Steven Riep
The Moral Universe of Martial Arts Cinema

House of Learning
411
(Season 4, Episode 11)

OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

Produced by the Harold B. Lee Library
At Brigham Young University
Thursday, March 9, 2006
Thank you. I am honored to have this opportunity to address you today. The topic I am speaking on is a new one for me, but it touches on a variety of research and teaching areas in which I have great interest, including contemporary Chinese cinema, cultural production under authoritarian regimes, and traditional Chinese civilization. Virtually all of the works I discuss today, including two of the films, are part of the Lee Library's collections. Information on their call numbers is included in the handout that is being circulated and is available at the back of the lecture hall. I hope you will take time to go and borrow them, take a look at them, and enjoy them because I think that is the best way to truly develop an appreciation for this topic.

In the wake of the Bosnian War that raged from 1992-1995, fighting had devastated the city of Mostar and destroyed its treasured three hundred year old bridge pictured on the left. The Muslim, Serb and Croat population sought to select one hero they could all look to, one free from parochial political or cultural ties, one whose statue they would proudly erect in the city center. They settled on Bruce Lee. Why Lee? The childhood idol of many, Bruce Lee stood for "universal justice" unquote and represented quoting again "loyalty, friendship, and skill" end of quote, values that all ethnic groups admired.

These values were not unique to Lee. They have roots that reach far deeper into China's remote history, and extend out to the present day. For Lee is only one example of the Chinese knight-errant tradition. The Chinese knight-errant wuxia, men and women who fought for justice in times of lawlessness and despotism, who offered their protection to all without regard to class, gender, or relationship. While we may be most familiar with the Chinese knight-errant from Bruce Lee's Enter the Dragon, Ang Lee's Oscar-winning Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, or Chinese director Zhang Yimou's recent Hero and The House of Flying Daggers. The fact is that the tradition goes back a lot further than that. Chinese audience members may of course know it reaches back to the 60s and 70s films of director King Hu and of course the best-selling martial arts fiction of Jin Yong. But the story does not begin here, either. It goes back to the mass-market martial arts stories that circulated among readers hungry for popular as opposed to highbrow works from the turn of the century through the 1940s and even back further to late imperial China and to the great masterpieces of fiction including the great novel The Water Margin. But its earliest manifestations are found in the historical records of the early imperial and even pre-imperial periods that date back to three hundred years before Christ.

I would like to introduce the rich history of the knight-errant tradition and its moral universe in literature and then explore how they have shaped the modern martial arts film. I will show clips from and then analyze King Hu's landmark film "A Touch of Zen" and then move on to Lee's Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and finally if time permits we will look briefly Feng Xiaogang's World Without Thieves, showing both continuities and differences exist and are woven into these films into the tapestry that is the wuxia or knight-errant legacy.

The term for knight-errant, James J.Y. Liu tells us, was originally youxia, or wandering knight, suggesting either their peripatetic existence or there willingness to travel to avenge the wronged. While their origins are subject to debate, they shared in common a series of values rooted in their desire for justice that transcended familial and political loyalties. In the Confucian tradition, and this one of the dominant philosophical traditions in China, obligations were based on five cardinal relationships of father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger
brother, ruler and subject, and friend and friend. This meant one owed supreme loyalty to one's father, hence the importance of filial piety, that is to say the respect children owed to their parents. As Confucianism became established as the dominant state ideology during the Han dynasty and the handout has a chronological table at the bottom of the first page for your reference. But as the Confucian ethical system became dominant during the Han dynasty, the first long lived empirical dynasty of a unified China, the relationship of father and son and the loyalty that attended it became the foundation for justifying the official's and subject's obligations to serve state and ruler, as found in the Classic of Filial Piety.

In contrast, the knights-errant sought to see justice served without regard to predetermined relationships and thus offered aid to anyone in need regardless of gender, class, or religious background, which made them altruistic in a way that a Confucian scholar might not be. A number of other core traits derive from this altruism and love of justice: prizing personal loyalty over institutional loyalty for example, the importance of honor and integrity to one's own principles rather than social conventions and customs, and the prizing of personal freedom over conformity to law. Obviously this left room for excesses—knights-errant could at times be impetuous and arbitrary, frequently sought revenge out of proportion to any provocation (punishments not fitting but exceeding the crime, to tweak W.S. Gilbert), and paid no heed to the law or to justice for society. But at times when society was in disarray or when a tyrant ruled and justice could not be served, the knights-errant came to the fore to help reestablish order.

I would now like to turn to two early accounts of knight errantry. The first is entitled "The Biography of Yu Rang," which comes from the first great comprehensive history of China compiled in the Han dynasty by the great historian Sima Qian. In this particular account, Yu Rang, who had served a variety of states, finally achieved recognition and honor from the earl of Zhi. When the earl is killed at the orders of Lord Xiang, whose kingdom the earl had attacked, and not being successful at defeating it, Yu Rang decides to avenge the killing of the man who had shown favor to him, quote "For a man to die for one who understood him is like a woman making herself pretty for one who loves her. Since the earl of Zhi understood me, I should sacrifice my life to avenge him. If I can repay him in this way, my soul need not be ashamed."

Yu Rang disguises himself as a criminal and entered Lord Xiang's palace, where he conceals himself in the privy and waits for his prey. When Xiang enters, he discovers the disguised Yu, has him searched, and finds a concealed dagger. This would-be assassin confesses that he sought to kill the nobleman to avenge the death of the earl of Zhi. And the Lord respects, you know, his moral motivations, these are things that Lord Xiang can respect and he frees him. Well, Yu Rang was not so easily deterred, he still had this debt he had to pay to avenge the death of the man he had served and so he again disguises himself in an attempt to kill Lord Xiang. This time he is captured and, when questioned by the lord, Yu Rang reveals the following, and again I quote, “When I served Fan and Zhonghang, they both treated me like a common fellow, and I therefore repaid them as an ordinary fellow might. But the earl treated me like a man of national eminence, and I thus must requite him as a man of national eminence should.” End of quote.

With no hope of escaping death, Yu Rang asks Lord Xiang if he would allow him to make a few strikes at the Lord's robe with his sword, thus symbolically fulfilling his debt to avenge the earl of Zhi. Lord Xiang, again still admires Yu's sense of duty, agrees. After making a few stabs at
THE MORAL UNIVERSE OF MARTIAL ARTS CINEMA

the robe, Yu Rang falls on his sword and dies. In this case it is the personal relationship and the moral obligations and personal loyalties that stem from it that motivates Yu Rang to go to such great lengths to sacrifice his life in avenging the earl. He’d served other people before, there is no reason why this particular ruler he would have to avenge if its simply a matter of serving ones ruler, but if its serving a ruler because he has shown you personal favor and honored you and a bond is created.

The second early example is a poem this gives us a sense of the life of a wuxia from the perspective, in this case of the poet Zhang Hua who lived from 232-300 AD. This is the first of "Two Songs of Knights-errant:"

The knight-errant loves a secluded place: He built a chamber behind a desolated hill. He went hunting but found few animals, He spread a net but caught no birds. The year is ending, bring hunger and cold; heroically he sings, beating time with his foot. Poverty stirs up a brave knight's spirit: How can he cherish bitterness in his heart?

Sitting alone, he strokes his precious sword, Now fast, now gently, as if playing a lute. He ploughs the fields on the slope of a dry ravine, But his real seeds are sown at the tip of the sword. He reaps his harvest among narrow paths: One blow is worth a thousand pieces of gold. He takes his rest among bear's dens, And roams in a forest full of tigers and leopards.

Translated by James J. Y. Liu (Liu, 58)

Zhang's poem casts the wuxia as a noble fighter living on the margins, a theme found in later poetry and in the classical and vernacular tales that proliferate in the Tang dynasty and afterwards. But the masterwork of pre-modern martial arts literature was the novel The Water Margin, written in the Ming Dynasty but set and based actually on anecdotal information and some historical accounts from the earlier Song dynasty. This text discusses the adventures of gallant bandits who come together under the leadership of one Song Jiang. They later surrender to the government and eventually fight for the empire to suppress rebellions and preserve the state. In other words, they go from being outlaws to being allies of the state. Early versions of these narratives can be found in the golden age Yuan dynasty drama Li Kui Carries the Thorns. And the illustration on the left here is a woodcut illustration from a Ming dynasty of the Ming dynasty drama. But it is as a novel that the exploits of Song and his men are best remembered. And the illustration on the right by the way is another image of Li Kui and here we have two more images of heroes from the novel. These illustrations come from a contemporary edition of the novel and depict several of the knights-errant, who the narrative introduces with great care and attention, providing models for later martial arts novelists to follow. This final illustration shows the opening page of an early edition of the novel, as is a Ming dynasty edition of the novel I believe.
In the centuries that followed, short stories and novels centering on knight-errant continued to remain popular. They formed the basis for the plots of a new form of theater, Peking Opera in which knight-errant characters performed complex acrobatics in stylized scenes of combat. In the early years of the twentieth century, martial arts stories became a staple of popular fiction, the so-called Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School, which also included love stories, mysteries, and scandal-mongering literature. Widely serialized in magazines and collected in cheap paperback editions, martial arts fiction remained popular to 1949. In Hong Kong in the 1950s, what was termed New School martial arts fiction, took the territory by storm as the stories of a mainland Chinese immigrant, Louis Cha, better known by his penname Jin Yong, were serialized in a local newspapers. Jin's finely-crafted stories with their well-developed characters, intricate plots, and ties to Chinese history and traditional culture have captured the imaginations of millions of Chinese readers, making him the most-read of any twentieth century Chinese author. Certainly any of the mainstream authors, and he is still very popular today.

Martial arts entered the world of cinema via the influence of wuxia-inspired Peking operas and the mass-market martial arts novels popular in the early twentieth century. David Bordwell reveals that these sources provided material for a burgeoning film industry in the 1920s. They remained a mainstay through the 1940s in both China and Hong Kong. In the years after 1949, Hong Kong and Taiwan became the centers of martial arts film production as literature and the arts in China became politicized under the socialist realist cultural policies of Mao Zedong; a film genre that mingled the traditional and the fantastic, which knight-errant cinema does, simply did not serve the needs of a new, Communist-governed China. In Hong Kong in the 50s and 60s, Bordwell notes, the fantasy martial arts film became popular and left their legacy on the techniques of martial arts filmmaking. The Mandarin martial arts films made by Hong Kong studios like Shaw Brothers aimed for more realistic portrayals of real warriors with outstanding fighting skills.

Perhaps the best known of these directors was Hu Jinquan or, as he is known in English, King Hu, an actor turned director who reshaped the face of Chinese martial arts films from 1966-1975. I would like to focus on Hu's 1971 masterpiece, A Touch of Zen. Before I do so, it is worth looking at these pictures. Anybody recognize this individual? That’s Bruce Lee of course. Ok, this is one his actresses, I don’t remember who she is, this is King Hu directing an actress. And up here, do you recognize her? Who’s that? Cheng Pei-pei, remember her, the Jade Fox from Crouching Tiger? She began her career actually in one of his early martial arts films, he trained her and she is one of his best known disciples.

Ok, nearly three hours in length, going back to Touch of Zen, nearly three hours in length Hu's film depicts the struggles of Yang Huizhen, the daughter of a prominent imperial official, to escape the clutches of the East Chamber, a eunuch-led government clique that has seized power and controls access to the emperor, and hence the throne. These forces have tortured Yang's father to death and now seek the daughter and the two generals, her father's former associates, who have fled with her. They have taken refuge in a deserted fort, where they meet the scholar Gu Shenzhai, who makes a humble living as a painter and calligrapher. Much to his mother's consternation, Gu refuses to take the civil service examinations that would bring him position, prestige and wealth. When asked why he refuses, Gu simply comments about not serving the government in times of chaos. While helping to nurse Gu's sick mother, Miss Yang
sympathizes with the scholar's decision to not take the exams. Eventually Gu joins Miss Yang and the two generals as they first repel the efforts of an East Chamber spy, whom they attack in a bamboo grove, and then, through stratagem, defeat two hundred East Chamber guards. This sets up a confrontation with the powerful commander of the East Chamber Guards, Xu Xianchun, who nearly overpowers Miss Yang and General Shi. In the end it is the Buddhist abbot Hui Yuan that first captures Xu and then ultimately defeats him as he defends Miss Yang's right to enter his monastery and seek refuge in the Buddha. The film ends with Hui Yuan backlit by the sun pointing the way to Nirvana.

The notion that a scholar could refrain from entering government service rather than serve a corrupt regime has a long tradition. In times of chaos, corruption and usurpation of power, scholars were justified in withdrawing from or refusing to enter the civil service. While Gu's mother may not grasp this, his noble act does impress Miss Yang. In flight from East Chamber forces, from East Chamber forces, which represent corruption, authoritarianism and tyranny, Miss Yang and the two generals that accompany her have becomes knights-errant, since they can only preserve their lives and see justice served outside of the government-established legal system. Miss Yang's given name, Huizhen, literally intelligent and chaste, embodies two key Confucian virtues for women. In an earlier King Hu film, Dragon Inn which was released in 1968, we meet the former imperial military officer Zhou Huai'an, who, like Yang Huizhen, fights to preserve his life and protect the innocent against the predations of the East Chamber. Zhou's name likewise has Confucian ties. His surname ties him to the Zhou Dynasty and its early sage-king rulers, including the Duke of Zhou, a model of Confucian virtues. His given name Huai'an suggests a longing for peace and end to disorder. While Yang and Zhou may now operate according to the code of the wuria, they do so because the Confucian order has been destroyed and the values they stand for in name and action are no longer respected.

As the clip we did not view but I summarized would have shown, Buddhist monks may choose to join forces with knights-errant to protect the innocent and defeat those deemed evil. It is Hui Yuan that repeatedly comes to the aid of Yang and her associates and ultimately defeats Commander Xu Xianchun. For him, martial arts power and spiritual power are inextricably linked, much as they are in the Shaolin tradition with which you may be more familiar. I am going to show you some images of traditional Buddhist sculpture and a bit later semantics. Please note that the forces used by Hui Yuan to defeat Xu comes from religious meditation rather than martial arts prowess. Let me explain what happens in the scene you didn’t see. At the very end of the scene, Abbot Hui Yuan is standing on top of a cliff and he is back lit by the sun, very very bright, and the whole scene is suffused in red, and he points off to the distance and there is a shot of kind of this hillside landscape looking off in the distance all suffused in a kind of a bright mix of white and red. And he is shown seated crosslegged in a traditional pose that you have probably seen, you can see illustrated in this particular image. It is common, you see images of the Buddha, you see images of arharts, individuals who have achieved nirvana, bodysatvas, individuals who have achieved nirvana and remain around to help others, savior figures in the Buddhist tradition. You see him seated and you also see him standing, both times backlit.

Though the film links, ok, though the film links the ethical values of Confucianism as represented by Xu Xianchun and the two generals, knight-errantry and Buddhism represented by Hui Yuan and the ones that followed him, it is the latter that ultimately leads to victory, hence the
films understated title, "A Touch of Zen," it should be called “a lot of Buddhism” because it really is the buddists influences are quite substantial. In the end, Yang Huizhen will only enjoy piece when she takes refuge in Buddha and achieves enlightenment. Now we can make some things out of this, there are some things we can think about. I would like to turn briefly to a quotation from James Liu’s study, you’ve noticed I’ve been referring to and there is a book called Chinese Naradolsolist on your handout. Probably one of the most important resources on this topic, and he makes the following impressive comments in his conclusion, “Our survey has shown the close interrelation between history and literature, for whereas historical personages and events provided material for imaginative literature, literary works in turn have thrown light on history—if not on the periods with which they are ostensibly concerned, then on those in which they were actually produced.” For instance, chivalric tales written in Tang times, when warlords were rampant, reflect the desire of readers and writers to be rid of these; stories and plays about the Liangshan heroes that came into being during the Southern Sung and Yuan periods reveal the wish of a people suffering from a corrupt government and foreign domination for champions of justice and patriotic warriors.”

Now, this is an image that comes from a Chinese cultural revolution in the 1960’s and 70’s. Given that the years in which King Hu shot both Dragon Inn and A Touch of Zen corresponded to the high tide of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, it is tempting to draw parallels between the despotism wrought by the East Chamber and the excesses of the Red Guards between 1966 and 1969 and the apotheosis of Maoist authoritarianism that followed. Just as the Cultural Revolution sought to weed out the last vestiges of traditions, represented by Buddhism and Confucianism, so A Touch of Zen foregrounds these same ethical-religious systems as sources of strength in times of disorder. The martial arts film offered a paradigm for and vicarious attempt at reestablishing order in a world where chaos had become institutionalized, where action could only be taken outside of normal channels, much like the ways in which the xia were not yet operated.

Now, let’s come back to that image of the sun. Ok, those of you who can read Chinese will recognize that it says Mao xu shi shur wur man shi shung gu cho tsaiung, or as the translated, chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts. Sorry, I left out the word red but that’s significant. Ironically Mao Zedong himself became the iconic symbol of ultimate power during this period. His image decorated pins, posters and all manner of objects, and was often shown with the sun, a symbol of not only a bright future but also an emblem of Mao’s vital importance in the lives of the people—he was at once as great and as a important as the sun to them. And those of you who’ve taken my advanced Chinese literature class know that that image comes up frequently in poems of the 1950’s. In A Touch of Zen, let me shift to another image. In A Touch of Zen, Hu has shown the ultimate power in Buddhism as represented by the Abbot Hui Yuan, who is frequently shown backlit and at the climax, backlit and this is true throughout the film but particularly and most obviously at the climax that concludes the film. And again he is in these two most common devotional postures, sitting cross-legged and standing. Hui Yuan and Buddhism, rather than Mao, are associated with the sun as a source of wisdom and enlightenment. And in these two images you’ll note around the head of this sculpture which comes, I believe from the Lomengratooes and also over here in this image. This halo, the halo varies in time over the years, over time periods as to what it exactly means. In some cases it is simply a sign of enlightenment, but in other cases it is the sign of the wisdom that has been accumulated. And its this wisdom that allows you to be freed
from ties and enter into nirvana. It is the nexus of traditional ethical systems—Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as knight-errantry that becomes important in times of chaos and despotism that become the forces for good. So in other words, we have a very traditional image used in King Hu’s film as kind of a commentary or a other of what was used in china during this particular period of time, during the cultural revolution when we have images of Mao backlit by the sun.

I would now like to turn to a recent film, Mg Lee's Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. This film aims on one level to deglamorize knight-errant life, as shown in interactions between the experienced female knight-errant Shu Lian and the aspiring young Zhen, who the viewer discovers, knows far more about martial arts than she lets on. Mg Lee pays tribute to King Hu by giving prominent roles to women warrior and, most notable, by setting an important scene in a quiet bamboo grove. Note, however, the different moral plane on which Lee's film develops. As is often the case in Ang Lee's films, the issues of love and loyalty to self take precedence over the broader historical or institutional concerns that motivated King Hu. Now is there any way we can get the clips for Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon or are we completely out on clips? No? That’s a pity. Alright, I’ll do my best to summarize then.

The clips in this case are, the first two, are scenes showing Shu Lian the older more experienced martial arts knight-errant with Zhen, who’s the daughter of a very wealthy family and who is about to be married off and we learn soon after that she is also, her nanny happens to be the evil villain, the nemesis of Shu Lian’s compatriot in knight-errantry Li Mu Bai, and this is the Cheng Pei-pei character, the Jade Fox. As it turns out, Zhen is well trained in marital arts and is quite accomplished and so the first two scenes, in the first two scenes Shu Lian is trying to disabuse Zhen of these romantic views of knight-errants as people with these wonderful lives. Basically she says you know, life is tuff, you sleep outside all the time, a lot of fighting, its just not a ideal world.

Many of you, how many of you have seen Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon just by a show of hands? Ok, you remember the bamboo grove scene? That’s pretty memorable. The bamboo grove scene, just to jump back to Touch of Zen for just a second is shot without the use of wires, so we don’t have people flying mysteriously in the air, hovering on you know branches of bamboo and things like that, they are basically shown throwing people up and they are flying threw the air. King Hu, um in his action styles used very little wire work, in fact most of what he used were trampolines and he used actors who were actually acrobats that could move around, not to say the actors in crouching tiger hidden dragon, none of them had any martial arts experience, far from it. Hu relied on this, he also used stunt doubles, and to get these wonderful shots of people jumping like onto tops of roofs and things like that, he would shoot them jumping off and print them in reverse so they sneakly created the image or the idea of jumping onto a roof, and it is so effortlessly done that it just is quite amazing. And with a lot of very quick editing, he is able to create the image of flying threw the air, even though he did not have to resort to the wire techniques that mister Lee used in his film. Interestingly enough, the pacing of the two directors works was quite different. Ang Lee’s film is very lyrical and slow and King Hu in his day actually, when compared to his contemporaries was actually considered very lyrical and fairly smug. Anyway, the final scene that is shown is the scene which Zhang picks up the sword, it looks like she is about to cut off or attack Jung but instead lets her go, charging her to be true to her loves and her what, true to her self.
Crouching Tiger tends to steer away from historical allusion and political allegory to focus on broader, more universal themes such as the fight of good against evil and the need to be true to one's self and one's ideals in choosing both opponents in battle and allies in love. As the first two scenes in the clip indicated, the film does offer a more realistic, less heroic portrayal of the knight-errant. In fact, the normal knight-errant struggle for justice is reduced to locating a missing sword and settling one final score as Li Mubai searches for Jade Fox. Likewise the moral message conveyed in the film relates to the individual's struggle for authentic feelings and values in opposition to impose social constraints, as can be seen in Zhen's struggle over whom to love and whom to fight for. This conflict between personal and socially-constrained loyalties appears in many of Ang Lee's films including Eat Drink Man Woman, The Wedding Banquet, and Sense and Sensibility. Where King Hu's moral universe focused on Chinese ethical frameworks, Ang Lee's moral world holds no such constraints, only the Chinese geographical setting marks it as particularly Chinese.

In the last few minutes I’d like to turn briefly to a very recent film, one that came out last year in China, Feng Xiaogang's A World Without Thieves. Set primarily on a train traveling from Tibet to the China heartland, the film pits rival groups of thieves against each other to steal a young peasant's $7500 lump sum wage payment. As the film opens, a young man and woman have fleeced a nouveau-riche Beijing businessman and taken his BMW, which they drive to Tibet to sell. The young woman's conscience gets the better of her and she proclaims to her partner that she has no further interest in a life of crime and wants to do something good for a change. While in Tibet, she spends her time visiting and worshipping at several Buddhist temples and monasteries. It is at one of them that she reencounters the young peasant, with the $7500 known as Root, who had helped her when she was stranded outside the city. Root has spent five years working to help restore Buddhist shrines and has decided to return home rural China where he lives, marry, and build a house, start a family. A devout Buddhist with a wholly innocent view of the world, Root decides to take his earnings in cash with him, he could have had the money wired back but he doesn’t want to spend 20 dollars to wire money back, why should he waste that money, people are honest aren’t they? Well, that is what the whole film is all about. He takes the money with him on the train believing that no one would dream of stealing the money from him. As he prepares to board the train, he calls out to the crowd, "There aren't any thieves here, are there? None of you are thieves, right?" This catches the attention not only of the young man and woman con artists, who Root affectionately refers to as Elder Brother and Elder Sister, but also of Hu Li, which interestingly enough is a pun on fox, the cold and calculating head of small band of thieves also traveling on the train. You should see them, he is portrayed by Glayo, who played the protagonist Fooglay in To Live, which many of you have probably seen. He is a wonderful actor and his performance, and it is just a fun movie.

Elder Sister takes Root under her wing and tries to protect him, though at first Elder Brother seems more interested in trying to get his hands on Root's money. But, as the journey progresses, Elder Brother and Sister take on the roles of Root's protectors as they struggle to see that he, the lamb as he is referred to in the film, keeps a hold of his earnings and that the wolves or thieves circling about him keep their hands off. By so doing, Elder Brother and Sister take on the role of modern-day knights-errant as they struggle to outwit the villainous bandits led by Hu and protect the innocent Root and see that justice is served.
That martial arts becomes the primary means by which both sides face off supports reading this film as a wuxia picture, although its is in fact much more than this. Like King Hu's film, A World Without Thieves appeals to a uniquely Chinese moral universe, in this case, a Buddhist view of the world in which people struggle to come to terms with their attachments and desires. It contrasts Tibet, a place of purity and peace—the world of innocence—with that of greater China, the world of chaos, crime, corruption—the world of experience. As the film nears its conclusion, Elder Sister, who realizes she is pregnant, tells Elder Brother that she has decided to abandon crime in the hope that she can save the child from the influences of the bad karma she has accrued, which stems from Buddhism's belief that actions good and bad bear fruit in this life or the next, and that one cannot escape their consequences. In their efforts to aid Root, they earn good karma for performing acts of merit, by protecting his money and him. And the moral, and this is verified by the fact that moral and ethical authority figure in the play, an undercover policeman, validates by praising their protection of Root, and in fact doing everything he possibly he can to minimize and charges that would be brought. The young man's, Root, and his earnings are protected and for at least the short term, the belief in innocence—a world without thieves, that is to say the title—is preserved.

Chinese martial arts cinema reflects a moral universe with ties to traditional Chinese culture. The values it espouses—justice, altruism, and loyalty—stretch back to much earlier phases of the wuxia tradition preserved in historical records, poetry, fiction, and drama. While the medium of expression has changed, the wuxia and the values these women and men stand for remain core components of Chinese culture. The examples I have discussed are but a few. I hope you will explore the world of the Chinese knight errant in literature and film. While the cultural context may be different from your own, I expect you will find the values will resonate with those that make up your own moral universes. Thank you.