

## Behind the Violence Images

### —Comments on the creation of Muay Thai action films

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**Abstract:** In the 21st century, Thai films come with a new and confident attitude again after a low tide, among which there are a series of Muay Thai action films that mark the maturity of its commercial films. In order to present the image characteristics and aesthetic value of this kind of works, this paper probes into the cultural connotation and creative art of this kind of Thai national films from three aspects: Muay Thai's entry into films and its imagery, aesthetic presentation and realistic significance behind the images.

### 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, with the rapid development of Thailand's film industry, the filmmakers have become more elite and innovative. Many excellent works have been shown on the world screen and achieved gratifying results. In addition to non-popular realism and experimental films, there are many mature works in Thai genre films. After careful commercial packaging, some of them have gone to the world market, with epic films narrating national myths *Suriyothai*; unique Thai style of horror movies *Mae Nak*, *Shutter*; some reflect the ethical and emotional changes in Thailand, such as *Monrak Transistor*, *Khang Lang Phap*; youth movie *The Love of Siam*, *Bad Genius* and so on. However, what we know most about it is the series of action films that were once popular and mainly showed the charm of Muay Thai, they are *Ong-Bak*, *Tom Yum Goong*, *Born Boxing*, *The Movie Legend of Muay Thai*, *Life Of Rachan The Boxer*, *Kung Fu From Latln Dance*, *Beautiful Boxer* and so on.

Like Chinese martial arts films, these films are colorful, let us vent the "id" impulse and helpless when facing the reality in the form of full of fun — we appreciate them, sometimes even from the bottom of our hearts, but perhaps we have not looked for the reason, and this is far from simple Muay Thai moves can be fought out

### 2. An expression of national dignity

Like many Asian countries, Thai films in the field of Oriental <sup>①</sup> culture also strive to find a suitable position for themselves to show the "the other" image full of exotic customs and collective ideas. In addition, this kind of image integrated into the national appeal and individual consciousness must use the universal expression mode to obtain the world recognition. Artists all have the impulse to express themselves, and their strong national dignity and sense of pride is bound to be reflected in Muay Thai action films -- it is not only about the history of a certain nation, but also the individual's experience in life.

First, Muay Thai entered the movie. Compared with Shaolin and Tai Chi Kung Fu shown in Chinese martial arts films, Muay Thai, as a unique national skill of Thailand<sup>②</sup>, is a kind of unarmed combat with strong actual combat. Muay Thai is also the most popular sport of the Thai people. It is closely related to the traditional culture of the Thai nation and has strong religious color. Whenever there is a temple celebration, boxing match is a necessary program and is often listed as a grand finale. All these indicate that it will inevitably become the object of artistic expression. The use of Muay Thai in the film itself has the symbolic significance of nation and history, and what this significance should point to is the spirit and dignity of a nation. Sometimes Thai people also enjoy

boxing, watching boxing and gambling boxing. At this time, Muay Thai has become a kind of entertainment, which makes Muay Thai have a contemporary character and can be integrated into the mass culture and play an important role in film and television works. However, when Muay Thai enters the film, it is not the only one, because what the film needs more is narration, and the pure Muay Thai and the spectacle action form cannot make the work form plot tension.

Second, Muay Thai saves the nation. Muay Thai is shown in the movies and is used to save the nation, traditions and beliefs, which has always been the theme of Thai action films. In the film of *Ong-Bak*, Ting, a loyal and honest master of Muay Thai, saves his villager from suffering with his own Muay Thai Kung Fu and reveals the whole nation's anti-smuggling activities of "Buddha statue". He and his Muay Thai have become the saviour of the nation and the defender of national traditions and beliefs. It was only a prelude, and after the success of *Ong-Bak*, Prachya Pinkaew, the genre's veteran director, continued that salvation in *Tom Yum Goong*, which shifted from Bangkok to Australia, turn the boxing ring to a international stage, and the Buddha statue was replaced by another national reference: the elephant. The poetic and harmonious rural scene of Thailand in the film is undoubtedly a satire on the noisy contemporary society. It is the traditional "weapon" Muay Thai that can finally save the "white elephant" kingdom from national revenge. Perhaps it was the national pride that was stimulated, and this kind of national consciousness was even stronger in the later movie *The Movie Legend of Thai Boxing* and *Born Boxing*.

Third, Muay Thai saves individuals. Integrating Muay Thai shows with individual life experiences and focusing on showing human emotions becomes another theme of Thai action movies. Ekachai Uekrongtham's *Beautiful Boxer* is an entertainment film, inadvertently reaches the artistic height of inspiring the audience's thoughts. The film ends with the question "Is it difficult to be a man or a woman?" is thought-provoking. In the process of the Muay Thai fight in the film scene, the protagonist's own complex "contrast" 3 contradiction and social and family attitude change can be delicately depicted. At the same time, the poetic and sensitive femininity in the works and the masculine charm of the tough fight in the boxing match form a fusion of opposites, which is an expression of the connotation of the national spirit of Thailand. Different from *Beautiful Boxing* to show "epic" individual life, *Life Of Rachan The Boxer* integrates boxing fighting into the real society, telling the story of resistance against revenge and pure love, and reveals the changes of human feelings in the commercial society. In addition to this, there is also a pure "Cinderella" style, *The Bodyguard*. And another movie *Kung Fu From Latln Dance* brings the audience a "pure entertainment". In these works, Muay Thai has made individual choices and catered to the psychological needs of the audience. Its inner spirit has also become one of the individual pursuit goals. The victory of Muay Thai seems to symbolize the victory of personality justice or some moral orientation. Therefore, Muay Thai saved people, and talent is a true freedom fighter. The dignity of the individual in the film is also repeatedly expressed.

### 3. The pursuit of violent aesthetics

Although the muay Thai into the film does not have the plot tension, and the individual fighting action can not form the main body of the film story. Most of these works run through Muay Thai fighting, showing the beauty of action and violence, giving the audience a visual enjoyment, and the form of fun brings emotional self-discharge to the audience.

The first is the "real beauty" of movement. *Ong-Bak* is considered to be a symbol of the maturity of Thai commercial films, it's not just because it is in line with international commercial film specifications from film production to publicity screening, but also because of the mature aesthetic choices from its beginning, similar to the violent aesthetics that Jackie Chan and Jet Li have gotten in the film: Real Kung Fu. Tony Jaa, a veteran of Thai boxing stunts, is an expected spectacle. He pursues realism without special stunts and no substitutes. His fist-to-meat movements show a lot of fun. In *The Movie Legend of Thai Boxing*, the ancient Muay Thai fight is also naked reality, coupled with the heavy historical vicissitudes of life, the artistic pursuit of the true beauty of the action is quite special. Based on the needs of human expression, the pursuit of the true beauty of action in the works after *Life Of Rachan The Boxer* is more conscious.

Second is the "formal beauty" of violence. When the film moves toward the true beauty of action, the more violent and beautiful, the artists perceive that this is not perfect. Because of the insufficiency of the Eastern social system, due to the consideration of their own national image and interests, some films began to dispel the overly cruel image narratives and began to turn to the exploration of the beauty of violence<sup>③</sup>. The *Tom Yum Goong*, which was produced by the *Ong-Bak* complete set of people, began to change into a poetic and beautiful scene. The fighting scenes also became fancy, the color contrast was clear, the lens was more compact, and the rhythm was obviously accelerated. It is the last piece of the wonderful "fracture" drama, which is also a form of violence that is innocuous and elegant, giving people the visual enjoyment of the beautiful action of Muay Thai. In *Beautiful Boxer*, the combination of true beauty and form beauty, in order to highlight the male temperament of the protagonist Dong Gangyi's masculine 50 scenes, the picture is only achieved by quick editing and flashback. This is just the right lens language, which makes the film's delicate, sensitive and poetic emotions express. *The Bodyguard* is more comical, and the pursuit of "formal beauty" is even more extreme, and even cannot feel the existence of violence. Obviously, this "formal beauty" is the pursuit of pure entertainment for the masses, because the violent aesthetics in the film itself does not need to assume the responsibility of social function and moral education. 4

#### 4. Actual intention to participate

Even today, when the mass image is unprecedentedly developed, we cannot completely deny Krakour's classic theory of "the nature of film - the restoration of material reality." Aside from the aspects of culture and aesthetics, what else can Muay Thai movies be touched by? Perhaps, the ones we feel most deeply about these films have never been concerned with the art itself – it is something that cannot be pondered, the reality and emotions under this literary framework. Real-life participation and emotional expression are also the premise that Muay Thai movies can meet the audience's (human) life and psychological reality. Moreover, these realities participate in both the conscious grasp of the creative subject and the spontaneous expression from the collective unconscious.

The first is the conscious participation of reality. Bringing daily life and real individual emotional experiences into the film narrative, prominently in those movies that save people through "Taiwan." The hero of *Beautiful Boxer* is a transgender woman. Her dream figure, after a series of exquisite Thai boxing, still keeps the mystery of the long hair. The film is restored by his oral experience with the reporter, so that the real personal life and emotional experience, accompanied by the shackles of the parties, is obviously directed by the director to the audience. Similarly, the protagonist of the film *Life Of Rachan The Boxer* has a realistic meaning, and he relies on boxing for a living. He is vengeful and eager for love. This creates a contradiction between loyalty and love, which is undoubtedly also creation. The conscious expression of the person. In contrast, *The Bodyguard* reflects the gap between the rich and the poor and the money struggle. *Kung Fu From Latln Dance* satirizes the people who fall for money and calls for the true feelings of the world. *Born Boxing* shows patriotism against terrorism. The expressions of reality in these works are more deliberate and superficial, and therefore more entertaining.

Second is the unconscious reality. Jung believes that everyone's subconscious mind has not only the things that individuals have experienced since birth, but also the experiences experienced by their ancestors.<sup>④</sup> This view is used here to mean that the creators of the film inevitably incorporate the experiences and emotions of their individual and even human beings. This is a kind of conscious expression under the potential power, it is a collective unconscious expression, which makes the Muay Thai film have an unconscious reality. For instance, we can also experience the comprehensive love among people from the same homeland and sisters, as well as the respect feeling to the Buddha in *Ong-Bak*, which is the return to the conception of value on the traditional relationship among people and local customs in fact. Whereas, *Tom Yum Goong* even put the oriental aesthetic feeling into the international society, in order to call for the equality among

different nations and their respect.

In the end, *The Movie Legend of Thai Boxing*, which is a film that described a revenge for family and the fight for nation, has shown the unconscious reality pursuit totally. In this film, Stimukek, the hero of Thai boxing, has become a symbol of integration spirit, he gained the freedom and respect for Thai people, which is the most desired thing in the conscious of Thai people. The inspiring feeling of reality in these film could be more clear and obvious if these unconscious feeling can be put more consciously into current Thailand that has experienced numerous crisis.

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