Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

MULTIPLE CAMERAS IN MARTIAL ARTS FILMS

Sia Kee Wu

Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
(Cinematography)
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MULTIPLE CAMERAS IN MARTIAL ARTS FILMS

SIA KEE WU

This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
(Cinematography)

Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 5: FINAL YEAR PROJECT

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

REFERENCES   36

ABSTRAK

MULTIPLE CAMERAS IN MARTIAL ARTS FILMS

Sia Kee Wu

Kajian in berkaitan dengan aplikasi teknik pelbagai kamera dalam filem yang berunsurkan Martial Art. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji teknik-teknik penggunaan pelbagai kamera dalam filem aksi dengan memberi penekanan terhadap blocking and staging, dan continuity of shots. Hasil kajian mendapati pengaplikasian teknik ini akan menambah kesan ketegangan kepada babak aksi dalam filem. Seterusnya, teknik ini akan diterapkan dalam video pendek yang berjudul, 《武鬥》 "Forced".

ABSTRACT

MULTIPLE CAMERAS IN MARTIAL ARTS FILMS

Sia Kee Wu

This research aims to identify the varieties of multiple cameras techniques in Martial Arts films. The objective of this research is to investigate the usage of multiple cameras techniques in action films by focusing on blocking and staging, and continuity of shots. This research found that the application of this technique would create a tension mood in the films. Besides, this research would be applied in a short film entitled,《武鬥》 "Forced".

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1 .0 Introduction

Film was a medium to deliver ideas or stories in both visual and audio. It was a series

of moving pictures which shown in cinemas or televisions. In order to produce a film, camera

was the only equipment that can be used. There were two shooting techniques, Single Camera

Production (SCP) [1]and Multiple Camera Production (MCP)[2]. This thesis would focus on

multiple cameras setups in a particular genre of the action film, which was the martial arts

film.

In general, there were just a few filmmakers that used multiple cameras in filming.

Normally, multiple cameras were used for shooting sports activities, documentaries, TV

programmes and action films. Otherwise, single camera was the choice for shooting films.

The multiple cameras setups were different from the Multiple Camera Production (MCP)

because multiple cameras setups were the cameras used to shoot a film, which the entire

footages[3] would be edited in the post-production. However, MCP was the production that

used multiples cameras to shoot a live event or live action and it relies on the switcher who

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[1] Single Camera Production (SCP) – A mode of production by using one camera operates at a time and the shots are done in the most economically efficient order.

[2] Multiple Camera Production (MCP) – A mode of production, which is unique to television by using two or more cameras when recording a scene.

[3] Footages – An amount or length of film or videotape.

controls and selects the visual from the cameras and normally it needs no or less editing again in the post-production[4].

Multiple cameras were a unique method for filmmaking where there was more than one camera set in the location to record a scene[5]. Multiple cameras were commonly used to record action or fighting scene. By using multiple cameras, the entire actions of the actors in the fighting scene would be recorded with continuity and without repeating the fighting scene. It also helps the editor when editing the fighting scene because the shot[6] and angle of the fighting scene was completely recorded. The details would be discussed in Chapter 2.

A multiple cameras setup usually uses three cameras. All the three cameras had their own functions and duties. When shooting an action scene by using three cameras, two cameras will be placed at the right and left hand side and one camera will be place in the central, as depicted in Figure 1.

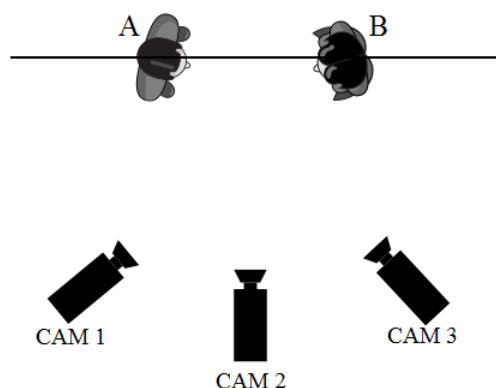Figure 1: Basic multiple cameras setup.

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[4] Post-production – The technical processes, as cutting, editing, and post-synchronization, necessary to ready a filmed or recorded work for sale or exhibition.

[5] Scene – A shot or series of shots in a movie constituting a unit of continuous related action.

[6] Shot – A consecutive series of pictures that constitutes a unit of action in a film.

Based on figure 1, the two side's cameras, cam 1 and cam 3 were used to shoot the close up shots of the two most active actors or characters, A and B in the fighting scene during the recording time. The central camera, cam 2 was used to shoot the master shot or in other words, the establishing shot of the set. Hence, with the use of multiple cameras, there was less chance to miss any shot or angle.

Besides, blocking[7] and staging[8] play an important role when the scene was using multiple cameras to shoot. From the positions and movements of the actors to the positions of the cameras, everything needs to be prepared and planned before shooting started to avoid the happening of unnecessary problems. It will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

Martial arts can be considered as a treasure of Asia. It was traditional and tied to an ethnic, cultural or religious background, while others were modern systems developed either by a founder or an association. For example, Chinese had *Kung Fu*, Korean had *Taekwondo*, and Malays had *Silat*. Those martial arts were very unique and can represent the culture. According to David West, "martial arts are a system of combat, both armed and empty-handed" (West, 2006). Martial arts were useful skills that can be learnt by everyone. Normally, people learnt martial arts for self-defense, health and fitness, competition, and mental and spiritual development.

> Martial arts film is specifically film that feature Asian martial arts that, though broad and varied, represent fighting styles quite distinct from Western martial arts such as boxing or fencing. (Desser, 2000: 77)

According to Desser based on the quote above, martial arts films had been popular since the early period of films in Asia. Most of the martial arts films in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan used the Chinese martial art, which was Kung Fu as the fighting style of the film.

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[7] Blocking – How the actor or actress are placed and moved around the set.

[8] Staging – Process of selecting, designing, adapting to, or modifying the performance space for a play or film.

In Japan, the martial arts films usually used Japanese swords as the weapons in a film. In Korea, the filmmakers would insert Taekwondo in their films.

In *Seven Samurai* (1954), Akira Kurosawa used three cameras to shoot a fighting scene. By using 3 cameras in a fighting scene, he managed to catch the action of the actors in one take without asking them to repeat the fight scene. This was because it is impossible to repeat the entire actions exactly same with the previous take. Finally, the film was very successful in its time and was also very popular outside Japan. Hence, the usage of multiple cameras can be considered as a very useful method to shoot scenes consisting mostly of fighting. It will be discussed widely in Chapter 2.

Mohd Zahari Affendi Bin Kasin @ Mansor (2009) had written '*Penggunaan Multiple Camera Dalam Adegan yang Berbentuk Aksi'*. He focused on the usage of multiple cameras in action scenes. In his thesis, he discussed and research about why multiple cameras were used in action scenes and not in other scenes and the different types of shots and position when using multiple cameras. Although it had some similarity with this proposal in the used of multiple cameras, this proposal focuses on the use of multiple cameras on martial arts films. Obviously, this proposal was more specific to martial arts films and not just action films.

In order to explore the used of multiple cameras in martial art films, participatory action research (PAR)[9] had been chosen in this proposal. Based on this methodology, the researcher will explored the ways to achieve the information of using multiple cameras in martial art film and analyses some films, which used multiple cameras. The details will be discussed in Chapter 3 and 4.

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[9] Participatory Action Research (PAR) – A methodology under qualitative research which is use to understand the world by trying to change it, collaboratively and reflectively.

As a result, there were lots of things need to be explored and found out to determine that the usage of multiple cameras in martial art film was the best choice for the director.

1.1 Problem Statement

In martial art films, there will be a lot of actions in one scene. If the director wanted to shoot the fighting scene with multiple cameras, it will be more difficult as the actors had different movements at the same time.

> Working with three cameras simultaneously is not easy as it may sound. It is extremely difficult to determine how to move them. For example, if a scene has three actors in it, all three are talking and moving about freely and naturally. In order to show how the A, B and C cameras move to cover this action, even complete picture continuity is insufficient, nor can the average camera operator understand a diagram of the cameras movements. (Kurosawa, 1982: 196)

Based on the quote by Akira Kurosawa, although it was difficult to use multiple cameras in film, it was the best way to do, as it can make sure the shots had continuity. The researcher would explore this technique in the short film that made by the researcher.

This research examined the application of the multiple cameras setup in martial arts films. The used of multiple cameras can be considered as a powerful method when shooting a fighting scene in martial arts films. This research would focus on the techniques of multiple cameras used in certain martial arts films such as *Rashomon* (1950) and *Seven Samurai* (1954) by Akira Kurosawa, *Project A* by Jackie Chan (1983), and *The Fighter* (2010) by David O. Russell.

1.2 Research Objectives

I.   There were several research objectives in this proposal. First, the researcher would explore the techniques used when applying multiple cameras in a set. Normally, there were at least two people in a fighting scene. Therefore, in order to capture all the important movements that the director needs, the cameras must be technically set in the correct positions and angles.

II.   In addition, blocking and staging will be determined in this research. Blocking and staging play an important role in the set when using multiple cameras to shoot. It was important to determine and planned the positions where the actors had to take actions or moves in order to record the entire movement perfectly without missing any shots.

III.   Furthermore, the continuity of the shots was very important when applying multiple cameras in a martial arts film mostly the fighting scenes. If the scene had many shots and angles, the editor needed to be very attentive when choosing the right shots. If not, the visual would look discontinuous and cannot delivered the meaning of the film to the audiences.

IV.   Besides that, a short film incorporating multiple cameras in martial arts film will be produced. It was to explore the ways and techniques by using multiple cameras in martial art film. The researcher can also determined and planned the shots for the short film by applying the other objectives in it.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to explore the used of multiple cameras in martial arts films, the different techniques such as the position of cameras, and the shots and angles would be the main concerns. This proposal addresses three research questions, which were:

I.   How to apply the multiple cameras techniques in martial arts films?

II.   How blocking and staging play an important role when using multiple cameras?

III.   How to rearrange the shots to have continuity throughout the film?

1.4 Research Scope

In this research, it was limited to the used of multiple cameras in a particular genre in action films, which were martial arts films. The number of multiple cameras used was limited to three cameras.

Besides, this research focuses on the blocking and staging in films. The researcher would focus on the positions and movements of the actors and the positions of the cameras. The continuity of the shots will also be concerned in this research.

This research will not cover the facial expression and the acting of the actors. It would not concentrated on the art direction and set design too. It only pays attention on the setups of the cameras, the movements of the actors and the continuity of the shots.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Literature Review

The multiple cameras used in films were different from Multiple Cameras Production (MCP). The multiple cameras in films were mostly used in fighting scenes to capture different types of angle and shots without the actors repeating the action. It was edited at the post-production stage. Besides, it also used for the middle budget scenes, which the props cannot be reused such as a huge explosion scene or a car crash scene. However, MCP was mostly used in covering TV programmes, live concerts or sport events. This type of production was relying on a switcher. It was edited through a switch where all the cameras were connecting to it and the switcher will select the best visual or shots on the spot so that it can be release (on air[10]) in the same time because it was impractical to repeat the action or editing for a live event.

> As a general system, I put the A camera in the most orthodox positions, use
> the B camera for quick, decisive shots and the C camera as a kind of guerilla
> unit. (Kurosawa, 1982: 196)

According to Akira Kurosawa, he used one camera (A camera) in the tradition position that normally or commonly used by other directors while shooting films. Then, he used another camera (B camera) to shoot quick and decisive shots such as chasing and fighting movement. The remaining camera (C camera) was used to capture the others angles

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[10] On Air – The program is currently being broadcast live.

8

and shots which the others two camera did not record. Hence, by using multiple cameras in a scene, one can film a single take without interrupting the actor's performance. It also saved a lot of time because the crews needed not to reset the lighting and set up the camera angles to shoot the same scene again.

The multiple cameras were used to capture different types of angles and shot sizes from different cameras positions and different types of lens. In order to avoid the duplication of angles, the cameramen must had good communication skill with the director and producer so that they would know where, when and what should they shoot for certain scene. They should have a good planned before shooting the scene. As a result of this technique, the audiences would not be confused by the visual and on the other hand they would enjoyed the visual.

Besides, blocking and staging was one of the important criteria when using multiple cameras in films.

> Blocking movement or staging action refers to the initial setting up of a shot where actor / presenter position and movement is plotted. (Ward, 2003: 195)

From the quote mentioned above, it can be said that blocking and staging was the director's craft of the films. By using multiple cameras in martial art film, it was very important that the director must had the minds and ideas on where the cameras positions and where the spaced for the actors to move so that the cinematographer and the prop master can start their work. There were different types of staging which were staging across the frame, in-depth staging, circular staging, man-on-man staging and zone staging, as shown in Figure 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5. If those staging can be creatively used, they can create a good composition and end up a good visual.
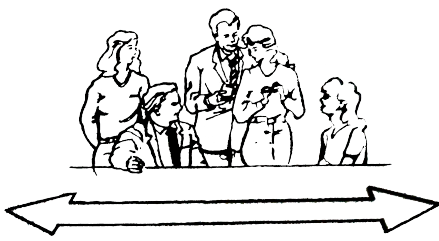
Figure 2.1: Staging across the frame

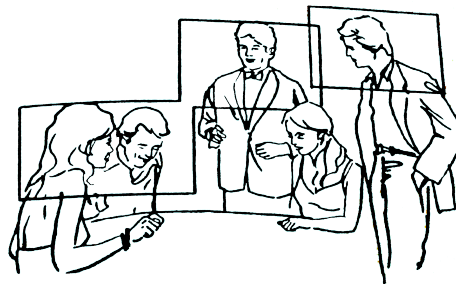Figure 2.2: In-depth staging

Figure 2.3: Circular staging

Figure 2.4: Man-on-man staging

Figure 2.5: Zone staging

Staging across the frame means the panning shots, which the camera will pan from the left to the right or vice versa. In-depth staging was the dolly shots that the camera shots from the front to the back or vice versa. Tracking shots were mostly used for circular staging without breaking the 180-degree rule. Man-on-man staging was used to create the focus on the conversation of a few actors although there were other actors besides them whereas Zone staging was normally used at the shoot in the restaurant, which the director wanted to show different types of people having their meal by focusing on each table.

In addition, do not started to shoot a scene without rehearsal or blocking it at all. "If a scene is sufficiently rehearsed, the actor will find exactly the best moment to take off his glasses, pour the drink etc, and will repeat that in every size of shot". (Crisp, 1993: 58). A perfect rehearsal not only can let the actor know what should he do but also saved the time and budget for repeating the shots. It was a win-win situation for a professional production house. When shooting a fighting scene, it was better to do the rehearsal before start shooting as the choreographer can gave the professional direction to the actors for their actions and movements. The art department would also had the time to do the final set up for the set in the scene so that the actors can moved freely and the visual would looked nice.

The effectiveness of cameras movement also affected the looked of the staging. When using multiple cameras, each of them represents different meaning and function. In a fighting scene, the director can used one camera for the facial expression (close up) of a fighter. The cameraman of this camera had to move along with the fighter. Besides, the cameraman had to be alert and avoid blocking the others cameras too. All the cameramen must had discussed well with each other and the director, so that the scene can be shoot smoothly. The movements of the actors also had to be planned before shooting. In order to capture the important shots and angles, the movements of the fighters cannot block the cameras. As a result, all the movements, no matter the cameras movements or the actors' movements had to be planned before shooting.

Different directors had different styles to do the staging for their films. Some directors liked to plan before shooting and some liked to plan on the set. No matter which method that the director chosen, the blocking and staging skills will be improved with experience.

One way that directors can sharpen their staging skills when they are not at work, is to simplify the seemingly endless considerations that go into staging

11

on a set by conceptualizing them as patterns of movement, and as a vocabulary of techniques. (Katz, 2004: 3)

According to Katz, there was no short cut for a director to improve their skills. He or she had to work smart in order to gain the experiences and knowledge through different types of shooting.

In addition, the used of multiple cameras also helped to reduce the continuity problem that was faced by the editor when reshooting a scene from different angles, mostly the fighting scenes. However, in order to smoothen the editing process, the director and cinematographer must be very alert on the position of all the cameras and the shots that they wanted to capture in order to make sure all the shots had continuity.

Filming is ultimately shooting for editorial. The primary purpose of the shoot is not merely to get some "great shots": in the end it must serve the purpose of the film by giving the editor and director what they need to actually piece together completed scenes and sequences which add up to a finished product that makes sense and accomplish its purpose. (Brown, 2002: 80)

Based on the quote above, a good scene was made up by good sequences, and a good sequence was made up by good shots. In order to edit a film, continuity of all the shots was very important. If the shots had no continuity, it would destroy the film and the producer needed to find the budget and the director needed to reshoot again if the editor cannot correct all the discontinuity.

There were four types of continuity, which were continuity of content, continuity of movement, continuity of position and continuity of time. Continuity of content referred to the things that were visible on the set, which can be easily recognized by the audiences. It was very obvious that a man carries a black bottle at the wide shot, and now the boy carried brown bottle at the medium shot. Those mistakes sometime were difficult for the editor to trick the shots. Continuity of movement defined anything that had movement in the shots. For example,

an old man opens a window in a medium shot and then change to the close up of the old man who just wanted to open the lock of the window will confused the audiences.

Continuity of position was also a big problem for the editor. It always happened on the position of the props such as the actor putted a note on the left hand side of his pocket in a medium shot then now become the actor putted the note in the right hand side pocket in full shot. If the crews did not realized that was wrong, then it would cause a big problem to the editor. Continuity of time obviously referred to the clock on the set. The time in the set must be corrected and had continuity with the previous shots.

Besides the four types of continuity, the researcher had to be attentive to the line, which was the 180-degree rule or the axis of action, depicted in Figure 3.
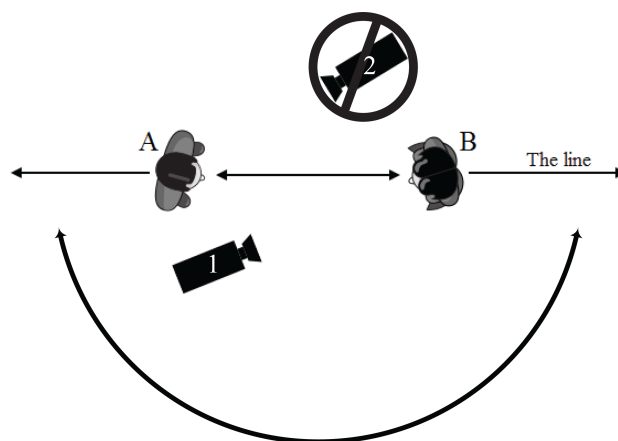

Figure 3: The line – the 180-degree rule.

The line was used to create a reasonable sense of visual that can be easily understood by the audiences.

> If you start shooting from setup 1, the rest of the setups should be on that side of the sightlines. If you cut to anything on the setup 2 side, you will have problems with matching sightlines, and the character will appear to be looking at some unseen third place. (Mamer.B, 2006: 37)

If the director follows the rule to shoot the scene mostly the conversation scene, the camera 1 would stayed on one side and every movement or angles change should be on that side. With that, the audiences would not confuse the position of the actors.

To avoid the happening of the example above, the script supervisor[11], art director, props master, producer as well as director and cameramen must always be attentive and pay attention on it. If shooting a scene with multiple cameras, it was important that the director and cameramen would not shoot at the same angles and the positions of the cameras must be planned before shooting.

In conclusion, shooting a film with multiple cameras was not as easy as writing ABC. It should have a well preparation and planning before start shooting. The director and cameramen must know their responsibilities and had great communication skills with each other.

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[11] Script Supervisor – A member of a film crew responsible for maintaining the motion picture's internal continuity and for recording the production unit's daily progress in shooting the film's screenplay.