



# FACULTY OF ARTS

Adelaide Summer Research Scholarship 2021-2022

## Sound Sculpting *Wuxia* Chivalry: Music and Sound in King Hu's Chinese Martial Arts Cinema

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The Chinese martial arts genre known as *wuxia* developed in the 1920s in Shanghai and has further flourished in the Hong Kong and Taiwan film industries since the 1950s, but it only became well-known to the international audiences of world cinema after the success of the Oscar-winning film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee 2000). The genre brings history and fiction together and negotiates between tradition and modernity, leaving room both visually and audibly for the filmmakers' imaginations. The most influential filmmaker and pioneer of the "new school" *wuxia* movement was King Hu (1932–1997), whose films not only reflected the social and political realities of his time, but in terms of their production and distribution were truly an outcome of post-war transnational collaborations among East Asian filmmakers. Hu's works inspired the new generation of filmmakers and triggered the new wave of *wuxia* cinema, and they have been studied from multi-disciplinary approaches. Nevertheless, the placement, application and function of music and sound in Hu's *wuxia* cinema have yet to be explored, despite those being critical components. Music and sound are essential to assist the storytelling of the film and to highlight the emotional expressions of the characters. Aiming to fill the lacuna, this project will investigate the audio-visual stylings and musical borrowings found in Hu's masterpieces *Come Drink With Me* (1966), *Dragon Inn* (1967), and *A Touch of Zen* (1972). Special attention will be paid to (1) the use of Chinese music (traditional and newly composed) and adaptation of Western classical music, (2) the musical instruments played by male and female chivalrous heroes in these fictionalised histories, as well as their symbolic implications, and (3) the experimental application of synthesizer.

The tasks expected to be undertaken by the selected student include:

- sound mapping to the screenwriting and visual design
- documenting diegetic and nondiegetic music and sound
- identifying audio styles and genera
- examining the placement and function of music
- discussing the relationship audio/visual elements and viewers' interpretations/experiences
- co-publication with the supervisor