ABSTRACT

Martial arts culture (侠文化) has a long history that dates back to the early Qin period. With such a rich historical background, martial arts literature has always been an important part of Chinese popular culture. Chinese culture has been known to be patriarchal in nature, due to the overwhelming influence of traditional Confucian thoughts. Being part of Chinese culture, it is not surprising that martial arts film inherited the same patriarchal characteristics.

Martial arts culture has demonstrated a tendency of male dominance. Compared to men, fewer women are given active roles in the narrative of martial arts culture. Constituting a significant part of the culture, martial arts film is naturally considered the domain of men.

Contrary to the above assumption, during the period of the 1920s and 1940s, as well as that of the 1960s, however, a great number of martial arts films featured a heroine as the protagonist was made. This curious phenomenon calls for a study which examines gender relations in a genre which has often been assumed to be predominantly male.

In this thesis, I examine the uncharacteristic trend of female heroism in early martial arts film and show why this trend later gave way to an overwhelming male phenomenon. By using Laura Mulvey’s feminist film theory, I attempt to explain the inherent masculine nature of the martial arts genre.