



## Eastern Martial Arts in cinematography and popularising a healthy lifestyle - interpretation sketch

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### Abstract

*The meaning of the notion of martial arts is very extensive. It concerns many phenomena at the plane of culture, psychology, science of physical culture and other fields. The object of this work is to present the widely-understood martial arts regarded as the leading motif in many film genres - some representations were supposed to scare a viewer, some others to entertain. In this interpretation sketch we draw attention to an important role of a film as a medium that inspires people to undertake some activities, popularizes a healthy life-style, and remains the source of entertainment and knowledge about the culture of the Far East. The following films have undergone analysis: Enter the Dragon (1973, directed by B. Lee, R. Clouse), Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon 2000, directed by A Lee), Shaolin Soccer (2001, directed by S. Chow) and Beverly Hills Ninja (1997, directed by D. Dugan).*

**Keywords:** martial arts, agonology, exercise, movies, entertainment, psychology, culture

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## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, in the societies of the whole world, it is trendy to have a health and active lifestyle that is composed of a proper diet and physical activity. Everybody can choose to practice the sport discipline that agrees with his or her abilities, skills and gives biggest joy. Also eastern martial arts, practising which does not only increase fitness, but also teaches the most precious skill of self-control, has gathered lots of attention [1-8]. Undoubtedly, cinema facilitated popularising this form of physical activity. The subject appeared in many film productions of different genres. Below, we would like to have a closer look at some selected movies [9-11]

## MARTIAL ARTS IN CINEMATOGRAPHY - INTERPRETATION SKETCH

Most classic and almost automatically associated with martial arts is *Enter the Dragon* (directed by Bruce Lee and Robert Clouse) from 1973. It shows a number of fight scenes, proper figures and techniques, also in the context of science and life philosophy. A very theatrical style of acting, the actors' mimics, exaggerated movements- all awake viewers' imagination. Exaggerated sounds of punches and kicks, howls and cracking sounds of broken bones work for the aesthetic "censorship" - it completes what we can see on the screen, or, rather, what we would prefer not to see, at the same time, making viewers realise what has just happened to the opponent of the fight. However, it is not about brutality only- first of all this American movie shows the cultural differences, their merging and the phenomenon that should exist in each sport discipline: sport rivalry cancels race and social segregation. The movie story refers to the classic legends and tales, universal fight between the good and the evil and the final triumph of what is good and beautiful. Martial arts are not only sport- they also make a lifestyle [12-16]. It was shown by stressing the rules and discipline that is present in Shaolin monastery and looking for internal peace. Undoubtedly such a film awakens imagination and inspires to practice self-control, makes viewers become interested in the eastern culture and undertake attempt to find inner peace [5,8].

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is a movie directed by Ang Lee in 2000. This movie connects fantasy and adventure elements; however, what attracts our attention most, is a number of fighting scenes, not only melee but also lots of beautiful choreographies of the fight with the use of a sword and other cold steel. The movie shows the reality of 18th century China and the elements of traditional Chinese legends. It makes an interesting connection of beautiful photos, accompanying music and interesting narration. It is worth noticing that the actress, playing the role of Jen (Ziyi Zhang), is a professional dancer, which provides her choreographies of fight with charm and smoothness. We may have an impression that the fight scenes shown here have less to do with sport and more with art. Despite all, it is a story put in a fairylike reality and no one expects that climbing further steps of sport skills, he or she will be able to fly among the trees or land on the roof of the building with just one leap- still the scenes impress us a lot. Here also the impact is put on the mental balance and health. The elements of meditations and certain moral rules are presented here. The film may inspire women to practise sports, gives hope to achieve success. It shows the brutal sport in a very sensual manner- due to fantasy elements and almost dance choreographies. It shows a woman as a strong, decisive and independent person. The feminist dimension is very important in the film.

A considerable majority of movies that present martial arts is made of sensational action movies. A considerably old tradition of such movies caused that there are some stereotypical views such as: the person of Asian features must for sure be highly trained in martial arts of any sort. It is worth stressing that using force often aims at introducing order; however, eastern

martial arts do not only aim at revealing aggression but, paradoxically, lead towards stillness and calming of an action and serve a good cause.

The popularity of this motif causes that eastern martial arts appear more and more often in the recent years, also in comedies and even animations. Due to the genre characteristics of such movies and aiming them at rather younger generation of viewers, we can indicate that eastern martial arts are not to shock with violence, but rather encourage physical activity and teach self-control. As examples we would like to mention the following movies: *Beverly Hills Ninja* (directed by Dennis Dugan, 1997) and animation *Kung Fu Panda* (directed by Mark Osborne, 2008).

The story of Haru from *Beverly Hills Ninja*, starred by a deceased Chris Farley, starts with a ship disaster in which both of his parents die. He is found by the Japanese ninja fighters, who believe he is the child prophesied by the legends. He is adopted by them and allowed to learn the secrets of ninjitsu. The problem is that this child grows into a plump, very clumsy and unlucky man that causes doubts of the clan, as for the appropriateness of their decision. By accident Haru accepts an order from a beautiful woman who needs protection. He goes to America to help her; however, he is followed by his older step brother Gobei, who observes a white ninja's activity. As befits the comedy, all ends good, and a viewer sees that due to involvement and dedication one can succeed against all odds.

The animated movie action of DreamWorks Animations, *Kung Fu Panda* takes place at the territory in China. Full of optimism, although clumsy, the panda bear named Po is the biggest fan of kung-fu in the area. However, in everyday duties of a dumplings seller in a family business it does not contribute to anything. One day, unexpectedly, he is chosen to fulfil the ancient prophecy that for all, including him, seems to be impossible to achieve. Day after day, Po enters kung fu world and starts training with his idols, five legendary fighters: Tigress, Crane, Viper, Monkey and Mantis, under the supervision of Shifu Master. The panda has to face danger in order to fulfil the prophecy and to perform as Dragon Fighter. Strenuous trainings, problems to control own body initially seem to be the obstacles that cannot be overcome; however, the fact that others are endangered causes that Po finds his inner strength, and defeats the enemy.

Though at first we may have an impression that these two productions are totally different and differ ten years in age, we cannot resist the impression that the animation creators used the American comedy as a model. Both heroes lost their biological parents and personalise characters of the legends that the fate somehow chooses. Characteristically, they are both big and clumsy and do not belong to the canon of kung fu or ninja fighters. However, they follow the same dreams to gain respect in their community to some extent.

Incredible physical abilities and skills that are presented in martial arts movies are often exaggerated. Despite this, the essence of these productions is not to laugh at the fighting techniques but most of all see them in a stereotypical way. A considerable popularity is gained by the productions with Jackie Chan starring. The movie *Shaolin Soccer* is also worth mentioning. The film was made in 2001 in China and was directed by Stephen Chow- starring one of the main roles.

The action of the movie takes place in the contemporary China. The story starts with the retrospection in which we can see how a famous football competitor, known as Golden Leg, becomes the victim of his own greed and having been bribed by Hung accepts his check. It comes out that accepting the money by the athlete has tragic consequences. In the key moment of the football match, he does not score a goal and his team loses, which leads to the team's and fans' fury. Golden Leg is floored and beaten and, consequently, his leg is broken. It causes an injury that finishes his career. We are now moved 20 years forward. The shoe is on the other foot. Clumsy but clever Hung is a coach of a known and famous football team, and Golden Leg serves him performing the works to stay alive.

The moment comes when a former master rebels against his employer. One day, when he walks down the street, he meets a strange boy who calls himself a Steel Leg. The man devoted to kung-fu is looking for a method to popularise the sport. As he meets a former footballer who suffers from a crisis, he tells him about Shaolin Kung Fu. Importantly, Steel Leg does not use it for a thoughtless fight but to improve the condition of his life. Soon, the life paths of Golden Leg and Steel Leg cross in a series of strange coincidences and they together connect Shaolin Kung Fu with football creating a football team in order to win the championship that is lead by Hung. The team is composed of Steel Leg's friends and Shaolin monastery students, the champions of kung-fu.

They have not practiced for years; they concentrated on everyday life, not always happy, anyway. Therefore, the beginnings in a football team are not easy, but all improves in the course of time. Watching this film, we cannot resist the impression that it is a parody with the elements of an absurd. In each scene we are literally attacked by the situations that make us think whether it is or it is not a joke. Besides the irreverent character of the movie, we also see the elements of eastern culture: among others, significance of honour and importance of work in one's life. We can also see the references to the cinema classic such as *Enter the Dragon*, mentioned before: one of the Great Brothers is Bruce Lee's fan: in a few scenes he looks and acts like Bruce Lee.

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

The list of movies presenting different eastern martial arts is pretty long. We have interpreted just a few of the movies; however, our main objective was to show considerable popularity of these motives in the movies of different genres. Although the notion of fight is associated with violence, the movies convince us that there is a deeper sense hidden behind it [1,4,5,17]. Practising eastern martial arts is not only connected with mastering the skills of own body but also the spiritual development, widening horizons, opening towards a new philosophy of life, and increasing awareness and self- control [8,18]. Although it seems that watching movies has little to do with physical activity, it is worth remembering that even the best film finishes at some moment and the screenplay may become the impulse to start practising sport [20].

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