

Wuxia

"'Wu' means martial arts, which signifies action, 'Xia' conveys chivalry. Wuxia. Say it gently... 'whooshah'... and it's like a breath of serenity embracing you. Say it with force, 'WuSHA!', and you can feel its power."

—[Samuel L. Jackson](#), *"The Art of Action: Martial Arts in the Movies"*

One of the oldest genres in Chinese literature, wǔxiá (武侠 — literally "martial-arts chivalry" or "martial arts heroes", and pronounced *roughly* woo-seeah in Mandarin) stories are tall tales of honorable warriors (侠 *xiá*) fighting against evil, whether it be an individual villain, or a corrupt government. Notable for melodrama, spectacular swordplay, and high-flying martial arts.

These films exist in an idealized realm in which legendary heroes live on the edges of everyday society and wield swords, spears or daggers, with fantastical skill. It is not considered unbelievable that these Zen warriors float through the air, skim the water and battle in trees and on rooftops and succeed against astounding odds.

A typical wuxia story draws a hero, who obeys a strong moral code, into the everyday world in order to fight, reluctantly, to defend the weak against corrupt officials or leaders. In between battles, the heroes of wuxia films often indulge in enigmatic philosophical and mystical contemplation.

Although some *wuxia* stories are set in modern times, or even the future, most take place in the "Martial Arts World" of *Jiānghú* (江湖 — literally "rivers and lakes") a Fantasy Counterpart Culture of Imperial China. The *Jiānghú* is a "shared universe", populated by martial-artists and monks, wandering knights and beautiful princesses, thieves and beggars, priests and healers, merchants and craftsmen.

The best *wuxia* writers draw a vivid picture of the intricate relationships of honor, loyalty, love and hate between individuals and between communities in this milieu. It is implicit that law and government are unjust, ineffective and/or corrupt, requiring the *xia* to settle differences by force moderated only by their chivalrous code, and often forcing them to live as outlaws despite their noble characters.

A more romantic term known as *Wulin* (武林 — literally "Warrior's Forests") is used when one wants to talk specifically about the world of martial artists and warriors *specifically*. *Wulin* is basically a majestic way of saying "The World of Warriors."

Modern works often incorporate outside themes and ideas, allowing the genre to develop, and in turn *wǔxiá* themes and visual styles have strongly influenced Western media, especially in cinema.