.

The 2015 film *Kung Fury* from Swedish filmmaker David Sandberg superbly captures the new aesthetic order of 21st century media culture

and its hypercultural appropriation of the martial arts. Like the costume selection in *Sleeping Dogs*, the red bandana worn by the title character (played by the writer and director himself) is no less a marker of martial arts than, for example, a high kick. The 30-minute film that came about as a crowdfunding project and was distributed online beyond the channels of cinema or even DVD/Blu-ray, can be regarded as programmatic for post-cinematic media culture on the levels of production, distribution, and reception, as well as in its narrative and aesthetic design. Even more so than the comparably coherent world of *Sleeping Dogs*, *Kung Fury*'s narrative and aesthetic is a wide and wild collection of tropes from cinema, television, anime, and video games. In this short film that currently has over 20 million views on YouTube, VHS aesthetics and hyperreal digital interpretations of 1980s film and television stand side-by-side with anime sequences and reproductions of side-scrolling fighting games like *Double Dragon* (1987) or *Streets of Rage* (1991) – both of which also feature bandana-wearing avatars – as do samurai- and ninja-adjacent 'kung fu masters', Nazi soldiers, a martial arts version of Hitler (the 'Kung Führer'), Vikings, fighting arcade machines, dinosaur cops, and laser raptors. These apparently disparate symbols come together to be 'simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' in a cultural heterotopia [Foucault (1984) 2002: 231].

While the film is clearly marked as an homage to the 1980s, it is very much an exaggerated update and mash-up of various '80s tropes that looks and feels less like *Miami Vice* (1984-1990) or *Knight Rider* (1982-1986) and more like other recent productions capitalizing on similar aesthetics, such as Ubisoft's *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon* (2013). Like Foucault's 'other spaces', these cultural products 'are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about' [(1984) 2002: 231]. Paying tribute to the 1980s, *Kung Fury* is at least equally informed by the culture and cultural arrangements of the 21st century. This underlines what is also reflected by the essays in this collection: that there are hardly any simple and linear flows from A to B – whether from past to present, West to East, or from old to new. *Sleeping Dogs* and *Kung Fury*, produced in Canada and Sweden respectively, further rival the idea of hegemonic flows of martial arts culture being restricted to Asia and the US, and at the same time can be considered prime examples of how production, distribution, and reception of martial arts-related texts have moved across the globe and beyond national lines. What we are dealing with instead are complex multidirectional flows, parallelisms, repercussions, updates, and spirals of culture. Tellingly, a side-scrolling beat 'em up version of *Kung Fury* was subsequently released for PC, adding yet another layer to its multiple and complex reference and media structure. The structure of the network [Castells 1996] and the notion of convergence [Jenkins 2006] have emerged as key characteristics of media cultures in the information age, in which cultural production and meaning-making are increasingly

spread across multiple texts and platforms. Like *Sleeping Dogs*, *Kung Fury* is about links and connections. Both embrace the hypertextual structures characteristic of (martial arts) culture in the information era. Watching *Kung Fury* on YouTube highlights the interconnectedness of the network as cultural paradigm and the network as technical arrangement, as the film is automatically and immediately followed by its official music video as well as other more or less related clips.

Hypertexts like *Sleeping Dogs* or *Kung Fury* recollect signs and images of martial arts from various contexts and co-texts. As tropes of martial arts do not stay restricted to what is discursively constructed as one medium, one region, or one (sub)genre,² neither do the essays in this collection. The martial arts, which have increasingly set foot beyond Asia both as embodied practice and pop culture text, are a perfect argument against the myth of a unidirectional flow of knowledge, ideas, and symbols from West to East. It is, however, not the aim of this collection to simply reverse this order, which would mean remaining in the very same dispositions of thinking about cultural processes. Instead, we trace constant updating processes beyond notions of cultural purity, processes which include multiple heterogeneous actors with different interests acting in transforming environments.

From the numerous elements playing into early *wuxia* film – described as a 'hypergenre' by Zhang Zhen [2000: 204-205] – to *Kung Fu Killer's* (*Yi ge ren de wulin*, 2014) combination of serial killer and profiler motives, urban kung fu action, swordplay, and notions of *wulin*³ and *jianghu* as realms in which martial artists seek out and challenge each other based on their famed skills, martial arts have hardly constituted a fixed, homogenous genre. Topped off by glimpses of kung fu and *wuxia* film posters, images of Jackie Chan in *Drunken Master* (*Zui quan*, 1978) and Tsui Hark's *Seven Swords* (*Qi jian*, 2005) on television screens, and cameos by former Shaw Brothers star David Chiang and others, a film like *Kung Fu Killer* is not situated within an exclusive generic notion such as kung fu or *wuxia*, while its specific references to these very categories and simultaneous allusions to generic tropes beyond the martial arts even stretches the boundaries of the *wuda pian* ('martial action film'). 'New Media' like computer games further complicate and question notions of genre with their penchant for combining settings and other elements not restricted to either kung fu or *wuxia*. The fact that 'martial arts' appears problematic as a genre- and culture-specific

2 Chinese-language martial arts cinema is generally discussed with a focus on either *wuxia* [e.g. Hong Kong Urban Council 1981; Teo 2009] or kung fu [e.g. Hong Kong Urban Council 1980; Hunt 2003].

3 Literally 'martial forest', this idea of a realm of martial artists is prominently featured in the film's Chinese title *Yi ge ren de wulin*, and also reflected in its alternative English title *Kung Fu Jungle*.

term is exactly what makes it appropriate for this collection, which extends to both kung fu and *wuxia* as the genres generally associated with Chinese martial arts culture, as well as to other realms and texts influenced by or related to martial arts.

The image from one of the very same posters featured in *Kung Fu Killer*, that of Zhang Che's seminal 1967 *One-Armed Swordsman (Du bi dao)*, also appears during the opening credit sequence of Rob Minkoff's *Forbidden Kingdom* (2008). This animated sequence primarily drawing on imagery from Shaw Brothers and Bruce Lee movie posters that decorate the room of the young martial arts aficionado at the center of the story already captures and essentializes what marks the entire film, and what has emerged as a paradigm in the production of martial arts-related texts: a collage of the signs and images of kung fu and *wuxia* culture. It was also this Hollywood blockbuster, produced in collaboration with China Film Co-Production Corporation and Huayi Brothers Media, that for the first time paired Jet Li with Jackie Chan, arguably the most prominent martial arts stars alive and two of the most popular 'Asian' stars – both of whom have also made appearances in computer games and have to be regarded as key signifiers of the martial arts genre(s).

Seldom has the fantasy of martial arts been more explicit, both on diegetic (a bullied American teenager and dedicated martial arts fan embarks on a fantastic journey across a mythical China, where he and a group of martial arts masters fight to rescue the imprisoned Monkey King) and non-diegetic (Jet Li and Jackie Chan teaming up as the realization of a fanboy's dream) levels. In fact, it is so explicit that one could argue that it is as much an orientalist spectacle and othered fantasy as it is a self-aware testimony to the merging and interdependence of self and other. It presents us with a space where utopia and dystopia meet with (and in) heterotopia. For Foucault, the 'joint experience' of utopia and heterotopia is exemplified by the mirror [(1984) 2002: 231-232], an analogy that is equally appropriate here insofar as the gaze at the (virtual) other is exposed as the gaze at the self and vice versa. This is due not least to the familiarity of the signs and images of the alleged other, which have long become part of the very self that was constructed in demarcation to the Chinese or orientalist other in the first place: Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and their respective images continue to act as strong signifiers for Hong Kong, China, or Asia, but (and also *because*) at the same time they are equally part of the visual and media cultures of China, the United States, and the rest of the world. The technical media of industrial modernity produced these signs and images in the first place, and, especially in their continuation and transformation in the video and digital cultures of the late modern and postindustrial age, facilitated and accelerated their global communication. At the same time, it was these technical arrangements and their symbolic communication that gave birth to

the nation-state, only to then overcome its imagined borders, which is precisely why the above-mentioned visual and media cultures that share images like those of Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Jet Li cannot simply be demarcated along fixed national lines.

Forbidden Kingdom, too, would neither be described as a clear-cut kung fu or *wuxia* film, although (or because) it alludes to both. US-American coming-of-age stories and orientalist martial arts fantasies like *The Karate Kid* (1984), motives and characters from *Xiyouji (Journey to the West)*, the classical 16th century novel ascribed to Wu Cheng'en that served as source material for numerous operas, films, television series, animated features, etc., and, as pointed out by Kenneth Chan [2009: 3], the narrative structure from *The Wizard of Oz* [1939], are all as much a part of this transnational co-production as references to *wuxia* and kung fu cinema, the casting of major representatives of the martial arts film, and the fight choreography by Yuen Woo-Ping, whose career as director and choreographer itself spans decades and continents. The productions Yuen Woo-Ping was involved in cover many of the broad aspects of martial arts cinema since the 1970s, from early entries in the kung fu wave like *The Bloody Fists (Dang kou tan, 1972)* and classical Jackie Chan kung fu comedies like *Drunken Master*, to Ang Lee's transnational production *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Wo hu cang long, 2000)* and Tsui Hark's fantasy spectacle *Zu Warriors (Shu shan zhuan, 2001)*, to his work on *The Matrix* (1999) and *Kill Bill* (2003, 2004), to him directing and choreographing *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: The Green Legend (Wo hu cang long 2, 2016)*, a sequel to the very film that was among the sparks of a new global martial arts fever in the early 21st century.

Finding a definition for martial arts has proven to be problematic in the past, to say the least. As described by Stephen Chan [2000: 69] and picked up by Paul Bowman [2010: 45-46] in his questioning of definitions and disciplinary boundaries, plans for a UNESCO project on the martial arts were cancelled after no consensus could be reached on the definition of its subject. For this reason, martial arts is utilized here as an umbrella term under which different but connected approaches and understandings may find a place. With a focus on Chinese connections in the world, use of the term martial arts has to be viewed critically. Obviously not a Chinese term, and not necessarily one that would be utilized with regard to many of the texts discussed in this collection in their respective spheres of production, it is still useful for drawing connections between heterogeneous (yet related) phenomena. Referring to the apparently more specific terms *wuxia* and kung fu, it is pertinent to keep in mind that the former entered China via Japan in the 20th century, while the Cantonese 'kung fu' and its translocal imaginary took on meanings that cover only parts of the term *gong fu*. Even if we break down the term *wuxia* and trace the long-standing

traditions of *wu* and *xia* in literature and history, we still do not arrive at clear-cut definitions [see Teo 2009]. With regard to the notion of 'kung fu', King Hu (Hu Jinquan), director of seminal *wuxia* films like *A Touch of Zen* (*Xianü*, 1969), has famously been quoted saying that 'Kung fu is like Fu Manchu, it doesn't exist anywhere except maybe in San Francisco's Chinatown' [Blume 1974; see also Teo 2009: 80]. When we speak of martial arts, *wuxia*, or kung fu, we do, to a large degree, speak of myths. What is meant by these terms and engaged with in this volume are semiotic structures and their interdependencies with sociocultural and technological shifts.

One of the reasons to start this introduction with *Sleeping Dogs* is because the game not only captures the transregional and transmedia flows of martial arts in media culture, it also gives us a good idea of what could be meant by martial arts in the first place. What allows *Sleeping Dogs* to be associated with martial arts is not just the game's fighting system, but rather its iconography, its utilization of signs that have largely come to be a direct signifier of martial arts, operating relatively decoupled from their alleged points of origin. As such, *Sleeping Dogs* exemplifies how the martial arts have come to operate in and with media culture even beyond (representations of) fighting. Still, the combat animation, the way the characters move when they punch, kick, and throw, plays a decisive role in the experience of the game. This play of forms, carefully designed by the producers through motion capture and the support of martial arts practitioners, interacts with memory images acquired by the players (whom, it is safe to assume, we cannot reduce to their role as players) in their socialization processes, and thereby triggers its very own association with the martial arts. At the same time, players develop a certain muscle memory as they embody the knowledge and practice of the game's control and fighting system.⁴ It is telling, however, that the earliest reference point in designing the game's fighting style, again, came from (post-)cinematic martial arts culture. Yet it was not Hong Kong cinema, the realm that is predominantly evoked in the game's allusions to martial arts culture, that acted as the first piece of reference, but the 2005 Tony Jaa film *Revenge of the Warrior*. Where Chinese martial arts culture and Hong Kong cinema were extensively used as a pool of signifiers, the first impulse for combat came from Thai cinema, which, in turn, has largely been hailed as carrying the torch of a Hong Kong style of martial arts in the 21st century. Even within the fighting dimension of martial arts (and we could identify many more such dimensions), there remains a basic element of transtextuality. The movements of shapes on the screen trigger and interact with the user's memory and a discursive knowledge

4 In this regard, we might even speak of rediscovering the gong fu of kung fu. Gong fu refers to the enduring practice and effort necessary to perfect a certain skill, be it calligraphy, painting, the martial arts, or anything else. At the highest level of perfection, the skill becomes intuitive and effortless [Pohl 2008].

of what the martial arts are. For the purpose of this collection, we can thus make sense of (the tropes of) martial arts in media culture as being predominantly signified through two interrelated dimensions: a collective symbolism and a (re)presentation of certain body techniques. Tracing both these dimensions, we examine the continuities and fragmentations that occurred in the shifting meanings attached to 'martial arts' in media culture.

The apparatus-based technical media of industrial modernity fundamentally changed arrangements of communication and created a global mass audience of martial arts culture, just before the new telecommunication and computer technologies were about to emerge and pave the way for a postindustrial information era. With the rise of the information age, its digital media, and the World Wide Web, the same information and knowledge became available for most societies and individuals at the same (and any) time.⁵ People across the world now have instant access to cultural goods that are themselves products of transnational flows of knowledge, symbols, and capital, leading not to homogenization but to a diversification and fragmentation of audiences and identities. As *Sleeping Dogs*, *Forbidden Kingdom*, *Kung Fury*, *Kung Fu Killer*, as well as examples discussed in the following chapters, such as *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), *Lethal Ninja* (1992), or *Jade Empire* (2005), attest, cultural production has changed (as have the arrangements and media of communication) and is increasingly arranged around the nexus of the local and the global. These (hyper)texts cannot be reduced to or meaningfully described along the lines of alleged entities such as 'Canada', 'Sweden', 'China', 'South Africa', or the 'United States', but show a convergence of the local and the global, of self and other. At the same time, as the papers in this volume carve out, these films and games can significantly change the meaning of the narrative and visual tropes they draw from by disconnecting them from their specific historical and sociopolitical context. To varying degrees and to different effects, they engage with, reflect, and (re)produce three paradigms of martial arts and media culture in the information age: glocalization, heterotopia, and hyperculturalism. What connects these three notions is that, rather than erase difference or establish it as something substantial and dividing, they engage with difference and otherness in inclusive and transformative ways. They unite what is apparently different, and they differentiate what appears to be a unit.

Media upheavals – and this becomes especially evident with regard to the developments in time-based visual media since the late 19th century – not only generate aesthetic shifts, they also change the basic patterns of social and media-related constructions of meaning. The roots of a literary *wuxia* culture can be traced back at least as far

5 There are, at the same time, always backlashes, repressive tendencies, and restrictions regarding the accessibility, distribution, and selection of information.

as the Han dynasty, yet it was the early 20th century that marked the beginning of a significant increase in both density of martial arts-related texts and heterogeneity of their forms of representation. Since then, the martial arts phenomenon has informed and has in turn been informed by various media in China and beyond. While new media have generally, within the prerequisites of their specific dispositions, aimed at reproducing previously established forms of representation, they are themselves equally shaped by repercussions of subsequent media developments. Under the influence of Hollywood genre cinema, Chinese filmmakers, drawing from *wuxia* fiction and the acrobatic fighting style of military plays, used imported technology to translate local (symbolic) traditions into reproducible images of kinaesthetic sensations that would eventually extend to global audiences and entertainment industries, in turn being adapted by subsequent media of representation, such as television series or computer games. In terms of sheer production numbers, the tally of 100 Chinese *wuxia* games released each year [Zheng 2011: 19] even surpasses the estimated tally of 250 *wuxia* films produced by Shanghai film studios between 1928 and 1931 [Cheng, Li, and Xing 2005: 133; Zhang 2011: 199] and hint at the popularity as well as the social impact and significance of the computer game in martial arts culture. In 2014, 377.16 million Chinese Internet users – which is 58.1% of the country's netizens – were counted as online gamers. Among the most popular online games in China, *wuxia*-themed role-playing games like *Westward Journey Online* (*Da hua xi you online*, 2001), *Fantasy Westward Journey* (*Meng huan xi you*, 2003), or *Dragon Oath* (*Tian long ba bu*, 2007) still ranked high despite their age [CNNIC 2015]. The three of them are also examples of how games mediate literary sources that already have a long history of being adapted into multiple forms of representation. Since images flow across different language communities more easily than written words, the global production contexts of martial arts-related games are generally less literary-informed and show a closer relationship to the globally communicated visuals of martial arts culture. As exemplified by *Sleeping Dogs* or *Jade Empire* as much as by fighting games like *Tekken*, post-cinematic screen media like the computer and video game engage in reproducing cinematic and genre characteristics, but also significantly shape the aesthetic design of film as well as its patterns of production, distribution, and reception. In addition, film's growing detachment from the dependence on the cinematic *dispositif* through the expansion of its marketing chain further adds to the multitude of channels through which the recurring signs and images of martial arts culture circulate, as do the image and video cultures of the World Wide Web.

Over the course of these dynamic processes, a set of tropes and a collective symbolism including iconic figures, characters, and images has been shaped and inscribed into social memory through constant repetition and remediation. At the same time, especially since the

dawn of the information age, these tropes and symbols are constantly being reshaped and reassembled in new fashions. The signs and images produced by the martial arts genre have thus become part of a global semiotic web that transcends text, genre, and media boundaries. Against this backdrop, we pose the following questions:

- What kinds of shifts has the construction of Chinese martial arts culture in different media arrangements witnessed in connection with changing sociocultural and technological environments since the early 20th century?
- How and under what circumstances are the recurring signs and images associated with this martial arts culture shaped, updated, and/or reassembled?
- How have they been transformed within, between, and beyond genre, media, and regional boundaries? What is the role of the local and the global?
- Which continuities and fragmentations accompany these processes?
- Which (human and non-human, technological, social, and institutional) actors participate in these processes? How do different actors attach meaning to these signs and images at different times, and how are they made sense of?

The essays in this collection observe how film, computer games, theatre, and literature, as well as analog and digital storage media, video clips, the Internet, and the World Wide Web participate in the representation and perception of the collective symbolism of martial arts. While the focus rests on technical media as the key area of constructing and communicating martial arts culture since the 20th century (and particularly cinema as the main vehicle of its global popularization and a continuing point of reference for post-cinematic martial arts culture), perspectives on other forms of representation have been included to see how they have affected and been affected by the dominant technical media of industrial modernity and the postindustrial information era. What links the individual contributions together beyond the mere label of 'martial arts' is a keen interest in the manifold narrative and aesthetic shifts that occurred within the mediated construction of martial arts culture across time and space on the one hand and across multiple media platforms on the other. None of the chapters in this volume approach their objects of study without asking after their surroundings and connections or their derivation and contextualization.

The first two entries in this collection reach back the furthest in time and explore shifts in basic concepts of *wuxia* culture. Clemens von Haselberg follows the figure of the *xia* and its (alleged) reimaginings across different periods and changing sociocultural arrangements, concluding that the *wuxia* film's crisis mode gave way to postmodernism and a reaffirmation of political order in today's more globalized and stabilized production environments. Helena Wu engages the notion of *jianghu*, arguing for a constant transformation of this central concept of *wuxia* culture as she traces its reconfigurations from literary to visual culture, and from 1960s martial arts cinema to the global blockbusters of the 21st century. Carlos Rojas explores how Jia Zhangke's 2013 *A Touch of Sin* (*Tian zhuding*) self-referentially remodels representational modes associated with the *wuxia* genre and combines them with narratives from media reports to comment on contemporary China's political unconscious and its affiliated logic of representation. Elaborating on an argument from his own previous research on 1960s and '70s Hong Kong martial arts cinema, Man-Fung Yip argues that Hong Kong's transformation from a modern industrial to a postindustrial network society is reflected in martial arts cinema's shift from a sensory realism associated with the solid and concrete to one characterized by lightness, fluidity, and effortlessness. Ivo Ritzer's article discusses the transnational flows of martial arts imagery with a focus on the Global South and South Africa in particular, making a case for the deterritorialization, hybridization, and transformation of generic conventions between global circulation and local appropriation. John Christopher Hamm, taking the popular animated Hollywood character Kung Fu Panda as a starting point for his journey across some of the martial arts genre's central tropes in cinematic accounts of two of its seminal heroes, explores representations of Chinese martial arts between signifiers of Chineseness, borderline chauvinism and xenophobia, and commodity in a global entertainment industry. In my own essay, I explore an alternative to the binary opposition of 'the real Bruce Lee' and 'Bruceploitation' through the notion of *zhenji* ('genuine trace'), in which the original becomes a process of ongoing creation and transformation. Kin-Yan Szeto examines how David Henry Hwang's 2014 stage production *Kung Fu*, combining martial arts, Chinese opera, and dance, negotiates the visual economy and cultural memory of Bruce Lee and problematizes racial Otherness in a global media context. The next two essays explore how the computer game – the programmatic medium of the post-cinematic era – has interacted with martial arts culture and previously established media of representation. Andreas Rauscher develops a typology of the mutual transmedia exchange between martial arts films and computer games, from the 'mise-en-game' of generic tropes and the feedback of game culture into film to virtual *wuxia* worldbuilding. Lastly, Zheng Baochun and Wang Mingwei present us with a very different and nowadays rather atypical type of computer game in their examination of early 1990s text-based

multi-user dungeons (MUD), in which *wuxia* literature met with the technological arrangements of an interactive digital age. The book concludes with an afterword by Paul Bowman on martial arts and media supplements, opening up important perspectives and questions for future research.

This collection of essays ranges from the proposed end of the *wuxia* film to the beginning of a new chapter of martial arts culture in computer games – a 'new chapter' shaped by 'old media' to the same degree that it remediates and updates them, underlining once again that there is no clear-cut beginning or end. Some of the chapters approach familiar material with new ideas and concepts, others address recent phenomena or issues that have so far received little attention, but all of them acknowledge the traces left in/by the old and the new. From the whole of these contributions emerges a picture of the mediation, remediation, and circulation of the martial arts through time that will help us better understand not only the development and transformations of the Chinese martial arts genre but also the role the media have played and continue to play in the constant process of drawing, dissolving, and redrawing boundaries as well as their close and complex entanglement in creating and (re)negotiating the local and the global. The conclusions the individual authors arrive at may match or contradict each other. This polyphony is kept alive, rather than being streamlined into homogeneity. In this way, our collection hopefully keeps the dialogue going, inspiring more critical work in the area of martial arts and media culture and glocal and transmedia cultural processes in general.

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