

CHAPTER FIVE

of

CUTTING ACTION

**APPRECIATING HONG KONG'S WUXIA FILMS
THROUGH AN ANALYSIS OF CONSTRUCTIVE EDITING**

PhD Thesis
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5. CHAPTER FIVE

DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

EFFECTS OF DESIGN ON STYLE AND NARRATIVE - A CASE STUDY OF *COME DRINK WITH ME* AND *SEVEN SWORDS*

In the opening chapter I addressed the problematic misconception that narrative and spectacle are dichotomous elements within the Hong Kong martial arts film genre and in the previous chapters I have established that, while astounding spectacle is an important aspect of the Hong Kong action film style, there are more significant influences upon the design of spectacular events. I have shown that the pursuit of novelty, the cyclic oscillation between the poles of fantasy and realism and the structural dominance of the staircase formula (which will be more comprehensively analysed in this chapter) are all better ways to comprehend the construction of spectacular events. Additionally I have provided a useful delineation of some of the differences between continuity editing and constructive editing so that we could see how Hong Kong filmmakers approach the presentation of action with an emphasis on the movement of the body as opposed to the sublimation of action to strict continuity guidelines which prioritise the space of the action over the body. All of this information encourages a better understanding of the *wuxia* film genre that should enable the viewer to find deeper aesthetic significance in an apparently simple clash of swords.

Having established these things we are now in a position to look closely at the opening fight sequences from two films to see how they bear out the points I have made. Because I have extensively analysed technical and plotting conventions of the genre we can now elucidate interesting deviations from typical *wuxia* narrative patterns and stylisation. At the same time, the two films I have chosen also reflect how contemporary Hong Kong film style has been built upon the same devices as the style of the 1960s. This chapter provides a case study of the ways that two films have contended with the influential forces that I have already discussed, with similar results.

King Hu's *Come Drink With Me* (1966) and Tsui Hark's *Seven Swords* (2005) are the focus here and I concentrate on the first fight sequences of either film. Both directors are seeking to apply a sense of realism to their first fight sequences, so we will see how they manage this goal. This is enabled through judicious constructive editing and staging. Both directors also appreciate that the use of blood needs to be controlled in order to present realism too. For Hu this means incorporating more blood-work than had been seen in films prior to the New Era. For Tsui it means restraining his penchant for blood-work. At the same time, the action events that are presented are highly violent. The violence is made more prominent through the stylistic means with which that violence is presented. Both directors are seeking innovative ways to show killing while not repeating themselves, or other filmmakers, and in this way the pursuit of novelty has encouraged a stylistically arresting sequence of action events.

There are numerous parallels between the ways that the two directors have handled the introduction of villainous characters and there are also significant differences. The primary reason that their first fight sequences have been chosen is because the plotting and narrative content of the combat traverses almost identical paths. The way that combat is escalated in this sequence best serves to show how Tsui has reinvented Hu's principal action events with novel stylisation. Therefore the organisation of this case study is predicated upon a comparative analysis of sequentially occurring action events, where I will analyse, in parallel, the ways in which both directors handle each successive action event. I place particular emphasis upon the way in which Cheuk Pak-tong's conception of the staircase formula applies to the plotting of action within the fight sequence (1998: 58) as well as how both directors have subverted this organisational structure. This provides a basis for analysing the way in which both narrative and spectacle are influenced by, and stylised according to, the principal forces that I have identified in this thesis.

There are also numerous parallels between the combat plotting of both films and these too will be taken into consideration early in this chapter to investigate how each director handles the transition between characters with lesser and greater martial arts power. Also, because the focus of this chapter is on first fight sequences, I have also spent some time elucidating the generic trait of beginning *wuxia* films with combat. Aspects of the final fight sequences are addressed but these are integrated into the analysis of the first fight sequence, at pertinent times, to provide a broader scope within which to demonstrate the stylistic similarities and differences between each film. But first, the two films that form the basis of this case study need to be introduced.

Film Selection #1: King Hu's Come Drink With Me

Although *Come Drink With Me* (1965) is not recognised as one of King Hu's most accomplished films it is certainly one of his boldest, if only because he challenged the prevailing norms of the Hong Kong film style. Prior to *Come Drink With Me* Hu had directed one film and co-directed two films, but he had not yet directed a *wuxia* film.¹ Faced with a genre that championed extraordinary human movement and with the Shaw Brothers supporting a new style of action, Hu began experimenting with filmmaking techniques in the pursuit of liberating human movement from the stage-bound influences of Beijing Opera. However Hu ran into trouble because the full implementation of his style required him to overhaul Shaw Brothers' studio-based production methods. He also he had a penchant for filming on location, setting him on a collision course with the fiscally focussed Shaw Brothers (Law 1998: 84-85).

An analysis of King Hu's *wuxia* film editing techniques in their earliest manifestation (within *Come Drink With Me*) identifies intriguing concepts that he put into practice during the germination of his style. We will find that Hu's style has the capacity to convey gentle or forceful movement through a combination of suggestive and implicit images. Some of his experiments challenge the viewer by pushing tempo, eye-trace and cogency to the absolute limit. On occasion, we will also find that Hu attempts to convey too much information at too fast a tempo, failing to impress the fuller content of his *mise en scène* upon the viewer. The analysis of one particular match-on-action reveals that his highly populated battlegrounds contain an

¹ *Sons of the Good Earth* (1965) and co-directed with Li Han-hsiang: *The Love Eterne* (1963) and *The Story of Su San* (1964).

over-abundance of visual information and orchestration that is not so easily discerned when played at the proper speed, while his mid-shots and close-up shots tend towards sparseness. This analysis also reveals an editing pattern in Hu's shot assembly, which displays a tendency to accelerate the tempo towards a crescendo. Overall, this detailed analysis enables us to more easily discern the manner and methods by which Hu orchestrated the camera, choreography and editing so as to convey the *xia*'s traditional skills with a sense of New Era realism.

Film Selection #2: Tsui Hark's Seven Swords

Producer Ng See-yuen has noted that '[if] we didn't have the King Hu style in the martial arts genre, we will not today have the Tsui Hark style' (Law 1998: 104). Tsui is a maverick filmmaker yet aspects of his style are born of the reinvention of other filmmakers' techniques and *Seven Swords* is no different. The title of this film evokes Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954) and its narrative shares similar parallels (because heroes rescue villagers from marauders) but my comparison will show that Tsui's plotting of action closely resembles *Come Drink With Me*.

Seven Swords is not the first time that Tsui's work has set new standards for action filmmaking. With his production company, Film Workshop, Tsui has consistently re-invented the action genre with films such as *Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain* (1983) which features the ground-breaking use of wirework and special effects and *The Blade* (1995) which re-invents Chang Cheh's *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) with 'precisionist' editing finesse (Bordwell 2003: 12).² Even though he already has

² Tsui has also revolutionised kung fu films, such as in *Once Upon A Time In China* (1991) where he displays expert martial arts practitioners Donnie Yen and Jet Li in combat and he has also been an influential figure in the

over forty films to his credit, Tsui is a tireless filmmaker who seeks to reinvent not only the work of others but his own techniques. In *Seven Swords* he set himself a number of challenges, not least of which is manipulating CGI with editing to achieve enhanced yet realistic combat (Gravestock and Walsh: 125-128). But Tsui also presents numerous heroes, creating the distinct challenge of an extended and complex staircase formula.

The staircase formula determines the sequential engagement of increasingly skilled combatants as the narrative progresses. It is present in most martial arts films because it provides a useful pattern for deploying increasingly spectacular fight sequences across a film as well as providing for increasingly spectacular action events during fight sequences themselves. Although the staircase formula is not a measure of spectacle but the hierarchy of character it still enables characters with greater skill to dispense greater spectacles later in the film. While the staircase formula does impose certain constraints upon the director, how the director subverts those constraints can be a sure sign of maverick filmmaking.

Hu's first *wuxia* feature also exemplifies his detection of the formula's limitations. The narrative development of *Come Drink With Me* is fractured by the clash between commercial demand for realistic action and the generic convention of fantastic action. The result is the substitution of the heroine's narrative path (which approaches a more realistic aesthetic) with the narrative path of the greater hero (who provides requisite fantastic feats). Tsui similarly introduces the greatest hero of *Seven Swords* at just over thirty minutes into the film and as he is drawn into the plot

development of contemporary action movies with such films as *Time and Tide* (1999) proving to be an explosive guns and gangsters film that mixes CGI, wirework and plenty of ammunition.

the lesser heroes' narratives are diminished. Beyond the sublimation of narrative to formulaic convention, *Seven Swords* exhibits a number of *Come Drink With Me*'s formulaic quirks while at the same time showing evidence of stylistic evolution as the genre is filtered, yet again, through Tsui's unique design.

The plot structures of *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* share remarkable parallels and uncanny likenesses in the types of action event displayed, from similar events and outcomes between consecutive fight sequences right down to the kind of dismemberment that is used to represent the total domination of one battle group by another. Although the characters' motivations and stories are different, each consecutive fight sequence delivers common narrative objectives, culminating in the confrontation between the ultimate hero and the ultimate villain (see Table: A Comparison of Fight Sequences in *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords*). Researchers have not previously addressed these similarities, so the next section provides a preliminary comparison of the way that the over-arching narratives of *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* are organised in relation to the staircase formula. This research helps to situate the more detailed analysis that will occur in later pages.

Permutations of the Staircase Formula in Come Drink With Me and Seven Swords

In both *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* it is the hierarchical structure of the group of villains that predetermines the structure of the staircase to be scaled. At the top of the organisation there is an ultimate villain who commands a lesser villain who, in turn, leads a group of mercenary types. In *Come Drink With Me* the ultimate

villain is Abbot Liao Kung (Yeung Chi Hing) and in *Seven Swords* the ultimate villain is Fire Wind (Sun Hong-lei). The hierarchy establishes that there will be at least three levels of fighting:

1. Hero(es) fighting the bandits/mercenaries
2. Hero(es) fighting the lesser villain
3. Hero(es) fighting the ultimate villain

In both films the majority of fight sequences concern the heroes (including the greater heroes) combating the lesser villains (bandits/mercenaries) while the ultimate villain's more extreme skills are not fully deployed until the end of the film. Because heroes are reluctant to utilise the full range of their powers to despatch opponents, this means that the action can retain a comparatively realistic flavour for the majority of the film. Moreover each fight sequence progresses according to the hierarchy that is inherent to the staircase formula, so that it retains combat between its topmost heroes and villains until the climax of the sequence.

At the time of making *Come Drink With Me* the distinction between real and fantastic cinema had begun to significantly affect Shaw Brothers' fight sequences and, as a result, the narrative development of their films. Hu opted to cast two differently skilled heroes to represent either category so that the formula could be fulfilled according to both generic convention and popular taste. Towards the end of the film Hu abandons his lesser (and more realistically) skilled hero (Golden Swallow) in favour of an overtly fantastically skilled character (Drunken Cat) who is able to withstand the attacks of the ultimate villain (Abbot Liao Kung). Golden Swallow advances far enough along the staircase to be confronted by the Abbot but does not have the power to overcome him and is herself defeated. Within Hu's conception of the *jianghu* the Abbot is greater than Golden Swallow because he is an

expert practitioner of martial arts who can harness his *qi* to perform fantastic feats. By the time she meets the Abbot she has already reached the summit of her narrative arc because she has trounced her direct counter-part (Jade Faced Tiger) and her brother has been rescued from the bandits' clutches. At this juncture her story is summarily abandoned and her character no longer affects the narrative of the film. Subsequently Hu turns our attention to the battle between the Abbot and Drunken Cat, both of whom can deliver more extravagant novelties during the film's latter fight sequences. Confirming Teo's assertion, Hu does not 'forsake fantasy' for realism and conforms to the requirements of the *wuxia* genre by replacing one central character for another who can deliver the requisite fantastic skills (2003a: 24). Although Hu uses fantastic action to deliver his closing sequences, the majority of Hu's fight sequences present prevailingly non-magical skills and, although *uncanny* skills are displayed in these sequences (such as Golden Swallow's manipulation of coins as projectiles to spell out her insignia in chapter 2), such skills tend to indicate a dexterous, rather than fantastical, harnessing of *qi* energy.

It should be noted that in Hu's later films, *Dragon Gate Inn* (1968) and *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973), there is a significant shift in the context in which the final battle is fought. In these films Hu increases the total number of heroes so that working together they are able to overcome the otherwise insurmountable magical powers of the principal villain (Teo 1984: 34-40). Golden Swallow cannot overcome Liao Kung by herself, but in *Dragon Gate Inn* a group of heroes working together does wear down and defeat the evil eunuch, Tsao (Bai Ying) and a similar group forces the tyrannical Lee Khan (Tian Feng) to meet his end in *The Fate of Lee Khan*. By increasing the number of non-fantastically skilled heroes Hu carries his central

characters through to victory in the final battle rather than abandoning them mid-way as he is forced to do in *Come Drink With Me*.

In *Seven Swords* Tsui slightly subverts this tactic by assembling a team of variously skilled heroes, yet he still affords the decisive combat scene to a single hero.

Occupying the beginning of the film is the character development and martial arts training of lesser heroes but their narratives are still surpassed by more powerful heroes in the latter half of the film. Of the lesser heroes, Fu Qingzhu's (Lau Kar Leung) quest for redemption and Wu Yuanyin's (Charlie Yeung) search for her heroic identity are superseded by a love triangle between the ultimate villain, Fire Wind (Sun Honglei), and ultimate hero, Chu Zhaonan (Donnie Yen), who vie for the affection of Green Pearl (Kim So Yeun). Both directors introduce their ultimate heroes and villains after lesser characters have been defined and both directors stylistically demarcate the skills of lesser characters as being less fantastic or less developed than the greater characters. They must also find ways to shed these lesser characters so that the ultimate characters can fight in a showdown to bring the film to a climax.

So, for the very first fight sequence, both directors begin at the lowest step of the staircase formula: the dispensable villains – lesser bosses and their minions. This fight sequence showcases their brutal fighting methods, which are conveyed in comparatively realistic ways that do not contain any sort of magical power. In *Come Drink With Me* the lesser boss is Jade Faced Tiger (Hung Lieh Chen) and his minions are bandits. In *Seven Swords* the lesser boss is Kualo (Chen Jia-jia) and her minions are the mercenary Lieutenants of the Red Flag Gang and lesser, unidentified soldiers.

They are soon to be despatched or driven away as the heroes climb their way up the staircase.

I have previously established in Chapter 2 that there are distinct differences in the ways that villains and heroes contend with conflict. Villains are quicker to resort to using their weapons. This is partly because they take pleasure in killing and partly because the staircase formula means minor villains are the soonest to be despatched. Thus the spectacle that their weapon-play provides needs to be demonstrated as early as possible. Heroes, on the other hand, are more reluctant to draw swords and they demonstrate their honourable disposition by not killing. They also need to keep their more extreme skills in reserve, as they will face a number of challenges as the film progresses. These are diametrically opposed combatants; the villain is often the deceptive attacker and the hero is the righteous defender. Helpfully, because *wuxia* films often feature a fight sequence within moments of their start, these significant character traits are easily identifiable at the outset of a film, as there is little time to pick sides.

By the showdown, the final fight sequence, there are more obvious displays of extreme martial arts skill as the most powerful opponents meet head-to-head. However, at this point, the way that fantastic skill is presented in either film is somewhat different. Hu employs techniques that serve to enhance the fantastic, magical capabilities of his characters while Tsui tries to play down the magical capacity of the humans and attributes it to their weapons. Stylistically, Hu's two primary combatants perform fantastic moves that are not always shown outright but are implied. Tsui, on the other hand, conforms to Sek Kei's notion of credible

exaggeration to present impossible feats that aspire toward realism with clarity of technique (1994: 31). Unlike *Come Drink With Me*, the action in the showdown of *Seven Swords* doesn't explicitly present palm power nor does it indulge in weightless leaping so much as it does in acrobatics. The fantasy that is contained within the action of Tsui's combat is attributable to the quasi-magical, magnetic power emanated by the swords and to the capacity of skilled swordsmen to wield those swords.³

In *Come Drink With Me* the showdown is staged in a different area and at a later time than the penultimate fight. As Drunken Cat prepares to leave his hideout for good, the Abbot attacks him and their duel revolves around Drunken Cat's hut and gazebo. The penultimate fight sequence of *Seven Swords* is neater because it leads into the showdown and rather than staging the showdown in a different time and place, it is staged in a different area of the fortress, upon the upper mezzanine level. Like *Game of Death* (Bruce Lee/Robert Clouse, 1972/1978) or a computer game the hero has to ascend a level to reach the next stage. At the start of the showdown Yang separates from the ground level battle area to challenge Fire Wind. To show this, Tsui provides a visual representation that encapsulates the staircase formula in a neat manifestation of the staircase itself. The step-up to the final battle is literally taken by Yang who is shown ascending the steps to the mezzanine where Fire Wind waits for him.

Tsui is toying with the viewer's expectations by having Yang ascend the staircase towards Fire Wind. Although he is powerful, Yang has not been cast as the ultimate hero within the film. By this stage we know that Chu has been cast as the ultimate

³ There is a spectacular clash of linked metal flags during the showdown of *Seven Swords*, which is attributable to the magical/magnetic power of the swords.

hero so we might ask: has Yang ascended too far up the staircase? Is he good enough to challenge Fire Wind? Yang's appearance upon the steps raises these questions – born of suspense – due to Tsui's obvious challenge to the formula. The mezzanine steps provide a good way to indicate the separation of combat areas within the fortress, but they also evoke the staircase formula itself.

Within this section we have begun to see how the staircase formula affects the character development, suspense and resolution within fight sequences. Because the first fight sequence of a *wuxia* film often occurs within moments, filmmakers often rely upon our instant recognition of good and evil characters so that the combat can engender an emotional response. A character's attitude to combat can delineate their moral alignment, which helps us to appreciate the narrative of a fight. Next we will see how directors establish their own predilection for the type of narrative and combat that will unfold, within seconds of the film's start.

THE PROMPT FIRST FIGHT SEQUENCE

Knowing which side to back is important to our appreciation of the outcome of a fight. Typically, we want the good guys to win and the bad guys to lose, but the staircase formula and the pursuit of novelty require that the plot-structure be organised so that the *decisive* bout between these two factions is delayed until the end of the film. In the previous section we have seen how the villains' treachery and the heroes' reluctance to draw their swords can help to delay this outcome. But the first fight sequence does not necessarily introduce us to both the heroes and the villains at the same time. In fact, we have also seen how more powerful characters

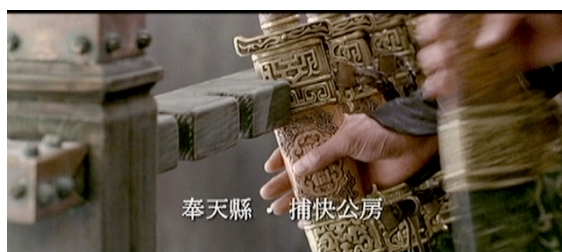
may be withheld and introduced until much later in a film – thus allowing the director to draw out combinations of combatants who will deliver various spectacles in the meantime.

Not only does the staircase formula help to escalate spectacle in conjunction with the pursuit of novelty, it also effectively generates a sense of anticipation because it delays the inevitable confrontation between the hero and the arch-villain. This confirms a hierarchy of attractions whereby the most spectacular fight sequence is (ideally) withheld until the very end of the film because it will feature the most powerful combatants. But the first fight sequence must also capture the attention of the viewer and for this reason the first fight sequence is often treated as a showcase for the exhibition of directorial flair. It can also deliver some of the themes of the movie as well as the types of ideas that the director wants to express. Because there are numerous ways to incorporate an immediate fight into the narrative, some of these methods are addressed in the following sub-heading.

Immediate Action and the Establishment of Plot and Character

The generic significance of a prompt (if not immediate) fight sequence was made apparent by its absence in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). Teo has argued that Ang Lee postponed the deployment of martial arts action for fifteen minutes because ‘the “crossover” ambitions of *Crouching Tiger* require a long passage of exposition designed to familiarize westerners with the period, the characters and even the appearance of the sets’ (2003a: 25).

Lee's decision is likely to have contributed to the sense of spectacular deficiency detected by Felicia Chan who found the action wanting by comparison to mainstream Hong Kong films that 'boast a far higher and more spectacular action quotient, as well as a considerably higher body count' (2003: 56-57). After *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon*'s lack of success with Chinese audiences the first fight sequences of Zhang Yimou's *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers* are subsequently introduced significantly earlier in either film. In *Hero* it takes just over seven minutes to appear, while in *House of Flying Daggers* the very first shot of the film cleverly provokes anticipation of combat as a rack of swords is systematically emptied.⁴



Through spectacular display, the prompt fight sequence is intended to pique audience interest in the storyline. The audience learns important plot details from the combat and are primed for the kind of encounters they might expect to witness in the remainder of the film. It was a tactic routinely used in Shaw Brothers productions and, as such, set a precedent for the genre. Within the Shaw Brothers' stable, directors managed the conventional prompt fight sequence in uniquely different ways. Chang Cheh, Chor Yuen and Lau Kar-leung used the first fight sequence as an assertion of their directorial individuality, technical skill and to confirm their thematic concerns while also delivering the opening credits (Teo 2003a: 25).

⁴ Swords are not drawn until fifteen minutes into the film. But the first spectacular event is initiated at just over 6 minutes when Mei's dance begins and soon becomes a marvelous, tension-building percussive drum-dance. The drum-dance then initiates the first fight sequence at 15 minutes.

Chang opts to show particularly bloody fights, with high body counts, and his assertion of *yang gang* (staunch masculinity) is manifest in the almost exclusive use of male combatants (Lam 2003). In Chang's film *The Trail of the Broken Blade* (1967) the first fight is initiated at just over a minute and a half. At this point Li Yue (Jimmy Wang Yu) slays his father's betrayer and a troupe of guards all before the opening credits (which appear at 2 minutes 35 seconds into the film). In Chang's next film, *One Armed Swordsman* (1967), the time until the initiation of the first fight sequence is halved to 45 seconds and the duration of the fight is lengthened to nearly 2 and a half minutes (though it is inter-cut with shots of the young Fang Gang [Chiang Wing-Fat] raising the alarm). In both of these films the narrative is distinctly concerned with vengeance and its consequences, particularly avenging the death of a father. But in *One Armed Swordsman* Chang employs the tactic of setting up the plot through a fight sequence that does not involve the central hero and in this way Chang postpones the obvious attraction of seeing the star of the film in combat mode.

In *Clans of Intrigue* (1977) and *Death Duel* (1977) Chor Yuen uses swift and immediate clashes to get his elaborate narratives underway. During the first 53 seconds of *Clans of Intrigue* eleven shots are used to construct three spatially and temporally independent assassinations (an average shot length [ASL] of 4.8 seconds). Chor does not dwell upon the slayings but efficiently moves on to establish the character of the central hero. The first "proper", or full-length, fight sequence then takes place at 4 minutes into the film during which Chu Liu-hsiang (Ti Lung) trades blows with Kung Nan-yen (Nora Miao) to learn that he must expose the identity of the assassin. The rhythm of the fight is punctuated by the exchange of dialogue, which provides further exposition regarding the murders.

In *Death Duel* (Chor's third film of 1977) the first fight sequence is an equally cursory affair and the scene is set for a showdown as the credits appear at the introduction of the film.⁵



The ensuing combat sequence takes ten shots and lasts just over 40 seconds, during which Yen Shih-san (Ling Yun) kills six opponents within thirteen blows, thereby fulfilling the terms of his boast.

Shortly thereafter central actors/characters are still being credited and so here is Chen Ping (Chan Ping) as Mu Yung Chiu-ti at 3 minutes 36 seconds into the film.

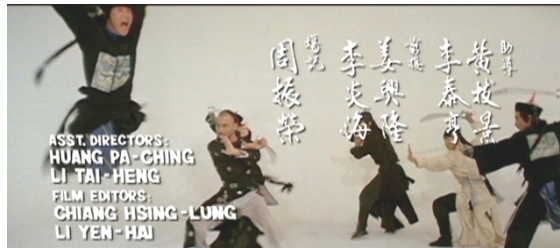


It should be noted that credits are not necessarily a measure of the swift introduction of the fight sequence, just that they are often preceded or accompanied by action.⁶ Chor delivers action with conventional promptness but he is also keen to get the plots, which spin off from these encounters, well underway.

⁵ Chor directed five films in 1977. In order of release they are: *Clans of Intrigue*, *The Jade Tiger*, *Death Duel*, *The Sentimental Swordsman* and *Pursuit of Vengeance*.

⁶ In Chang Cheh's *The Water Margin* (1972) Chang tackles an epic story that is over-populated with characters such that, twenty-six minutes into the film, he is still introducing characters with titles (Lan Wei Lieh as 'Chief Wrestler').

In contrast with Chor's elaborate set and plot design, Lau Kar-leung's concern with the transparent representation of traditional martial arts is reflected in his tactic of showcasing the skills of his actors against a neutral back-drop, such as during the opening credits of the kung fu comedy *Dirty Ho* (1979).



In a setting devoid of scenery, the plain backdrop encourages the viewer to concentrate upon the action. The sparse introductory setting is not exclusive to Lau, as other Shaw Brothers directors used the same kind of introductory display. In *Dirty Ho* the fight routine itself does not initiate the narrative but provides a preview of some of the film's martial arts styles and motifs as well as establishing the tutor/pupil relationship between the two protagonists, Wang Ching-chin (Gordon Liu Chia-hui) and Ho Chi (Wong Yue), well before they have actually befriended each other in the narrative of the film. The introduction to the first fight sequence in Lau's film *The Eight Diagram Pole Fighter* (1984) is postponed until two minutes into the film but continues for another eight minutes. It takes place against a slightly more elaborate studio back-drop just as the credits appear, but in this film the long opening battle shows the motivation of the two heroes' disparate journeys when Sixth Brother (Alexander Fu Sheng) and Fifth Brother (Gordon Liu Chia-hui) witness the gruesome slaughter of their father and brothers. Sixth Brother goes mad while Fifth Brother embarks upon a quest for revenge.⁷

⁷ Alexander Fu Sheng died during the production of this film, hence his disappearance from the staircase formula.

The Shaw Brothers directors' common practice of instigating a fight sequence within the first few minutes of a film became generic convention and was subsequently employed by other action filmmakers. For instance Tsui Hark's - *Zu Warriors From the Magic Mountain* (1983), features three distinct fight sequences within the first nine minutes.⁸ Notably, when Hu left Shaw Brothers after making *Come Drink With Me* he opted to challenge the convention he had helped to instigate by delaying fight sequences until the narrative had already been established – for as long as an hour in the case of *A Touch of Zen* (1971).

In both *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* the first fight sequences also begin shortly after the opening of the film, within two and three minutes respectively. No heroic characters are involved in these initial fights and so the lesser villains, characters on the lower steps of the formula, are introduced. This allows a combat situation that will reflect a sense of realism because these characters are not fantastically powerful and it is too early in the staircase formula to deploy fantastic feats. Instead, this combat will be violent and bloody. A gruesome spectacle establishes the utterly corrupt identities of the villains and so the scenes convey the brutality that these villains embody. The fights are massacres, with the defenders standing no chance of victory. As the fights proceed, the killings grow increasingly graphic until the moment when the immediate boss (the topmost boss of the sequence but a lesser boss within the context of the film) delivers the mortal blow to finish off his/her direct counterpart and brings an end to the resistance. However the scenes do not finish at this point and in both films one more character, an essentially defenceless victim, is slain to confirm beyond doubt the malevolence of the villains.

⁸ Firstly the unfortunate scout, Dik Ming Kei (Yuen Biao), is set upon by his own army, secondly he fights a Red Army Soldier (Sammo Hung) on a junk and lastly the pair of them find themselves in the midst of an enormous battle between three different armies and have to work together to escape.

The first fight sequence of *Seven Swords* exhibits numerous parallels to that of *Come Drink With Me*. A number of the techniques and action events initially employed by Hu are re-invented by Tsui. These spectacles also fulfil similar plot developments within the fight sequence and, what's more, they occur in the same order. The following section examines how both of the first fight sequences are assembled to achieve these plot developments, how spectacles are organised according to a staircase formula and how both directors have used editing to convey the action contained therein.

ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST FIGHT SEQUENCES

As this chapter is concerned with elucidating the similarities and differences between the assembly and editing of the first fight sequences of these two films, it is important to note that the narratives of both films develop from the initial massacres. Within the first fight sequences of *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* we are not only given a reason to be in awe of the power of lesser villains, but we are also provided with the narrative impetus for the heroes' path. More specifically, in *Come Drink With Me* a group of bandits ambush and massacre a company of government soldiers and take a prized hostage. The hostage is the brother of Golden Swallow (the lesser heroine) so the ambush and his capture motivates her appearance in the narrative. *Seven Swords* begins during a hiatus in battle while the remaining defenders of a village plead for mercy but they are systematically executed by the Twelve Lieutenants of the Red Flag Gang.⁹ During the execution they kill an

⁹ The Lieutenants' motivation is fiscal because the Emperor has placed a bounty upon the heads of martial arts practitioners (which so happens to be anyone they choose – practitioner or not).

inhabitant from a neighboring village, an action that draws the people of that town and, subsequently, the heroes into the narrative.

In both first fight sequences the audience is led to infer that the sequential executions are wholly efficient and temporally consecutive due to the methodical assembly of the edit that reveals the fighting prowess of significant villains in the consecutive manner required by the staircase formula. In both fights a series of short, constructively edited vignettes are shown which demonstrate the fighting skills of significant lesser villains as they despatch an opponent. The final sword-thrust is then afforded to the immediate boss-villain, Kualo in *Seven Swords* and Jade Faced Tiger in *Come Drink With Me*. However it must be noted that in *Seven Swords* Tsui subverts the staircase formula when a crossbow-wielding Lieutenant effectively robs Kualo of the opportunity to draw the very last drop of blood and Hu alters the formula when Jade Faced Tiger maims his counterpart at the very start of combat. So here is the common structural conceit: before the bosses can *kill*, their minions must be presented to the audience.

The delay of the final killing blow harks back to the influence of the *Sanjuro* climax. The build-up towards the topmost boss-villain's involvement develops the viewer's anticipation of action with the climactic event being the boss-villain's direct involvement in combat. This is done by delaying combat and then by using projectile attacks in the lead up to hand-to-hand combat. Within this context the two directors organise the action in quite different ways. Hu takes the opportunity to generate suspense before battle and, once hand-to-hand combat is initiated, he accelerates the tempo by ramping up the speed of the shots and the number of actions accomplished

within those shots. Tsui prefers to modulate between slow-motion shots of the boss-villain and vignettes of action to showcase the majority of bizarre weapons in the Lieutenants' arsenal, demonstrating how these weapons work and how they might pose a devious, deadly threat to the heroes later in the film. The spatial organisation of these fight sequences is also governed by differing spatial agendas: for Hu it is the bandits' ambush and encroachment upon the Governor's palanquin while for Tsui it is the procession of combat from mounted (on horseback) projectile attacks, to mounted hand-held weapon attacks and finally to hand-held weapons used at ground level.

Introductions to Villainy

To counter any supposition that the hero will inevitably be victorious (by of their simple virtue of *being* a hero) *wuxia* directors commonly showcase the threat posed by the villains' predilection for trickery through their use of devilish weapons. This is usually done early in a film. *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* are no exceptions as both films exhibit the villains' arsenals within the first fight sequences. This overcomes the problem of the invincible hero; if a hero has superior powers to everyone in the film then there is little drama. For example, Superman needs kryptonite to generate a sense of genuine threat, and this forms the basis of more involving drama.

In chapter 2 I showed that villains are identifiable by their bizarre and concealed weaponry, but it is the way in which they use their weapons that confirms their evilness and engenders within the viewer a desire for retribution. From their

despicable actions the viewer determines that they deserve their comeuppance. In fact we expect it. The capacity to truly enjoy the villain's demise is determined by the extent to which the villain is seen to deserve retribution. 'Often it is our hatred of certain characters', says Noel Carroll, 'that keeps us riveted to the screen.' Carroll calls this a 'primitive feeling of retributive justice' and suggests that this response:

is probably why most of the time astute filmmakers wait until near the end of the film to kill their villains off. If the characters that we love to hate die too soon, there may be little left on-screen to hold our interest. (2006: 218)

The sooner the ruthlessness of the villains is shown, the sooner the viewer will begin to comprehend (and possibly fear) the threat that they pose to other inhabitants within the world of the film. *Wuxia* directors often include a scene, a moment, that convinces us of the villains' moral corruption. In *Come Drink With Me* Jade Faced Tiger's use of a concealed weapon at the start of the first fight sequence is an instant indicator of his deceptive nature and the way that he dispatches his hapless counterpart at the end of the sequence also pertains to the brutality of the villains. But the soldiers are armed and relatively worthy opponents so, later in the film, Jade Faced Tiger uses his poisoned dart to wound an innocent child-monk, which confirms his contemptibility. In *Seven Swords* the fact that the Kualo and her Lieutenants do not accept the villagers' surrender in favour of the financial gain granted by killing everybody in the village is reason enough to despise them from the outset. Tsui establishes this during a short dialogue sequence at the head of the scene, which allows him to quickly advance to the action. This allows Tsui to capitalize upon the opportunity to invent new ways to kill off extras with the bizarre weapons within the Lieutenants' arsenal and, as he does this, he also seeks not to repeat himself so that each new killing is done in a novel and increasingly spectacular manner.

Establishing Demeanour, Creating Suspense

Both fight sequences are gory affairs but they are both preceded by the necessary and suspenseful formality of introducing the immediate boss villain's demeanour. Hu generates suspense through a lone figure single-handedly halting the procession of government troops with a wave of his fan. It soon becomes apparent that Jade Faced Tiger is a bandit seeking the release of his imprisoned compatriots. The suspense is two-fold: when will violence erupt and how does this bandit think he will escape from the company of soldiers? Hu protracts the affected formality between the Captain of the Guard and Jade Faced Tiger and toys with the viewer's expectations because we know that conflict and combat will soon arise. The bandit hands a letter to the Captain who carries it down the line of soldiers to the palanquin in which Master Chang is waiting.



Wide shots reinforce the contrast between the size of the government troop and the solitary figure of Jade Faced Tiger, which makes the bandit's gesture for the procession to halt seem a brash, poised and wholly confident manoeuvre. But the wording of the letter, "Release our leader or else", implies a greater number of bandits.

Similarly, Tsui opts to establish the ruthlessness of his villains through dialogue before the bizarre weapons are revealed. As in *Come Drink With Me*, the formality of the meeting between the combatants generates suspense, but in *Seven Swords* it occurs after the viewer has been shown evidence of combat having taken place. Before the area for the first fight sequence is established some shots are used to show the carnage already wrought upon the villagers.



In the staging of the fifth shot it is apparent that an indomitable force surrounds the remaining villagers. As the camera executes a lateral pan, the distance between the villagers and the bandits is only a few meters.



But the shot is full of information and although some villagers are herded into the embattled group – directing the eye to the middle of the shot – a cut is soon made to a frontal, medium shot of the village spokesman as he pleads for mercy.



Then, in reply, the cut is made to a mid-shot of Kualo and her Lieutenants in profile.



By employing a disjunctive shot-reverse-shot style (where the reverse shot is not a “reverse” but a reaction profile) the distance between the parties becomes obscured as the dialogue progresses and the initial establishing shot is forgotten. This phenomenon is helpful because the close proximity between the villagers and Lieutenants needs to be forgotten so that Kualo and her men don’t appear to close in on their targets too quickly when the action is initiated. From this point the villagers and the Lieutenants are not contained within the same shot until the aftermath of the first projectile attack.

During the brief conversation between Kualo and her immediate counterpart (the spokesman) it becomes apparent that the Lieutenants will not accept surrender for a milder form of punishment because, as Kualo says, “Death is the mildest punishment”. The villagers don’t stand a chance and they are systematically killed. True to the staircase formula, Kualo kills the spokesman at the very end of the villagers’ resistance. He is established as the leader of the survivors and therefore must be obviously despatched for that resistance narrative to be properly concluded.

Before Hu and Tsui can get their immediate boss villains to despatch their respective counterparts they both have to counter the problem of close proximity between the boss villain and his/her immediate counterpart. How does Hu extricate Jade Faced Tiger from his close proximity to the soldiers, and how does Tsui delay the

engagement of Kualo since she is only a few feet away at the start of battle? This problem is partly solved by the use of projectile weapons that provide the opening salvo of both films.

PROJECTILE WEAPON ATTACKS

In both first fight sequences the initial distance between the villains and their victims predicates the manner of the first strike because the space between the two parties must be broached before the boss-villain can engage hand-to-hand combat. The use of elided match-on-action cuts for the release, flight and result of projectile weapons is a neat way to launch a swift and effective attack upon targets without the villains having to move closer. Not only does this allow for the spectacle of projectile action to be included, it is also a handy way to delay the boss villain's involvement. Thus the distance between parties is initially surmounted by a projectile attack that also partially establishes the position and proximity of the villains to the victims. In both of these fight sequences the position and proximity of the combatants is established by the use of wide shots (not necessarily used at the head of the scene), projectile flight and an initial screen direction that establishes the group of villains to the right with the victims to the left.

Projectile Weapon Attack: Come Drink With Me

In *Come Drink With Me* the Captain of the convoy is distinguished as Jade faced Tiger's counterpart. Upon the order of the Master Chang (riding in the palanquin) the Captain prepares to stab Jade Faced Tiger in the back. Back-stabbing is, of course, a

dishonourable method of attack made more dishonourable by the fact that Jade Faced Tiger appears to be unarmed, and a righteous *xia* would not deign to perform such treachery. But the Captain is not a righteous *xia*, he is a government minion, and Jade Faced Tiger is indeed a villain, armed with a poisoned dart concealed in his fan. By interpreting both men's actions in terms of the kinds of behaviour that delineate good and evil in the *wuxia* film of that time-period we can assert that neither man is particularly righteous – although the Captain, it can be said, is acting under orders.

When Chang Cheh made *Golden Swallow* (1968), the sequel to *Come Drink With Me*, he was ambivalent about the kinds of characteristics that define the *xia*. The hero of his film, Silver Roc (Jimmy Wang Yu), is a brooding, brothel-dwelling malcontent who thinks nothing of slaying legions of enemies and laying the blame on his long lost love (Golden Swallow) in order to get her attention – and it works. In Chang Cheh's interpretation the Golden Swallow character is more attracted to a man who has the capacity to wantonly kill than a man who merely maims, such as Han Tao (Lo Lieh). But Hu does not indulge in the grey-area between good and bad because easily recognisable heroes and villains afford him the opportunity to develop his interest in style. Despite Hu's Manichean predisposition, the first battle of *Come Drink With Me* suggests ambivalence about clearly dividing the two groups into 'good' and 'bad'. The first strike by Jade Faced Tiger is a counter-attack that could be justified as a self-defensive response to the Captain's attempt to stab him in the back, but he later uses this sinister weapon to shoot a young novice in the eye; and when a monk pleads for the antidote it is duly administered in the form of a fatal stabbing. The killing of the innocent child confirms beyond doubt that these bandits

are truly homicidal malefactors within the moral backwaters of the *jianghu* and that they deserve punishment for their crimes.

Given orders to kill the interloper, the Captain walks back to Jade Faced Tiger and ushers him toward the palanquin. The Captain moves to strike Jade Faced Tiger from behind but, before he can bring his sword down, Jade Faced Tiger shoots him with an over-the-shoulder flick and the poisoned-dart-shooting-fan is revealed.



The dart travels to the right of screen, barely visible but showing the flight of the weapon. Then an elided match-on-action cut is made to the Captain and the implied impact is enhanced by the victim's gesticulation.



When struck by the dart, the Captain reels backward. Hu thus establishes the method of editing projectile attacks that will be used in this fight sequence: the first shot shows the release and flight, the second shot shows the projectile already in the

target. Hu adds novelty to this otherwise tried-and-true method by having Jade Faced Tiger make a well-aimed over-the-shoulder shot without looking. Additionally Jade Faced Tiger's weapon is a dart concealed in an otherwise innocuous fan (recalling the mundane arsenal of James Bond). So with this surprise projectile attack the battle is instigated. The poisoned dart paralyses the Captain's left arm and his troops rally to his aid as he retreats from the battlefield. As tympanic music strikes up, soldiers set upon Jade Faced Tiger.



He retreats backwards, from the left to the right of screen, which prompts the introduction of the rest of the bandit horde. On the hillside, in the background of the shot, three silhouettes pop up.



They appear very briefly (but are easily seen against the sky) before a cut is made to a brief shot (13 frames) that establishes those silhouettes as archers who fire a volley of arrows towards the foreground and left of frame.



This shot provides an example of Hu's characteristic inclusion of barely glimpsed (and perhaps unnecessary) detail because the Bare Chested Bandit (standing just behind the archers) is properly introduced to the viewer at the conclusion of the next shot. Here the focus is firmly upon the action of loosing arrows and the characters involved in this action are incidental. There is no time to analyse them but Hu goes to the effort of including a significant villain regardless. It is the dynamic movement that catches the viewer's attention and motivates an elided match-on-action as in the *Temple of the Red Lotus* (Xu Zhenghong, 1965) projectile example cited in the previous chapter.

Before he discovered the capacity for an intervening whip-pan to enhance the sensation of projectile flight, Hu's demonstration of the use of projectile weaponry is regularly shown as a two-shot match-on-action where the continuity of the screen direction across the cut is maintained by the trajectory of the projectile. The first shot shows the projectile being thrown or loosed and the second shot shows the projectile already in the target. This technique elides the flight-time to imbue the action with an uncanny speed. The flight of the projectile is not continued in the second shot, nor is the actual puncturing of the target shown, thus all projectiles shown in such a manner (an elided match-on-action) can cover any distance within the same amount of time. Even though the bandits' arrows will have to cover a greater expanse than Jade Faced Tiger's dart they both meet their mark within the same amount of time.

Hu allows three frames to pass after the arrows exit the screen before cutting to the next shot that shows the guards immediately reacting to being hit by the arrows.



By allowing 3 frames to pass before the cut, Hu accounts for the flight of the arrows. Similarly, when Jade Faced Tiger shot his dart, Hu allowed 4 frames to pass after the dart left the screen before cutting to the Captain recoiling in pain. Although Hu has the option of eliding the flight for an even more dynamic transition from loosing to impact he opts to account for the time needed to suggest the flight of projectiles over distance (despite the varying distances) because this is a more realistic option when employing this technique.

This technique is inverted during the final fight sequence of *Come Drink With Me* so that the loosing/throwing action is shortened and the reaction of the target is favoured. This is done to show how Drunken Cat escapes being hit by the Abbot's projectiles. As Drunken Cat prepares to leave his hideout the Abbot suddenly attacks him. The Abbot throws a handful of pellets; his projectiles are still visible in the outgoing frame.



The incoming frame shows Drunken Cat poised.



But by the fourth frame he is in motion, ducking out of the way.



Before he completely exits the shot a jump cut is made to the projectiles embedded in the tree trunk behind him. His eyes, which are the viewer's principal point of fixation, are replaced with the pellets in the same area of screen. So if the viewer hasn't followed Drunken Cat's swift ducking movement, then her eye-trace will be negated.



By shortening the throw and lengthening the reaction Hu still allows time for the flight of the projectile but in this way the audience is also able to glimpse Drunken Cat's uncanny capacity to avoid being hit. The jump cut creates the sensation of the pellets hitting the tree and so projectile penetration is dynamically implied.

As with the pellets and the dart, the projectile flight of the bandits' arrows maintains a constant screen direction with the second shot confirming the direction established

by the first shot. In the first fight sequence, when the guard closest to the camera topples forward through the bottom frame, he reveals an arrow in his back and maintains the screen direction indicated by the flight of the arrows.



His fall below the frame (and off-screen) reveals the unruffled Jade Faced Tiger in the mid-ground and by falling across the screen to the left the soldier effectively indicates that the way is clear for Jade Faced Tiger's passage back toward the bandit troops. With that, the archers' attack is over. The archers' rescue of Jade Faced Tiger has essentially been book-ended by his plight at the hands of those guards and then his safety when they are killed. The relative positioning and proximity between the parties has also been established such that the bandits, at this point, occupy the right side of screen and the soldiers occupy the left.

By this stage the action has shown two types of projectile attack and there will be no more in the first fight sequence. The first is a one-on-one attack that reveals Jade Faced Tiger's deceptive fan-dart device, and the second is the group attack that reveals the hidden bandits and lays waste to a number of soldiers with a hail of arrows. Both of the attacks are tailored to suit the narrative of the action – Jade Faced Tiger's self-defence and then the bandits' rescue of Jade Faced Tiger.

Projectile Weapon Attack: Seven Swords

In *Seven Swords* there are important differences to Tsui's handling of the opening salvo and these are motivated by his stylistic concerns for the ensuing action. Tsui's agenda is to show his significant villains' bizarre weapons in operation. Just as Jade Faced Tiger carries a poisoned-dart-fan that is integral to the narrative of *Come Drink With Me*,¹⁰ there are *two* particular Lieutenants who carry projectile weapons that Tsui wants to showcase at this point of the story. So, Tsui opts to forego showing a volley of indiscriminate arrows and starts with a significant step-up on the staircase formula. Like Hu, Tsui showcases projectile weapons but, unlike Hu, Tsui does not display a projectile attack *en masse*.¹¹ Tsui opts to alternately present a style that *shows* the flight of a single projectile and a style that *conceals* the flight of a single projectile.

Hu was dedicated to replicating period costumes and accoutrements as accurately as possible and so he rarely equips his villains with truly bizarre weapons. Instead he prefers concealed weapons and poisons. Tsui does not share Hu's predilection for historical accuracy and prefers to utilise far more outrageous and overt weapons that he frequently designs himself. His interest in the representation of unusual weaponry is manifested in his first feature film, *The Butterfly Murders* (1979), where the mysterious murderer uses a peculiar but deadly butterfly net.

¹⁰ It is later used to incapacitate Golden Swallow. Then Drunken Cat manages to steal the dart from the fan, which enables Golden Swallow to defeat the defenceless Jade Faced Tiger.

¹¹ Moreover the opening shots of the scene provide evidence that there has already been a group attack. Prior to the opening dialogue we are shown scenes of carnage and then we have seen the minion troops herding the villagers to appear before the Lieutenants so, presumably, these minions have been the first wave to attack the village and round up the survivors.



But the butterfly net is not an especially imposing weapon and it suffers from being under-utilised in the film so it appears to play a more cosmetic role, while the murderer's suit of armour does save him from injury on a number of occasions. Similarly, the villains of *Seven Swords* also wear dreadful, bulky black armour; their faces are visible (for easier identification by the viewer) but they still bear the stamp of corruption with elaborate facial tattoos/war paint.

By *Seven Swords* Tsui had become far more concerned with foregrounding the bizarre weapons of his villains by their utilisation. More effort is made to elucidate their mechanical function. The villains tend not to use conventional swords, but instead they are equipped with such devices as a crossbow, a three-pronged mace, a scythe, curved sabres and even a guillotine disguised as an umbrella.¹²

Despite the small distance that has been established between the two parties, the first two attacks upon the villagers are made with projectile weapons. These two different attacks afford Tsui the opportunity to use stylistically different (and therefore independently novel) methods of editing the same type of attack. The first combat-vignette is designed as a showcase for a particularly curious weapon: the Bladed Shield. Six shots are used to show its effect; the first three shots show the weapon being set in motion, shots four and five show it hurting the villagers and the sixth

¹² The premier villain, Fire Wind (Sun Honglie), carries an ornate, ringed broad blade rather than the slender *jian* (sword). Fire Wind aspires to wield one of the seven magical swords, but when he does it ultimately brings about his downfall.

shot shows the villagers' reaction to the pain dealt by the shield. The sixth and final shot of this vignette is also the first to display a slow motion effect and it is used to initiate the first slow motion interval, but more on this shortly.

The Bladed Shield effectively mows down a number of villagers and partly explains the clearing of a path for Kualo and her Lieutenants. The Bladed Shield is brandished thus: the Lieutenant leans over, blades spring out of the shield's rim, the blades begin to spin around the rim and the shield is thrown. Within each shot, two principal actions take place. In the first shot (shot 1) the Bladed Shield Lieutenant¹³ leans to the right of screen (action 1) [34f].



His movement is accompanied by a short, diagonal whip-pan.



The whip-pan reframes the subject so that the camera and shield come to a stop in close-up. At this point, the blades spring out (action 2).



¹³ For easier recognition I have named each individual Lieutenant by their principal weapon/s.

Tsui could have simply cut to an inserted close-up of the shield but by containing two important actions in the shot the director maintains the integrity of the prop. The shield has been built to perform certain functions (popping out the blades and then rotating them) so rather than using constructive editing to imply these actions they are shown within the shot.

Shot 2 is a static close-up of detail. It is shorter than the shots that bookend it, but this insert still contains two principal actions. It provides the viewer with a high angle shot showing the Lieutenant flexing his arm (action 1) and then the blades begin spinning (action 2) [14f].



It is tempting to suggest that the near point of view angle of this shot would prompt the viewer to feel the sensation of being part of the action, of being in the position of the Lieutenant and therefore aligned with the villains. But the shot is angled to again reinforce the integrity of the prop. Although it foregrounds a degree of mechanical spectacle, this kind of constructive, clear filmmaking accords with Pudovkin's declaration that '[t]he details organically belonging to scenes ... must not be interpolated into the scene but the latter must be built out of them' (1958: 51). By using angles and shot scales that complement the action Eisenstein's conception of a dynamically understood work of art is achieved, so that, 'the spectator receives the represented result of a given consummated process of creation, instead of being drawn into the process as it occurs' (1970: 17). Rather than being drawn into the

process the viewer is placed “inside” the area of action, which recalls the Yingjie’s report that New Era directors used more close-ups than before. Also, in the second projectile attack with the crossbow, Tsui is quick to put the viewer in the position of the victim (as we shall see).

Shot 3 of this projectile attack shows the Lieutenant leaning further to his left, accompanied by a camera movement (action 1) [32f].



He throws the shield off-screen (action 2).



During these three shots only glimpses of the Lieutenant’s face can be seen as the viewer’s attention is clearly directed to the weapon; in fact, it wouldn’t be inaccurate to say that showing the visage of the Lieutenant is a far lesser concern than showing his weapon. Because the villains’ characteristics are closely associated with their fighting styles, emphasis is placed upon their unorthodox weapons such that the prioritisation of these details affects the assembly of shots. Just as Chu is preceded

by his Dragon Sword (in chapter 2), more screen time is afforded to the operation of their weapons than to the Lieutenants themselves.

There are two frames after the shield has exited where the Lieutenant remains upon the screen so that at the outgoing shot there is little of distinction to keep our interest.



Because of the two frame lag in this shot we might expect to see the shield already imbedded in a target, such as when Hu left three frames before cutting to pre-punctured soldiers, but Tsui has other ideas.

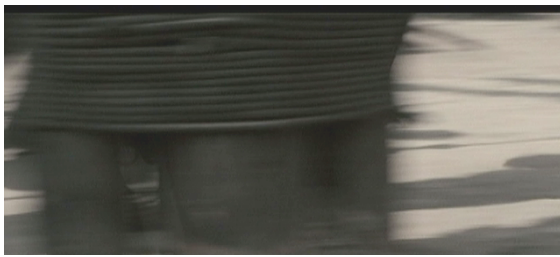
The shield flies off-screen to the left of frame and the viewer's eye-trace follows to that side of the screen and is attracted to a pair of legs, already on-screen, running in the opposite direction (left to right) in the incoming wide shot (shot 4 of this vignette). This is the first of three shots that show the effect of the Bladed shield as it cuts the villagers' legs from beneath them (shots 4, 5 and 6). The feet are already in the left half of the screen at the start of the shot so they are in prime position to command the viewer's attention [64f].



But by the fourth frame (within Dmytryk's margin for the visible identification of an incoming shot) the shot is obscured by a stationary roped pole that comes into shot with the tracking camera movement, effectively darkening the screen.



By the eighth frame (by which time the eye has certainly recognised and informed the mind of a new shot) the camera has nearly passed the pole so that its shape, moving across the frame in a right-left direction, is effectively repeating the direction of the throw, continuing the right-to-left trajectory of the shield.



By drawing the eye to the left the movement creates a sense of flight, similar to the effect of Hu's blurred whip-pan inserts, and it reinforces the dynamism of the throw by bouncing the eye trace back off the left side of frame for a second time after the cut. When the pole has passed, the running legs emerge from behind it and draw the eye back across screen.



The camera tracks with the legs until their inevitable collision with the Bladed shield that now enters the shot.



The integrity of the prop is maintained because it is shown spinning as it flies, with the aid of concealed wires, across screen from right to left.



The crumpling of bodies in the foreground implies contact between the weapon and victim, but the carnage is not explicit because the bodies are between the shield and the viewer. Unlike the flight-of-the-dagger example from *House of Flying Daggers* (which we examined in the previous chapter) the shield is necessarily kept at a distance and the shot is comparatively short and busy. By keeping the foreground bustling with legs, the relatively cumbersome and awkward weapon is not subjected to too much scrutiny. But this type of staging befits Tsui's desire to downplay the use of blood (Gravestock and Walsh 2006: 126-127).

Tsui eschews CGI in favour of wirework to show the flight of the weapon and he uses constructive editing and basic visual effects to imply the result of the weapon's buzz-sawing flight. The next shot (shot 5) shows detail of impact between the shield and the villagers when a leg is lopped off [52f].



Just as piercing was a novelty to be achieved in the result shot of the constructive editing of projectile weapons (chapter 4), Tsui also opts to show the novel (and dastardly) effect that the Bladed shield has upon the villagers. Yet he still keeps the gore of the situation inexplicit which is a considerable change to his film-style, especially when we recall the fountain of blood from *The East Is Red* (Raymond Lee Wai-Man, Tony Ching Siu-Tung, 1993) example in chapter 2.

However, the types of violence that are enacted upon the villagers are still quite novel and Tsui does favour the reaction of the villagers as they topple. The last of the shots showing the victims crumpling during the Bladed shield attack (shot 6 of the vignette) sits upon the 180-degree axis of action that has been established between the villains and the victims. This shot provides a frontal view of villagers flailing about and is rendered in slow motion – an effect that enhances the sense of their helplessness [60f].



This is the first slow motion shot of the fight sequence. It initiates the first of the three slow motion intervals that show the immediate boss-villain, Kualo, approaching the villager's position from a 180-degree reverse angle. Each interval contains footage (sourced from the same master take) of Kualo and some of her Lieutenants walking towards the camera – with a John Woo inspired 'gangster stroll'. In this initial instance the villagers topple and flail about in the foreground [101f].



In the same way that arrows fell guards to clear a path for Jade Faced Tiger's retreat, the villagers drop and indicate that a path is being cleared for Kualo and her Lieutenants to enter the fray. The recurrent use of this slow-motion shot indicates that it is a vital tool for creating dynamism between Kualo's location and the Lieutenants' bursts of action. It also helps to break up the sequence of events and will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. Here the focus is on Tsui's manipulation of projectile attacks and the next projectile attack is stylistically advanced such that it provides a significant step up in Tsui's pursuit of novelty, not just within this sequence but also within his canon of techniques.

After the first slow motion shot of Kualo, the villagers rally. One of them charges towards the Lieutenants in slow motion [65f].



He is swiftly brought into line and killed during the second projectile attack. In this case the distance between villain and victim is reduced and it is reduced by the machinations of the Lieutenant's arsenal. In two swift shots that are edited with a jump cut, a grappling hook wraps around the villager's neck. The jump cut is used so that the otherwise difficult to perform action can be cheated. In the first shot the chain wraps around the victim's neck.



Then in the second shot the hook appears to secure a hold.



The reverie induced by the slow motion interval is broken as the Grappling-Hook-and-Crossbow Lieutenant yanks upon the chain, takes aim with his crossbow and shoots the villager in the head. This is not done in the usual match-on-action manner of presenting arrows hitting targets but in a manner that shows an evolution of the principles involved. Tsui uses the same principle of the atypical first shot for the loosing and the atypical second shot for the hitting of the target, but rather than relying on the usual constructive editing to convey the action he also employs

camera work and the actors' gestures to create the illusion of the flight of the bolt. In the first shot the Grappling-Hook-and-Crossbow Lieutenant takes aim as the camera pushes in which gives the impression of the bolt approaching the viewer even before it is loosed.



Eye-trace between the shots is negated in the next shot because the victim's head replaces the space that the crossbow bolt had occupied.



The actor is recoiling as the mindful response kicks in after the cut (the actor's initial recoil occurs during frames 5 to 10). The negation of eye-trace and judicious cutting makes it look as though the bolt has been fired directly into the head.

As the victim drops out of shot, a focus pull brings the Lieutenant back into focus.



An earlier version of this style of rack focus enhanced projectile shot can be found in Tsui's *Time and Tide* (2000). Without the target being included in the frame, the focus racks from background to foreground, from the gunman to the gun.



In *Seven Swords* Tsui uses two different, contemporary methods of showing the use of projectile weapons: firstly the use of the Bladed Shield is shown with a shot dedicated to its actual flight and secondly the flight of the crossbow bolt is not shown at all – neither its release nor its penetration. This accords with the directorial desire to invest action sequences with action that exceeds past techniques and stacks the novelty of techniques used *within* the individual fight sequence itself.

Tsui cannot resist showing the effect of a crossbow bolt and so at the very end of this fight sequence one last victim is killed. We must jump ahead here to address the effect of this particular projectile attack. Tsui toys with the viewer's expectation by using constructive editing to circumvent the staircase formula. The village trumpeter

is shown being violently silenced. The inference is that Kualo's blade kills him.

After a shot of Kualo waving her blade over the trumpeter's head Tsui provides a shot of Kualo in close-up and scowling as she makes a slicing movement.



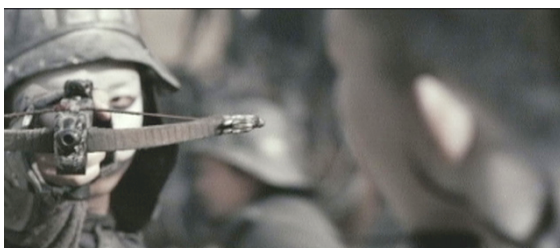
By this stage Kualo has already killed her direct counterpart and reached the summit of the staircase formula within the scene so the killing of the trumpeter is an additional grotesquery.



But the shot continues to reveal not a blade but a crossbow bolt protruding from the victim's mouth.



The ensuing shot reveals it to have been the Grappling-Hook-and-Crossbow Lieutenant's handiwork.



Although denied the kill by Grappling-Hook-and-Crossbow Lieutenant, Kualo, curiously, does not chastise the Lieutenant but perhaps his lack of discipline explains why he is alone in the woods for the third fight sequence, or perhaps he has been sent out to search for the interloper, Fu. Perhaps he is a loner. Either way, for his breach of the staircase formula and for drawing attention to his character, he is the first of the villains to die. This is confirmed by the fact that there are, as yet, un-showcased villains (Tri-Club Lieutenant, Net Lieutenant and Double Sabre Lieutenant) who are being held in reserve to provide surprise and spectacle later in the film. By exhausting his range of talent and his complete arsenal the Grappling-Hook-and-Crossbow Lieutenant becomes a prime candidate for “killing off” as soon as possible because the novelties he can provide are almost depleted. In the third fight sequence Tsui shows the *flight* of his grappling hook reflected in the water of the creek (which we saw in chapter 3) and he is soon killed. But his death does serve a narrative purpose because it introduces Wu to Fu (and hence the other heroes) as well as showing Wu’s despair at the combative situation, which is a problem she will have to surmount to fulfil her character arc.

We have seen how Hu reinvents the flight of projectiles at the start of his final fight sequence so let’s jump ahead once more to see how Tsui reinvents the flight of the Bladed shield at the start of his showdown. As in *Come Drink With Me* the last fight sequence of *Seven Swords* also begins with a projectile attack. But here there is a distinct inversion of directorial agendas. When the Abbot surprises Drunken Cat at his hideout Hu is quick to get the action underway, while Tsui wants to generate suspense when Yang makes his way up the staircase. As Yang ascends the staircase his progress is not easy. Ascending the staircase formula requires the hero to

overcome obstacles as he makes his way to the top and Tsui ensures that Yang must encounter obstacles as he climbs the steps. A bandit topples a brazier down upon Yang.

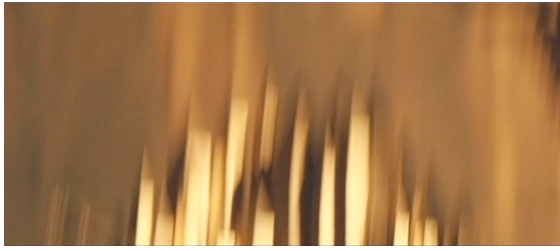


But Yang employs his heroic capacity to turn obstacles to his advantage by striking the brazier away to the right of screen.



Aided by wirework, it flies away in a similar fashion to the Bladed shield but this time it is travelling in a different direction – a small novelty but a deliberate choice to provide difference to a previously used technique. The primary novelty is now the addition of fire to the projectile. This addition pre-empts the manipulation of fire during the final fight sequence.

Unlike the hapless villagers who succumb to the Bladed shield, the target of Yang's redirected strike is the topmost villain of the film, Fire Wind, who won't be so easily defeated. Instead he lounges upon his throne and, as the brazier streaks toward him, he expresses the power of the Dragon Sword by splitting the brazier in two. The first shot of this action begins with a downward whip-*tilt* that pre-empts the direction of Fire Wind's downward sword strike.



The vertical panels of the throne emphasise the tilt before it comes to a stop and Fire Wind completes his chopping action.



While whip-pans (lateral and diagonal) are more common, the *whip-tilt* adds a novel dimension to the technique. Rather than adding dynamism to the projectile it adds dynamism to the swordplay. In the context of this particular action it also has narrative importance. The brief visual impact of the whip-tilt accentuates the impact of the sword with the brazier and gives additional credence to the forcefulness of the strike and the immense power of the Dragon Sword.



Whereas Jade Faced Tiger dodged the Abbot's projectiles, in this instance, rather than the projectile striking the target, it is deflected. But the result is similar; by not

having the projectiles strike their intended targets the battle can advance to the next step.

When melee combat gets underway both directors re-establish the proximity of the boss-villain to the battle by relaying his/her position in wide shots. Hu does this with shots of Jade Faced Tiger observing the battle. Within those shots Hu orchestrates the movement of combatants to new areas around Jade Faced Tiger's distinctive white-robed figure. Tsui's method of re-establishing the proximity of the boss-villain is much simpler. He uses parallel editing to return from the combat vignettes to a John Woo-like slow-motion shot of the boss-villain and her Lieutenants strolling towards the camera. Tsui's parallel editing technique shapes the combat-vignettes into dislocated pockets of action. The combat-vignettes between the re-establishing shots are then organised according to either director's particular concern: Hu presents an edit that accelerates by the assembly of small groups of neatly organised shots whereas Tsui is still preoccupied with demonstrating an outrageous arsenal of weapons.

RE-ESTABLISHING THE BATTLEFIELD

After projectile attacks the directors continue to the second phase of their first fight sequences. For Hu this means generating suspense as realisation of the ambush dawns upon the guards while Tsui, who has already established that the victims are surrounded, continues to showcase the bizarre arsenal of his villains who now engage in combat with melee weapons. The way that the two directors attend to the engagement of combatants is markedly different. The *Sanjuro* effect of delaying the

inevitable clash of swords is maintained, but Hu prolongs the delay to confirm that the guards are fully surrounded. Tsui, who has begun with only the survivors of an initial, unseen attack already surrounded, is quicker to have his villains engage in combat but he also adopts a parallel editing technique which serves to create anticipation by postponing the boss villain's engagement in battle. During this stage of combat the boss villains serve as visual "anchors", meaning that they are used as figures around which the combat is orchestrated.

Re-Establishing the Battlefield: Come Drink With Me

The enormous amount of detail that Hu injected into his shots is easily missed on a casual viewing of the film and the extent to which Hu has orchestrated unity between shots is really only apparent on renewed viewings or in detailed analysis such as this. In this section we will see that Hu very cleverly organises his battlefield according to fairly strict continuity of positioning, but we will also see that this organisation is perhaps redundant given the relative size and on-screen brevity of his visual anchor, Jade Faced Tiger. Nonetheless we will also see how Hu cheats continuity to make the suspense of the ambush work when eye-line matches are used to impress the size of the bandits upon the surrounded soldiers.

Having poisoned the Captain, Jade Faced Tiger moves safely out of immediate danger thanks to his minions' projectile attack. He is tossed a sword and his minions move in to resolve the skirmish that restores the proper development of the staircase formula. In this fight sequence Jade-Faced Tiger sits at the top of the staircase formula with the Captain of the Guards as his direct counterpart and they will only

meet again at the very end of the fight. While his minions engage in combat, Jade Faced Tiger assumes the role of field marshal and his white robes act as a visual anchor around which Hu orchestrates multiple areas of action. Once the battle is all but over, Jade Faced Tiger steps in once again and executes the hapless Captain to bring the fight sequence to a close.

However, before the lesser bandits engage in melee combat, Hu has to get them to ground level. We have seen the start of the shot showing soldiers felled by arrows (falling to clear the space around Jade Faced Tiger) but that shot continues with a tracking movement and introduces the fact that there are bandits at ground level (which, as we shall see, is similar to Tsui's organisational tactic of progressing the assembly of vignettes from horseback to ground level melee). As Jade Faced Tiger begins to walk towards the right side of the frame the camera tracks with his movement to reveal the Bare-Chest Bandit (previously in the background with the archers and now in the mid-ground).



The Bare-Chest Bandit heads into battle to the left, while Jade Faced Tiger retreats to the right. Jade Faced Tiger has initiated the battle for the other bandits to finish and he will now take up his place as field marshal.¹⁴ That the Bare-Chest Bandit covers a great deal of ground to be at Jade Faced Tiger's side at the conclusion of this shot is

¹⁴ As the story progresses we learn that Jade Faced Tiger fancies himself as quite the charismatic statesman, blessed with the gift of the gab, which partly explains why he is the lone bandit who stops the procession to deliver the notice demanding the release of their leader. The other explanation is that by setting him up to face the Captain, Hu allows himself an opportunity to disclose the dart-fan.

no accidental continuity error but a deliberate choice because one of Hu's primary tactics when using constructive editing is to use the cut to mask the repositioning of characters.

Before the Bare-Chest Bandit fully exits the tracking shot a match-on-action cut is made to the incoming shot. Now the camera frames him from behind in a medium close-up shot scale as he runs at the guards, halts and brandishes his sword above his head.



The guards retreat and the camera tracks with them to the left. The Bare-Chest Bandit has corralled the guards further back into the valley, whereupon we are treated to a series of eye-line matches that compound their plight. Here Hu's use of constructive editing really shines as he generates the suspense of the ambush by simultaneously increasing the dawning comprehension of the guards with the knowledge of the viewer. This is expertly done through eye-line matches.

The next six shots confirm that the Captain and his troops are surrounded. We already know that the bandits occupy the space to the right of screen, but what about the space to the left? The Captain and his guards look to the left of screen.



They see a bandit (Smiling Tiger) joined by other bandits rising up from behind the hill.



Thus the guards are out-flanked. Then the action is repeated; only this time the soldiers look even further to the left of screen, back down the line of troops and the direction from which they came.



More bandits rise up so we learn that the guards' rearward escape route is cut off.



Then Master Chang lifts the flap of palanquin and adds his eye-line to look right once more.



This shot re-confirms that bandits surround them on all sides.



We learn of the bandits' positions at the same time as the guards do; meanwhile Hu ingeniously shifts the camera closer to the palanquin in the fifth shot so that Master Chang can be included in the sequence. In the first two shots of the guards he is at a distance from the palanquin but by the third shot he is right beside it. How does Hu conceal the discontinuity of the Captain's positioning? Although the discontinuity of the Captain's repositioning is obvious upon close analysis (and more obvious than the sudden movement of the Bare Chest Bandit from the background to foreground) the jump in continuity goes unnoticed due to the moderated rhythm of the shots and the speed of the bursts in which the eye-trace of the viewer is challenged to glean as much information as possible about the guards' responses.

First and foremost the shots of the guards are rapid – only a second long (an ASL of 25 frames) while the shots of the bandits are nearly twice as long (an ASL of 43.7 frames). So the re-framing is disguised by the modulated rhythm of the six shots. The viewer is forced to garner more information from the swifter shots of the guards and

their attention in those shots is primarily focused upon the reaction of the Captain.¹⁵ This is helpful as the Captain occupies the right zone of screen, which is the same zone that Master Chang occupies when he is introduced, so the eye-trace of the viewer is generally drawn to this area during the guard shots and this effect helps to smuggle Chang into shot without notice.

Additionally the guard eye-line match shots are full of detail and motion (with a subtle addition to the evocation of tension being their wind-whipped, red tassels) while the shots of the bandits are simple; their movement is restrained and consistent. The bandits also occupy a smaller amount of space on the screen. So in effect there are pauses when the bandits ascend the hills and bursts when the guards respond and turn their heads. During these bursts the viewer is forced to garner information about the guards' reaction and to anticipate the next shot from their prompting eye-lines. All the while Hu is using this effect to establish the position and proximity of the bandits without resorting to an establishing shot that includes both the guards and bandits. By the inference of eye-line matches the space is further delineated and the viewer learns that the guards are surrounded on all sides. Furthermore we assume that more than a dozen bandits surround them when in actuality Hu is using the obfuscating aspect of the wide-shot to conceal detail and these are possibly the same actors in different settings.

Hu then cuts to Jade Faced Tiger to confirm his role as field marshal. Jade Faced Tiger flicks his fan open and closed before raising his sword as a signal to attack (his fan is a multi-purpose tool – a weapon, signalling tool and cooling device). Then, the

¹⁵ The guard shots (A=24f, B=26f, C=25f) average 25 frames while the bandit shots (A=49f, B=48f, C=34f) average 43.67 frames. The third and last of the bandits' shots is slightly shorter as by now the rhythm has been established so that it does not need to linger on-screen.

following wide shot confirms that the guards are surrounded, as there are dozens of bandits creeping towards them. In this very deep establishing shot the guards occupy space in the background to the left of screen, guarding the palanquin. The bandits are situated on all sides and at all depths - on the slopes behind, at mid-depth and even walking into shot from outside the frame in the foreground.



Until now, the constructive editing of mainly uncluttered static mid-shots and medium-long framing has concealed the bandits' advancement from the extreme distance to their closer proximity to the sedan chair. The restriction of the viewer's spatial comprehension in this way enables Hu to suddenly fill the frame with bandits in an establishing shot that compounds the size of the ambush.

Hand-to-hand combat begins in this deep establishing shot but it is obscured by distance and it is cut short. In the centre of the shot, where the bandits and soldiers meet in the background, two small figures have just crossed swords when a cut is made to (of all things) a bucking and galloping horse!¹⁶



¹⁶ This recalls the use of a raging horse to represent the death of General Miki and the changing, turbulent mood in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957). In Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' (upon which *Throne of Blood* is based) Duncan's tame horses turn wild and eat each other as an indication of the disruption caused by regicide.

Not only is the first clash of swords kept at a distance in the depth staging of the previous shot but the ensuing collision between armies is omitted. Instead Hu decides to insert a dynamically representative shot that recalls the collision of armies in *Alexander Nevsky* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1938). There are a number of reasons to make this edit. In terms of narrative the horse is not an altogether random inclusion as the Captain had been riding a horse until Jade Faced Tiger halted the party, and now as it gallops away from the camera this further suggest that there is no possible escape. Stylistically the sudden and unexpected subject provides a more rousing introduction to the swordplay. Just as the eye is led to a small point of fixation, in the deep, wide-shot the cut to the horse suddenly provides a larger subject with no specific focal point. Its mane, legs and tail flailing create an explosion of visual information and an erratic challenge to eye-trace. From the small focal point to this explosion of information the introduction to actual melee combat is delayed once more, yet it is dynamically and symbolically represented with a chaotic subject. The deliberate postponement of combat recalls the *Sanjuro* tactic of creating suspense by delaying the expected. Yet the galloping horse also provides a release from the tension of anticipation and this is confirmed by the sound-track accompaniment of a loud braying and a vigorous crescendo in the music when a crash of cymbals finally ends the incessant tympani that has been building until now.

Hu expertly delays the combat and then substitutes the first clash of swords with an unfettered and un-choreographed subject that proves a rousing introduction to the chaos of battle. The horse extends the delay between the initial projectile attack and swordplay. The projectile attack confirms the bandits' hostility and then the viewer is forced to wait for that hostility to erupt into hand-to-hand violence. The horse is also

a deliberate distraction that enables the discontinuity within the subtle reorganization of the combatants in the area of the action to pass unnoticed.

The battle begins in earnest in the two shots that follow the galloping horse. The relationship between these two shots exhibits Hu's masterful capacity to disregard spatial continuity in favour of presenting deftly orchestrated bodies in motion. These shots also demonstrate his capacity to cheat continuity to express forceful movement that catches the eye. For both of these shots the action that governs the transition is the imminent collapse of a guard.

In the first shot Hu uses an extreme depth-staging by positioning bandits in the distance (standing motionless on a hill and silhouetted against the horizon) while the distinctively white-robed Jade Faced Tiger stands motionless in the middle ground. The arrow-pierced bodies of some guards also dress the set and provide some continuity with the previous action. The audience might be aware of the motionless figures but their attention is drawn to the movement of the figures in the foreground. Standing in the right half of the frame is the Bare Chest Bandit who is attacked by four guards from the left half of the frame.



The screen direction that has previously been established is maintained – guards on the left and bandits on the right. But by situating the Bare Chest Bandit in the right

half of screen, and keeping him there for the duration of this clash, Hu creates a certain blocking difficulty for one of the actors playing the last guard to strike.

In the first shot the Bare Chest Bandit locks swords with the guards who surround and obscure him from view. Then three of the guards simultaneously fall away from him, all of them display the kind of prostrate physical attitude that indicates that they have been dealt a mortal blow. The realism of this kind of multiple death dealing is dubious, but it befits the credible exaggeration of Hu's diegetic framework, as we have seen Jade Faced Tiger miraculously find his target without looking only a few shots before this one.

The remaining guard makes an overhead strike but the Bare Chest Bandit swivels to his right to deliver a backhanded roundhouse blow which pulls the guard from behind into the foreground, where he stands prostrate.



Rather than toppling and dropping through the bottom of the frame (like his comrades) the guard doubles over and staggers to the left of the frame. He heads back in the direction from whence he came. All of the bandits remain stationary and so the viewer's eye follows the guard's movement.



Why not cut out this awkward movement? By drawing the eye to the left screen zone a more dynamic cut can be made to the next shot that enables a smooth and swift transition to the new action that over-rides the staggering performance.

Before the guard completely exits the screen in the outgoing shot, a cut is made to the incoming shot where another guard is attacking in a left-to-right tracking mid-shot. At the incoming frame of the new shot the guard is in the middle of the screen, with his out-stretched arm dominating the right side of screen.



When the actor slows in his movement to strike, the camera maintains its trajectory to the right. By the fourth frame the guard dominates the left screen zone that had previously been occupied by the staggering guard.



This creates a reversed eye-trace effect (similar to the previously mentioned example from *Seven Swords* where a pole passed across screen before the villager's legs drew

the eye back to the centre of screen) and the discontinuity of the staggering guard is over-ridden by the dynamic effect upon the eye that is produced by the collision between shots of objects moving in different directions. The guard running off-screen in the outgoing shot draws the eye-trace to the left of the frame when the cut is made to another guard, moving in unison with the camera, in a rightward direction. If the 'principal eye-catcher is movement' (Pepperman 2004: 7), then in this case the eye swings away to the left in the first shot but is brought immediately back to the centre of the screen by the forced reverse eye-trace. Moreover the eye is brought back to an almost immediate clash when the Bare Chest Bandit blocks the new attack with his sword.



The real time between the two shots would not have allowed the Bare Chest Bandit to break repose, charge and block an attacker in such a way, but the editing permits this illusion because it cheats the temporal and spatial reality. First of all, the initial shot breaks from the Bare Chest Bandit as a subject and the eye favours the passage of the staggering guard. Then the incoming shot begins as a spatially dislocated mid-shot. By forcing the viewer to focus on a new subject that is not spatially located within the broader context of the battle-field (until the familiar Bare Chest Bandit comes into view) Hu forces the viewer to focus first on the movement before the context of the movement. There is no time to realise both the potential temporal and spatial discontinuity between the two shots. The use of shots in rapid succession to force the suspension of cognitive appraisal is commonly used by Hu, as well as by

many other of Hong Kong's martial arts and action filmmakers, to sweep the viewer up in the sensation of movement, provoking a feeling of exhilaration that overrides continuity concerns.

The eye-trace is pushed rightward with the momentum of the camera track to meet resistance in the form of the Bare Chest Bandit who blocks the blow and delivers a counter strike that spins the guard around to face the camera with a bright red gash across his chest.



The guard does not fall over in this shot because the cut is made before that action.

This time, however, Hu does resolve the collapsing action in the following shot (unlike the previous staggering guard) but the action can only be glimpsed. The Bare Chest Bandit and the guard are situated in the mid-ground in the right screen zone of a wide right-to-left tracking shot. As the camera moves left they soon pass out of frame. Additionally the increase in the shot scale means that they occupy a small amount of space and eye-trace has not been directed toward their location. Thus the cut to a busy, moving shot does not allow the audience to swiftly locate the falling guard.



Furthermore the shot flips the camera position of the previous two shots to shoot back down the 180 degree axis of action and an out-of-focus bandit dashes (left to right) across the screen, acting like a wipe effect to brush the collapsing action aside. With all of these factors contributing to the concealment of the collapse it seems surprising that Hu decided to include it at all. That Hu chose to include the conclusion of their fight as a match-on-action between shots indicates a concern for resolving an action, even when it is not easily appraisable.

It is reasonable to suggest that all but the keenest observer would most likely miss the guard's fall as a detail of the incoming shot. Yet Hu has been meticulous to place the guard and Bare Chest Bandit in the correct proximity to Jade Faced Tiger, and as the camera continues to track we come to learn that this vista is giving us an opportunity to appraise the battlefield from Jade Faced Tiger's perspective. So this re-establishing shot collates all the information about the ambush that has been delivered so far.

Jade Faced Tiger is a stationary character framed in a mid-shot, with his back to the camera as it tracks laterally across him.



The camera comes to a halt when he is situated on the far right side of the frame.



Now more of the left hand side of the frame is visible and the most pronounced action is a squad of guards running to the left hand side of the frame. This shot gives brief spatial continuity to action that has for the most part been dislocated, constructed by maintained screen direction and eye-line matching. Whereas the previous establishing shot immediately dislocates the action by cutting away to the horse, this re-establishing shot gives an indication as to where each pocket of action is being played out in relation to Jade Face Tiger. However the re-establishing shot comes very late in the battle and the continuity it seeks to provide is not necessarily required. As we will see with Tsui's organisational agenda, each pocket of action succeeds if it successfully conveys dynamic action.

It is quite possible that Hu, working with new editing methods, became overly familiar with the content of each shot (like many neophyte editors) and thus took the content of each shot as plainly obvious, forgetting that the audience requires more time to digest all the information than someone already familiar with the footage. But it is more likely that the falling guard is an early case of Hu applying the 'glimpse', as Bordwell called it, to his editing (1998: 32-39). The suggestion of action may be acknowledged even if it is not fully cognized or understood to have been motivated by the preceding shot because movement catches the eye (Pepperman 2004: 7).

Re-Establishing the Battlefield: Seven Swords

Tsui also uses his boss-villain, Kualo, as a visual anchor of sorts, but because Tsui's agenda is to display his villains' weaponry he is quicker to get his combat underway. He has a number of weapons to bring to the fore. Each weapon is presented within an area that has its own self-contained spatial continuity, disconnected from the other areas of action. A recurrent parallel edit back to the slow-motion shot of the boss villain provides a familiar but essentially dislocated visual anchor to which Tsui returns after the combat vignettes have been played out.

The elaboration of space and proximity are less of a concern for Tsui than for Hu. After the aftermath of the Bladed Shield, Tsui does not provide the viewer with shots that establish the proximity of Kualo to the combat of the fight sequence; in fact, he finds it more useful not to provide such information. Due to the foregrounding of weaponry as a stylistic choice, the assembly of shots is much simpler than Hu's design. As a result, the suspense of Tsui's action sequence is not in the build up to conflict but revolves around the sinister slow motion shot of Kualo and her Lieutenants strolling into battle. Actually it is less a sensation of suspense than an anticipation of what Kualo will do. Each time the edit returns to this shot they appear closer. This is the second instance.



This is the third instance.



The intervals of Kualo strolling develop anticipation and Tsui returns to this shot and uses it to create intervals that partition off the combat vignettes (CV) in the lead up to Kualo's attack. The division of events is as such:

CV 1	Mounted Projectile attack	Bladed Shield
<i>Interval #1</i>	<i>Kualo and Lieutenants strolling</i>	
CV 2	Mounted Projectile attack	Grappling Hook and Crossbow
	Mounted attack	Serrated Trident
	Ground level attack	Chain Mace
<i>Interval #2</i>	<i>Kualo and Lieutenants strolling</i>	
CV 3	Ground level attack	Guillotine Umbrella
<i>Interval #3</i>	<i>Kualo and Lieutenants strolling</i>	
CV 4	Mounted attack	Venus Fly-Trap Rake
	Ground level attack	Bladed Ring
	Kualo's Ground level attack	Sickle
	Ground level Projectile attack	Crossbow

There is a deliberate progression from weapons used at a distance, to those used by Lieutenants mounted on horseback, to those used at ground level and in close proximity, culminating in Kualo's cheek-to-cheek throat-slitting. Tsui's agenda for the construction of the edit is apparent because with each vignette the proximity between the villains and victims is reduced due to the type of weapon being used – from a crossbow used from horseback, to a long handled trident used from horseback to the use of a chain-mace at ground level. When the Chain Mace Lieutenant enters the fray he literally leaps into frame from a high position, reinforcing the idea that his combatants are getting closer to the ground. Combat vignette 4 repeats this progression in a condensed form when the Lieutenant who wields both the Venus

Fly-Trap Rake and Bladed Ring enters the fight. This Lieutenant descends from horseback to ground level with the help of an intervening prompting reaction shot of his victims. By progressing in this way Tsui is able to evenly deploy the majority of bizarre weapons in the Lieutenants' arsenal. Each demonstration shows how these weapons work and how they might pose a devious, deadly threat to the heroes later in the film.

The intervals also provide distinct rhythmic pauses. Rather than hard cutting between real-motion and slow motion shots (as per Woo and Peckinpah) Tsui clusters slow-motion shots before the intervals to ease the viewer into the rhythmic pause that it provides. In each instance the strolling wide shots are accompanied by other slow motion shots to create three extended pauses within the rhythm of the fight sequence. This technique is visually confirmed by the transition between combat vignette 3 and interval 3 when a single shot begins in real motion and then ramps down to slow motion.

There are a total of fifteen shots displaying slow motion and thirteen of these are overt slow motion shots that are clustered with the strolling wide shots to provide a rhythmic pause. In contrast to the pauses the attacking bandits seem fast and efficient during their combat vignettes. While slow motion makes Kualo seem composed and purposeful, it also makes the flailing victims seem ungainly and sluggish. The languid tempo of the intervals also helps to generate anticipation and promotes the idea that when Kualo finally attacks it will be decisive. This tactic accords with the postponement of the climactic strike as per the *Sanjuro* effect.

When Hu reminds us that Jade-Faced Tiger is overlooking the battle it is as part of a broader strategy to show where pockets of action are taking place upon the battle-field, if only as a glimpse within a very ‘over-informative’ wide shot (Bordwell 1998: 38).¹⁷ In *Seven Swords* the Bladed-Shield ordeal maintained screen direction but the second combat vignette doesn’t have a distinct spatial orientation within the broader scope of the battle. We have been informed of the relative position and proximity of the Lieutenants to the villagers through the use of projectiles and their slow motion struggle at the head of the first interval, but with close proximity fighting the relative positioning of the action within the broader arena becomes obscured. The concentration upon dislocated pockets of action enables Tsui to focus upon the construction of edited action and to foreground his particular interests. Tsui displays a preference for showcasing the weapon at work as a primary detail. The slow motion interval simply reminds the viewer that the boss hasn’t yet entered the fray.

As well as providing a rhythmic pause, creating a sense of anticipation and enabling spatial dislocation, a closer inspection of the strolling intervals reveals that they are also a practical post-production solution to lapses in continuity. Firstly, the distance in the establishing shot that contained both villagers and the villains appeared to be no more than five metres. By drawing out Kualo’s stroll and the villagers’ charge in slow motion, the crossing of that small distance is prolonged. Secondly, the third time that the stroll shot is revisited, the framing is deliberately chosen so that the Guillotine Umbrella Lieutenant is concealed behind Kualo. This is because he and his weapon are featured in the combat vignette directly *before* the last extended slow

¹⁷ Bordwell refers to this tendency of Hu as ‘overinformative long shots’ (1998: 38).

motion pause. Therefore it does not fit the continuity to have him returned back alongside Kualo and the others. This suggests that the arrangement of the shots was not firmly planned out on set.

Compared to Hu's deliberate obfuscation of the clash of swords, the parallel editing from Kualo's anchoring shot to the dislocated pockets of action satisfies the viewer's curiosity for combat and diffuses the tension somewhat. But the staircase formula still means that the combat will escalate towards Kualo's engagement in battle. In this development Tsui follows Hu's path by steadily escalating and showing the brutality with which the villains despatch their unlucky opponents. The specific parallels between Hu and Tsui's narrative progressions of combat will be outlined in following sections. We have already seen how Tsui subverts the staircase formula by affording the very last kill to a minion rather than the immediate boss-villain. The next section provides a detailed analysis of Hu's shot assembly and will demonstrate how Hu subverts the design formula.

AN INTRODUCTION TO HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT

While Hu has meticulously planned a tense build up to the explosion of action, Tsui has leaped into the fray much more quickly. I have already established that the main reason for these differences is because each director has a different agenda. Tsui's agenda to showcase the weapons is relatively simple and so it addresses the assembly of shots in a different way by parallel editing back to Kualo. Conversely Hu doesn't have an arsenal that needs to be showcased and so his method does not have the same kind of self-imposed restrictions that Tsui faces. Hu's stylised design

concentrates upon the capacity for an ambush to generate suspense, and then concentrates upon the way in which the combat can be manipulated to convey ferocity and speed. Because of his stylistic complexity the next sub-heading principally examines the way that Hu has controlled the tempo of shots during the initial clash of swords and, in doing so, looks at how he has prioritised style over the staircase formula in order to create an accelerated shot pattern.

King Hu's Accelerated Pattern of Shots.

Tsui wants to showcase an arsenal of the bizarre weapons, but Hu's villains are all armed with swords and his agenda is to construct a stylised battle that reaches a crescendo. Hu does this by accelerating the tempo of his shots towards a moment of dismemberment. Both directors use dismemberment as a symbolic representation of the end of resistance by the embattled party and they both construct their fight sequences towards this moment. The act of dismemberment will be discussed later in this thesis, but here the focus is upon the way that Hu accelerates the tempo of his combat towards that grim goal.

The ASL of the first fight sequence in *Come Drink With Me* is 105 frames and in *Seven Swords* it is 85 frames. This shows an increase in the speed of shots in the latter of the two films but what is most significant here is the way in which the shots of the two fight sequences relate to these average numbers. For Hu there is a definite pattern of acceleration that can be seen in the nine shots that follow the re-establishing, tracking shot of Jade Faced Tiger surveying the battlefield.

The lead-up to this battle has been prolonged by Hu to generate suspense (recalling the *Sanjuro* climax effect). So when violence finally erupts it is swift and immediate. Once Hu has re-established the battlefield from Jade Face Tiger's perspective (in the previously discussed wide-shot) he applies a distinct pattern to the nine shots that follow. For the first six of the nine shots Hu uses a pattern of two-shot actions that are each joined by a match-on-action cut. So these shots are grouped into three distinct pairs. Each pair of shots shows guards repelled and killed by bandits – repelled in the first shot and killed in the second. The sequential composition of shots can be tabulated as such:

Shots	Action	Frame Count
1 & 2	A group of bandits repel and kill a group of guards	$[33f + 50f = 83f]$
3 & 4	Smiling Tiger repels and kills a guard	$[29f + 32f = 61]$
5 & 6	[Han Yingjie] repels one guard and kills another guard	$[89f + 63f = 152f]$

Then the two actions are combined so that they both take place within each shot. The guards are repelled and killed within each individual shot of the last three shots.

Shot	Action	Frame Count
7	Two bandits repel and kill guards	$[73f]$
8	Two bandits repel and kill guards (one is beheaded)	$[49f]$
9	Two bandits repel and kill guards	$[114f]$

All but the last of these shots are below the ASL of the fight sequence (105 frames).

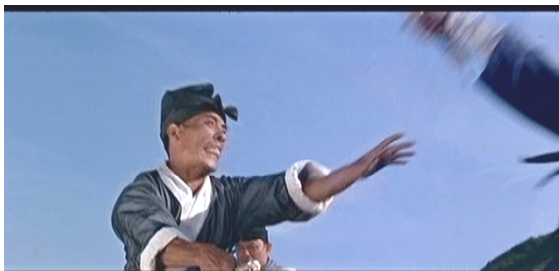
The last shot is slightly longer as more time is given to the action of a bandit withdrawing his sword after the principal actions of repelling and killing have occurred.

The move to present whole actions played out within single shots significantly increases the tempo of the fight sequence because up until now most actions have

been played out across a cut, such as when the bandit played by Han Yingjie kills repels a guard in shot 5.



He kills that guard, as well as an interloper, in shot 6.



Each shot in the last three shots of the nine-shot-sequence contains, in the centre of frame, a *pair* of bandits each repelling and killing soldiers. For example shot 7 shows how the repelling and killing actions are combined.





In addition, each shot is spatially dislocated from the rest of the battle, as though we are now seeing particular incidents within the broader scope of the action. Only the sloping hillsides, contrasted against the blue sky, locate the action within the valley. The shots are self-contained spectacles that add to the chaos of the battle by their spatial dislocation from each other. In this way they are like the vignettes in the *Seven Swords* fight sequence, but they are more obviously organised and united according to a design principle of acceleration.

Although the ASL of the first six shots is 49.3 frames, this is lower compared to that of the last three shots, 78.6 frames (which appears not to show an acceleration). This is because the complete repelling and killing actions are more economically performed in the last three shots. Moreover, the last three shots contain more action because of the increase in the number of combatants and actions therein. Also the last shot (as previously mentioned) concentrates on a bandit after his kill, as he withdraws his sword from a body, which increases the shot length too. So the time it takes to repel and kill an opponent is visibly reduced in the last three shots. When analysed in this way the actions that span cuts (296 frames divided by 3) have a longer ASL than the individual shots – 98.6 frames to 78.6 frames. By containing the repelling and killing actions and increasing the ASL, Hu accelerates the action with an identifiable pattern towards a crescendo.

The spatial dislocation of the shots also helps to bring the narrative of the battle to a close. Because the viewer only sees bandits successively beating back guards, the favoured pockets of action prompt the notion that the bandits are winning, and they are. Additionally, because the bandits' skilful execution of the guards is the common theme of all nine shots, Hu shows that the bandits will win the battle because of their martial supremacy.

By showing pockets of action in the series of nine fairly rapid shots, the intent of the editing is multi-fold. A generally smaller shot scale now brings the viewer closer to the action and serves to individuate significant bandits while also proving their martial arts prowess with a gripping exhibition of realistic action. But in accelerating the action, so that single more populated shots accommodate both the repelling and killing actions, Hu must compromise the staircase formula to give more screen time to the more significant villains earlier in the accelerated sequence. Although they are not yet identified as significant, 'Smiling Tiger' Tsu Kan (Lee Wan-Chung) and the bandit played by Han Yingjie (Hu's choreographer), are afforded more screen time so they must appear earlier in the sequence to aid the acceleration of shots. Their importance is not indicated by their delayed engagement in the battle (as they would in a typical staircase organisation) but by their greater apportionment of time and shot scale. However, these bandits will have more opportunities to distinguish themselves as the film progresses.

Invention and Redesign

Just as Tsui re-invented the stylisation of projectile attacks he also finds novel ways to re-invent some of Hu's melee attacks. The accelerated pattern of shots contains action events that have been redesigned by Tsui: the penetration by a melee weapon and beheading. Then, as the hand-to-hand combat continues, Tsui also re-visits Hu's other principal action events: dismemberment and the final sword strike. It should be noted that these are the core action events of both fight sequences and that they occur in the same order within each fight sequence. These action events also convey the same kind of combat narrative but their stylisation is considerably different. This is not surprising given the demands of the pursuit of novelty, but it is intriguing that Tsui has followed Hu's plotting so closely. We have seen how the staircase formula of *Seven Swords* replicates the plotting of *Come Drink With Me* (see Table 1) and in the following sections we will see how Tsui uses Hu's action events as a template to plot the narrative trajectory of the first fight sequence.

The ensuing technical analyses will follow the chronological deployment of action events as they occur in the first fight sequence, looking first at Hu's application of design and then at Tsui's reinvention of that type of feat. Finally, at the end of the chapter, I jump to the end of either film to analyse the way that both directors handle the demise of the ultimate villain. We will find that there are further narrative parallels there though the stylisation is also quite different.

PENETRATION BY A MELEE WEAPON

Penetration by a Melee Weapon: Come Drink With Me

As the sense of realism in the New Era period was geared towards the generation of realistic violence, constructive editing was employed to show and “prove” violent actions. In the previous chapter we saw how the piercing of a target by a projectile was eventually achieved *within* the shot through the development of film techniques such as the concealment of fishing line, reverse motion and later through CGI. Here we have a similar development but with pointed, hand-held weapons. In *Come Drink With Me* the thrusting of a sword into and out of a body within the shot has been used to provide a certain authenticity for a stabbing action. There are two particular and individual instances during the first fight sequence of *Come Drink With Me* that show the penetration and then, later, the withdrawal of the blade. Later we will see how Tsui has capitalised upon these techniques to combine them into one exclusive attack by the Serrated Trident Lieutenant – showing both the penetration and the withdrawal.

In *Come Drink With Me* Smiling Tiger is a particularly high-ranking bandit and he is the immediate boss-villain of the second fight sequence at the inn. Although he can be identified in the first fight sequence as one of the distant bandits during the guards’ eye-line matches to the hills, he is properly introduced in a closer framing during Hu’s accelerated pattern of combat shots. Smiling Tiger appears in shots 3 and 4 of the accelerated nine shot sequence. In the first shot he repels a guard and stabs him in the back.



The sword is actually thrust past the guard on the far side of his body to imply penetration in this shot. Hu uses the cut to cheat the substitution of the dummy blade. Then, better visibility of the skewering spectacle is provided when, in the second shot, the audience is treated to a low angle frontal view of the guard grimacing with a bloody blade sticking through his chest. Hu is showing the viewer that the blade is not held under the arm. By having both actors turn to the side, the viewer can get a better look at the blade in profile against the blue sky and the remainder of the sword being held by Smiling Tiger.



Thus Hu provides a novel adaptation of the out-moded method of clamping the sword under arm. But this technique does not allow the withdrawal of the blade in this shot because of the nature of the two-piece dummy prop. So Hu finds a way to imply both the penetration and withdrawal of a sword later in the sequence, and when he does so he advances the novelty yet again.

Because the last of the nine shots within accelerated pattern demonstrates the withdrawal of a penetrated sword, it provides an action that lends symmetrical resolution to the pattern of shots. However, the bottom of the frame occludes both of

these actions, so penetration and withdrawal are implied rather than shown. A repelled soldier falls and exits through the bottom of the frame whereupon the bandit attacking him thrusts his sword downward.



Wrenching the sword upwards again, a jet of blood spurts upward across the bandit's chest and face from below.



The spurting blood is an indicator of the New Era's conception of realism in combat while the withdrawal of the sword also provides a certain punctuation – a pause – that gives closure to the accelerated series of shots. Similarly, after the projectile attack, Tsui's second combat vignette features penetration and withdrawal actions that combine the techniques we have just see. The pursuit of novelty demands that actions be reinvented and Tsui does this with some aplomb.

Penetration by a Melee Weapon: Seven Swords

In *Seven Swords* the Serrated Trident Lieutenant skewers a running victim so hard that the blade protrudes through his chest. One of the principal changes in the battle at this point is the mobility of the bandits. Stationary attackers made the initial

projectile attacks but the Lieutenants are now shown moving about. Although their proximity to the villagers is closer, their actual positions within the broader context of the battleground are not made apparent. This is accentuated by the use of high and low angled shots that bookend a close-up during the vignette of the Serrated Trident Lieutenant.

In the first high angle shot (which we retrospectively learn is motivated by the Lieutenant's position on horseback) the twirling trident occupies the frame, but there are also villager's legs running in the same left-to-right screen direction in the background.



The legs provide a distraction that enables a sleight-of-hand substitution to take place because the weapon momentarily disappears off-screen to the right.



The momentary disappearance of the weapon off-screen means it can be substituted with a blunt replica weapon that rams into a different villager's back within the same shot.



So Tsui “shows” penetration of the weapon within the shot through clever choreography and props without resorting to either constructive editing, or implying that the event occurs off-screen as per Hu’s tricks. Nor does Tsui resort to CGI as per the flying dagger example from Zhang Yimou’s *House of Flying Daggers* discussed in chapter 4.

The high angle of the shot effectively flattens the two-dimensional plane of screen so that the apparent distance between the falling victim and the ground is visually reduced. This effect nullifies the temporal discontinuity between the victim starting to fall, and his sudden, jolting landing upon the ground in the following shot.



A prong of the Serrated Trident now protrudes and elevates the victim slightly off the ground. Like example of Smiling Tiger’s bloody blade, the points of the trident are included in this shot to help the viewer to appreciate the penetration.

While not resorting to the slow motion fall to real motion landing technique (that was analysed in the previous chapter) Tsui has still managed to express the violence of an impact with the ground in this example. This is done through the temporal elision of

an elided match-on-action cut. Such temporal elision is made possible by cutting between camera angles that do not allow for an overlap of action – as per the example from *Twelve Gold Medallions* in chapter 3 where Mr Ma rises and collides with the banister. In this case the elided match-on-action is not trying to create an impossible feat of strength because, once slammed into the ground, the victim is incapacitated. The realism of this fight sequence and the *Come Drink With Me* fight sequence is that once victims are mortally wounded, they stay mortally wounded and do not rise up once again. In this way both first fight sequences conform to the Shaw Brothers intent that the New Era of *wuxia* film would display ‘realistic action and fighting that immediately decides life or death’ (cited in Ho 2003b: 115).¹⁸

The high angle of the first shot also enhances the sensation of speed and power that appear to have been invested in the lethal blow and the prongs jutting out of the victim’s body confirm the impact. To confirm that the prongs are firmly wedged into the body Tsui cuts to a third shot in which the Lieutenant, shot from a low angle, pulls his trident out of the man with enough force to momentarily lift him back into shot.



This is reminiscent of Hu’s use of the unseen lower edge of the frame to initiate a spurt of blood across the shirt of the bandit. But in *Seven Swords* Tsui generally avoids the use of blood-work; at least, he uses far less blood than in some of his previous *wuxia* films. His conception of realism in this instance is predicated by the

¹⁸ Shaw Brothers (Oct 1965) ‘Shaws Launches “Action Era”’, *Southern Screen* 92: 30 quoted in Ho 2003b: 115.

apparent physics of the combat action and the rising body indicates the force that the Lieutenant must apply to retrieve his weapon.

The penetration of a weapon into a target body is one of the core spectacles that has been achieved and presented by either director with unique stylistic aplomb. But the violence does not end there. There are other ways that violence can be inflicted upon a body and both directors seek to show this.

BEHEADING

Both directors show the act of beheading. The difficulty of showing beheading arises from the nature of the act. It is difficult to show a head being torn from the shoulders and generally requires a dummy head and torso. This is precisely how the Flying Guillotine is shown to operate in *Master of the Flying Guillotine* (Jimmy Wang Yu, 1974). The Master throws his weapon at his target.



The bizarre weapon drops over the victim's head.



The head is then wrenched from the shoulders in a wide shot which keeps the action at a distance and allows for both the weapon and the head it contains to travel part of the way across the screen.



The wide shot helps the subterfuge of the action by keeping the flailing body of the actor at a distance because he has his head tucked into his shirt.

Beheading: Come Drink With Me

In *Come Drink With Me*, Hu does not explicitly show the action of a head being removed from the body. The actual decapitation takes place in off-screen space and a dummy head is tossed across the screen in unison with a bandit's sword swipe. This is shown very quickly as one of the actions during his accelerated pattern of nine shots (shot 8) and it only spans 49 frames. Tsui, on the other hand, devotes an entire combat vignette to the use of the Guillotine Umbrella. Although Tsui's action is much more explicit, the separated head of the victim is not showcased. However Tsui then includes a beheading during the third combat vignette that does show the head briefly rolling across the shot – reminiscent of Hu's tactic.

Hu uses the area outside of the frame so that he does not have to show the head separated from the body. A bandit trades slashing blows with a soldier who is predominantly off-screen, with only the soldier's arm and sword visible. The bandit makes a sweeping lateral strike and as his sword slashes across screen the soldier's

head travels across screen with it. A dummy head has been thrown into shot to imply a beheading.



In the background of this shot a second bandit fells another guard too, which adds extra information to the shot. This combination of actions conveys a sense of the chaotic melee. At the same time Hu foregrounds the principal action of the beheading but as the fastest complete action of the accelerated pattern of shots (49 frames) Hu is content not to dwell upon the novel spectacle that this action affords.

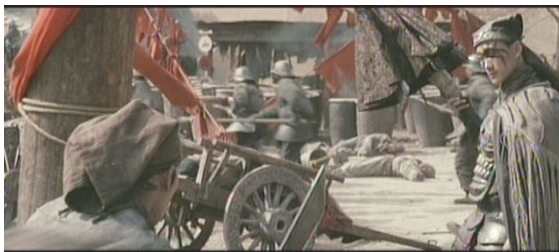
Beheading: Seven Swords

Tsui, on the other hand, prefers to take time to shock the audience with the power of his villains' weapons and allocates a full combat vignette to the Guillotine Umbrella. There are nine shots dedicated to the Guillotine Umbrella, six of which display the

weapon's curious operation when it beheads an unlucky villager. When the weapon is used for a second time there are a further three reaction shots of a young villager watching his comrades fall to its evil machinations, but this time the action of the weapon is glimpsed. This is the only weapon of the first fight sequence for which CGI is employed to display its effect.

The first beheading with the Guillotine Umbrella gives the action and result the most clarity. But it does involve a persistent darkening and obscuration of the screen by the flaring umbrella so that the result, the staggering body, is the point at which the viewer best understands what has happened. Yet the machinations of this weapon are also conveyed through a subtle but dynamic discontinuity in the direction of the umbrella's movement.

At the start of the combat vignette a villager and the Guillotine Umbrella Lieutenant face off (shot 1 of 9).



The villager makes two strikes at the Lieutenant who counter-attacks and pummels the villager backwards (shots 2 and 3). Then the Lieutenant envelops the villager's head with the umbrella (shot 4).



Once the villager's head is encased there is a cut to a swift, 13 frame shot (shot 5) which frames the action across the axis of action that has been established. Given the Lieutenant's posture and given that the umbrella and villager's shoulders are in focus whereas the Lieutenant is not. This breach of continuity makes the face and upper body of the Lieutenant easily discernable from the best possible camera position. He gives the shaft a vigorous heave and the umbrella swirls in a clockwise direction.



A match-on-action is made on the swirling motion to a shot that crosses back across the axis of action and is now framed from the Lieutenant's side of screen. Notably, the swirling motion is also in a clockwise direction here.



The dynamism of the umbrella's movement is enhanced by a subtle discontinuity. The clockwise direction is maintained across the cut despite this action contravening the laws of physics. From the Lieutenant's perspective the umbrella should be swirling in an anti-clockwise direction if continuity with the first shot of this action was maintained, but by keeping the swirling motion continuous across the cut it helps the jump back across the axis of action to be kept invisible. The discontinuity of this cut does not give the impression that the Lieutenant's wrenching motion has been reversed so much as it engenders a sense of dynamic action. Eye-trace would be negated by this cut if it weren't for the movement of the umbrella catching the eye

because the beheaded villager effectively fills the space of the Lieutenant and would be facing the same rightward screen direction – if he still had his head. The result is shown as the umbrella is pulled away.



Thin jets of blood spurt from the stump. A dummy head very briefly exits the shot but is overshadowed by the motion of the umbrella, which holds the viewer's attention. CGI has been used to erase the actor's head as his body staggers and falls. This is a comparatively graphic expression of fatality that, unlike Hu's beheading, shows more of the act of separating the head from the body although this is still concealed by the folds of the umbrella.

After the operation of the weapon has been shown once it can then be displayed in a glimpsed fashion because the viewer is now aware that it is not an umbrella but a weapon to be reckoned with. Just as Tsui will show the use of the Venus-Flytrap-Rake in two different ways Tsui also shows the Guillotine Umbrella in a different and glimpsed way. In his pursuit of novelty Tsui endeavours not to repeat the stylisation of an action event. We have already seen this with the different projectile attacks but now he redesigns the operation of the same weapon.

The Lieutenant remains off-screen to the left and the umbrella darts over the top of a barricade to behead more villagers. A dark shape briefly invades the left zone of screen and the villager there collapses.



In real time, the eye-line of the young villager in the background is the best indication of what is happening as his eye-line directs the viewer to his crumpling comrades.



Then the dark shape of the umbrella darts into shot from the top left corner of screen and we follow the youngster's eye-line to its second target.



But the weapon is so swift that it can barely be seen. Before the second villager collapses a cut is made to a reaction shot of the young villager in the background. Because the movement of the umbrella is so swift and barely perceptible (compared to its previous more explicit operation) the action relies upon the reaction of the young villager to indicate what has happened, and so Tsui provides a prompting reaction shot of him in medium close-up.



This shot does not traverse the axis of action but it does establish that the Guillotine Umbrella Lieutenant's position is on the other side of the 180 degree axis. By positioning the camera here, and cutting to the young villager looking to the right, Tsui uses the eye-line to his advantage because the swift action occupied the right screen zone and that is where the young villager is looking. He then looks up to where the unseen Guillotine Umbrella Lieutenant would be standing.



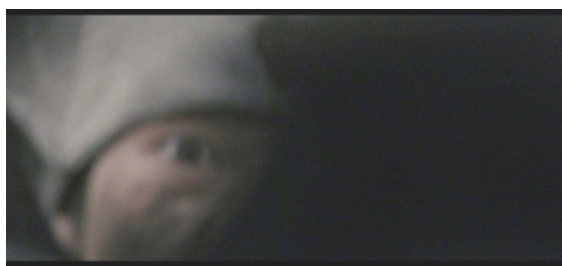
The crossing of the 180 degree axis of action was useful in the first beheading of this combat vignette because it helped to show the Guillotine Umbrella Lieutenant's face and arms as he wrenched the weapon's handle; the match-on-action cut to the umbrella twirling in the same direction, despite being a discontinuity, aided the dynamism of the action. In this case the cut is not a match-on-action but is a cut-in to a prompting reaction shot of the spooked villager. Yet it is not quite a "cut-in" as the camera position has changed significantly and in this way Tsui provides a basic level of novelty by refreshing the camera angle. Afterwards, when he returns to a wide shot, it reinstates the original screen direction. Unlike the continuity system, the constructive system of production enables and encourages this kind of breach of continuity. Both times that the 180 degree axis of action is crossed in this combat vignette it is to a closer shot. By reducing the content of the shot and hence reducing

the spatial detail the discontinuity goes unnoticed but the subtle change of perspective does provide a novelty that revitalizes the action.

The primary purpose of this shot is not to provide novelty; it is to isolate the reaction of the villager. This reaction shot prompts the viewer to understand that more beheadings have just taken place because, in contrast to the CGI beheading, the glimpsed beheadings have happened so quickly. Like the example from Chapter 3 of the startled onlooker whose *sake* bottle was split in half by Zatoichi's swordplay, the young villager here provides the viewer with a way to appreciate what has just happened by guiding her response with his own. The initial action is not constructed from detailed shots that are reconciled by cumulative reasoning but rather the action takes place in a single shot and the darting umbrella is a glimpsed action that is made salient by the falling villagers and then the medium close-up of the young villager. Given that the viewer has just seen the young villager's compatriots fall to the umbrella, she might expect the youngster, craning his neck, to be the next target too. But Tsui is content to let this youngster attempt to escape, only to be rounded up by a mounted Lieutenant who rides into the plaza, after which a cut is made back to Kuo strolling, ending the second combat vignette.

Tsui is not content to let this kind of grotesquery go unexploited and so he also includes another glimpsed beheading (the third and last of the beheadings) when the Venus-Flytrap-Rake and Guillotine-Hoop Lieutenant are introduced. The action is very swift and relies upon a prompting reaction shot of villagers to make the action of the Venus-Flytrap-Rake apparent and even then the shot is so swift and out-of-focus that the viewer may wonder what exactly has just transpired.

At the beginning of the last combat vignette, Tsui again uses Hu's method of providing a glimpse of a dummy head for the beheading by the Venus-Flytrap-Rake, but this time the dummy head fills the screen. Just as he presents two different types of projectile attack with the Bladed shield and the Grappling-Hook-and-Crossbow, now he diversifies the techniques used to present beheading by two different weapons in three different ways. Compared to Hu's glimpsed foregrounding of the beheading action Tsui also foregrounds the dummy head, but because there is no initial indication as to the kind of action that is taking place, the action is shown with less cogency. Tsui uses the darkening of the screen to keep the action obscure but he does afford more time to the beheading action. After the last of the strolling intervals a group of three villagers huddle together and one of them advances directly toward the camera. The screen darkens as he advances into the foreground.



Out of focus streaks then indicate that something has obscured our view of the villager.



This shot remains dark and blurry for a total of nine frames before a cut is made to the next shot. The incoming shot begins with the dummy head situated in roughly the same position as the charging villager had been.



The intent of this incoming frame is to replicate the positioning of the villager in the left screen zone so that his and the dummy head appear as one and the same. But even though the focal point of the shot is kept in roughly the same position across the cut there are 9 streaking, dark and blurry frames that make it difficult to negate eye-trace completely. After the incoming frame of the dummy head the shot then goes dark for the following 4 frames before it resolves into glimpse of a dummy head as it spins to the left and out of shot.



The shot then reveals a prompting reaction shot of the two remaining villagers huddled together with the prongs of a weapon in the foreground. Notably the villager in the foreground is the villager spokesman, Kualo's counterpart.



The second half of the weapon then snaps shut to obscure the spokesman's face.



By snapping shut across the eye-line and over the villager's head the weapon's action symbolically repeats the beheading. It also provides more information as to how the weapon works and how it might have beheaded the villager – though the details of this have been kept obscure because the constructive editing details have prioritised its effect rather than its operational nature, and even then those details have been obscure.

Because of lack of clarity during the beheading (and perhaps because of the awkward nature of the weapon) Tsui relies upon the snapping action across the villager spokesman's startled reaction to inform us what has just transpired. In chapter 3 we saw how the prompting reaction shot was used to inspire a sense of awe in the viewer by mirror neuron repetition. In those examples it was used in an attempt to convince the viewer to respond with awe to feats of credible exaggeration such as in the die-tossing example from *Zatoichi: The Fugitive* and of marvellous feats such as Golden Swallow's response to Drunken Cat's blurry, whip-pan weightless leap in chapter 4. The prompting reaction shot after the glimpsed beheading applies a sense of awe to a quasi-realistic action that has been conveyed through a blurring of frames similar to Drunken Cat's leap. In itself the beheading action is not entirely successful in conveying this notion but the symbolic clamping of the weapon over an awed reaction shot does prompt retrospective comprehension from the viewer to realise what has just taken place even though they haven't seen it with any clarity.

Heads are currency for the villains in *Seven Swords* so it is fitting that the Lieutenants should wield strange weapons that are suited to beheading. It is therefore also fitting that Tsui should chose to depict three separate beheadings – although it is also within Tsui’s nature as a filmmaker to want to exploit this action event in three different ways and to pursue its novelty to the fullest. The beheading by the Guillotine Umbrella is a highly spectacular event, and beheading is a strong, symbolic action event in itself. But while it would seem to be a most debilitating violent act that ought to (symbolically) indicate an end to the villagers’ resistance in *Seven Swords*, and the guards’ resistance in *Come Drink With Me*, it is not used as the final decisive action in either of the first fight sequences. Nor is it the last of the brutal acts performed by the lesser villains upon their victims. The staircase formula does not necessarily prioritise the most violent or spectacular act, it simply facilitates a potential escalation of spectacle and so there is another specific grotesquery that both directors have decided to use to indicate the overwhelming victory of the villains within the combat narrative of these first fight sequences.

DISMEMBERMENT

Toward the end of both first fight sequences Hu and Tsui use dismemberment to demonstrate that the resistance of the embattled guards and villagers has been crushed. This is shown with the lopping of arms – a literal disarming. Although the beheading is an impressive show of force, the disarmament comes later in the staircase formula and is therefore an important symbolic choice. It is the penultimate

act perpetrated by the villains upon the defenders and shows that they can no longer hold out.

Dismemberment: Come Drink With Me

In *Come Drink With Me*, having reached the apex of battle, the pace of the fight sequence slows after the accelerated pattern of nine shots and begins to decelerate by returning to the paired shot method of repelling and despatching an enemy. Three bandits are shown attempting to free their imprisoned cohort from a wheeled-cage by banging at the locks with the hilts of their swords. This indicates that the bandits have all but achieved their goal of freeing the prisoners. It shows the degree to which they have advanced through the ranks of guards. Because the cages have previously been established in close proximity to the palanquin it also indicates that the bandits have nearly achieved their objective of taking Master Chang hostage, although we do not know that this is the secondary purpose of their mission at this early stage.

Despite the bandits' relative success one hapless guard makes a last ditch attempt to slow the bandits' progress. From off-screen, he thrusts his sword at the closest Moustachioed Bandit (Feng Ku) who deflects the blow and seizes the guard's free arm, holding it steady while his own sword arm is below screen.



A cut is made at this point to an angle that frames the bandit in mid-shot and from a more frontal position.

He holds the guard's wrist in the centre of the shot while the guard has his back to the camera. The Moustachioed Bandit then brings his sword down; slashing at the wrist and forcing the guard's hand to drop below the frame, along with the Moustachioed Bandit's own sword and his own hands.



When the Moustachioed Bandit brings his own hand back into frame he is clutching a severed hand. He holds it up to his wickedly grinning face.



To facilitate this trick it would seem apparent that the dummy hand was substituted into shot when the actors' hands dropped below frame and exchanged the real hand for a dummy hand, or that the substitution was made at the point of the cut – but this is not the case. On closer inspection a dummy hand is being held in the wide shot *before* the hands drop too.

By closely analysing these shots we can see that Hu was ambivalent about how he would edit this action because the dummy hand is also used in the first shot - even

though no limb-lopping takes place on-screen. Therefore it is likely that Hu initially collected coverage of the complete action from this angle with the intention of selecting the best cut-point in post-production. Yet Hu cleverly uses a deliberately busy *mise-en-scene* to distract the viewer from the physical abstraction of the guard's arm. In the background the two other bandits continue to bash at the locks of the cage in a vigorous up-and-down motion so that their swords jab into the negative space occupied by sky and across both shots this movement acts as a distraction to the subterfuge taking place in the foreground.

The symbolic significance of the dismemberment is emphasised when the Moustachioed Bandit raises the hand to his face and grins before tossing the limb away. This is one of the key gestures of the first fight sequence because it shows that the bandits are not only ruthless and formidable, as has been expressed by the majority of shots, but here we specifically see a homicidal relish for the gore of battle.

Dismemberment: Seven Swords

Disarming by dismemberment is revisited in *Seven Swords* when the Venus-Flytrap-Rake and Guillotine-Hoop Lieutenant continues his rampage after beheading a villager. The nature of his attack is a condensed reiteration of Tsui's agenda to show action proceeding from horseback to ground level. His weapon precedes him (recalling the importance of foregrounding the weapons rather than the actors) when he beheads the villager. It is only then revealed that he has arrived on the scene mounted. With a sweeping attack he lops the legs off a villager and the resulting

reaction shots of the alarmed village spokesman provides an ellipse that allows time for the Lieutenant to dismount, although he is not shown dismounting. He approaches the village spokesman and lops his arm off with a bizarre guillotine-hoop weapon. The first of three shots devoted to this new weapon provides a high angle close up to specifically show the hoop encircling the arm as its blades spring out.



Like the examples of the Bladed shield and the Serrated Trident, the camera angle for this shot is framed to best show the way that the weapon operates and to confirm the integrity of the prop. The next is a slow motion shot that shows the way that it is wielded as the Lieutenant rips the arm off the village spokesman.



Like the example from *Come Drink With Me* the arm is a dummy limb that is torn away by the villain's action. However the villain, to achieve this effect, did not have to grasp the villager's wrist, as his weapon seems specifically design for dismemberment. So rather than the limb being held up by the villain, it is shown twitching on the ground in the next shot.



To aid the sense of realism the arm is not a dummy, but a real arm. The twitching is acted. Constructive editing of this action event has not only allowed for excellent camera angles to see the weapon in use, it also benefits the substitution of prop limb for a real arm. By using a real twitching arm the gruesome action is lent a sense of grim realism.

The literal disarming of the village spokesman is shown as an immediate prelude to the first and last killing strike made by Kualo. Likewise after the accelerated pattern of shots and the dismemberment of the guard in *Come Drink With Me*, the bandits have visibly achieved their objectives and so the remaining shots of the sequence demonstrate Jade Faced Tiger's murderous ways.

CUTTING THROATS

The final hand-to-hand strike demonstrates that resistance to the villains' attack is over. In both cases the boss-villains slice the throats of their immediate counterparts and the fight has ended (save for the unfortunate trumpeter who is silenced by a crossbow bolt in *Seven Swords*). Although their manner of delivery differs, Tsui subjects the village spokesman to the same kind of impairment to which Hu subjected his Captain: firstly a rendering of an arm useless and secondly a slit throat.

In both sequences the boss-villain's first strike against his/her counterpart indicates the end of the fight.

Cutting Throats: Come Drink With Me

In *Come Drink With Me* the Captain manages to put up more of a fight than the village spokesman of *Seven Swords*, who has his throat cut almost immediately after his arm has been cut off. Notably, both of these men are unable to use one arm in battle due to poisoning and dismemberment respectively. Even if they still have the will to fight, they do not have the capacity to put up much of a fight. The atmosphere, at this stage, is one of hopelessness for the embattled guards and villagers, while the boss-villains are unstoppable. Kualo approaches her kill with a cool air of indifference, yet Jade Faced Tiger exhibits a certain homicidal glee.

Jade Faced Tiger and Kualo's methods of execution may not be the most spectacularly stylised killings of the fight sequence, but they are up close and personal and they do provide an insight into the sadistic cruelty of these bosses. By choosing to diffuse the spectacular content of the climactic moment both directors subvert the notion that fight sequences present ever-increasing spectacles. Instead they opt for character development of the immediate boss villains by focussing upon their sadism rather than their power. Moreover both directors provide a climax that is also a diminuendo to soften the transition to the following scene.

In *Come Drink With Me* the Captain struggles on, still protecting the palanquin. With his left arm visibly paralysed by the poisoned dart, he nonetheless manages to

despatch a few opponents. He is sufficiently advanced within the scheme of the staircase formula to be able to defeat these minions despite his handicap.



But an establishing wide-shot then confirms that he is surrounded and his efforts are hopeless.



Jade Faced Tiger halts the advance of his minions so that he and the Captain can duel and fulfil the topmost contest of the staircase formula of the first fight sequence.



Jade Faced Tiger walks into a re-establishing shot that is slightly reduced in size to the previous establishing shot and the pair square off.



Their clash of swords is swift due to the Captain's handicap and in accord with Shaw Brothers' call for immediate death, rather than a drawn out, interminable duel. Once Jade Faced Tiger has the Captain backed up against the palanquin there is an agonising wait for Jade Faced Tiger to make a final move. Hu adopts the *Sanjuro* effect to draw out the suspense, but there is little surprise when Jade Faced Tiger makes the finishing move because the dominance of the bandits in the preceding shots indicates that the Captain's eventual death is inevitable.



A reverse shot is motivated from the point-of-view of stretcher-bearers crouching behind the palanquin; though these men have not been prominent figures during the battle, Hu takes the opportunity to jump the axis of action and to present Jade Faced Tiger from an excellent angle that affords a prime view of his face as he kills the Captain. Also, because he does this deed with visible relish, this shot confirms his despicable nature and the threat that his homicidal tendencies could pose to future opponents. The final move is to skewer the Captain.



A clever edit to the interior of the palanquin ensures that Master Chang glimpses the blade as it withdraws from his sight. This 9-frame prompting reaction shot serves to

conclude the skewering action as well as to inform Master Chang that he would resist the bandits at his peril [9f].



Jade Faced Tiger's final malicious act absolutely confirms him and his horde as merciless villains, and the general brutality of the ambush has established their ruthlessness, trickery and dangerousness. These characteristics give a reason for the audience to be concerned about the destructive potential of the bandits for the rest of their involvement in the film.

This fight sequence has established key characters within the bandit horde as well as their homicidal tendencies, their overwhelming force and the kind of fate that awaits anyone who resists their demands. In broader terms this first battle is a bloody statement of Hu's intent to pepper his film with potentially gory and dexterous spectacles. Just four minutes and thirty-one seconds into the film Hu has already fully realised Shaw Brothers' aims of establishing the New Era style through the judicious syncopation between choreography, staging and editing to convey violent and immediate death. The first fight sequence exploits the kind of bloodshed that heralded the genre's new disposition towards a more 'realistic' depiction of combat and provided a benchmark for *wuxia* films that followed.

Cutting Throats: Seven Swords

Tsui, on the other hand, has avoided extreme displays of bloodshed and has stylised extreme violence without it; or at least, without the kind of bloodshed that characterised some of his earlier *wuxia* films. Bloodshed does occur, but it occurs more naturalistically as an incidental result of the impact of weapons. However, the weapons themselves are bizarre, as are the bizarrely dressed villains who wield them, and this is where the more overt novelty of the sequence arises. For Tsui the stylisation of blood-work in the *wuxia* film has swung back toward realism and it is therefore treated with more subtlety. This is expressed in Kualo's final strike, which is very efficient and subdued.

The organisation of shots around Kualo's gangster stroll culminates in her final strike which is more subdued than extreme. With a twirl of her sickle she steps forward in real motion, approaches the now disarmed village spokesman and cuts his throat.



A cut-in is paired with a hand-held camera pan to disguise the addition of a bloody (but not gushing) gash across the actor's neck.



The edit to a shot that contains the wound recalls the tried and true technique of adding the wound to the victim in the second shot of the match-on-action. In this instance, however, the violent action is not matched across the cut but takes place completely in the second shot. Therefore this is more like the revelation of a bloody gash when the victim turns towards the camera rather than an edited demonstration of action. It is noteworthy that Tsui should use such a simple technique for the decisive blow of the first fight sequence. Similarly Hu does not dwell upon gruesome and bloody detail when Jade Faced Tiger despatches the Captain and, in contrast to the rest of the fight sequence, he does not use any blood at all. These stylistic choices are significant and they attest to the way that both Hu and Tsui share an interest in subverting the otherwise expected escalation of spectacle towards a more bombastic display. For these two fight sequences the spectacle of the climactic sword strike is attenuated to draw out the characteristics of their lesser bosses. During these final moments the spectacle is not in flashy displays of technique, it is in the chilling and dispassionate way that both villains execute their prey, and this shows a prioritisation of narrative development over spectacular action.

However, the tactic of showing a more subdued attack by the lesser bosses does accord with the way that the staircase formula staggers spectacle across the film because Jade Faced Tiger and Kualo will unleash more impressive moves when they are faced with more formidable opponents later on in the film. Right now they do not have to exert themselves as their prey has already been incapacitated and cannot put up much of a fight by the time they reach them. By the same reasoning, it is important that Tsui demonstrates all of the Grappling -Hook-and-Crossbow Lieutenant's weapons because he will be the first Lieutenant to be killed. Because he

is individuated in this way, he has few novelties left to offer. Also, because of his breach of the staircase hierarchy (robbing Kualo of her opportunity to kill the trumpeter), it makes sense that he is the first of the lesser villains to die when he meets his end in the third fight sequence. Although the staircase formula dictates the escalating hierarchy of the villains' involvement within the fight sequence it does not necessarily dictate an increase in spectacle.

With regard to bloodshed, Tsui has restrained his impulse to bombard the viewer with bloody action to arrive at a point that almost matches the amount of bloodshed that Hu has displayed. The irony is that Tsui is attempting to tone down his use of bloodshed, while Hu is using it to an extreme for his time period. Chang Cheh's observation that the *wuxia* genre thrives on cycling between realistic and fantastic representations of action is pertinent here as both directors are trying to use blood work to represent realism (2004: 133); Hu uses more blood than usual as the cycle swings towards realism while Tsui uses less blood than usual as the cycle swings back to realism. Likewise, Hu uses constructive editing as a new tool that enables the dynamic presentation of action while Tsui eschews CGI in favour of constructive editing for the same reason. Bazin's notion that the techniques and aesthetics used to present realism are influenced by the taste of a time period is re-confirmed in this case where we have two maverick directors stylising realistic violence and yet both rely upon constructive editing to do so. We have seen that within this paradigm there are multiple ways that editing can be used to convey the same type of action. Within this context Tsui has resolved to re-invent the actions that Hu has used but he has also resolved to convey the same type of action in a number of different ways within

the one fight sequence; hence there are three different stylisations of projectile attack and three different stylisations of beheading.

THE FINAL BLOW

The very last strike of the last fight sequence in both films is similarly subdued compared to the spectacular combat that has taken place prior to that moment. In either case the use of blood is significant as Hu uses it to an extreme while Tsui uses it in a very understated fashion. In this section we jump ahead to the climax of these films to examine how the final strike is dealt and how this once again subverts the idea that it will deliver great spectacle, in favour of foregrounding narrative resolution.

Within the final fight sequence, the narratives of both films contain similar approaches to the demise of the ultimate villain. The final fight sequences share with the first fight sequences a common twist of making the final blow simpler and more realistic compared with the extravagant and fantastic actions that have preceded them. The killing blow comes from a relatively mundane strike after other more magical skills have been expended. The demise of both villains is also accompanied by that symbol of realism - blood. The Abbot is dealt a particularly bloody wound while Fire Wind leaves a bloody spot on the wall behind him. Additionally the ultimate heroes indulge in a little sleight of hand to overcome the villains. Drunken Cat takes a swig of wine and spits it in the Abbot's face while Chu distracts Fire Wind with a decoy sword throw. Hence the heroes ultimately conform to less noble methods in order to defeat their untrustworthy counterparts. But these are somewhat

necessary manoeuvres as the villains have recurrently resorted to underhanded tactics to gain the upper hand. Moreover, the final blow resolves overarching narrative threads of greed and power. The ultimate villain's lust for power ultimately brings about his downfall.

The Final Blow: Come Drink With Me

In my second chapter I showed how gorier films such as Chang Cheh's *The Assassin* soon surpassed the use of pooling blood in *Temple of the Red Lotus* with more extreme blood work. In the year between these two films *Come Drink With Me* was released and had thoroughly increased the amount of on-screen bloodshed. We have seen that the first fight sequence establishes the ruthless villains in a gory battle and during the final battle the combat is no less bloody. In fact there is a significantly large amount of blood on display during the showdown. Furthermore, if we consider the final blow to be the one that delivers a meaningful action event within the ultimate fight then Hu has chosen to present a bloody, hence pseudo realistic, climax rather than a magical one. Although Hu could not abandon the pre-requisite fantastic feats of the *wuxia* film he was able to rearrange them within the latter levels of combat to assert a directorial concern for realism. Despite the deployment of fantastic skills such as palm power, the final fight sequence is won with a simple stabbing.

The Abbot surveys Drunken Cat's demolished hut and sees him leap out. Drunken Cat makes his way to the nearby gazebo and collapses. He is exhausted and apparently unarmed. The Abbot takes this opportunity to leap over and attack

Drunken Cat. His leap is weightless (unaided by a kick-off shot but suspended by wires) and he hovers before landing. At this point the Abbot raises his spear, preparing to thrust it into Drunken Cat. However Drunken Cat takes a swig of wine and spits it in the Abbot's face, momentarily blinding him.



This unexceptional action brings about the Abbot's demise. His demise is spectacular in its presentation, as we will see that Hu seeks to make a direct impact upon the viewer, yet it is not magical but bloody. Therefore, although Hu has included generic fantastic events within this showdown, they are not included in the final decisive blow.

While the Abbot is distracted, Drunken Cat grabs the staff that has also been left in the gazebo and skewers the Abbot. When he withdraws the staff the Abbot is frozen, grimacing.



The camera tracks in to isolate the mortal chest-wound as it begins to spurt blood. The stylistic intent is clear: Hu wants to shock the audience by shoving their faces into the wound.



A grim reverse-shot pre-empts the audience reaction and shows Drunken Cat recoiling. The blood has spurted over his face.



A further novelty is then added when the Abbot topples into the creek and the resulting splash is deliberately dyed red.



Despite both characters having fantastic skill the Abbot is killed by the hero's resourcefulness, not through a display of his power. The wine that has been a motif for Drunken Cat's character now becomes a weapon and the staff that the Abbot covets is used to kill him. This situational irony is repeated at the climax to *Seven Swords* when the Dragon Sword that Fire Wind covets kills him too. Both films express the concept that the power these weapons represent cannot be wielded by corrupted souls like the Abbot and Fire Wind. In their drive to control such power they are ultimately defeated by their own greed.

The Final Blow: Seven Swords

Tsui uses two primary organisational concepts that mould the expression of combat in the final fight sequence: Chu's progression from shackled kung fu fighting to unshackled sword fighting as well as the combatants' increasing spatial confinement. Although Chu has been unhitched from the horses, his shackles still remain and, although he masterfully uses them to fight Fire Wind, they still restrict his movement and delay the expression of his true skill, which is sword fighting. Working together, Yang and Chu use the Transience Sword to remove the remaining bonds. Then Yang hands over his Transience Sword so that Chu can exact revenge upon Fire Wind in a one-on-one duel. Chu is not at maximum power as Fire Wind still has his "soul" - the Dragon Sword.

Tsui's tactic for the progression of the final fight is similar to that of his first fight. Whereas the first fight progresses from projectiles that are launched on horseback to ground level hand-to-hand fighting, the final fight sequence is organised according to the progression from Yang combating Fire Wind to Chu combating Fire Wind, and Chu's progression from using his chains in a kung fu style to using Yang's Transience sword and, finally, to using his own sword. Also there is an additional novelty that is determined by the increasingly confined spatial context in which the stages of the combat are fought. Whereas Yang fought Fire Wind primarily upon the open-air mezzanine (which enabled the use of spectacular, giant metal flag whips) the duel between Chu and Fire Wind begins within the arcade on the upper level of the fortress and the space decreases as they move further into the building. They gouge the walls as they try to swing their swords in the confines of a tight

passageway, before they finally face off in the armoury of the fortress. I asked Tsui about the similarities between this fight and Lau Kar-leung's *Martial Club* (1981), which also features a fight that is increasingly restricted by narrow alley walls. Tsui replied that he did not deliberately try to refer to those scenes but identified the need to develop novel displays, saying:

We do have a problem: 'This is a scene we have done before, so how are we going to do something differently?' That's why every time when we came up with a scene like this, when it's the same type of set-up, we would try to do it differently by having a totally different concept. (Gravestock and Walsh: 127)

Stylistically, difference is achieved by the use of swords in a confined space as well as utilising walls to climb higher to perform swooping attacks. The narrative implication is that, despite the unwieldy use of swords in this situation, neither man can let go of his weapon as he would lose the advantage that the powerful sword bestows upon him.

Tsui then employs the generic *wuxia* feat of casting flying swords – but in this case it is greatly attenuated to befit a more realistic narrative. Chu throws the Transience Sword at Fire Wind but it sinks into the wall next to him. This is shown in a single CGI enhanced shot, similar in concept to the flight of the dagger from Mei's hand in *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, 2004) although it covers less distance and is less uncanny [93f].



During its flight, the Transience Sword does not remain in the centre of the shot for as long as the dagger in the *House of Flying Daggers* example. This deliberate imperfection creates a sensation of reality as the CGI is not used in an overt manner to prioritise the important subject.



The viewer's potential right-to-left eye-trace is suddenly halted when the sword embeds itself in the wall.



As Fire Wind seeks to wrest the sword from the wall, to control its power once more, Chu capitalises upon Fire Wind's momentary distraction to throw his Dragon Sword through his chest. CGI is employed again, this time to show the blade of the Dragon Sword rotating as it makes its way to its mark.





The action is easily understood and CGI is *integrated* into these swift but salient actions. The actions are not constructed to allow a contemplative viewing, as Pierson has suggested of early uses of CGI (Pierson 2002: 123-4), but conforms to become one of a number of film-crafts operating in unison to present rapid action. The constructive editing principle of cumulative reasoning is maintained, as each shot adds to the total comprehension of the scene by the viewer and each shot is framed to best present each detail of the action. No single shot showcases CGI as an independent attraction, but rather CGI is integrated into the action to work in unison with the other film-crafts. Although the flight of the sword is shown using CGI it is shown in a considerably short shot that also contains three distinct actions: the throw, penetration into the wall and Fire Wind beginning to wrest it out of the wall. Additionally the shot presents these actions in 93 frames – just over three seconds. The rapid series of seven shots that show the total action: throwing, wall penetration, the Dragon Sword piercing Fire Wind's body and withdrawal of the sword from the body, have an ASL of 45.8 frames, which is shorter than the ASL of the total fight sequence (53 frames) and this speed keeps the action swift. The shots are tightly framed and only pertinent detail is shown so that the construction of shots is clear and the content is significant.

When Fire Wind is stabbed by Chu he slumps down the wall to reveal a bloody patch that recalls Mr Ma's death in *The Twelve Gold Medallions* (Cheng Kang, 1970). But unlike the marvellousness of the handprint a more mundane blood-spot is shown.



Fire Wind acknowledges the ignobility of his death (though he does not recant his misdeeds) and, ever repugnant, he wishes the same fate upon Chu, saying: “One day, you will die like me. Squatting.” Then Fire Wind kicks a cannonball to knock over a brazier that Chu catches with crossed swords. Fire spreads across the floor towards gunpowder and, at this point, given Tsui's previous films and the frequent destruction of sets at the climax of martial arts films, we might expect the location to explode in a spectacular, blazing finale but instead Yang returns to help Chu put out the flames. In this way Tsui subverts audience expectations that the location will be destroyed. At the same time he conforms to the convention of a number of Hu's latter films that only heroes working together can successfully defeat the ultimate villain. Although Chu has the capacity to match Fire Wind's ingenuity (as indicated by his bluff with the Transience Sword throw) he doesn't foresee Fire Wind's final effort to kill him and he must be rescued by Yang. The ways that Hu and Tsui present the final blow in a more realistic, less fantastic manner has greater meaning to a viewer who understands how this decision subverts generic convention.

In chapter 2 I showed how heroes and villains fight in distinctly different ways. The hero is a righteous defender who can use everyday items to protect herself and who

will not draw a sword unless absolutely necessary. In turn, the villain is quicker to employ treacherous tactics and deceptive weapons. When these two opposing forces meet the combat that originates is duly escalated towards swordplay as the hero faces increasing threats. The final blows of *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* demonstrate the directorial decision to subvert heroic character traits because the heroes resort to sleight-of-hand tactics to deliver the mortal blow to the ultimate villain.

In chapter 4 I discussed the way that the stylisation of action events cycles between predominantly realistic or predominantly fantastic representations of heroic feats. This information enables us to see that Hu and Tsui favour the realistic stylisation of action, especially at climactic moments. Their first fight sequences display realistic rather than fantastic combat and both Hu and Tsui decide to restrict the final blows of the immediate boss-villains upon their counterparts to relatively mundane strikes rather than extravagant displays. This choice is atypical of the martial arts film genre where the opportunity to increase spectacle is usually taken. Thus it subverts the idea that spectacles are likely to increase in extravagance due to the staircase formula or, at least, makes us consider that we need a more complex formulaic model in which the transition between phases is modulated rather than constantly escalating. Similarly, by examining the final strike between the ultimate villain and greatest hero, we have seen that both Hu and Tsui have used their final blows to present bloody finales rather than fantastic displays of *qi* power that would be warranted by the diegetic world of the *wuxia* film and which have occurred in both films until this point. This decision reveals a directorial intention to prioritise the realistic stylisation of action. Although Teo has suggested that Hu could not ‘forsake fantasy altogether’

(2003a: 24), the final blow does show how Hu subverts the dominance of fantastic feats within the *wuxia* genre.

At the beginning of this chapter I discussed the common generic trait of the first fight sequence occurring within minutes of the film's start. In both *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* we are very quickly introduced to the homicidal ruthlessness of the villainous characters that occupy the lowest rung in the hierarchy of the staircase formula in either film. What better way to engender and prolong our thirst for retribution than to introduce the despicable characteristics of the villains at the very start of the film? How better to give us some reason to doubt that the heroes will be victorious than to manifest the villains' treachery in their unorthodox weaponry and devious tactics? The first fight sequence is an opportunity to introduce the weapons, tactics and malevolent entities that will pose a serious threat to the heroes, while the staircase formula conveniently delays the moment when the villains will meet their fate.

My analysis of the first fight sequences and the showdowns in *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* prove that there can be a high degree of narrative content contained in the spectacular combat of *wuxia* films. Part of the difficulty that Western audiences have is that they are not familiar with the cultural depth that combat can express and far too often dismiss it as pure excitement. This misconception is also due to unfamiliarity with the development of the genre and the way that narratives and spectacles have mutated over the years. It is also partly attributable to the use of unfamiliar filmmaking techniques that do not conform to continuity system methods.

CONCLUSION

At the start of this thesis I stated my concern that narrative and spectacle should not be thought of as distinctly dichotomous components of the Hong Kong film style. To understand how spectacles and narrative are intertwined I suggested that there are more complex forces that affect the presentation of action events in the *wuxia* film that could be understood through an analysis of constructive editing techniques, they are: the pursuit of novelty, the evolution of peculiar editing techniques, the stylisation of heroic feats and a formulaic design principle that organises combinations of combatants.

At the start of this thesis I also pondered the question: what is Hong Kong film style? To begin to answer this question I suggested that the in-camera method of production has resulted in the development of unique filmmaking techniques that, in contrast with continuity system production methods, concentrate upon the presentation of action rather than the establishment of space. The in-camera method often means that the details of an action are used to construct the total action. Therefore each shot presents a significant filmmaking decision. An understanding of this key point has been vital for the elucidation of how Hong Kong filmmakers craft their work. By concentrating on the assembly of shots and the placement of cuts my analysis of constructive editing practices has enabled the identification of the key forces that affect the Hong Kong film style and an explanation of how these forces sway the construction of *wuxia* film style and narrative. The case studies in this final chapter have further demonstrated the influence of these forces.

The first fight sequence is used to kick-start the narrative but I have also established that the first fight sequence can convey directorial intention for the stylisation of action events that might be expected within the ensuing film. By specifically analysing the very first step of the staircase formula as well as the final, conclusive blow, I have shown that the stylistic intention of King Hu and Tsui Hark is to present combat of a more realistic type. In the first fight sequence this is enabled by their focus upon the lesser villains who do not have the martial arts skill to perform fantastic feats. Later on there are more extravagant displays of combat such as the use of giant metal flags as whip-like extensions for the swords in *Seven Swords* and in *Come Drink With Me* there are displays of palm power, the capacity to move with invisible speed and a weightless leap. The inclusion of these spectacular and fantastic feats befit the diegetic world of the *wuxia* film and I have asserted that they are a prerequisite inclusion that helps to delineate a *wuxia* film from other martial arts genres. But, as explained in chapter 4, they are attenuated and even replaced with other super heroic feats as the genre develops. Both *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* downplay the more extravagant stylisation of key feats, despite the extravagant spectacular possibilities they can deliver.

In this chapter I have also looked at the ways in which Hu and Tsui have organised fight sequences within *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* according to Cheuk Pak-tong's notion of the hierarchy of the staircase formula (1998: 58-59). Although the staircase formula has the potential to deliver increasingly extravagant spectacles towards a demonstration of great martial arts power that will showcase filmmaking expertise, I have shown how Hu and Tsui have subverted that notion to establish their own stylistic and narrative intentions for their films.

This chapter's detailed case study of first fight sequences in *Come Drink With Me* and *Seven Swords* has borne out my assertion that narrative and spectacle are intertwined by showing how both directors have used similar action events to create and advance the narrative of their first fight sequences. Familiar action events often get played out along familiar narrative lines; therefore novelty must be injected into the stylisation of action events. Because narratives do not necessarily change a great deal, the pursuit of novelty demands the significant reinvention of familiar action events. The example of the coin toss in chapter 2 showed how a familiar action event could be reworked as its novelty wanes. This effect is reconfirmed by the ways in which Tsui has redesigned Hu's action events, as well as his own. In chapter 2 I also showed how the use of blood was an indicator of realism that came to be used in fantastic ways. The case studies in this chapter have shown how Hu capitalised upon the novelty of blood work to present gory action events that accorded with Shaw Brothers' New Era directive and (considering Tsui's predilection for grandiose gouts of blood and the total destruction of his sets during climactic moments) Tsui has also attenuated his use of blood work in favour of a realistic and therefore novel stylisation of action.

Realism is further aided by the persuasive effect of constructive editing. For Hu constructive editing was a fairly new technique (learned from Japanese *chambara* films) that he could use to find ways of generating suspense and to make action more dynamic and bloody, while for Tsui it was an established technique that could be reworked in novel yet still dynamic ways and into which CGI could be incorporated. In the presentation of realistic action events both directors favour the use of

constructive editing because of its capacity to persuade the viewer of the credibility of difficult if not impossible action events. We have seen how constructive editing helped to construct death, such as the piercing of a body by melee weapons, as well as conveying the machinations of Tsui's more novel devices, such as the Bladed Shield and Guillotine Umbrella.

In chapter 3 I provided a close examination of constructive editing techniques to provide more explicit terminology with which to dissect the Hong Kong film style. I elucidated how constructive editing can be persuasive and I used an example from *Zatoichi: The Fugitive* (Tokuzo Tanaka, 1963), to demonstrate how action can be presented in a swift yet cogent manner. The Zatoichi example also provided a way to elicit key techniques that demonstrate the Japanese influence on the Hong Kong film style. Because the rapid presentation of shots became an identifiable trait of the Hong Kong constructive film style I then investigated the speed at which shots become imperceptible. I also explained how Hong Kong filmmakers have developed techniques that guide the viewer's focus (eye trace), prompt anticipation (eyeline matches) and attempt to engender an emotional reaction to the action (the prompting reaction shot). More over I have shown how constructive editing can convey a sense of continuousness despite intermittently contravening spatial and temporal continuity. By analysing the ways that they have used constructive editing techniques I have also been able to establish the design agendas that both directors have used to assemble their first fight sequences. Hu accelerates the tempo of his shots toward a crescendo while Tsui prefers to assemble the edit according to the demonstration of his ingenious weapons.

With this thesis I have added to the academic analysis of two relatively under-researched areas: the Hong Kong film style and film editing. By combining these areas through an investigation of the *wuxia* genre I have been able to track the development of certain constructive editing techniques, such as the kick-off shot and the whip-pan flight of projectiles, but more than this I have helped to determine that these are distinct components of the Hong Kong film style. Such techniques have been applied and developed by filmmakers in other countries – which is something that I see as a positive development for the generation of new and exciting filmmaking – but this thesis helps to distinguish peculiar editing techniques so that their origin is not forgotten. Though reconciled to the end of the Hong Kong era of martial arts, action choreographer, Stephen Tung Wai, also envisages that the Hong Kong style will enable a new Chinese action style to flourish when he says:

Who dares say that the complicated wirework wasn't learnt from those in Hong Kong? When you can't survive on this world anymore, do you still hang on to this old notion of great Hong Kong films? To continue, we have to reproduce like an orchid: break off little branches to grow new roots – in the mainland, it's still half Hong Kong! Hopefully they will create new styles, and then the films of the Great Motherland, Chinese kungfu/action films will stand up. Because the roots come from Hong Kong, we can say they're still Hong Kong in these new styles. (Li 2006: 163)

The evolution of the Hong Kong film style will continue. Just as I was inspired to undertake this thesis, the techniques developed by Hong Kong's action filmmakers will continue to inspire others.

As well as elucidating stylistic aspects of the *wuxia* genre, this thesis was also written with an eye to it being used as filmmaking handbook. In that pursuit I hope that my work can alert filmmakers to the greater possibilities of presenting action beyond the constraints of continuity system methods. For those who already practice

the techniques that I have identified, I hope that this study encourages them to seek new and exciting ways of developing the Hong Kong film style.

TABLE
A COMPARISON OF FIGHT SEQUENCES IN *COME DRINK WITH ME* AND *SEVEN SWORDS*

<i>COME DRINK WITH ME</i>	<i>SEVEN SWORDS</i>
<p><u>Fight Sequence 1</u></p> <p>Massacre</p> <p>Lesser Villains & Lesser Boss Kill Guards.</p> <p><i>The Bandits ambush Master Chang's escort. Jade Faced Tiger kills the Captain of the Guards, taking Chang hostage.</i></p>	<p><u>Fight Sequence 1</u></p> <p>Massacre</p> <p>Lesser Villains & Lesser Boss Kill Villagers.</p> <p><i>The Lieutenants, led by Kualo, systematically kill the remaining defenders of the village.</i></p>
<p><u>Fight Sequence 2</u></p> <p>Confrontation</p> <p>Lesser Villains vs. Lesser Hero.</p> <p><i>Lesser bandits confront Golden Swallow at an inn and are defeated.</i></p>	<p><u>Fight Sequence 2</u></p> <p>Confrontation</p> <p>Lesser Villains vs. Lesser Hero.</p> <p><i>Lieutenants try to stop Fu from escaping the village. Fu escapes.</i></p>
<p><u>Fight Sequence 3</u></p> <p>Greater Hero Saves Lesser Hero From Assassination</p> <p>Lesser Hero chases Greater Hero. Lesser Hero vs. Lesser Villains.</p> <p><i>Drunken Cat lures Golden Swallow away from her room saving her from an assassination attempt. Upon returning to her room she defeats the assassins (lesser villains).</i></p>	<p><u>Fight Sequence 3</u></p> <p>Lesser Hero Saves (Potential) Lesser Hero From Assassination</p> <p>Lesser Hero & (Potential) Lesser Hero Kill Lesser Villain.</p> <p><i>The Crossbow-Grappling-Hook Lieutenant attacks Wu. Fu saves Wu and kills the Lieutenant.</i></p>
	<p><u>Fight Sequence 4</u></p> <p>Heroes Defend the Village</p> <p>Lesser & Greater Heroes Kill Lesser Villains.</p> <p><i>The Lieutenants attack Martial Village but they are defeated and some are killed by the 'Seven Swords' who arrive just in time to rescue the Chief, his daughter and the children. At the climax Fu chops off the arm of a Lieutenant and sends him back to Fire Wind.</i></p>

<p><u>Fight Sequence 4</u></p> <p>Infiltration</p> <p>Lesser Hero infiltrates Villains' Compound. Lesser Hero vs. Lesser Villains & Lesser Boss.</p> <p><i>Golden Swallow investigates the temple where the bandits are hiding out. Her disguise is uncovered and (with the subtle aid of Drunken Cat) she fights her way to freedom but not before a dart from Jade Faced Tiger poisons her.</i></p>	<p><u>Fight Sequence 5</u></p> <p>Infiltration</p> <p>Lesser & Greater Heroes infiltrate Villains' Compound. Part A: Lesser Heroes vs. Ultimate Villain. Part B: Lesser Heroes vs. Lesser Villains. Part C: Greater Hero Kills Lesser Boss.</p> <p><i>Fu, Wu and Han (Lesser Heroes) draw Fire Wind out of his fortress while the rest of the group infiltrate the compound and begin wreaking havoc. Chu fights and eventually kills Kualo while saving Green Pearl. The compound is set alight and the villains' horses are poisoned.</i></p>
<p><u>Fight Sequence 5</u></p> <p>Disturbance at Hero's Hideout (Kung Fu)</p> <p>Lesser Villains attack Greater Hero's Hideaway. Greater Hero Kills Lesser Villains.</p> <p><i>Lesser villains discover Drunken Cat's hideaway. They are easily defeated by Drunken Cat's kung fu.</i></p>	<p><u>Fight Sequence 6</u></p> <p>Disturbance at Heroes' Hideout (Kung Fu)</p> <p>A (Traitorous) Villager causes a disturbance within the Hero's Hideaway. Lesser Hero vs. (Traitorous) Villager.</p> <p><i>A short kung fu stoush between villager, Dongluo, and hero, Yang Yunchong in the hidden tunnels. The hero easily subdues the villager with his kung fu.</i></p>
	<p><u>Fight Sequence 7</u></p> <p>Tunnel Massacre</p> <p>Traitorous Villager Kills Villagers.</p> <p><i>The traitor, Dongluo, now revealed, defeats the Chief and stalks through the tunnels of the hide-away, slaughtering all who stand in his way.</i></p>
<p><u>Fight Sequence 6</u></p> <p>Prelude to Showdown</p> <p>Part A: Minion Soldiers vs. Minion Bandits. Part B: Women Warriors vs. Minion Bandits. Part C: Lesser Hero Kills Lesser Villains. Part D: Ultimate Villain defeats Lesser Hero. Part E: Greater Hero vs. Ultimate Villain.</p> <p><i>The bandits ambush the governmental party with a projectile attack. At ground level a troupe of women warriors take up the defence against the bandits. Golden Swallow then kills a number of significant lesser villains (including: The Moustachioed Bandit, The Bare Chest Bandit and Smiling Tiger). She also defeats her nemesis, Jade</i></p>	<p><u>Fight Sequence 8</u></p> <p>Prelude to Showdown</p> <p>Part A: Greater Hero Rescued by Lesser Heroes. Part B: Lesser Heroes Kill Lesser Villains. Part C: Greater Hero Defeats Minion Soldiers.</p> <p><i>Greater Hero, Chu, is unchained by the Lesser Heroes. The Lesser Heroes fight and kill the Lesser Villains, while Chu despatches Minions with his chains.</i></p>

<p><i>Faced Tiger, but she does not kill him as the Abbot stops her. The Abbot defeats Golden Swallow but before he can kill her, Drunken Cat saves her. The Abbot and Drunken Cat fight and Drunken Cat is victorious but mercifully lets the Abbot live.</i></p>	
<p><u>Fight Sequence 7</u></p> <p>Showdown</p> <p>Greater Hero Kills Ultimate Villain.</p> <p><i>Abbot Liao Kung finds Drunken Cat's hideaway and attacks him. They fight inside and outside of the hut which is destroyed during combat. Drunken Cat finally kills the Abbot.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">{END}</p>	<p><u>Fight Sequence 9</u></p> <p>Showdown</p> <p>Part A: Lesser Hero vs. Ultimate Villain. Part B: Lesser Hero and Greater Hero vs. Ultimate Villain. Part C: Greater Hero Kills Ultimate Villain. Part D: Lesser Hero Saves Greater Hero.</p> <p><i>Yang Yunchong ascends the steps of the fortress to the mezzanine level. There he fights Fire Wind. Chu arrives and they both fight Fire Wind. Yang cuts Chu free of his chains. Yang hands the Transience Sword to Chu who fights Fire Wind in a corridor. Chu eventually gets his Dragon Sword with which he kills Fire Wind.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">{END}</p>