

Illustrations in Jin Yong's Martial Arts Novels

Mr Lee Chi-ching

In 1963, Sha Tin was a rural area of fields and farmland. On the road to Tai Wai, next to the railway track, there was a new government clinic which we called the “new hospital”. It was where I was born. Today, Hong Kong Heritage Museum is located less than 50 metres from the original site of my birthplace.

In spring 2017, the museum organised a thematic exhibition on Jin Yong, and I was invited to be the researcher and guest curator for the *Exhibition on Paintings Adapted from Jin Yong's Novels*. After more than a half-century, I was welcomed back to the place I was born to join what was, for me, the literary and art event of the century — an exhibition focusing on a highly respected writer who has played a critical part in my artistic career. Words cannot express my joy.

I felt the same intense feeling more than 20 years ago when I received a phone call inviting me to meet Jin Yong in person for the first time. Before that call, I had never expected that I would one day enjoy tea and dinner with this literary giant — someone whose works had touched my heart since I was a child. After our meeting, I started creating covers and illustrations for his novels. I even became his partner in forming a publishing company of comic books, and accompanied him to a promotional event in Taiwan. I also continued to create mega-sized ink paintings and, ultimately, was invited to serve as the guest curator for this thematic exhibition.

Jin Yong's novels have been adapted or used as the basis for films, TV drama series, animations, comics, games and works of art. The art created for or inspired by his books can be put into three main categories:

1. Covers and illustrations for novels

The covers in most of the earliest published versions of Jin Yong's novels were famous ink paintings, both ancient and contemporary, which existed before the time of writing, and not original works created to supplement the contents. This practice continued until the publication of Tokuma Shoten Publishing's version in Japan, and the third revised edition by Jin Yong in Hong Kong, mainland China and Taiwan, which had covers featuring my works specifically drawn to reflect the story content. Later cover drawings included works by Tung Pui-sun, with the most recent editions featuring design

graphics and no illustrated drawings.

As illustrations that go with the texts serve to elaborate upon the content of the novels, so they avoid too much subjectivity or elements that are irrelevant to the stories. Jiang Yunxing (Yun Jun) and Wong Sze Ma created some of the illustrations used in the editions of the novels published by Ming Ho Publications Corporation Limited. I drew the illustrations for the Japanese versions of the novels.

2. Comics

Jin Yong has given his permission to several comic artists to use his novels as their blueprints, including Wee Tian Beng of Singapore, Lin Chengte of Taiwan and, from Hong Kong, Au Ching, Tony Wong Yuk Long, Ma Wing-shing, Ho Chi-man and me. We each have our respective style of presentation and preferred forms of publication. However, as comics are market-oriented, the artist-writers cannot dwell on personal expressions of emotions or break away from the original storyline, but must always bear in mind the readers' perspective.

3. Ink paintings

In the last two decades, there were only two artists who created ink paintings inspired by Jin Yong's novels and received his permission to do so, and they were Tung Pui-sun and me. Unlike illustrations and comics, ink paintings are not created for the literary market or a particular readership but for display and appreciation. They are meant to be hung on a wall as works of art and are, therefore, much larger than illustrations and comics. Also, when artists are free from marketing considerations, they are more willing to express their personal feelings and views through art creation, thus further enhancing the artistic value of their works. The ink paintings adapted from literary works are a means of interpretation and inspiration. For example, Tung Pui-sun's works mainly show scenes from the novels while my works generally take abstract notions from the novels and imbue them with my own feelings.

The *Exhibition on Paintings Adapted from Jin Yong's Novels* presents the three categories of art — novels' covers and illustrations, comic-book art and ink paintings — with the aim of deepening visitors' understanding of Jin Yong's novels on a new level. As the only artist to have worked in all three categories, I am impressed with the infinite possibilities that Jin Yong's novels offer. I have merely given a general

description of the three main types of paintings influenced by his creativity when, in fact, his novels have served as a spark for every form of art, leading to new creations and original perspectives.

When I was young, I used to flip through the illustrations in a new book to get a first glimpse of its contents before I started reading it. I still indulge in this habit today. A good illustration amplifies the words, giving readers multiple levels of imagery and feelings to enhance the reading experience.

The illustrations by Jiang Yunxin (Yun Jun) and Wong Sze Ma, which appeared in Jin Yong's novels, are good examples of how individual artists contributed their style to the literary works. Jiang used a traditional approach, reminiscent of practices featured in the *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden*, the handbook of Chinese painting compiled during the early Qing dynasty. The characters were drawn with crisp outlines in black and white and no tone-on-tone rendering, a method that was suitable for traditional printing. The accurate proportions of the figures and the schematic layout provided an objective representation of the story.

In contrast, Wong Sze Ma's illustrations deliver a more personalised style. His figures have a vivacious, lively appeal. The layouts are daringly innovative, ranging from the use of wide spaces between objects to suggest openness of landscape, and dense cluttering for a strong impact. Such contrasts make his illustrations good for decorating purposes, in a way similar to the style of mainland Chinese artist He Youzhi. Also, if you look closely, you always find some tiny figures in the background. Such use of perspective suggests a much wider span on a limited canvas. Sometimes he adopted the Chinese ink painting technique of using washes of varying tones. Nevertheless, due to the limitations of printing technology in the days the books were first printed, the tonal layers are not clearly shown on the works, only leaving stark black-and-white contrasts. However, his works are regarded as reminiscent of the style of Fu Baoshi, with delicate lines and free-flowing, random applications that lend a lyricism to his works.