



RICH PIECES

B R O A D W A Y

EVENING COURSE



@BroadwayCinema
@richpieces

broadway.org.uk
richpieces.com

Far East on Film

Rich Johnson

Week 6

MARTIAL ARTS AND OTHER VIOLENT BALLETT

The artful nature of hand-to-hand combat has often played to its own beat. Popularised by the Shaw Brothers Studio during the early '60s, martial arts movies not only found their own footing on home soil but also exploded in a tidal wave across the west when Bruce Lee brought the art form to Hollywood. However, it would take another couple of decades for Hong Kong action movies to elevate the art of violence further via the nihilistic and kinetic gunplay of John Woo* and Ringo Lam's directorial efforts. Then there's the masterful works of Japanese standup comic turned idiosyncratic filmmaker, 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano who is almost impossible to replicate.

Hong Kong/Taiwan

A Touch of Zen (1971)

Director(s): King Hu

Studio(s): Union Film / International Film Production

Hong Kong

Drunken Master (1978)

Director(s): Yuen Woo-ping

Studio(s): Golden Harvest Company / Seasonal Film Corporation

Hong Kong

City on Fire (1987)

Director(s): Ringo Lam

Studio(s): Cinema City

The Killer (1989)

Director(s): John Woo

Studio(s): Film Workshop / Golden Princess Film Production Limited / Long Shong Pictures / Magnum Films / Media Asia Group

Japan

Hana-bi (1997)

Director(s): Takeshi Kitano



RICH PIECES

B R O A D W A Y

EVENING COURSE



@BroadwayCinema
@richpieces

broadway.org.uk
richpieces.com

Studio(s): Bandai Visual / Office Kitano / Tokyo FM / TV Tokyo

South Korea

The Villainess (2017)

Director(s): Jung Byung-gil

Studio(s): Independent Filmmakers / Group BFG

Notes:

Kung fu

Shaw Brothers Studio: largest film production company in Hong Kong, a ‘film empire’.

Arrow Films: “Where Do I Start With Shaw Brothers?” www.arrowfilms.com/blog/features/where-do-i-start-with-shaw-brothers

A notable director was King Hu who worked on one of Shaw Brothers’ most notable films of the period, *Come Drink with Me* (1966).

In 1965, Hu left the studio just after completing *Come Drink with Me*. Leaving for Taiwan he met with producer Sha Rongfeng and the two created the short-lived studio, Union Film Company.

Hu’s *A Touch of Zen* (1971) is a seminal piece of Chinese cinema. “*At once a wuxia film, the tale of a spiritual quest, and a study in human nature.*” Criterion.

Physical releases: available on US Criterion and Eureka Entertainment’s Masters of Cinema series.

The iconography of the bamboo forest can be seen in Zhang Yimou’s *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), a film that followed the success of Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000); both of which are a direct homage to King Hu’s work.

Yuen Woo-ping’s *Drunken Master* (1978) is definitive Jackie Chan; showcasing his skills as a martial artist coupled with comedic timing. Chan’s signature style.

Also available on Eureka Entertainment’s Masters of Cinema series.

Yuen Woo-ping is known for his choreography on *The Matrix* (1999) and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and *Kill Bill Volume 1 and 2* (2003-2004).

Gun fu

John Woo’s *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) was a major game changer within the Hong Kong action cinema.



RICH PIECES

BROADWAY

EVENING COURSE



@BroadwayCinema
@richpieces

broadway.org.uk
richpieces.com

Ringo Lam's *City on Fire* (1987) is a major part of this landmark era. Both films set the style for the 'heroic bloodshed' genre.

This revolves around highly stylized (two gun) action sequences and dramatic themes such as: brotherhood, duty, honour, redemption and violence.

A huge influence on Hollywood; there are major beats, scenes and framing used by Quentin Tarantino in his '92 debut, *Reservoir Dogs*. His signature 'borrowing' (or popularising) of cinema from around the world he has always done.

The Killer (1989). How do you choose a favourite Woo? The Killer is certainly up there.

Shows all his hallmarks of violence juxtaposing melodrama and sentimentality.

Stop pointing those guns! Obsessed with the 'standoff', Woo's films are, essentially, HK Westerns.

John Woo's *Hard Boiled* (1992) has one of the highest body counts in the history of cinema. Once again the film stars Chow Yun-fat; Woo's very own de Niro, having worked on numerous films together.

As a pro-democrat, Chow Yun-Fat has been banned from working on film productions in mainland China by the socialist government. This was specifically for publically supporting the student protests around 2014.

Plans to give his \$700 million fortune to charity.

John Woo's first Hollywood movie was *Hard Target* (1993) starring Jean-Claude Van Damme and Lance Henriksen.

In influencing Hollywood so heavily during the '90s, he went on to direct *Face/Off* (1997) and *Mission: Impossible 2* (2000).

Hana-bi (1997) is an off-beat crime drama written, directed and edited by 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano. As with all of his films, they have a distinctive style. Quiet, odd and violent.

You may recognise Kitano from the David Bowie film, *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* (1983).

He actually began his career as a standup comic and is not well known in Japan as a presenter from the hugely popular (syndicated) game show, Takeshi's Castle that ran in Japan from 1986 to 1990. This is the equivalent of Timmy Mallett becoming Quentin Tarantino.

Other films include his debut feature, *Violent Cop* (1989), *Sonatine* (1993) and his 2003 remake of the *Zatoichi* series of films (1962-1989).

The Villainess (2017) is an outstanding South Korean action movie from director Jung Byung-gil. The film boasts an opening action sequence shot entirely as an optical POV.



RICH PIECES

B R O A D W A Y

EVENING COURSE



@BroadwayCinema
@richpieces

broadway.org.uk
richpieces.com

Inspired by the Luc Besson's *La Femme Nikita* (1990).

Heavily stylised, the film feels like a throwback to HK '90s action.

the influence of this film now seen in the likes of *John Wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum* (2019); specifically the cinematography and motorbike chase sequence.