

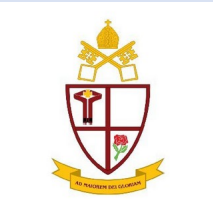
Prior Knowledge:

You have studied the first film in the Global Cinema Unit Pan’s Labyrinth

EDUQAS A LEVEL FILM STUDIES, COMPONENT 2: HOUSE OF FLYING DAGGERS, (2004, Zhang Yimou, China & Hong Kong)

Future Learning:

Hollywood 1930-1990, Casablanca and Bonnie and Clyde



Rationale for study

House of Flying Daggers is a Chinese wuxia/martial arts film, featuring the genre elements of spectacular fighting, breath-taking acrobatics and exotic fantasy. It combines these with a tragic triangular love story and a narrative where nothing is as it first appears.

Starting Points - Useful Sequences and timings/links
The Echo Game - Blind Mei dances for Leo 0:10:55 - 0:18:40

Bamboo Fight - Mei and Jin are attacked by Government soldiers 1:05:10 - 1:08:03

Mise-en-Scène

- Emphasis on **production values**, visually beautiful settings and costumes, elaborate **film set** create the fantasy. Peony Pavilion rich, exotic ancient China. Beautiful, extravagant Tang Dynasty **costumes**, authentic detail of interiors props, musical instruments. Costumes by Emi Wada, a Japanese designer who has worked for director Akira Kurosawa.
- **Landscapes** bamboo forests, birch forests, meadows and fields with mountain ranges in the background. Green forests, red and gold autumn leaves in the meadows, white snow provide the setting for the emotion and the imagination of the film.
- Dramatic effect through **visual imagery, colour and composition**. Highly stylised

Editing

- Mei’s dance intercuts long shot of her performing in the circle with a **closer shot** of the drummers outside the circle. Movement of beans towards drums, close up of faces.
- Use of **CGI** to follow swift trajectory of daggers.
- In the bamboo forest **cuts** between **vertical and horizontal** above ground swaying soldiers, ground level traps.



Sound

- Mei at the beginning is portrayed as blind; sounds serve as a clue to her understanding. Peony Pavilion echo game sounds used to emphasise her reliance on them. Tension, excitement, chattering of women, drumming, slapping, silence.
 - Action scenes, action emphasised by sounds of bamboo fronds, counterpoint of flying daggers, whoosh of bamboo spears, clash of bamboo poles. Also sounds of flying bamboos, falling leaves, sound of sword cutting the air - Mei’s perception of the fight.
- Music by Shigeni Umebayashi mostly **low register**: cello, drums. Women’s voices used towards conclusion of action scenes, **action not signalled by music** which acts as a commentary at the conclusion.

Performance

- **Physicality and Choreography**: The performances in "House of Flying Daggers" are distinguished by their **intricate martial arts choreography**. Actors, particularly Zhang Ziyi and Andy Lau, undergo rigorous training to execute complex fight sequences that are both visually captivating and emotionally resonant. The fluidity and precision of movements contribute significantly to the film's **aesthetic** appeal, highlighting the performers' physical prowess and dedication.
- **Emotional Depth** and Character Development: Beyond the action sequences, the performances in the film also delve into the emotional complexities of the characters. Actors convey a range of emotions—from love and betrayal to honour and sacrifice—with nuanced expressions and gestures. For instance, Zhang Ziyi's portrayal of Mei captures the character's vulnerability and strength, allowing audiences to empathize with her journey. Similarly, other key characters are brought to life through performances that emphasize their **internal conflicts** and **motivations**.
- **Cultural Authenticity and Context**: The performances in "House of Flying Daggers" are rooted in the film's **historical and cultural context**. Actors adopt mannerisms, speech patterns, and gestures that resonate with the film's setting, reflecting a commitment to authenticity. By incorporating elements of Chinese **culture and tradition**, the performances not only enhance the film's realism but also provide insights into the **societal norms** and values of the period depicted.