
*Warrior Women: Gender, Race and the Transnational Chinese Action Star* is a welcome entry into the literature on gender in action film, examining female identity from the perspective of a globalising Chinese identity reflected in its popular culture over the past forty years.

Funnell's exploration of the topic takes a historical perspective, looking at female actors in wuxia (martial arts) movies, and in movies which draw on wuxia tropes, from the 1970s through to the early 2000s. One of its unique selling points is that it also takes a transnational view, rather than focusing simply on mainland China, Hong Kong or Taiwan. To this end, it looks at the genre's different iterations in these three areas, and also explores wuxia's entry into global cinema, as diaspora Chinese from Canada and the USA increasingly populate the genre, and as Hollywood borrows tropes and actors from Chinese cinema. The book emphasises that women have been key players in Chinese martial-arts cinema from the very beginning; the genre embodies women differently to men, but this distinctive female embodiment is crucial to the visual language of Chinese martial-arts cinema.

This book is particularly valuable in pointing up the transnational nature of wuxia, particularly regarding the boundary-spanning careers of Chinese-Canadian and Chinese-American stars. Significantly, local discourses continue to affect transnational ones, for instance the fact that Canadian actresses tend to downplay their Canadian connections, reflecting the (self-) perception that Canadians are not “interesting” or “exotic” in the way that Americans are, and yet Canada is an increasingly dominant node in the Chinese diaspora. The book also contains insightful comparative examinations of the careers of different female wuxia stars over the years in terms of their domestic and international reception, including Pei-Pei Cheng, Michelle Yeoh, Lucy Liu and Zhang Ziyi. It also considers the different sorts of transnationalism within the history of wuxia, contrasting the 1970s, when the practice of dubbing movies and of massive cheap overseas sales, plus the sudden international stardom of Bruce Lee, led to global visibility for Chinese film, with the 2000s, when the exportation of the martial-arts comedy (particularly as promoted by Jackie Chan) and the success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* led to a renewed global popularity for Chinese martial arts. *Warrior Women* continually returns to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as a kind of touchstone, which works well in that, first, this film has arguably done the most in recent years to raise global awareness of the fact that wuxia is not an exclusively male genre, and, second, because of its deliberate flagging up of the multi-generational, multi-country nature of women's appearances in Chinese martial-arts movies, between characters played by Pei-Pei Chen (a Shanghai-born...
actress who became famous in Hong Kong cinema in the 1960s and 1970s), Michelle Yeoh (a Malay Chinese who, likewise, rose to stardom first in Hong Kong and then in Hollywood in the 1990s), and Zhang Ziyi (a Beijing-born actress for whom *Crouching Tiger* was her breakout film) respectively at the heart of the story.

Areas where the book is less effective tend to revolve around the discussion of Hollywood's relationship to *wuxia*. The author praises Michelle Yeoh's portrayal of Wai Lin, a leather-clad, heroic martial artist, in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* as a progressive development for women within the franchise, in which Bond’s female companion and love interest, the “Bond Girl”, is usually presented as a passive sex object. However, one might argue that Wai Lin conforms strongly to the “butch” archetype of the Bond Girl as represented by Honor Blackman in *Goldfinger* and Grace Jones in *A View to a Kill*: the sensibly dressed female fighter whose relationship with Bond is generally more egalitarian than with the more “traditionally feminine” Bond Girls. The author also could do more to consider the negative side of transnational careers. For instance, mainland Chinese actress Gong Li’s Hollywood career is largely presented without comment on the fact that her prestigious mainland filmography has led mainly to a series of low-market B-pictures in America. On the reverse side, it is arguable that Chinese-American actress Lucy Liu’s film career is not, actually, much of a departure from the “Lotus Blossom”/“Dragon Lady” stereotypes which permeate her television appearances.

More generally, also, the book could do more to engage with the difficult question of whether the appropriation of *wuxia* imagery and tropes by the likes of Tarantino and the Wachowski Siblings constitutes homage or cultural appropriation, or with the complicated issue of high versus popular culture in martial-arts cinema, at a time when we have seen the emergence of a kind of “art-wuxia” subgenre with films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Hero*, or *House of Flying Daggers*. There is also the strange situation of modern Hollywood action films, in which pictures such as the *Transformers* franchise and the James Bond film *Skyfall* visibly court the Chinese popular action-filmoer market without directly positioning themselves as *wuxia*.

Generally speaking, the book is a good exploration of women’s roles in a film genre which was originally Chinese, has become international, and continues to be both Chinese and international, without focusing on one perspective to the exclusion of the other. It is arguably a little too presentational and uncritical, meaning that the reader needs to bring their own critical faculties strongly into play; however, it may also serve to spark debate among scholars of popular cinema and pulp fiction across different countries.

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