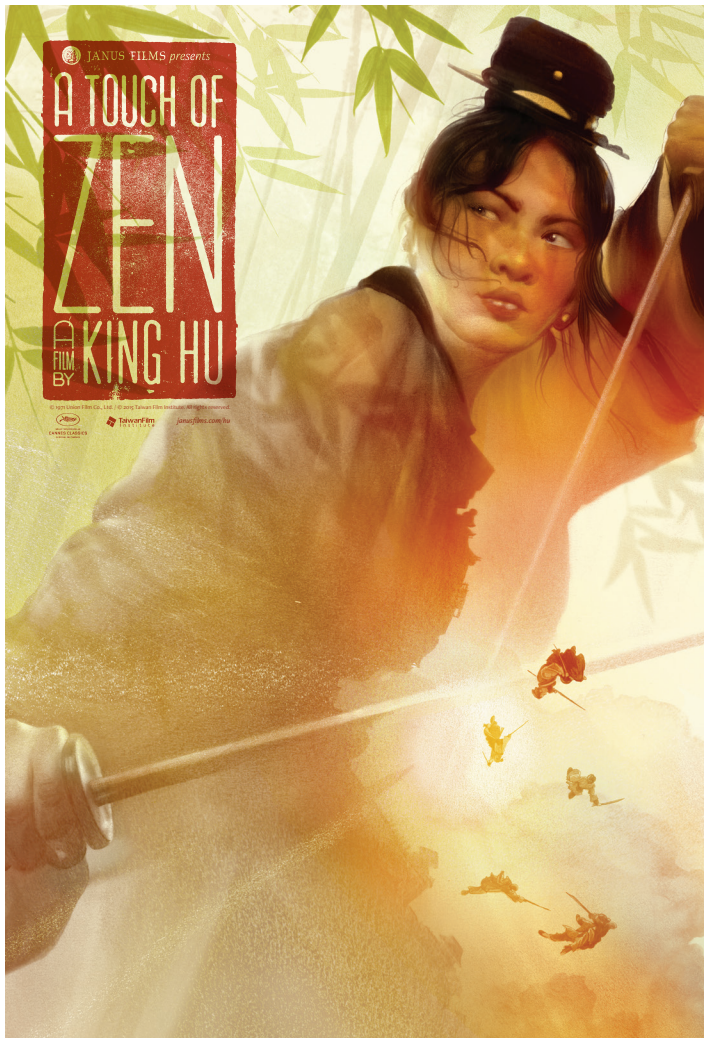




JANUS FILMS *presents*



SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE  
CANNES CLASSICS  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES



In director King Hu's grandest work, the noblewoman Yang (Hsu Feng), a fugitive hiding in a small village, must escape into the wilderness with a shy scholar and two aides. There, the quartet face a massive group of fighters, and are joined by a band of Buddhist monks who are surprisingly skilled in the art of battle. Janus Films is proud to present the original, uncut version of this classic in a sparkling new 4K restoration.

“The visual style will set your eyes on fire.” —*Time Out London*

“Truly spectacular.” —A. H. Weiler, *The New York Times*

“An amazing and unique director.” —Ang Lee

Taiwan • 1971 • 180 minutes • Color • Monaural  
In Mandarin with English subtitles • 2.35:1 aspect ratio  
Screening format: 4K DCP

## CREDITS

*Director/Scriptwriter:* King Hu  
*Producers:* Sha Jung-feng,  
Hsia-wu Liang Fang  
*Cinematographer:* Hua Huiying  
*Editors:* King Hu,  
Wang Chin-chen  
*Music:* Wu Dajiang  
*Martial arts choreographers:*  
Han Yingjie, Pan Yao-kun

*Starring:*  
Hsu Feng as Yang Huizhen  
Shi Jun as Gu Shengzhai  
Bai Ying as General Shih  
Wen-chaio

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## WUXIA: A PRIMER

ALTHOUGH IN THE WEST most often applied to film, the term *wuxia*—literally “martial [wu] hero [xia]”—in fact refers to a genre of Chinese fiction that is represented in every medium, from literature to opera to, of course, movies. Dating back to 300 BCE in its protean form, the wuxia narrative traditionally follows a hero from the lower class without official affiliation who pursues righteousness and/or revenge while adhering to a code of chivalrous behavior. Brought to mass popularity in the early part of the twentieth century via a series of post-Confucian novels, wuxia soon spread to film with the appearance of *Burning of the Red Lotus Temple*, a now lost serial adapted from the novel *The Tale of the Extraordinary Swordsman* that was released between 1928 and 1931. Banned by the government in the thirties due to their subversive and supernatural elements, wuxia films returned to the screen in the fifties, taking the traditional narrative form while also borrowing elements—such as careful choreography—from Chinese opera. Following a strict formula, wuxia films—though always period pieces—can be said to have become fully modern in the 1960s, with the formation of the Shaw Brothers studio and the advanced direction of filmmakers such as King Hu. The commercial success of Hu’s *Come Drink with Me* (produced for Shaw) and *Dragon Inn* (produced independently) kicked off a wave of wuxia titles, which were frequently exported to the U.S. as reedited, dubbed action films during the martial arts craze of the first half of the seventies. Though the genre wavered in popularity in the succeeding decades, it returned to international prominence in 2000 with Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which is heavily indebted to Hu’s classics of the sixties and seventies.

### ABOUT THE RESTORATION

KING HU’S *A Touch of Zen* was restored in 4K by the Taiwan Film Institute and L’Immagine Ritrovata from the 35 mm original camera negative. The negative was generally in good preservation condition, with very light shrinkage. The most serious problems were several tears that needed to be repaired.

The film was not particularly warped or unstable, but it was covered in stains and colored spots of various sizes, and full of splices, so the lab used a dust removal filter and went frame by frame to eliminate unwanted artifacts. The removal of splice marks was a heavy task: a movie with fast editing, *A Touch of Zen* is full of close splices. This work was done by manually reconstructing the damaged parts of frames with interpolation tools, adjusting for luminance and grain.

During the color-correction process, the 4K resolution allowed the lab to achieve a deep definition and richness. As there was no vintage positive element available to use as a reference for color restoration, a 1992 print preserved at the Taiwan Film Institute was consulted. Research results on *Dragon Inn* provided by the TFI and the lab’s previous restoration experience on that film also helped the lab execute the color correction of *A Touch of Zen*, which was shot by the same director and film crew.

## KING HU BIOGRAPHY

BORN IN BEIJING in 1932, King Hu moved to Hong Kong at the age of eighteen and started work as an illustrator for film advertisements. In 1954, he made his acting debut in the film *Humiliation for Sale*, and in 1958, through director Li Han-hsiang, he joined the Shaw Brothers studio as an actor, screenwriter, and assistant director. In 1963, Hu was first assistant director for Li on the film *The Love Eterne*, and the following year he made his directorial debut with *The Story of Sue San*. In 1966, Hu released his first wuxia film, *Come Drink with Me*, which was a major factor in the rise of the genre.

*Dragon Inn* (1967) was a blockbuster, setting box-office records in Taiwan, Korea, and the Philippines, and proved to have a broad and lasting influence. Its follow-up would not hit screens until 1971, after three years of filming. *A Touch of Zen* took the Technical Grand Prize award at the Cannes Film Festival in 1975, propelling Hu onto the world stage, and its bamboo forest duel became a classic scene and an indelible contribution to cinema.

Hu's 1981 film *The Juvenizer*—entirely self-funded and self-shot—was his first comedy, and his only work set in the present. After *The Wheel of Life* (1983), Hu stepped out of the limelight until 1990's *The Swordsman*, for which he made a comeback at the request of the younger wuxia director Tsui Hark. Hu was involved in the costuming, styling, and set design for the film, including setting up a massive set in Xitou, Taiwan. In 1992, he received a lifetime achievement award from the Hong Kong Film Directors' Guild. The following year saw the release of what turned out to be his final film, *Painted Skin*. In 1997, while about to begin work on a film about the Chinese immigrant workers who built the transcontinental railroads of America, Hu died while undergoing heart surgery.

### SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 1964 《玉堂春》 *The Story of Sue San*
- 1965 《大地兒女》 *Sons of the Good Earth*
- 1966 《大醉俠》 *Come Drink with Me*
- 1967 《龍門客棧》 *Dragon Inn*
- 1970 《喜怒哀樂》第二段『怒』 *Anger*  
(part of the omnibus film *Four Moods*)
- 1971 《俠女》 *A Touch of Zen*
- 1973 《迎春閣之風波》 *The Fate of Lee Khan*
- 1975 《忠烈圖》 *The Valiant Ones*
- 1979 《空山靈雨》 *Raining in the Mountain*
- 1979 《山中傳奇》 *Legend of the Mountain*
- 1981 《終身大事》 *The Juvenizer*
- 1983 《天下第一》 *All the King's Men*
- 1983 《大輪迴》 *The Wheel of Life*
- 1990 《笑傲江湖》 *The Swordsman*
- 1993 《畫皮之陰陽法王》 *Painted Skin*

## KING HU: A TOUCH OF FREEDOM

AFTER A LONG STINT at Hong Kong's historic Shaw Brothers studio, which specialized in martial arts pictures, King Hu had decided to strike out on his own. His 1966 Shaw production *Come Drink with Me* had been an enormous commercial and artistic triumph for him but had proved too radical—in the realistic violence of its carefully orchestrated action—for the studio. So he had left Hong Kong for Taiwan, where he made his first major independent success, 1967's *Dragon Inn*, with producer Sha Rongfeng, for their short-lived studio the Union Film Company.

Hu's next film would prove even more ambitious. *A Touch of Zen* (1971) is the kind of gargantuan production that only an artist high on newfound freedoms would dream of making. A three-hour production with a richly woven plot, structural complexity, and dazzling visual experimentation, *A Touch of Zen* is the director's grandest vision.

Starting as a story about a fugitive noblewoman (played by Hsu Feng, in one of the strong female roles typical of the director) hiding out in a village after she and her family were marked for extermination by the corrupt Ming Dynasty government, the film builds into a spiritual action epic about the uneasy coexistence of violence and Buddhist principles. With its mystical beauty, exquisite photography, and moving, ambiguous depiction of faith, *A Touch of Zen* is a work of metaphysical genius, Hu's clearest statement of faith and ultimate visual expression of the seemingly unfilmable concepts of Zen Buddhism. It is especially renowned for its radically disjunctive editing and dexterous camera movements during fight scenes. Here more than ever, one can feel the influence of the Chinese opera on Hu's action cinema. It wholly reflects his ideas about the relationship between film and viewer; as he once said, "The audience is the camera. I don't want the audience to sit and watch, I want it to move."

With its three-hour-plus running time, *A Touch of Zen* offers many characters and plot strands, and it was, in fact, originally released in two parts. The first half, which climaxes with the most famous action sequence of Hu's career—a gravity-defying, startlingly edited battle set in a bamboo forest—was released in 1970, while the second half was released in 1971. The two parts were subsequently combined into one title for international audiences, as Hu originally intended, and it has mostly been presented this way ever since.

*A Touch of Zen* was the first wuxia film to make a mark on the Western art-cinema world, screening to acclaim at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival and winning the Technical Grand Prize (awarded for "superior technique") there. Just as *Pather Panchali* had brought Indian cinema to an international audience at Cannes twenty years earlier, *A Touch of Zen* was the breakthrough for a particular strand of Eastern cinema, convincing an audience that had previously been skeptical, or at least disinterested, of the artistic value and singular beauty of the best martial arts moviemaking.

Despite the film's success at Cannes, however, it was an expensive disappointment domestically, which made it difficult for Hu to raise money for future projects—certainly for anything on such a scale. After 1975, Hu would focus on Buddhist- or supernatural-themed dramas. Though he continued to work in Taiwan, the movies being made by the ascendant daring filmmakers of the Taiwanese New Wave marked his work as dated. Nevertheless, Hu, who died in 1997 after complications following heart surgery, remains among the most influential filmmakers of all time, inspiring directors from Wong Kar-wai and Zhang Yimou to Tsui Hark and Tsai Ming-liang.

## CAST BIOS

**Hsu Feng's** first film was King Hu's 1967 *Dragon Inn*. The following year, she began filming *A Touch of Zen* for Hu, playing the lead role with a combination of icy beauty, fierce will, and powerful heroism. That film went on to win the Technical Grand Prize at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival, and Hsu's performance received critical acclaim not only at Cannes but around the world.

During her five years (1966–1971) with the Union Film Company, Hsu appeared in five films; from 1971 to 1975, she starred in over twenty, including Hu's *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973) and *The Valiant Ones* (1975). In the former, she plays a steely Mongolian princess, dignified, imposing, and ruthless. This was possibly her greatest performance in a wuxia film, although her lead role in 1976's *Assassin* earned her the best leading actress award at the thirteenth Golden Horse Awards. That same year, her role as Weicheng, the wife of the famed nationalist Chinese military officer Xie Jinyuan, in the film *Eight Hundred Heroes* earned her a special award for acting technique at the Asian Film Festival in South Korea. *The Pioneers* (1980) garnered her the award for best leading actress in a feature film at the seventeenth Golden Horse Awards. Hsu's other films include *Everlasting Glory* and Hu's *Raining in the Mountain* and *Legend of the Mountain*.

**Shi Jun** was a leading man from his first film appearance. His role in King Hu's *Dragon Inn* (1967) made him a bona fide celebrity and the new rising star of wuxia films. With his role in *A Touch of Zen*, Shi cemented his place as part of Hu's regular company. He specialized in cool, calm, rational characters. In 1978, he traveled to South Korea with Hu to appear in *Raining in the Mountain* and *Legend of the Mountains*, and in 1983 his role in Hu's *The Wheel of Life* earned him the best actor award at the Asia-Pacific Film Festival.

Shi was known to be very selective about scripts without Hu's name attached. As a result, his filmography is smaller than those

of many of his contemporaries. He has served as director of the Taipei Show Business Union, continues to make occasional appearances on television, and is currently chairman of the King Hu Foundation. In 2003, Shih made a cameo in a film by renowned director Tsai Ming-liang entitled *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. He also made a guest appearance in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's wuxia epic *The Assassin* (2015).

**Bai Ying** joined the Union Film Company in 1966, and during his five-year tenure there took part in five movies, including King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* as well as *Black Invitation* and *The Grand Passion*. His debut film performance in *Dragon Inn* immediately made him a star, and he was always a standout performer, whether on the side of good or evil. His role in *Dragon Inn* as the formidable martial artist, court eunuch, and antagonist Cao Shaoqin, with his unique combination of a youthful face and white hair, spawned many imitators.

In *A Touch of Zen*, he played the flip side of Cao, the upright Ming Dynasty general Shih Wen-chiao, who helps the Donglin movement in their resistance against the court eunuchs.

From 1966 through 1977, Bai acted in over twenty titles, most of them wuxia films, with the more well-known including Hu's *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973) and *The Valiant Ones* (1975). In 1971, he joined Hong Kong's Shaw Brothers, traveling there to star in *The Eunuch* for the studio. This marked the start of frequent trips between Taiwan and Hong Kong for the actor. In 1977, Bai's turn as a villain in the 3D wuxia film *Dynasty* earned him the best supporting actor award at the Golden Horse Awards. Bai became one of the preeminent actors of the Hong Kong/Taiwan film world, known for his ability to play hero or villain, his agility, and his stern appearance.

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## TRIVIA

- Production of *A Touch of Zen* began in 1967 but was not completed until 1969. Against director King Hu's wishes, producers demanded that the film be exhibited in two parts (in 1970 and 1971) in Taiwan, where it languished at the box office. The famous bamboo-forest fight climax of the first part was reprised at the beginning of the second. Without Hu, the producers then recut the film into a two-hour version and rereleased it to theaters, where it performed no better. In 1973, Hu regained control of the film and recut it according to his original intentions: as a single three-hour film. That version premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 1975.
- Hu stated that the Ming Dynasty was a period "when Western influences first reached China," and that he conceived his films as critiques of the unjustified killings depicted in such Western movies as the James Bond franchise, where the hero indiscriminately guns down faceless enemies.
- *A Touch of Zen* was the first Chinese film to win an award at Cannes, where it took home the Technical Grand Prize in 1975.
- Unusual for the wuxia genre, the first fight sequence does not occur until almost an hour into the film.
- *A Touch of Zen* was inspired by "The Magnanimous Girl," from Pu Songling's ghost-story anthology *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*. The anthology consists of roughly 500 stories and has inspired many films, including Li Han-hsiang's *The Enchanting Shadow*, Tsui Hark's *A Chinese Ghost Story*, and Gordon Chan's *Painted Skin*.
- Hu had a full village constructed for the opening half of the film, and then left it alone for nine months to give it a weathered look.