

Seminar

Another Night in Hong Kong: Hong Kong-Japan Film Exchange in 1950s & 60s



(From left) Law Kar, Mary Wong, Takarada Akira, interpreter Eric Chiu

Against the passage of time, collective memory flourishes, perhaps best, on the silver screen. Knitting viewers closer to each other through the reminiscences of the past is among the many unique functions of the Hong Kong Film Archive. To complement the thematic programme on ‘Early Hong Kong-Japan Co-productions’, a seminar titled ‘Another Night in Hong Kong: Hong Kong-Japan Film Exchange in 1950s & 60s’ was held at the Archive Cinema on 8 October 2005. Accompanied by veteran film critics Law Kar and Mary Wong, the 71-year-old Japanese film star Takarada Akira shared with the audience his memorable experiences working with Hong Kong filmmakers back in the 1960s.

Law Kar first came up with a brief account of the prosperity of Japanese films in 1950s and 60s Hong Kong. At the time, Chinese films (including Mandarin and Cantonese films), Western films and Japanese films made up the mainstream of the market. The Shaws Company purchased a host of films from its Japanese contemporaries like Daiei, Shochiku and Toei, and had them dubbed into Cantonese to cater for the local audience. Their immense popularity could be seen in the 1950s where as many as three chains of theatres were screening Japanese films at the same time. Works on show covered a wide range of genres, including chivalry, gambler, gangster, comedy, romance and horror films, posing direct influence on such renowned Chinese directors as Chang Cheh, Li Han-hsiang, King Hu, Tsui Hark and Wong Jing. Among the many Hong Kong-Japanese co-productions, works of MP&GI were considered the most outstanding in terms of production quality. The main

attraction of our programme, the Hong Kong Trilogy starring Lucilla You Min and Takarada Akira, is an exemplary attempt of the opening up of visions in the rather clichéd foreign romance. In particular, the intensifying passion between the couple was somehow symbolic of the progress of Hong Kong-Japanese relationship. Thanks also to the closer cultural background between the two countries, the characters being portrayed proved far more convincing compared with those in Western films of the same period.

The in-depth analysis by Law was then followed by a question from Mary Wong, host of the seminar, on the probable differences between the Japanese filming crew with Hong Kong's. Takarada responded that despite the inevitable conflicts, both sides were equally devoted to the perfection of the art. He further added that in view of the critical acclaim of the Hong Kong Trilogy, Toho was ready to kick off the fourth episode, only to know that You had decided to marry and end her acting career. This had though paved the way for the pairing up of Takarada with Betty Loh Ti for *The Longest Night*, directed and written by Chinese filmmaker Yi Wen in 1965.

The cinema that day was packed to the full with enthusiastic visitors who were most curious about Takarada's stories with You and Loh during their collaborations. Towards the end, Takarada sang the mesmerising theme song from *Love Is a Many Splendored Thing* (1955) to be followed by an autograph session, making the afternoon an unforgettable one for his fans. (Collated by Elbe Lau)

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