



Factoid:

The first Chinese film (also first in Hong Kong film) mixed in "Dolby Surround 7.1" encoding system. Coincidentally, Wai-keung Lau's movie Kuen sun (2001) was the first Hong Kong film mixed in "Dolby Digital EX" 6.1 surround encoding system. ~ IMDB

Donnie Yen (Iron Monkey 1&2, Flash Point, Ipman 1&2) reprises his role as Chen Zhen in the theatrical continuation of the 1995 television series Fist of Fury. For anyone not in the know, the role of Chen Zhen in Fist of Fury was originally made famous in 1972 by Bruce Lee, and Legend of the Fist won't let you forget it. As for the Donnie Yen version, at the end of the television series it's assumed that Chen Zhen is killed in a hail of gunfire. In Legend of the Fist Chen Zhen is very much alive, fighting the Germans in France, when he returns home Japan still occupies China. To keep cover Chen uses the name of a fallen comrade in order to infiltrate his homeland and maneuver within the underground movement to free China. There's romance, espionage, and action. Unfortunately not enough coherency to put them all together.

Andrew Lau (Infernal Affairs franchise) does a fantastic job of giving Fist an epic look. The opening battle sequences look great and Donnie Yen's fight choreography for the films intro is brutally intense. When we enter China and find ourselves at the Casablanca Club everything is glamorously decked out to give it a look and feel of something far more epic than simply an action spy film. Everything is going so well but as the story unravels the scope of the films look begins to shrink. City streets range from lush and vibrant to no more than studio lots and a military base nothing more than a half empty warehouse. Where there used to be lavish costumes and interesting characters things just start to look plain. Those who saw the trailer for this film know that even Chen Zhen's costume is just an homage to Bruce Lee as Kato from the Green Hornet. There's some sort of connection here that probably works as a grand statement, but by this juncture in the film the mood has changed drastically by going from a suave spy film to a comic book one where Chen Zhen's single punches send his foes flying across streets and over cars. This sudden change up in dramatics leaves much to be desired after the film's grand intro. As if this sudden change up isn't bad enough once the spy theme breaks in everything becomes confusing.

Another major problem I had with Legend of the Fist is that it feels like Gordon Chan's earlier rewrite of Fist of Fury, which was titled Fist of Legend starring Jet Li. Where it looks like the film is going to build up to something enormously revealing we simply get a deviation of the original and Chan's Fist of Legend treatment. The first real battle in Fist of Fury (The original) feels like the final fight here mixed with Chan's Fist of Legend ending. While the local Inspector played a smaller role in Fist of Fury his role was bumped up significantly in Fist of Legend and remains somewhat similar here in Legend of the Fist. Then there are smaller coincidences such as in Fist of Legend Chen Zhen is in a relationship with a Japanese woman, and here, though it may sound like nitpicking, Chen Zhen's relationship covers the same ground with different circumstances. This aspect is easily overlooked because it's so minor but after all the build up we get in the beginning of the film with Chen's secret identity, underground resistance, and spy vs. spy romance story, it all comes to a similar conclusion. I just felt like everything in-between, which has a soft focus, it just feels like filler in the end. Even Yen's fight choreography towards the middle feels like left over from his Ipman films (Ipman 2 was filmed prior to Legend of the fist). I'm a huge fan of Donnie Yen, Gordon Chan, and Andrew Lau so it's an even bigger let down for me to see something so incomplete from the trio. As always final judgment is yours. Give it a shot and see what you find. Enjoy.

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