

Hong Kong Filmography, Volume Two

The Hong Kong Filmography, Volume Two will be published soon, its birth a result of incessant labour and thorough research. Because the *Filmography* covers the years 1942 to 1949, the period thus covered includes the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong to the years of recovery after the war. The research undertook was extensive and particularly taxing since many of the films were considered lost while the existing textual and photographic materials open up more gaps than they close them. It was difficult to establish the records and determine the chronology of production and dates of release, to say the least.

After nearly one year of research and study, we were finally able to put together the materials of over 430 films produced in the 40s. Then came the process of arranging the materials, filing them, checking the years and titles and to input them as computer data. The tasks of editing and proofreading were enormous. We are now reaching the completion stage and Volume Two is due for publication in July, thanks to the dedication and unstinting efforts of our research and editorial staff.

The Hong Kong film industry was virtually non-existent during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong (from December 1941 to August 1945), apart from the production of one Japanese propaganda feature, *The Attack on Hong Kong*, and a handful of documentaries. In the first year after the war, the film industry got down to business and production recovered. 1946 was the year which marked the resumption of film production. The films that were released between 1942 and 1945 were actually films produced before the Pacific War broke out.

The process of research involved in the making of *Volume Two* of the *Filmography* went through many stages. First, we looked through the filmography records published in the Hong Kong Retrospective Catalogues by the Hong Kong International Film Festival, focusing on films of the 40s. We re-categorised the information collected according to the year. Then, our colleagues in the Research Unit scoured the various public libraries, universities and newspaper archives. They studied old copies of the *Commercial Daily News, Commercial Evening News, Ta Kung Pao, Sing Pao, South China Morning Post, Wah Kiu Man Po, Sing Tao Daily* and *Wah Sheong News*, etc. Photographic records were taken of all related documentary materials, including advertisements, news titbits and all records of credits lists, film reviews, lobby cards and photographs, etc.

Our researchers also went as far as Guangzhou, to the Zhongshan University Library to look at newspapers such as *Zhongshan*, *Jianguo*, *Guangzhou Lianhe*, *Yuejiang*, *Liangyou*, etc, to compile available records and materials of Hong Kong films released in Guangzhou in the 40s.

Our further search also yielded the following results: 52 prints or video copies of films, 118 copies of film magazines and souvenir programmes, over 20 handbills, and articles published in various publications, booklets, brochures, etc. After all the above-mentioned materials and records were categorised and put in order, the process of putting pen to paper and translation could begin in earnest and a book took shape.

Volume Two of the *Filmography* is much richer in content and appendatory materials. Apart from synopses, we have also included extracts of film reviews and director's comments. The indices include titles of films, film production companies and names and titles of filmmakers. The book will be a treasure trove of information for researchers, scholars, students of film history, and all the fans of Hong Kong cinema.

The Joys and Pains of the Research Unit

Research Assistant Janice Chow

Visit to the Zhongshan Library

It was 6:30 in the morning. The Hunghom train station was covered by a thick morning mist. I and "Fatty", the Archive photographer Elvis Leung, were waiting for the express bus to Guangzhou with sleepy eyes. Yu Mo-wan, our eminent film historian and researcher, was already in Guangzhou. He should have already been dressed and set out to the Zhongshan University Library where he would look through the newspapers published in the 40s (such as the *Honglu Evening News*, *Tianguang Daily*, etc.). He awaited our arrival so that we would photograph all relevant records and materials that he had marked out.

The library was a four-storey building. The periodical reference archive was on the top storey. I pitied Fatty who had to carry heavy equipment and with sweat upon sweat, must start work immediately, photographing whatever was marked by Yu Mo-wan's pencil. My job was to look for Yu's pencil marks and to co-ordinate with Fatty as he photographed each cinema advertisement and each film article. On average, Fatty finished about 20 rolls of film a day. His speed was amazing. Even more amazing was Yu Mo-wan's speed in reading the newspapers. Each day, he turned the pages of years of newspapers and without fail, he searched out the relevant cinema advertisements, film reviews, introductory comments, even the biographies of actors and filmmakers. Without his experience and profound knowledge of film, the work would be impossible.

Once the film rolls were processed, we marked them with a registration number and noted down the source of the materials. Then, our student helpers would open a file for each film. The photograph record was blown-up by our copying machine and then filed. I breathed a sigh of relief only after seeing the over 400 files we had compiled. Each file seemed like a new-born baby, each with its own life. The files were put away in the cabinet, each occupying its place (and a place in Hong Kong film history), and bearing witness to the blood and sweat of the Hong Kong filmmakers as they pursued their art.

Captions are Small but not Simple

The "Archive Treasures" Exhibition ended recently had displayed close to 1,000 items. Each item of exhibit needed an accompanying caption, like an "identity card" to identify the item exhibited and to let the viewer possess an extra slice of knowledge. The caption had to be precise; it had to explain the exhibit's special characteristics and its year of origin. When I was entrusted with the task of writing the captions by Yu Mo-wan, I was both overjoyed and worried. Overjoyed because he had delegated an important task to me, thus showing his confidence in me. Worried, because I had to complete the job within a short time to meet a tight deadline. Fortunately, I was assisted by Karen So who was working as an assistant to the exhibition. Each day, we shut ourselves up in a small office room, writing and writing, turning the pages of piles of reference books and had eventually met the deadline. When I saw the small captions underneath each item of exhibit made out with new clothes, so to speak (mostly with plastic covering), I felt a sense of satisfaction. But when I think back on how tough the research had been, I could not feel too complacent. The road ahead is still a long and challenging one.

A Researcher is Like a Detective

At times, a researcher has to act like a detective. To solve problems, one must adopt an undying and courageous attitude. An anecdote arising from our recent exhibition testifies to our thesis. One item in the exhibition was a large photograph taken in 1958 of the disciples of kung fu master Wong Fei-hung. The photograph was donated by Mr David Quan, the son of the late Kwan Tak-hing. A very precious photograph indeed! But apart from some famous people, such as Madame Mok Kwai-lan (wife of Wong Fei-hung), Master Chan Dau, Kwan Tak-hing himself, the actor Lam Kau, we could not identify the other people in the photograph. Therefore, we got in touch with the veteran director Wu Pang, actor Lam Kau and the martial arts club of Master Chan Dau (which we succeeded in finding through making enquiries from the telephone company). In the case of the latter, we were put in touch with Mr Chan Ching, son of Master Chan Dau. He put us in touch with one Master Lam to whom we showed our large photograph. We established that Master Lam is in fact the nephew of the grand kung fu master Lam Sai-wing, disciple of Wong Fei-hung. Master Lam expressed astonishment at the photograph, asking us how we got hold of it. In double time, he quickly identified the other members in the picture. Looking at this grand old photograph and its caption, who would have guessed its underlying detective story?

Yu Mo-wan, Man of Dedication

I was first on the job, I thought he was an adviser to the Archive. Only after our introductions did I know that he was, in fact, my boss. As someone who could work with a veteran like Yu, I was anxious lest he found me ignorant, but after co-working for a while, I found him not only to be extremely knowledgeable about Hong Kong cinema but a patient teacher as well, one who would gladly share his knowledge. His open attitude and accessibility is what I admire most. Presently, he is known in the Archive as "Grandpa". When he is happy, "Grandpa" is like a child who will joyfully shout "Eureka!" when he comes across a rare artefact in the Archive and proclaims it to all and sundry so that they will also share his joy. Grandpa, if only I can achieve as you have, in your own words: "I need the Film Archive, the Film Archive needs me".



Each exhibit caption is like an "identity card".



Mr Yu Mo-Wan (right) and Ms Janice Chow at work.

Research on Film - A Matter of Searching

The Research Unit occupies a crucial position within the Archive, bearing heavy responsibilities apart from its regular duty of compiling research materials. Whenever the Archive holds an activity or puts out a publication, it is the Research

Unit which must supply the relevant information, photographs, and organise interviews. The two important personages in the Research Unit are the veteran film historian and researcher, **Mr Yu Mo-wan**, and his assistant, **Ms Janice Chow**. The areas of their work include the following:

- 1. **Film Screenings**: Each year, about two screenings are organised for the public. These programmes are usually based on a theme and the films shown are rare prints deposited in the Archive. Work includes the selections of films and compilation of research materials (such as bio-filmographies of relevant artists, film credits, etc.), write-ups to review and introduce the films, editing and publishing a programme booklet and arranging small-scale exhibitions.
- 2. **Exhibitions**: The Research Unit has to assist in preparations for the Archive's large-scale annual exhibition. It is responsible for acquiring exhibits, collating artefacts, writing captions, etc. It also collaborates with the editorial team on the publication of a catalogue.
- 3. **The Hong Kong Filmography**: For the *Filmography*, the Research Unit is responsible for searching all primary materials, including newspaper articles, video copies, special souvenir programmes, assorted books and documents, handbills, photographs, etc. The work also involves tedious checking of names and years among other details.
- 4. **The Oral History Project**: The Research Unit needs to work out whom to interview and arrange schedules and meetings with film personalities. The outlines of questions must be drafted and comply with the demands of our interviewer; such work being done beforehand so as to ensure a smooth interview. The number of film personalities interviewed is now over 80 (figure as of May 98).
- 5. **Regular Research**: Newspaper cuttings and all kinds of documentary materials are compiled, arranged and then filed in order to ensure the Archive's ongoing collection of information.



Data input is but one part of a researcher's work.

The Face of the Cinema of the 40s

Back to Point Zero

The Hong Kong film industry in the 40s was in zero production mode during the course of the Pacific War. Only after the Japanese surrendered unconditionally and the war ended did the Hong Kong film industry enter its second productive phase. In our research and study for the publication of the *Hong Kong Filmography, Volume Two*, we discovered that the Hong Kong film industry's recovery after the war was a rapid one. Production increased dramatically year by year: in 1947, about 86 films were produced; in 1948, the number had increased to 150, and by 1949, over 170 films were produced.

The first production company to launch into production after the war was the Da Zhonghua Film Company. Established in 1946, its productions include *Gone are the Swallows When Willow Flowers Wilt* (1946), *An All-Consuming Love* (1947), *Female Spy 76* (1947), etc. However, the most influential films made during this postwar recovery period were the Cantonese pictures. Over 350 Cantonese pictures were made, many of which have become classics, being influenced in part by the realist motif of Mainland Chinese films produced in the same period. One thinks of Cantonese classics like *Tears of the Pearl River* (1949), *Everlasting Regret* (1948), *Fishing Village in the War* (1948), and *As Time Goes By* (1948).

Mandarin cinema too became more prolific with the passing of each year. It produced a total of 76 feature films, a record number over the figures of the prewar years. Behind the scenes of the Mandarin film industry were such eminent figures of the golden years of the Shanghai film industry as Zhang Shankun, Li Zuyong, Jiang Boying, etc.

The genres of the 40s were not limited to realism. Many films were adopted from the so-called "airwave novels", such as *Silent Dream* (1949) and *Crime Doesn't Pay* (1949) or from literary novels, such as *Red Chamber in the Sea* (1947) and *Waving the Red Ribbon* (1948). Filmmakers also turned to traditional sources like Cantonese opera and folk legends, as seen in films such as *The Second Attempt* (1948), *The Judge Goes to Pieces* (1948), Lau Kam-ding's *Clash at the Gate* (1948).

Martial arts and fantasy films occupied a certain niche. The longest-running film serial ever produced in the world -- the Wong Fei-hung film series -- began in the late 40s. Hong Kong's first puppet feature, *Prince of the Big Tree* was produced in 1949.

Worthy of special mention is the Grandview Company which, under the management of its boss Chiu Shu-sun, continued production in the United States during the war. Chiu produced many films and was quite an innovator. He pioneered the production of colour features in 16mm, as witnessed in *White Powder and Neon Lights* (1947).

Below, we append mini-biographies of four memorable personalities on and behind the screen in the 40s, hoping to arouse our readers' interest in the impending *Hong Kong Filmography, Volume Two*.



Still from White Powder and Neon Lights (47).



Brochure of Red Chamber in the Sea (47).

Film Personalities in the 40s

The Perfect Tragedienne, Wong Man-lei (1913-1998)



Wong, the loving mother of Yu Kai in The Orphan's Rescue (49).

Wong Man-lei, real name Wong Man-so, excelled in playing evil mothers-in-law. She reached her peak with performances in *Mutual Understanding* (1954) and *The House of Kam Topples* (1961). However, in the 40s, Wong was known for playing virtuous wives and kind mothers, virginal daughters or debutantes of distinguished families.

Sister Mary, as she was known to her devoted fans and close friends, lived through an acting career of over half a century. She began acting in silent pictures like *Cry of the Cuckoo in the Temple* (1932), *Gunshot at Midnight* (1932), and was an established star by the time she appeared in her first sound picture, *Yesterday's Song* (1935).

In the 40s, Wong Man-lei was a dazzling figure in the film industry of the whole South China region. Her superb skills and refined character earned her the nickname of "The Perfect Tragedienne". After the war, Wong starred in *Tears of the Returned One* (1947), *Cast Aside the Beloved One* (1949) and *It Will Pay Off* (1949). In these films, Wong played noble, sacrificial mothers or women who have been done wrong to. Her co-stars and colleagues behind the camera have all testified to being moved to tears whenever they watch Sister Mary at work in the studio. Film personalities frequently worked with her included veterans like Ng Cho-fan, Cheung Ying, Pak Yin, Hung Sin-nui, Mui Yee, Siu Yin-fei, Tsi Lo-lin, etc. Wong had appeared in more than 300 films between 1930-1966. Her husband, Tse Yik-chi, was a director and producer. Their marriage began in 1937 -- a model marriage that lasted until Wong's death in April this year. With Sister Mary's death, the film world has lost an extraordinary artist. However, her art survives in her films, the classics of which may hopefully be preserved for all time by the Film Archive.

- Winnie Fu, Agnes Lam



Heroine of the Movie World, Tong Sing-to

The name Tong Sing-to is little known today but she was one of the most important female stars of the Hong Kong cinema, being one of the pioneers in the Hong Kong film industry. Together with Li Beihai, she established the Zhonghua Film Production Company in 1933 and produced six feature films, including the partial-sound feature *Conscience* (1933) and the sound film *The Idiot's Wedding Night* (1933).

She co-founded with He Luo her second production company, the Da Shidai Film Company, which produced *House Number Sixty-six* (1936) in which she also starred. The third production company she founded was named after herself, the Sing To Film Company, which produced *The Bomber Wen Shengcai* (1937).

Tong Sing-to was a producer and a screenwriter. The scripts of *Conscience* and *House Number Sixty-six* were written by her. Tong was a star as early as in the 30s, appearing opposite Ng Cho-fan in *Gunshot at Midnight* (1932). In the 40s, with the recovery of Hong Kong cinema after the war, Tong became a supporting actress, playing a wide variety of roles, such as the mother in *The Kung-fu Couple* (1949), a

martial arts film and as a swordswoman in *A Sword to Save the Country* (1949) co-starring with Kwan Tak-hing.

Tong, a Manchurian princess, became a producer largely due to her distinguished family. Unfortunately, in her twilight years, she became bankrupt and was rumoured to have died in poverty.

- Winnie Fu

The Oriental Chaplin, Yee Chau-shui (1904-1955)

Yee Chau-shui, real name Yee King-wing, lived up to his nickname of "Southern Chinese Cinema's Essential Spices". His popularity meant he was prolific as well. In any one year, Yee would appear in numerous films, mostly as the source of humour and laughter. His characters were mainly petty urbanites or "a nobody". Put him together with the straight leading man or leading lady and his eccentric features would light up any scene. Yee was paired with Sun Ma Si-tsang as the Orient's Laurel and Hardy in *Unpredictable Tomorrow* (1947) and *The Immortal Children* (1948).

Yee's range was wide and he appeared in films of all genres. He excelled in playing misunderstood common people who often suffered beatings and had to go around with bandaged head wounds. He also excelled in playing henpecked husbands and mock heroes displaying false braggadocio who were eventually put in their proper places by the real he-men. One of his most memorable roles was the unkempt monk Chai Kung ("Live Buddha"). In arousing the audience's laughter, Yee was also adept in making the audience think.

Yee also created his own humorous singing styles a la Cantonese opera, such as "Counting the Olives" and the "Buddhist Chant" style which became added attractions to his comedies. Finally, one cannot neglect to mention that Yee Chau-shui was the Far East's foremost imitator of Charlie Chaplin. His greatest accolade was to be known as the Oriental Charlie and he assumed the role of Charlie the Tramp in such films in the 40s as *Charlie and the Child* (1948), *Charlie's Escape from the Trap of the Heavenly Immortals* (1949), *Charlie's Visit to Hell* (1949) etc.

- Agnes Lam



Yee (2nd right), the mock hero in My Love is Like the Wind of Spring (49).

The Whiz Kid, Yu Kai (1939-)

The screen has seen many new talents rise over the years but rarely, as in the 40s, did we have a four year old already trained in acting and achieved fame three years later by appearing on the stage. This whiz kid was Yu Kai. Yu was trained in martial skills and it was in these roles that he earned fame. His father, Jak Sin-chung, was a famous martial artist, while her mother, Chow Siu-ying was a famous "*huadan*" in Cantonese opera (the 108 year-old lady is still presiding in Hong Kong). Perhaps because of his family background, Yu Kai carried on the proud family tradition of performing arts. At ten, he starred in *Nazha's Adventure at the East Ocean* (1948) and became an overnight sensation.

On screen, it was as if Yu Kai was the reincarnated Nazha, the wonder kid of myth. He went on to star in *The Red Kid* (1949), *The Pauper King* (1949) and played Wong Man-lei's adopted son in the family melodrama, *Third Madam Educates Her Son*. The success of all these roles made Yu Kai the most sought-after star by producers.

Yu Kai was also adept in singing and was said to get up every morning at four to begin his voice exercises. In *The Birth of Kiddy Stone* (1949) where Yu Kai played another wonder kid of legend, he learned to sing arias in Shanghai, Suzhou, Guangzhou and Wuzhou styles. It aspired the lyricist and writer Tong Tik-sang to eulogise the talents of Yu Kai in a poem of praise.

- Agnes Lam



Selina Ho, Winnie Fu

This year's multi-media exhibition "Hong Kong Film Archive Treasures" has put on display close to one thousand precious exhibits, covering more than 80 years of Hong Kong's film history. The exhibition got off to a dazzling start with an opening ceremony on April 7 officiated by Mr Pao Ping-wing, Chairman of the Culture Select Committee of the Provisional Urban Council. Distinguished guests at presence included Mr Raymond Chow, Chairman of Golden Harvest (Int'l) Ltd, the famous screenwriter and lyricist Chen Dieyi, the "pioneering martial arts heroine" Chin Tsi-ang, actresses Wei Wei, Miu Kam-fung, songstress Yao Li and Mr David Quan Hon-chuen, son of the late Kwan Tak-hing. They took part in a ribbon-cutting ceremony to signal the opening of the exhibition.

The exhibition was a great success when it folded up on April 26. A total figure of 33,000 entrances was recorded and the exhibition attracted both the young and old, including many retired members of the film industry who came to relive the glory of their past. Actress Josephine Siao was in attendance after she completed her master degree course and before her departure to the United States to attend her graduation ceremony. She was followed by a retinue of press and TV reporters who employed all means to secure personal interviews and autographs.

The exhibition's audio and visual component was particularly well-received. The theaterette was often "full house". Newspaper commentaries have described the filmed interviews with film personalities as "historical documents full of human warmth." The "jukebox" setup for selecting golden oldies was equally popular with the elderly, who could constantly be seen pulling up chairs close to the panel where they would ponder upon the old tunes on playback.

While sharing with the public the treasures of the Archive, we hope the exhibition would spark interest among the public so that people will come forth to donate more film treasures to the Archive.



(From left) Ms Miu Kam-fung, Mr David Quan, Ms Wei Wei, Mr Raymond Chow, Mr Pao Ping-wing, Ms Chin Tsi-ang, Mr Chen Dieyi and Ms Yao Li officiating at the opening ceremony.



Though superstar Chow Yun-fat was away in Canada, his gigantic poster blow-ups became his "Replacements".



Exhibition booth of Master Kwan Tak-hing simulated the famous "Po Chi-lam" setting from his film series.



Some one thousand precious exhibits were on display.



Songstress Yao Li enjoys the golden tunes of yesteryears once more.

Exhibition Titbits

- The superb fabrication design of the exhibition settings was contracted and done by the set production team of the Clearwater Bay Studio. This crew of set masters had handled all the areas of carpentry, painting, electrical works, claywork and art decoration. Each time they appeared, it was like a military unit who did whatever was demanded of them. The exhibition cabinets, wooden sets, lighted show cases and all audio-visual complements were conjured up virtually from zero by them.
- Dialogue overheard between a grandfather and his grandson: Grandfather: "Look, this is Lin Dai, this is Ng Cho-fan!" Grandson: "I know. This is Chow Yun-fat. His film (pointing at a still from *The Replacement Killers*) is now showing in the cinemas." A real case of youth that should be regarded with respect.
- The most moving sight was to see groups of old grandfathers and grandmothers flock in with alacrity to see and re-live the past. Even as the exhibition was winding down, it attracted a record number of visitors. The video showing theaterette was often "full houses". Such enthusiasm vindicated the hard work of our staff and designers who often had to work overnight to set things up.
- The wood-plank drawings of Kwan Tak-hing, Josephine Siao and Chow Yun-fat were so life-like that one could easily mistaken them for real presences. They were all fine works of painting masters who used to paint cinema advertisements in the old days. Such expertise is slowly dying out and it was a rare occasion indeed that the exhibition could get hold of these experts.

• Yet another heroic craftsman of the exhibition was our graphic designer, Mr Ernest Ho. It was in *his* office that the Archive's Editorial and Exhibition staff spent several through-nights to check, proofread and correct all the printed materials. Mr Ho was also the brain behind the exhibition's display and graphic design.

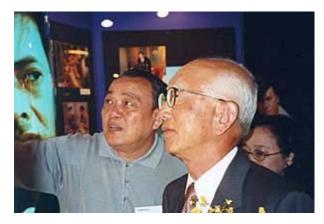
Raymond Chow, producer: "I feel proud. These exhibits bear witness to the past glory of Hong Kong cinema since Hong Kong pictures have always been in the forefront in Southeast Asia."

Yu Mo-wan, Head of Research Section, Film Archive: "We spent a total of four years to collect thousands of film materials and half a year to select the best items from our collection so that the exhibition can be held."

Selina Ho, Exhibition Assistant, Film Archive: "The most exciting moment was to organise and put up the exhibits, the saddest was when the exhibition ended and we started dismantling."

Josephine Siao, actress: "I didn't know that the Archive also collected vinyl records, posters, magazines, etc. Only when I saw the exhibition did I realise. From now on, I'll search into the deep corners of my house to see whether there are such items for donation."

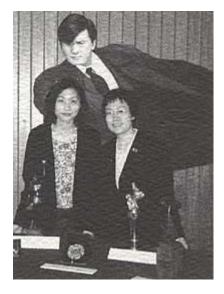
Mark Chan, video programme producer: "Though exhausted, I feel proud to be involved. It is like recapping some long-lost feelings of excitement and joy, something that is not replaceable."



Head of Research Section, Mr Yu Mo-wan (right) introducing the exhibits to Mr Raymond Chow (left) while touring the exhibition hall.



Josephine Siao's presence adds radiance to the display items.



Exhibition Coordinator Ms Winnie Fu (right) and Exhibition Assistant Ms Selina Ho (left) have followed through the entire organizing process.

Hong Kong Film Archive Now a Full Member of FIAF

The Hong Kong Film Archive has its own "Prague Spring", for it was in the 54th annual conference of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) held in Prague that the Archive was officially declared a Full Member of the world organization. The Archive's Senior Manager, Ms Cynthia Liu, attended the conference between April 21-26.

The Hong Kong Film Archive joined FIAF as a provisional member in 1996. Two years later, the Archive became a Full Member on the recommendation of our Technical Consultant, Dr Henning Schou (current Deputy Head of the National Film and Television Archive in Britain). Dr Schou praised the work done by the Hong Kong Film Archive in front of some 150 delegates. Dr Schou had visited Hong Kong three times in recent years and had familiarised himself with the conditions and work of the Hong Kong Film Archive. In his view, the Archive had done impressive work in the fields of acquisition, conservation, publications and research. The Archive had also put great store by professional standards and made sure that its staff had sufficient training as well as exchanges with overseas experts.

As a Full Member, the Hong Kong Film Archive must strictly adhere to FIAF's Code of Ethics, ensuring professional integrity among staff members in dealing with matters such as respecting the rights of the Archive's collections and collaborating with fellow archivists.



Dr Henning Schou (left) recommending the Hong Kong Film Archive to become a Full Member of FIAF at the General Assembly. Presiding at the voting session was Mr Clyde Jeavons (right), Honorary Adviser to the HKFA.



Asian archivists at the Prague Conference: (from left) Kim Jae II (North Korea), Chen Jingliang (China), Cynthia Liu (Hong Kong), Hongtaek Chung (South Korea) and Edmond Wong (Taiwan).