

Wudang, Shaolin, and symbolic asexuality: Linguistic Landscape in the Chinese action films

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Chinese martial arts films are a rich site for the analysis of how gender and sexuality are constructed. These films are usually described as highly masculine—male heroes dominate female characters (Hiramoto 2012). In this presentation, we examine how idealized male dominance is constructed around Confucian ideologies. Our investigation is premised on the idea that films can be viewed as a legitimate space, albeit fictional and mediatized, which can be analyzed using a Linguistic Landscape (LL) perspective. On the one hand, we treat these films as a space of their own which has landscapes, e.g. Wudang Mountain and Shaolin monastery, which construct highly masculine landscapes. On the other hand, we view these films as resources that are situated in physical space by looking at the intertextual and contextual considerations that surround these films.

Based on samples of over 200 films, we aim to contribute to the growing literature of LL and gender/sexuality studies (e.g. Milani, 2014; Kitis and Milani, 2015; Milani and Levon, 2016). We argue that the LL of the films (e.g. referential names of landmarks, physical construction of settings including temples/schools, costumes of characters) semiotically mark gender and sexuality of the martial arts practitioner characters. We also examine how the LL of the films glorifies asexuality as an ideal practice that go along with ultimate masculinity, which can be seen in the rejection of romance and celebration of chastity. This is consistent with how the landscapes of the films deal with homosociality.

References:

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