

Role of Film Archives in the New Millennium

Film Archives in the 21st Century

by Ray Edmondson

In the beginning there was film - but no archives. Even though the 20th century is distinguished from all others by the transforming influence of the audiovisual media - as communication, record, art and entertainment - it has taken much of the last hundred years just to get the value of this heritage recognised. In 1900 our forebears were awed by the first moving images. In 2000 the medium is so omnipresent we no longer notice it. Amid continuing change - economic, technological, political and social - what lies ahead for its film archives? Your guess is as good as mine, because confident predictions often fail. (Remember how the computer age was to bring us the "paperless office"? Or television was to doom the movie theatre?). So let me share a few issues I ponder about.

The first is the future of film itself. Will we still be using it twenty years from now - or will we have moved entirely to digital forms of production, distribution, presentation - and preservation? Or, maybe, will we have to support both technologies? Either way the curatorial and financial challenges will be immense. Archives may become movie museums in the purest sense - preserving not only the technology of film but the carrier itself, and with it the possibility for future generations to experience the mechanically-projected, non-digital photographic image. On the other hand, film may retain its relative preservation advantage of simplicity, security and cost-effectiveness.

What is already clear is that computer networks will be increasingly used to access digitised images and sounds, as well as to search on-line catalogue databases. The on-line archive is already with us and its importance will grow. So will the use of digital techniques in film restoration, as the treasures of the past are freshened up for new generations. Costs will drop: but the expectations of a discerning and demanding public will rise. The possibilities of mass storage of digitised images and sounds can already be glimpsed. But digitisation - like earlier breakthroughs - is not a universal panacea for the complexities of archiving. It will add to them. It brings new possibilities, and also new problems. (It will be harder to protect the integrity of a collection, and so easier to change history. And what if a virus corrupts it?)

The second is the convergence of film with the other audiovisual media. Will the term "film archive" - which increasingly includes television and video - still mean the same thing in, say, 2020? A growing number of archives now cover the whole audiovisual spectrum, including sound and radio. As collections grow, and the technical demands increase, each institution will face strategic challenges. For some, the answer will be in expanding their range and their mandates: for others, conversely, it may lie in increasingly deep and narrow specialisation.

Why? Because the third issue is the effect of globalisation! The worldwide network of audiovisual archives is developing all the time - most notably, in recent years, within Asia - and the need for archives to become interdependent in complementary ways has developed too. Less and less will it be possible for a single archive to contain all the skills, equipment, and facilities to manage the growing tide of obsolete formats. More and more will archives need to exercise their collective political and economic power - to influence, for example, stock and equipment manufacturers. We will have no choice but to work together - and our global professional network will become larger, more coordinated and less fragmented than it is today.

Fourthly, I ponder about the question of selecting material for our collections. Of the rapidly expanding flood of moving images that are being, and will be, generated - what are we going to keep? What will we consign to oblivion? How will we decide? How do we reconcile that with the important principle of legal deposit of films and television programs - for the recognition of which so many archives have fought for so long? To keep up with this, will national film/television/ audiovisual archives have to increasingly monitor, coordinate and regulate the work of a multiplicity of other institutions in their countries, rather than carry out the whole task themselves?

Finally, to guide us through the challenges of tomorrow we will be constantly driven back to our roots: what are we? what is the essence of an archive? what is (if you'll pardon the management-speak) our "core business"? In answer, how many would say "Our collection! Without a collection you don't have an archive!"

I wouldn't agree. Collections don't create themselves. They're a product: the outcome of deliberate selection and acquisition. Their survival and accessibility depend on a technological infrastructure which has been created to match it. In future, archives will be less and less confined to servicing their own collections on their own infrastructure: nor will clients be satisfied by the limitations of a single collection. They will want to be facilitated in accessing many collections and will go where they are serviced best.

No: the archive of the future, as in the past, will be best defined by its principal resource - its people! They are the repository of technical skills, collection knowledge, initiative and ideas to add value for their clients. They sustain the relationships which comprise the archive's support base. They will possess the formal professional training that will be increasingly necessary, and be imbued with the philosophy and ethics critical to the protection of an ever more vulnerable heritage. Most of all, they will be fired by the enthusiasm and the love of the medium which will always be necessary to stretch the boundaries of the archival future, and the persistence to keep reshaping yesterday's perceptions.



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The Impact of Digital Technology on Film Preservation

by **Hisashi Okajima**

Digital technology is now indispensable to various projects and processes of the film archive: cataloguing and documentation of films and related materials, as well as constructing a comprehensive database based on such information; making the national filmography database including both extant and non-extant films as well as its public online access; participating in future joint database projects for national cultural heritage, etc. Such tasks and undertakings will be accomplished with the aid of more advanced digital technology in a better computer environment with better interface.

For example, Japan's National Diet Library has announced that public access to the bibliographical information of their collection from 1948 of 1,800,000 Japanese books and 200,000 foreign books is expected to be available on the web site as of March 2000. They also plan to digitise 23,000 picture images from their collection of Edo materials and open them to the public in the near future, and to complete the periodical title index database of 3.6 million journals by year 2002. This kind of movement toward enhancing digital resources has been promoted by other national institutions and museums, and it is understandable that the National Film Center, the film department of the National Museum of

Modern Art, Tokyo, and the sole national film archive, is expected to develop a comprehensive database of its collection - about 20,000 films and probably over 700,000 items of related materials - and provide them on web sites as soon as possible. Unfortunately, however, the reality is that we have acquired more films and related materials than we can catalogue. To make matters worse, because of rapidly advancing digital technology, both software and hardware obsolescence often causes problems in data transfer.

The National Film Center still maintains a cautious attitude toward the application of digital technology to film preservation/restoration, neither because it is still not cost effective or time effective enough, nor because automation technology like automated dustbusting is not advanced enough (such problems will be solved sooner or later). Rather, it's because in a high-tech oriented country with many novelty hunters like Japan, the technological shift from the analog to digital and film to non-film could happen too rapidly and drastically, which could not only result in the transgression of film preservation/restoration ethics (eg colorisation or excessive enhancement) but also cause a negative influence on traditional photochemical technology, the infrastructure of laboratories, and even on the raw film manufacturing.

Of course, given that digital technology could do more for film restoration than photochemical technology can (such as the removal of scratches by superior wetgate printing), the positive use of digital technology should be explored. About a year ago, for example, a film restoration project initiated by the University of Tokyo and led by Professor Ken Sakamura drew special attention: part of Yasujiro Ozu's Tokyo Story (1953) was digitally restored from a 35mm print Shochiku owns (using a PhotoCD scanner at the resolution rate of 3072x2048, storing about 6.1 MB of information per frame in PGM). The National Film Center is planning to form a research group in collaboration with them. In any event, many issues need to be addressed, including the choice and the life expectancy of storage medium in which, in theory, stored binary digit information itself never deteriorates. But the most important is to insist that the fundamental system to be constructed follow the film/digital/film line; that is to say, the ultimate restoration should be able to at least maintain the original quality of a 35mm print. However, if the output of the digitally scanned information of a 35mm print is designated to the 1/2 inch format videocassette tape, one would expect no higher resolution for either the input or the output than the level of the average quality one would expect on a regular TV screen; nor would one expect to spend more money or time than necessary insofar as the output one sees matches the average quality level of the 1/2 inch video tape. To make it worse, it is possible that once restoration is done, the concern for the long-term preservation of the 35mm print might be neglected. For the moment, therefore, the ultimate format

of the restoration should remain film.

A possible definition of film as a cultural form is that the experience of an anonymous audience in the dark theatre to view the image on the big screen - the projected image of moving light and shadow reproduced by the filmic apparatus - far bigger than themselves. Therefore, what the film archive as the guardian of cinema should preserve is not only the film as the physical material - physical in the sense that Jean-Luc Godard once described film as "a thing to be carried" - but also the filmic experience as a whole that in itself is a cultural form. It is not enough to preserve and restore films; the form of presentation/exhibition as part of the experience needs to be preserved.

Although the varied and considerable work undertaken by the film archives will require digital technology from acquisition, preservation/restoration, cataloguing/documentation, to programming/exhibition, the final goal of its task has to be to preserve the genuine filmic experience in every way. To put it another way: only a place that is able to present the perpetually 20-foot tall image of Toshiro Mifune deserves the name of a film archive.



Tokyo Story

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(Translated from Japanese by Ayako Saito.)

Digital Imaging for Preservation

by **Anna Chan**

The digital storm has hit archives, libraries and museums at full blast. Digitisation projects have linked to the headings of conservation and preservation management. The conservation management would choose to allocate her resources to digitisation. The actual scanning is the simplest part of the digitisation project. Materials to be digitised are complementary to conservation work: to conduct the condition report, to repack, to review storage conditions,

etc. Catalogue descriptions together with condition information on individual item turn the system to valuable tools for surveying and planning preservation project. Two types of image database can be created. The first one is made as a surrogate of the original. The digital data has to be scanned in a way that, hopefully, the original can be reconstructed. Often old color photographic materials are faded. Digital imaging caters for a digital restoration or reconstruction. Negative collections benefit from it most because a positive image can be visualised at the monitor in scanning. Many older photo negatives are glass plate negatives. Scanning them once would reduce the risk of breaking them during documentation and dupping.

The second type of image database is for information technology, such as an image database where the historical value of the information content is important. The digital file in the image database will not be used to reconstruct the original photograph or scene. Anyway, it must be borne in mind that even the best-digitised image is no substitute for the original.

In quality control of digitisation project, the best way is subjective visual inspection augmented with objective measurements performed in software on digital files themselves. The image quality framework should take into account four main image quality parameters, namely, tone production, detail and edge reproduction, noise, and color.

In choosing the carrier, we listen to the material scientist's advice. But, normally the recommendation for use of a specific type of carrier cannot be made when it is not to be used in market and is further exacerbated by the rapid development of hardware. Will a carrier used today still be current tomorrow? It is risky to commit valuable information to any type of CD-ROM or tape if one wants to be certain of access over the next millennium. Timely mitigation will be able to guarantee long-term preservation of data and full functionality. To avoid expensive mitigation, we need to select a carrier that is worldwide popular and cost effective.

To conclude from the preservation point of view, our objectives in the digitisation/preservation project is (1) to conserve the original, (2) to create surrogate copies to recognised standards, (3) to reformat unstable originals, and (4) to document an historically accurate performance of visual collections. Application of internationally recognised standard in computerised cataloguing would provide researcher with a direct link between the catalogue entry and its surrogate digital image, which is worldwide accessible on the internet. It has been informed that users become interested in seeing the originals after seeing the digitised version. Despite the many challenges arising from the usage of

digitisation in conservation matters, it certainly fulfills much preservation and access needs in archives, museums and libraries.

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Hong Kong Filmography, Volume III (1950-1952)

The Hong Kong Filmography, Volume III, sequel to the Hong Kong Filmography, Volume I and II, will carry details of more than 580 films from the period as mentioned above. The details include the genre classifications, language, dates of release, names of production companies, credit lists of directors, writers and players, synopses, and the best available film stills. The whole catalogue is bilingual, printed in hardcover and will soon be released to the public.

The 50s was a more prolific period in Hong Kong cinema than the 40s. More than 2,500 films were produced. Because of the huge quantity involved, it was decided that the 50s be covered in three volumes. This Volume III of the Filmography covers the period 1950-52, with more than 580 film entries. Besides Cantonese and Mandarin films, Amoy-dialect pictures began their production in 1950, a result of the expanding Amoy audience in Southeast Asian markets.

The 50s was a period of burgeoning prosperity for Hong Kong. The film industry was flourishing and was the people's main source of entertainment. However, the 50s was not without trials and tribulations. The Korean War which erupted in the end of 1950 resulted in the UN embargo that affected the supply of raw film stock to the film industry. In this period, Mainland China implemented a regime of "ideological" censorship against Hong Kong films, affecting its distribution. The film industry was thus afflicted with much hardships and the downturn resulted in the foreclosures of several production studios.

In 1952, the situation began to turn around as the film industry began to be supplied with film stock imported from the United Kingdom, Belgium and Japan. In China itself, the pre-war industry based in Shanghai was virtually relocated to Hong Kong. Talents such as Zhang Shankun, Fei Mu, Bu Wancang, and others, began to produce pictures in Hong Kong. A market was cultivated in Southeast Asia. All these factors led to the recovery of the film industry in 1952 and its gradual prosperity throughout the decade.

As a legatee of the traditions of the 40s, Hong Kong cinema continued to produce fantasy martial arts pictures, melodramas, comedies. These genres remained the mainstays of the industry. Not a few were adapted from so-called "airwave novels." Among the most distinguished productions of the period were Dawn Must Come (aka Tears of the Pearl River), produced by Shanghai expatriate Cai Chusheng; Kaleidoscope, produced by the South China Motion Picture Workers Union to raise funds for the building of a permanent office; The Dividing Wall, a social-realist comedy produced by the Dragon-Horse (Loon-Ma) Film Company ; Modern Red Chamber Dream, a Great Wall production that was the box-office

champion of 1952.

To summarise, the Hong Kong cinema produced quite a number of classic pictures in the brief span of time between 1950-52. The pictures dealt more with realist subjects and society, and the level of film technique was generally advanced. Cinematographer Ho Look-ying, for example, had assiduously applied himself to the skills of lap dissolves and superimpositions; Kwong Tzan, the boss of a production studio, had founded his own latent for a sound recording machine; the Wan Brothers had successfully exploited matte shots to create new set designs. The Filmography, Vol III adopts a completely new design in data presentation, incorporates more notes regarding the historical and production backgrounds and includes more quality stills in enlarged formats, a publication not to be missed by Hong Kong film fans.

(Text: Winnie Fu)



Kaleidoscope (1950)



An Illusion of Paradise (1951)



Infancy (1951)



The Driving Wall (1952)

Monographs of Hong Kong Film Veterans, Volume One : Hong Kong Here I Come

With burgeoning careers in Shanghai before the World War II, they came south to Hong Kong to start afresh when the war ended. Their experiences in developing the postwar Hong Kong film industry bear witness to the fact that Hong Kong cinema and Chinese cinema are inextricably linked. They worked together through thick and thin, and through uncertain times. When they speak of their life experiences and reminisce about colleagues, the ties of friendship and the camaraderie of comrades-in-arms deeply impress the listeners. Who are these people? They are Tong Yuejuan, Chin Tsi-ang, Li Lihua, Yue Feng, Wu Pang, Lo Dun, Chen Dieyi and Ho Look-ying -- eight veterans of both Chinese and Hong Kong film industries. Their conversations, thoughts and reminiscences unfold in a new publication of the Hong Kong Film Archive, the first volume of monographs published in our Oral History Series entitled *Hong Kong Here I Come*, providing readers with first-hand information about their participation in the Hong Kong cinema.

The actual writing of the contents in the new book was undertaken by Donna

Chu, Mable Ho, Yuen Tsz-ying, Wong Ain-ling, Cheng Pei-pei and Kwok Ching-ling. Apart from the collations of interviews, the book contains over 100 photographs including stills and pictures of the filmmakers at work and at play. Some of these photographs are rare mementoes supplied by the interviewees themselves. The texts include endnotes and annotations of important facts including biographical notes and bibliographical references for those who are interested in pursuing more information of the subjects.

Getting along with the veterans, people will gain a broad picture of the workings of the film industry - they will learn how the film industry developed in its early embryonic period, how a movie is produced one after the other, how ideas are converted through technical means, how our early filmmakers absorb the impact of events and changing times... In editing this book, I received the help and strong support of the veterans themselves, and colleagues within various sections of the Film Archive who aided in research, editing, writing, and simply providing opinions. I sincerely thank them all.

(Text: Kwok Ching-ling, Editor of the monographs)

New Acquisitions

Duplicating a New Copy of The 72 Martyrs of Canton

The Hong Kong Film Archive has all along kept vigilant of news around the region concerning discoveries of old prints of Hong Kong films, since some of them can no longer be found in Hong Kong itself. The Hong Kong and Taiwan film industries have long been intimately linked. The Hong Kong Film Archive maintains exchanges with other film archives around the region and the world, and through such links, we have facilitated a close contact with the Taipei Film Archive.

The Taipei Film Archive has received a copy of *The 72 Martyrs of Canton* from producer Tong Yuejuan. The film was produced and released in 1954, directed by a group of directors including Richard Poh (Bu Wancang), Ma Xu Weibang, etc, and featuring some 30 stars including Huang He, Grace Chang, Yu So-chau. The story depicts the Guangzhou military uprising against the Qing dynasty in 1911 in which 72 revolutionaries died and were commemorated in Huanghua Gang. The Hong Kong Film Archive has obtained a copy of the film with the assistance of the Taipei Film Archive, and has been given the rights by Tong Yuejuan to preserve the film and to screen it for retrospective and research purposes.

New Prints from the Bang Bang Film Productions

Apart from celluloid copies of feature films printed from the negatives for public release, films are also duplicated onto video tapes for sale. This is also one source of the Film Archive's collection of film titles from the Hong Kong film industry. The Bang Bang Film Productions was known as a pioneer in film production in Hong Kong in the 70s and 80s. About 18 years ago, the Pearl City Video Limited bought over the video distribution rights of the Bang Bang, and although the rights have lapsed since then, Pearl City still possesses the prints of Bang Bang films in its warehouse. Pearl City handed over the prints to the Hong Kong Film Archive for safekeeping as the company relocated its warehouse at the end of last year. The prints include the following Bang Bang titles: *The Servant* (1979, directed by Ronny Yu and Philip Chan), *The Way to Hell* (1980, directed by Lee Chiu), *Do-Re-Me* (1980, directed by Leung Kar-shu) and *Charlie's Bubble* (1981, directed by Philip Chan). Apart from these, there are also several 35mm prints from other production companies. Although Bang Bang is now a defunct company and its founder or responsible person can no longer be located, the Film Archive is going to investigate the whereabouts of the prints' owners and try to clear the problem of rights.

Actor Di Long's Surprise Visit to the Archive

It was on the 8th of December 1999 that the actor Di Long suddenly showed up at the acquisition section of the Hong Kong Film Archive, holding a copy of our Newsletter and other goodies in his hand. Di Long had come to the Archive to donate three photographic prints (50cm in width and 40cm in length). These pictures are group photos of cast and crew who worked on the Li Hanxiang / Shaw Brothers diptych *The Empress Dowager* and *The Last Tempest*, released in 1975, which starred Di Long as the Emperor Guangxu.

Di Long had accepted to be a subject in the Archive's Oral History Project in March last year, and since then had regularly received copies of our Newsletter. He said: "I read about Yonfan donating prints of his productions to the Archive, and about critic Sek Kei saying that they were very important pictures, and so I come to donate these photographs taken during the making of *The Empress Dowager* and *The Last Tempest* for preservation and research purposes."

MP and GI Special Publications and Film Brochures

Mr Tau Hon-fun, former production officer of the Cantonese pictures division of the Motion Picture & General Investment Co Ltd in the 50s and 60s, had collected scripts, budget ledgers, shot breakdown scripts, film brochures of MP and GI-produced Mandarin and Cantonese movies, and the company's organ *International Screen*, to the Hong Kong Film Archive; he even delivered them personally. Among the most precious of his collections are special issues of film brochures for some of the most well-known MP and GI films: *Mambo Girl* (1957), *Our Sister Hedy* (1957), *Calendar Girl* (1959), etc. Mr Tau said, "I am very happy that these materials may be preserved for all time and that people can find a use for them."

Collections of Important Film Publications

Apart from finding, restoring and preserving old prints of feature films and other historical materials connected with these films, the Film Archive is committed to liaising with other film organisations in order to keep record on current film events. The Archive recently received the collections of film publications put out by two organisations: the Hong Kong Film Awards Association and the Hong Kong Film Critics Society.

To all the above-mentioned donors, the Film Archive extends its sincere thanks.



The 72 Martyrs of Canton



The Servant



Do-Re-Me



Li Hanxiang (front row middle) and Di Long (2nd row middle) with the crew.



Pocketful of Happy Returns -- Research Tour in Australia and New Zealand

In November, I was sent on training visit to a total of six organizations in New Zealand and Australia. There were two main objectives of my visit, firstly, to familiarise myself with the live implementation of "HORIZON", the computerised information system adopted by the Hong Kong Film Archive; and secondly, to take reference from the setting, layout, functions, services, and daily operation of film libraries as well as other libraries.

I have visited New Zealand's University of Canterbury Library in Christchurch, the Australian Film Television and Radio School Jerzy Toeplitz Library (AFTRS) in Sydney as well as the City of Sydney Library, which is using the Chinese-English version of "HORIZON" to maintain the catalogue of its Chinese collections. The systems librarians in these institutions explained to me in detail the functional and technical operations of "HORIZON" in the aspects of cataloguing, acquisition, serials, Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) and Web-based Public Access Catalogue (Webpac).

As for my second objective, I was introduced to the library services and facilities provided by the New Zealand Film Archive (NZFA) in Wellington, Screensound Australia (formerly known as National Film & Sound Archive Australia) in Canberra, and AFTRS in Sydney. NZFA and Screensound both operate effectively with well-conditioned storage facilities, conservation expertise, systematic acquisitions and efficient dissemination of film information. The layout and settings of the libraries, such as the one in AFTRS, provide a comfortable and user-friendly environment for film researchers and students.

The National Library of New Zealand in Wellington is a very impressive research library housing a large manuscript collection of precious heritage and cultural value of the country, with well-equipped conservation facilities, and a huge on-line image collection. Researchers will benefit from their rich audio-tape and script collections of Oral History with professionals and celebrities of different schools of knowledge. Experienced and professional librarians are ready to assist users in information retrieval.

The hospitality extended to me by staff of all these institutions was truly sincere. Also, it is very encouraging to find out that the Hong Kong Film Archive's endeavours to preserve our film heritage has attained a very good image overseas. For instance, our bilingual publications and oral history recordings on film personalities were much appreciated. As remarked by Mr Ray Edmondson, Deputy Director of Screensound Australia, the concerted efforts made by the staff of the Hong Kong Film Archive were instrumental in establishing its good relationships with international archives. For me, it was a very fruitful journey.

(Text: Monique Shiu, Assistant Librarian, Hong Kong Film Archive).



Monique Shiu (1st right) and the librarians of AFTRS



New Zealand Film Archive

Films of Action

by Zhang Che

A still photograph may be converted to a slide, and when slides "move", a moving picture is created. An animated feature is termed, in Chinese, as donghua, which means "pictures that move." A film is nothing more than live pictures that move, performed by people.

In the beginning, film was documentary. There was no story or plot. Then, there was silent film, with no dialogue or sound. That is why a film can have no story and no plot, and it can have no dialogue and sound and is still classified as film. Who will deny that the silent films of Charles Chaplin are films? However, if a film does not move, then it is not a film - it is a still photograph.

Movement is the prerequisite of film and is its most essential element. Thus, the "sense of movement" is important to a film. It is the chief ingredient of the "film sense." Chaplin's films have become classics because they possess the comedian sense of movement and a sense of dance. Charles was originally a dancer.

The fiction film has its source from drama. Cinema transcended theatre to become the main carrier of drama. That is because cinema was not as limited as theatre, and it had greater scope to move space.

In 1985, I made my first film in China. Before me, key Hong Kong directors who had gone to China to make films included Li Hanxiang. In the Mainland, it was customary to set up all the shots beforehand and then proceed to shoot them according to the intercutting principle. We observed this custom. Thus, we need to rearrange the shots through editing. We also brought in the usage of hand-held cameras. The later influence on Hong Kong directors like Wong Kar-wai was obvious. I was constantly asked this question: "Mainland directors put greater importance on visual composition, what do you think?"

I reply: "Visual composition is important but that belongs to the static image. Film is not like painting. It is movement. You should finish a composition and then break it up, go on to the next composition and break that up. As with dissonance and resolution in music, similarly you create a sense of rhythm from combining stasis and movement." After Li Hanxiang and myself, excellent Hong Kong action directors such as Ching Siu-tung went to China to make films. Ching made *A Terra-Cotta Warrior* (1990), starring Zhang Yimou. As more and more Hong Kong and western films get to be shown in China, they will have an impact on the techniques of Chinese directors.

A film is live pictures that move, performed by people. Movement is the key ingredient. This is true of all types of genres and isn't confined to only action pictures. In fact, the art of cinema with its advance in technology has made it an independent artistic form, separate from the stage. It has strengthened the sense of movement. When a melodrama lacks a sense of movement, it becomes a "dull art." The same with comedy. The attribute that makes classics of Chaplin's comedies and makes a success of Stephen Chiau's comedies is that of movement, fresh and eternal.

This is true of all cinema, whether western, Hong Kong, or action film. Action is the language of the world, one which is understood by all peoples. Action breaks through language and regional barriers. Because of this, Hong Kong's action films have influenced Southeast Asia, and then Europe and America. They have penetrated Hollywood itself. In terms of size, population and resources, Hong Kong by rights would have found it impossible to occupy any space in the international film market. Today, it is the action pictures of Hong Kong that manage to do so.

Naturally, the affairs of the world do not unfold in a straight line. They unfold in a circuitous and roundabout way, with alternating highs and lows. The action picture unfolds in the same way. If the climaxes are overdone, you end up with a low tide. It is necessary to come up with new-fangled things at any moment for the sake of change. But an action picture will not disappear because it conforms to the most essential demands of cinema itself.

Hollywood is the most prosperous cinema in the world because it has a large domestic market and a huge share of the international market. Its energy is inexhaustible and it is seemingly immortal, being able to absorb new life forces at every turn. When Hollywood makes too many westerns, it gives place to variations such as the Italian style "Spaghetti Western." Following the advance of technology and the development of computers, science fiction has encroached into the field of the action picture. Of late, Hong Kong's martial arts directors and their techniques have been absorbed into Hollywood. Hong Kong has lost many of its talents to Hollywood: Jackie Chan, John Woo, Jet Li, Stanley Tong, Sammo Hung, etc. As talent continues to become scarce in Hong Kong, a fault line will develop. This is a little worrying.

King Hu has already passed on, and I am now in my twilight years. John Woo wrote to me from America, saying "You should write something to leave behind to those coming after you." His words aren't bad, but in view of my current circumstances in Hong Kong, it is not without difficulties.



A Terra - Cotta Warrior was shot in the Mainland.

Zhang Che, film director and screenplay. Alongside with King Hu, the two pioneered the "new style" martial arts pictures in the 60s, making stars of Wang Yu, David Chiang, Di Long, etc. He has recently retired, spending his time writing..