

Martial Arts Cult Stars

Hollywood has a funny effect on film stars. Even on those from halfway around the world. Hollywood puts international celebrities on its own big screen, and suddenly they're bigger than life.

Martial arts films

may have originated in the Pacific Rim, but the degree of cult following they attained was pure Hollywood. There, film directors created a new class of movies built on martial arts moves and counter moves, good guys and bad guys, and questionable dubbing. In the process, they also produced a whole new generation of martial arts films, film stars and film fans.

Of

course, Hollywood has many of its own western movie stars who have made it big busting martial arts moves. Chuck Norris, Wesley Snipes, G. J. Torres and Jean Claude van Damme have all taken the bad guys down with some mean kicks, chops and blocks.

But the undisputed real heroes

of martial arts films remain the masters who originated in the east. Many of these national heroes have also graced Hollywood sets, and all enjoy a sizeable fan following. Here is a "who's who" list of legendary artists and martial arts practitioners:

Kwan Tak-Hing

Played the

original screen Wong Fei-Hung, a legendary Hung Gar master who starred in 100 films from the late 1940s to the 1960s. Kwan himself was a master of Tibetan White Crane, rather than Hung Gar. Using the whip was his specialty.

Bruce Lee

Every kid in the 1970's wanted to be able

to fight like Bruce Lee. Admit it, you tried to karate chop a board in half after watching a Bruce Lee film. It's OK, we all did. Legendary is perhaps too lame a word to use for this man. Bruce Lee began America's infatuation with the martial arts. He made Hollywood take notice. Originally trained in Wing Chun, Bruce Lee's cult films include "Enter the Dragon" and "Return of the Dragon."

Jackie Chan

Touted

as the man who "does his own stunts", Jackie Chan picked up where Bruce Lee left off. Chan kept the martial arts on the big screen through the 80's and 90's, but without the rabid following that Lee possessed. Jackie Chan's unique genre combined martial arts with slapstick comedy, so every drop kick came with a gag. He has directed and acted in more than 50 films and enjoys a distinct worldwide following.

Jet Li

Another

Hollywood favorite, Jet Li won the Chinese national Wushu championships five times in a row before becoming a movie star. His many film credits include his premier role in "Shaolin Temple".

Some are

more focused on the performing arts than the martial arts, but are worth mentioning nevertheless. Chow Yun Fat has starred in martial arts blockbusters in China, Hong Kong, and America. Michelle Yeoh is a popular

dancer-turned-actress. Jason Scott Lee was an actor who undertook martial arts training to prepare himself for the role of Bruce Lee in the movie "Dragon: Bruce Lee".

Not only Asian artists have made it big in martial arts films. Hollywood has produced many Caucasians who have trained in martial arts and made it big on the silver screen. Tough-guy Steven Seagal is an aikido instructor. Jean Claude van Damme practiced karate in Europe. While in Korea, Chuck Norris learned Tang Soo Do, a martial arts similar to Taekwondo. Cynthia Rothrock is probably the best-known female martial artist in the film industry. Ms. Rothrock was taught by G.J. Torres and is considered to be Queen of martial arts films.

Unlike some film genres, it isn't all smoke and mirrors in the martial arts film industry. Before they were actors, many of the film stars you see were actually martial artists#incredible athletes who became great film stars.