AKSIYON
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Aksiyon (action) film, also called bakbakan (rough-and-tumble) in Filipino, focuses mainly on physical conflict. This genre is of two types: those based on true-to-life stories or stories about real persons and actual events, and those based on completely fictional stories.

True-to-life stories may be based on the lives of real persons, such as Acedillo, 1971, which focuses on a schoolteacher-turned-rebel who leads discontented elements against landlords and bureaucrats during the American colonial period; and Nardong Putik, 1972, which depicts Cavite’s “Robin Hood” character who protects helpless peasants from powerful carabao rustlers. Those based on actual events include Maliwala Massacre, 1964, which describes the brutal massacre of peasants suspected of being Huk sympathizers in Central Luzon in the early 1960s; and Hostage: Hanapin si Batuigas (Hostage: Get Batuigas), 1977, which chronicles the exploits of a well-known police reporter, Ruther Batuigas, who negotiates the release of a family being held hostage by goons.

Action films that are based on fictional stories may deal with contemporary or familiar issues, such as Ang Pumatay nang Dahil sa Iyo (To Kill for You), 1989, which examines the evils of the American military presence in the Philippines; and Bagong Hari (New King), 1986, which focuses on small-town politics and the vicious battle for supremacy between rival groups vying for the governor’s office.

Many prewar action films exploited the peace-and-order campaigns of the Philippine Constabulary (PC) under American rule. Pugad ng Aguilta (Eagle’s Nest), 1938, focuses on the pursuit of the fugitive Teodoro Asedillo in the Sierra Madre mountains, while Datu Talim, 1940, tells of the PC expedition to quell a Muslim revolt in Mindanao. In Punit na Bandila (Torn Flag), 1939, Fernando Poe heads a PC contingent to Davao to place the notorious Muslim leader Ali Mudin under government control after he tears up the Philippine flag and burns a village.

After 1945, most Filipino action films depicted the ex-soldier or the “guerrilla” fighter who came home from the war, as personified by Fernando Poe in Dugo ng Bayan (I Remember Bataan), 1946; Leopoldo Salcedo in Kaaway ng Bayan (Public Enemy), 1947; Jose Padilla Jr in Halik sa Bandila (A Kiss to the Flag), 1948; Efren Reyes in Kumander Sundang (Commander Bolo), 1949; and Fred Montilla in Takas sa Bataan (Escape from Bataan), 1950.

Lauro Delgado, left, Tony Ferrer, Romeo Vasquez, Fernando Poe Jr, Joseph Estrada, Jess Lapid, and Max Alvarado in Armando Garcés's Suicide Commandos, 1962 (Cesar Hernando Collection)
In the 1960s and 1970s, Filipino action films were heavily influenced by foreign models, like Rebel without a Cause, 1955, with James Dean, which gave rise to the Low Waist Gang movies; the John Wayne cowboy films, as well as the Django series, also known as spaghetti Westerns, which were copied by Jess Lapid movies such as Ito ang Lalake (This Is a Man), 1964; the James Bond movies, as seen in Tony Ferrer films like Sabotage, 1966; gangster films like The Godfather, 1972, which inspired movies like D’Godson, 1983; and martial arts or Kung Fu movies from Hong Kong and Taiwan, which launched the Ramon Zamora movies, like Dalmacio Armas, 1983.

From the 1960s to the 1970s, Fernando Poe Jr dominated the action genre films that depicted him as champion of the oppressed. Ramon Revilla, who started out as a boy-next-door type at Sampaguita, acquired a new image as an action star when he went freelance in Nardong Putik, 1972, while Rudy Fernandez, also a Sampaguita “pretty boy” contract star, turned from lover boy to convict roles in Bitaayin si Baby Ama (Execute Baby Ama), 1976. Former dancer Jun Aristoreñas and stuntmen Lito Lapid, Eddie Garcia, and Anthony Alonzo also rose from the ranks to gain prominence in films that were mostly based on true-to-life stories.

In the 1980s, the important action stars were Phillip Salvador, Bong Revilla, Ace Vergel, Ronnie Ricketts, Jestoni Alarcon, and others who depicted both establishment and anti-establishment heroes. Salvador became known for his roles in Gabi Na, Kumander (It’s Nighttime, Commander), 1986; Balweg, 1987; Afgang: Bounty Hunter, 1988; Boy Negro, 1988; and Kumander Dante (Commander Dante), 1988. Revilla starred in movies such as Sparrow Unit, 1987; Boy Tornado, 1987; Anak ng Lupa (Child of the Soil), 1987; Alega Gang: Public Enemy No. 1 of Cebu, 1988; and Moises Platon, 1989. Among Vergel’s most popular films were Hari ng Tondo (King of Tondo), 1982, and Pusakal (Hardened Criminal), 1983. Ricketts became known for his films Target Maganto, 1988, and Alex Boncayao Brigade: The Liquidation Squad of the NPA, 1989, and Alarcon for Ang Lihim ng Golden Buddha (The Secret of the Golden Buddha), 1989, and Babayaran Mo ng Dugo (Your Blood Will Be Shed), 1989.

These actors continued to appear in many action movies in the 1990s but they were joined by new actors as well, such as Robin Padilla, Monsour del Rosario, John Regala, Raymart Santiago, Ian Veneracion, Cesar Montano, Jeric Raval, and Victor Neri. Robin Padilla rose to stardom in 1990 with the films Barumbado (Troublemaker), Bad Boy, and Anak ni Baby Ama (Son of Baby Ama). Cesar Montano gained popularity in Alyas Waway (Alias Waway), 1993; Sanggano (Hoodlum), 1997; and Bullet, 1999, among his other films. Other films made in the 1990s were Walang Awa Kung Pumatay (Merciless Killer), 1990; Mabuting Kaibigan, Masamang Kaaway (Good Friend, Bad Enemy), 1991; Grease Gun Gang, 1992; Masahol Pa sa Hayop (Worse Than a Beast), 1993; Paghiganti Ko Tapos Ka Na! (When I Get Back You Are Done!), 1994; Dog Tag: Kamay ng Katarungan (Dog Tag: Hand of Justice), 1995; Bilang Na Ang Aray Mo (Your Days Are Numbered), 1996; Padre Kalibre (Father Caliber), 1997; Wangbu (Nuts), 1998; and Alyas Pogi: Ang Pagbabalik (Alias Handsome: The Return), 1999.

In the 2000s and 2010s, the production of action movies slowed down because of the high cost of filming and the competition from foreign films, which had very sophisticated effects. Moreover, many action stars shifted to other genres, such as drama and comedy. Among the action films produced during these decades were Testigo (Witness), 2000, with Zoren Legaspi; Ex-con, 2000, with Victor Neri; and Ping Lacson: Super Cop, 2000, with Rudy Fernandez; Kaaway Hanggang Hukay (Enemy until Death), 2001, with Phillip Salvador; Aagos ang Dugo (Blood Will Be Shed), 2001, with Gardo Verzosa; Hari ng Selda: Anak ni Baby Ama (Prison King: Son of Baby Ama), 2002, with Robin Padilla; Mano Mano: Arnis the Lost Art, 2004, with Ronnie Ricketts; Batas Militar (Martial Law), 2006, with Mark Lapid; Rumble Boy, 2007, with Derek Dee; Alfredo S. Lim: The Untold Story, 2013, with Cesar Montano; On the Job, 2013, with Joel Torre; and Magnum Muslim.357, 2014, with George Estregan.