



Computerisation of the Archive Film Library

The Hong Kong Film Archive's permanent site is slated to be completed in 2000. At that time, a multi-media bilingual computerized library system will also come on stream. The bulk of the film materials including stills and film clips collected by the Archive will be easily retrieved from the system by the public. The system will form a part of the Archive's On-line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) made accessible to the public in the future library and research centre.

Apart from the film clips, the Archive's textual and still record (subject to copyright clearance) can be accessed on the information highway for the benefit of film lovers and film scholars all over the world. This way, rare information about the history of Hong Kong cinema will be disseminated from near to distant computer screens.

The Archive's programme of computerisation is a grand one, involving the input of our staff and computer experts. The aim is to achieve the following:

1. To design an effective Chinese-English cataloguing system, covering all our collections in the Archive.
2. To supply an accurate and comprehensive library system, complete with digitalised functions of moving and still pictures, to facilitate research.
3. To supply on-line services to the public to retrieve textual materials and images for research and study purposes.

The Provisional Urban Council has employed the services of ST Computer Systems (HK) Ltd whereby the company will supply hardware and software to the Film Archive and to assist in the ambitious project of data conversion of all textual materials and images. The company will supply the "HORIZON" software as the mainstay of the computer system which will bring the system in line with the MARC Format and Z39.50 protocol.

Such technical terms may sound off-putting to the lay public but they are the key elements in computer cataloguing. The MARC format will make uniform the various index systems of the libraries and provide a quick information retrieval method. Z39.50 is a standard library protocol which will allow researchers to directly look up the catalogues of local and foreign libraries which are also supported by the same library protocol. Under the Z39.50 software, foreign catalogues can adapt to different computer platforms and adjust to the individual window environments used by various libraries, making the task of looking up information much easier.

The computer company is setting a great store by the project because it will be one of Asia's most ambitious bilingual systems (a similar system is being used by the Shanghai City Library). The company's Application System Manager, Miss Conser Lee, regards the project as a great challenge because the Archive's needs are quite different from the ordinary libraries. The whole system not only must take into account two languages but also the different set-ups and needs of the various sections such as the research and conversation. Thus, the staff of the various sections are looking into every detail in order to make the programme a unified and uniform one.

It is naturally our hope that the massive project of cataloguing all the Archive's collections will proceed without glitches, so that the public will soon be able to enjoy the rare and precious information in our Archive.

Cataloguing: Key to Archive Collection

Arranging and Cataloguing Film Materials

The film materials and artefacts collected by the archive, no matter how large their quantity is and where they come from, have to be registered, sorted out and catalogued, then preserved according to the systematic and high-quality standards set out by the Archive.

Cataloguing is a heavy and complicated job. It does not only mean recording information by reading all our document resources, viewing each film, or listening to each sound record in our collection. A cataloguer must undergoes expert training and must have relevant experience and subject knowledge. He or she must analyse and evaluate the research values of the materials being catalogued. Sometimes, contradictory data have to be clarified. It is, therefore, important for a cataloguer to utilise authoritative reference tools to verify their authenticity and accuracy.

The cataloguer must also consider the various needs of all walks of film researchers. Since an effective and user-friendly system of information retrieval relies on an efficient integration of well-established international classification system as well as cataloguing and indexing standards, the work of updating the catalogue is undertaken constantly by our Cataloguing Section.

Establishing a Computerised Cataloguing System

Another important task for the section is to establish a comprehensive and effective multi-media computerised system of cataloguing. This task has to be done in coordination with the work of other sections such as acquisition, conservation, research and editorial, etc. Through the computerised system, the multi-faceted resources of the library will be stored in one uniform system to allow for fast retrieval on-line.

Acquisition of Film Research and Audio-Visual Materials

For the sake of enriching the Archive's film reference materials, the Cataloguing Section always keeps its ear to the ground in the market, to review publications as well as audio-visual materials on the internet. It also keeps itself up to date with the catalogues of film resources in other libraries and goes to book shops and other shops selling audio-visual materials to locate treasures for the Archive's collection.

Up to now, the section has already acquired 3,000 magazines and publications, and subscribed to some 50 magazines. It has collected over 4,500 videos cassettes, laser discs, VCDs, DVDs and CD-Roms, and about 300 audio tapes, compact discs and phonograms. The criteria for such acquisitions are their archival value as applied, firstly, to Hong Kong cinema, secondly, to the Chinese-speaking cinema on both sides of the Taiwan strait, and finally, to fine productions of the world cinema. The contents considered are rather broad and comprehensive, including synopses, scripts, reviews, biographies of film personalities, film theory, techniques of film planning and production, cinematography, lighting, settings, special effects, make-up, props, etc. The research materials also include special topics like finance management, conservation skills, cataloging, operations of archives, etc.

Planning the Film Library and Research Centre

When the Film Archive finally moves to its permanent site, the public will be able to enjoy the use of a comfortable and well-equipped film library and research centre. The Cataloguing Section will contribute to the interior design of the library, arrangement of the shelves and furniture, the computer set-up and audio-visual complements. It will work in coordination with the archive staff and assist in the planning. For the Film Library and Research Centre to function efficiently, the Cataloguing Section has to participate in drafting policies, rules and regulations regarding the services to be provided by the library.

Providing Information Enquiry Services

Though the Film Archive is still at its planning stages, it receives many requests for information through telephones, faxes and correspondence. The section also assists in looking up relevant information for this purpose. When the Film Archive is finally completed, the section will employ more staff to satisfy the demands in this area and to provide a comprehensive frontline enquiry service to the public.



All film materials and artefacts are registered, sorted out, catalogued and stored away properly.



Drawer for keeping posters



Cataloguing Section keeps acquiring audio-visual materials.



A cataloguer's essential task - quality review



The giant step before multi-faceted resources can be retrieved on-line in one uniform system-data input.

Laughter in the Rain

Monique Shiu

Here goes my reminiscence. On the first day when I was posted to the Hong Kong Film Archive from the public libraries four years ago, I felt like being sent to a remote bareland...

The office was undersized and understaffed, with insufficient facilities and equipment...

In a moment, I was aware of my sole existence in the Cataloguing Section...

Perplexity was the strongest sentiment I had encountered after meeting with Ms Cynthia Liu, our Senior Manager. I reckoned heavy loads on my shoulder, especially the computerisation project which urged me to equip myself with more knowledge of information technology.

A few days later, I was on duty at the basement of Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Wanchai. There situated several rooms deployed by the Archive for storing film-related materials. Lying around were batches of materials wrapped in stale and dusty bags and cartons from donors or depositors. Film stills, photographs, film brochures, handbills, posters, scripts, books, periodicals, news cuttings, etc., some of which had already slid out of their dirty coverings, like miserable orphans begging for love and care. Such was a sad spectacle that would break the heart of any audience. I had no other choice but firstly stripped them of their "old clothes" and dust them, myself being adorned with a messy look from head to toe in return!

As the Conservation vacancies would only be taken up for another few months, I had to assist colleagues of the Acquisition Section to check in film reels. Some films housed in the temporary film stores at Sheung Wan Civic Centre had already decomposed, turned sticky and released a pungent odour. Old film cans had to be immediately replaced by new ones to prevent the films from rapid deterioration.

That was my weekly schedules - rotating work at different locations to organise the film-related materials. While back in the small Cataloguing Office, I would be busy with administrative work, handling office documents, drafting proposals and concentrating on cataloguing work. From time to time, I would contemplate what my career life would be like... "Am I going the wrong way? Why had I asked for a transfer? Why didn't I stay in the post of Librarian-in-charge of a branch library? Here in the Archive, I have to deal with intellectual as well as physical work alone! Shall I apply for 'repatriation'? ..."

The friendliness and sincere concern of the Archive colleagues slowly eased away my worries. Meanwhile, during my contacts with various librarians in the universities, government sections, film and television organisations, I gained their warm guidance and encouragement. Heart-felt advice on library and cataloguing work was also received from some of them with whom I barely had the first acquaintance. The feeling that working in the Archive was a meaningful challenge started to grow in me.

Very soon, the working environment improved, as another temporary librarian joined to share the workload. In early 1995, I was delegated to attend a short-term training at the Cataloguing Section of the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. That was a precious, unforgettable and exciting experience. During my stay, the cataloguers and librarians there patiently explained the cataloguing details, library functions and services provided by the section, while letting me have hands-on film cataloguing practice. I was fascinated by the gorgeous sight of the Landover Centre, a huge store of the Library. My meetings with the archivist of the American Film Institute, and Ms Harriet Harrison, the editor of *The FIAF Cataloguing Rules for Film Archives*, had been very amicable. We exchanged ideas in the aspects of cataloguing policies, standards, rules, and formats. It was a very fruitful journey.

The overseas training experience, my deeper understanding of the film culture, and the high team spirit among my colleagues have strengthened my decision to welcome the big challenge... the computerisation project has been contracted out; data conversion will soon be underway; the design of the Archive building is in progress; our collection is being enriched; the Archive materials are attired in new archival "clothings", and their enchanting "merits" being unearthed!

When I think of the growing Archive, the amazing film materials, the boisterous Archive staff, the lovely part-time helpers, and... all of a sudden, my heart is humming an old but melodious love song, *Laughter in the Rain* (by Neil Sedaka)... Although the mood is different from what I am experiencing, the title well suits my feelings of being a member of the Archive... and here's my version of the song:

"Workload falls onto my head like rain,
but - I hear laughter in the rain - because I feel the joy
around, it is no more in vain..."

Monique Shiu (Assistant Librarian I) is Head of the Hong Kong Film Archive's Cataloguing Section. Before joining the Archive in 1994, she had 10 years' experience working in the Urban Council's Public Libraries.



Monique Shiu with Mr David Francis at the Library of Congress, USA.

Cataloguing - Window to Archive Collection

Ann Baylis

Why do we need to catalogue our films?

Cataloguing is the window to the content of the collection of any archive. In summary, cataloguing describes the films, and who made them, when, where and what they are about.

Many people who can see the benefit of their investment in film archives are happy to provide physical protection of films through safe storage and restoration work. However, it can take time for the value of film cataloguing to be appreciated, as this work is very labour intensive and can be slow to accumulate sufficient useful amounts of data.

Steps to a film archive

When an archive is first established, energy is concentrated on acquiring all the films, old and new, which reflect our heritage and hold our nation's special memories. We also try to acquire the posters and scripts and other materials that belong with the films.

Once the acquisition is assured, archivists then worry about how this newly collected film material should be stored and cared for. We are anxious that our film heritage is now lost or damaged due to the lack of proper care and correct storage conditions, and make arrangements for storage vaults to be hired or constructed.

The next step is to examine and identify the special films that need our urgent conservation or restoration treatment. During this process, technical information about the films is generated for the catalogue, eg, length, gauge, colour etc. If the archive is fortunate in obtaining funding, we then establish facilities to copy and preserve our films.

From this point, efforts are concentrated on providing access to clients, whether they are today's filmmakers seeking images for a new film, or individuals on a nostalgic hunt for cherished images from the past. Cataloguing provides access at varying levels. Protecting our film heritage and giving access to the archive collection, now and in the future, provide us with strong reasons for film cataloguing to be supported in our archives.

What cataloguing does for the archive and its clients

Cataloguing provides long term access to the content of the collection. It frees us from relying on personal memory of the collection of films.

When cataloguing a film, we describe who made the film, when and where, and what the film is about, so that our clients will know what images are held at the archive, and where they are located within the archive.

There are many levels of cataloguing, and an archive may select varying levels for a number of reasons. These could include the significance of a particular film, the funding available for cataloguing, and the type of information that will satisfy access clients.

At a basic level, cataloguing can provide lists of film titles with summaries. This can be sufficient to identify certain films and to provide control over them within the storage vaults. Title lists enable us to provide a very limited form of access to the films, since clients and archive staff must know the exact title of the film they are looking for.

Another way to handle access requests, using basic cataloguing description, is to search all the text on a computer database of titles and summaries. Free text searching by computer is useful to retrieve on particular words, particularly for topics that are not heavily indexed. For instance, there are few local films made on pearl fishing and these can be retrieved quickly on a free text search. In contrast, there have been many films made in Australia of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Opera House. If you search a large Australian database using the term "Sydney", you will retrieve thousands of titles. I am sure the same overload response will apply to searching on other major cities, eg, "Hong Kong", in your database.

The basic level of cataloguing will not provide enough information for a client who wishes to locate all films the archive holds on a certain subject, such as ferries, buildings, locations, or a particular person. To provide this level of access and retrieval, cataloguing must include subject terms.

Using the above example, if the cataloguer indexed the films using the subject term "Sydney Harbour Bridge", this would retrieve a much smaller and more specific list of films. To enable us to retrieve items consistently, we use a list of specific name and subject terms, known locally as a thesaurus. Using the thesaurus means that each time a client searches the catalogue for a particular subject, eg, street scenes, cars, people or air travel, they will retrieve all the catalogued films on that subject topic.

At an even more detailed level of cataloguing, when describing a film for a filmography, the cataloguer includes all details of production credits for cast and crew, as well as the title, series, awards, subject, collection information, and summary. This greater depth of information produced for filmographies also enables researchers to access all the films by, for example, a certain director, writer, cinematographer or actor.

This in-depth level of cataloguing is favoured by archives and researchers when producing the national filmography. It will become by default the definitive record of the national film production. As such, it will be used for historical research into film production and the cinema heritage of the particular country.

Filmographies can also be made about the work of individual filmmakers or on particular subjects, such as newsreels, or items of importance to the clients of the archive. The cataloguing information found in filmographies forms part of the nation's cultural heritage.

Cataloguing can also include information on the history of the making of the film, and if it has been part of a significant collection. This extra information can be time consuming to research and compile. Cataloguers must therefore assess the importance of such information for future researchers, and feel confident that the benefit outweighs the cost of cataloguing.

It has been our pleasure to see the small catalogue of films in the National Archive grow over the years. May I take this opportunity to wish you the same happy outcome.

Ann Baylis is head of Documentation and Cataloguing Commission of the International Federation of Film Archive, and Senior Manager of the Australian National Film and Sound Archive.

New Acquisitions

***Stubborn Lovers* - film print**



Released in the 40s, *Stubborn Lovers* (1943) was adapted from a novel directed by Wong Fook-hing, starring Ng Cho-fan, Pak Yin and Tsi Lo-lin in a moving and somewhat convoluted tale. The Archive obtained the permission of the film owners to strike a new print of the film for preservation.

***Magic Cup* (1961) - film comic book**



Mr Yeung Kuen donated this item among his other donations to the Archive. The comic strip was first serialised in the *Ming Deng Yat Po* in the 60s and later published in book form.

***Bitter Lotus* - film brochure**



The Archive has acquired more than ten brochures of films released in the 50s and 60s including *Wong Fei-hung Vanquishes the Bully at the Red Junk*, *Bitter Lotus* (1960), etc. *Bitter Lotus* is representative of the cinema of the period. It was shown over two weeks to full houses amounting to 400 screenings. According to the territory's population figure at the time, it was estimated that one-fifth of the population had seen the film, thus breaking the box-office records at the time.

***Mingxing, Xin Yingtan* - film magazines**



Mingxing was one of the most authoritative film magazines published in Shanghai in the 30s. When the city was occupied by the Japanese in the 40s, the Huaying Film Company published *Xin Yingtan* to publicise the company's new productions and stars. These newly acquired publications from the past contain many articles about film personalities such as Butterfly Wu, Lin Zhuozhuo, Zhou Xuan, Nancy Chan and Li Lihua who later worked in the Hong Kong film industry.

Film still of *Fan Po Nong*, Amoy-dialect film



The Hong Kong film industry produced many Amoy-dialect and Chaozhou-dialect features in the 50s and 60s which were exported to various Chinese dialect-speaking communities in Southeast Asian countries. The Archive has acquired the original negatives of film stills from these dialect pictures, a valuable resource for the research and study of Hong Kong film history in the 50s and 60s.