A Prelude to the *Hong Kong Filmography Vol IV*

The *Hong Kong Filmography* is a chronicle of the history of Hong Kong cinema. The first volume was published in 1997, well before the Archive's official opening in 2001. What possibilities does the upcoming volume, Volume IV, open up? I was involved in the write-ups of Vol I, and in the heat of editing the fourth volume, I am pondering on the direction this publication should take in the future. Our work relies heavily on robust 'mass transportation systems'(ie, research files and HORIZON, our on-line enquiry system) available at the Archive, which allow us to travel back and forth in the 1950s.

This issue covers the latest of the 'Oral History Project' conducted by our Research Team (pp 3-5), and reviews of our recent publications (pp 6-9). They are reflections of the Archive's endeavour in research and publications. The interview with Patsy Kar Ling, a glamorous star in the 1950s and 1960s, prompted associations with my experience of editing Vol IV, to be published in around August. These are just but prelude to the chronicle of the era. More on this in our next issue...

Kar Ling and Tse Yin at Kong Ngee

Singapore's Kong Ngee set up its Hong Kong branch in 1955 (and closed shop in 1968) to produce Cantonese films. Under director-screenwriter Chun Kim's leadership, the company broke fresh ground and distinguished themselves from the two Singaporean giants MP & GI and Shaws, and traditionalists such as The Union and Sun Luen of the Cantonese camp.

Patrick Tse Yin, Kong Ngee's trademark, posing with then on and off the set partner Patsy Kar Ling. (Stills on cover taken from *Tragedy of Love*, 1959 and *The Heart-Stealer*, 1958.)

Southeast Asia was a major market for Hong Kong films, and there was no shortage of films with Asian settings, including the productions by Kong Ngee. *The Whispering Palms* (1957, stills above) deals with pragmatic issues (setting up schools for overseas Chinese) and the ideals, spiced up with travelogue-like shots. [clkwok@lcsd.gov.hk]

Donna Chu

Patsy Kar Ling in Bangkok

We often come across Carina Kar-ling, family name Lau, in showbiz news. Then there's another Kar-ling, Valerie, family name Chow, a law-graduate-turned-actress. For those devoted film fans of yesteryears, we couldn't have missed out yet another Kar Ling, now residing in Bangkok.

I flied over to Bangkok with friends from the Film Archive over the Chinese New Year. The truth is, Bangkok pales beside other sunny resorts in the kingdom, sharing so many similarities with Hong Kong. The only thing that drew us there was Patsy Kar Ling.

The place was the Regent Hotel, Bangkok. Our crew of four was waiting quietly in the lobby. And lingering in our minds were images of the star in the numerous films she posed, so tenderly, with Patrick Tse Yin. Of course, Patsy Kar Ling has retired from the silver screen for over thirty years now, but our memories of her were frozen by magical camera work, and even distorted by it - the inseparable couple Patrick Tse Yin and Patsy Kar Ling. No question about it.

But in real life, the couple Burin Wongsanguan and Patsy Kar Ling have been blessed by true love and romance promised not by the deluding silver screen. Dressed in claret attire, Patsy Kar Ling made her entrance, her arms in her husband's. It was not difficult to recognise the star. Her charm doesn't fade with time, but glitters alongside Mr Wongsanguan, a well-established architect and celebrity in Thailand. A picture of the couple appears on the cover of *Bangkok Timeout* just out, featuring their love story in its Valentine's Day special.

In that laid-back afternoon, Patsy Kar Ling shared with us small but hearty talk. And we learned Ho is her family name. Yet, it matters little, as in many of her fans' hearts, there is only one Kar Ling, be her in Hong Kong or in her second home, Bangkok.

Kong Ngee boosted their 'Three Movie Queens' in hot starlets Nam Hung, Patsy Kar Ling and Kong Suet. Kar Ling said: Fame and fortune don't impress Ah Mei (Nam Hung); I myself am laid-back, and Kong Suet regards me as a big sister. We won't fight.

Patsy Kar Ling and Patrick Tse Yin on Kong Ngee

Patsy Kar Ling: Kong Ngee's films are serious productions, each demanding a filming schedule of at least three weeks. We never rushed to produce seven-day quickies. When we got the script, we immediately knew whose turn it was among us three (ie Kar Ling, Nam Hung and Kong Suet). My typical role is the fallen woman, or a rich heiress...Talking about Kong Ngee's left-wing background, I remember there was a time I got arrested and cross-examined by the police in Bangkok for no reasons. Mr (Burin) Wongsanguan's father bailed me out. It was a scary experience. Turns out it had to do with Chun Kim (boss at Kong Ngee) and Chen Wen's connections with the leftists. (HKFA Oral History Project interview, 16th February 2002)

Patrick Tse Yin: My fourteen years at Kong Ngee was an enjoyable time. I'd played almost every character type, but mostly rich heirs and playboys. We followed the line of real life, of the common people, and would allow no nonsense in our films; comedies or police dramas, we were always realistic in our portrayal. ...We'd been shooting B&W films at Kong Ngee, then the film industry shifted to make colour films which required a bigger budget. Because Kong Ngee was reluctant to invest, we were left out of the race... (HKFA Oral History Project interview, 26th April 2000)

The couple Pasty Kar Ling and Burin Wongsanguan with Archive staff in Bangkok. Back row from left: Donna Chu, Priscilla Chan, Varlerie Wong and Angel Shing.

Wong Wai-yat in Guangzhou

Director Wong Wai-yat had just celebrated his 90th birthday when we conducted an interview with him in Guangzhou in mid-March. Well-acquainted with many key figures of the early Chinese cinema such as Zhao Dan, Nie Er, Yang Hansheng, Shi Dongshan, and Choi Cho-sang, director Wong is himself a living proof of this glorious page of history.

The saga of director Wong is equally theatrical, demanding an interview which spanned two days amounting to five hours of video recording. While we treasure the precious first-hand information Wong provided us with, we slowly felt unease to have Wong rising to the challenge of this marathon meeting. Fortunately, our story-teller was going from strength to strength throughout the interview. His vivid memories are evident in his graphic accounts of such classics as *Dawn Must Come* (1950) and *The House of 72 Tenants* (1963). His recollections of his senior Choi Cho-sang, on the other hand, replenish the gaps left by dissipated material and help shaping the profile of this memento episode.

Wong Wai-yat: After the release of *Dawn Must Come*, renowned director Fei Mu published an article in *Wen*

Wei Po commenting, '(The film) amalgamates drama with the actors, rendering the director invisible to the audience....' I was pleased with the remarks, overjoyed for having achieved my own goal!

Dawn Must Come (1950) is regarded as a milestone in Cantonese cinema. It was one of the finest works of dialect films clearly not outshore by mainstream Mandarin films. Picture shows Cheung Ying as Young aster Kwai and Wong Sun as Ngau's wife.

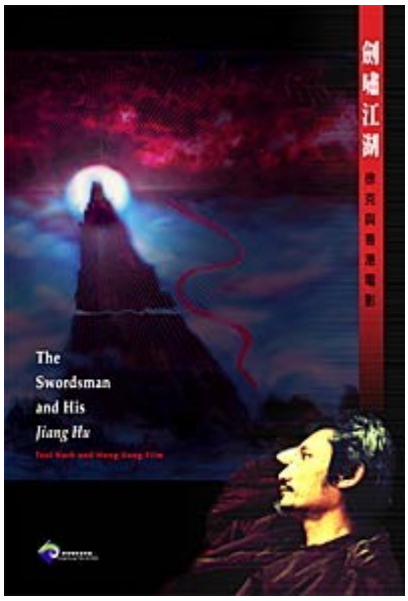
Postscript: May I take this opportunity to thank Patrick Tse Yin for arranging our interview with Patsy Kar Ling; Chu Hung for her tireless liaison work and staff at Pearl River Film Studio for assisting in the filming.[•]

Donna Chu is a freelance research writer.

The Swordsman and His *Jiang Hu*: Thoughts on the World of Tsui Hark

David Bordwell

In a film industry where most directors come across as refreshingly down-to-earth, Tsui Hark stands out by his sheer flamboyance. Wild-eyed, outrageously energetic, full of visionary prophecies, Tsui would be a remarkable figure in any national cinema. The Swordsman and His Jiang Hu is among many things a portrait of a filmmaker on fire.



Edited by Sam Ho and Ho Wai-leng. Priced at HK$100.

The book consists of astute critical commentaries (by Li Cheuk-to, Sek Kei, Cindy S C Chan, and Po Fung) and, bulking much larger, in-depth interviews with Tsui's creative associates. The Oral History project of the Hong Kong Film Archive, by means of Sam Ho's careful editing and translation, proves its value in these fascinating memoirs, though not always flattering, of working with the director. One comes away comparing Tsui to Steve Jobs, the man who mesmerises his team members, inviting them into his reality-distortion field and demanding that they redo everything one more time.

Most broadly, this densely informative and lavishly illustrated book helps us rethink Tsui Hark's place in local film history. When the Hong Kong New Wave emerged, young cinemas in all parts of the world had ceased to be truly innovative. By then a new cinema usually announced not a revolution in theme or technique but the arrival of a new generation. So it was, it seems to me, with the Hong Kong New Wave.

The New Wavers, born between 1946 and 1960, were of the same generation as important emerging studio-trained directors (Jackie Chan, Yuen Woo-ping, Corey Yuen Kwei, Sammo Hung, Johnnie To). While the latter became the most popular mainstream entertainers of the 1980s and 1990s, the New Wave group brought prestige cinema to Hong Kong: mostly serious, thoughtful psychological dramas and socio-historical commentary.

If we tentatively distinguish, say, the arthouse baby-boomers (eg, Allen Fong, Clara Law) from the mainstream baby-boomers (Jackie Chan, Corey Yuen Kwei, *et al*); and if we allow that some directors (notably Ann Hui) shift back and forth over the boundary line, where do we situate Tsui Hark? The Swordsman volume suggests that Tsui was by temperament always closer to mainstream entertainment than were more serious New Wavers. Like John Woo, he crossed over from the start.

For local critics, *All the Wrong Clues* (1981) and *Aces Go Places III - Our Man from Bond Street* (1984), his entry in the Cinema City franchise, signalled his capitulation to the mass market. Yet already *The Gold Dagger Romance* (1978), his rapid-fire *wuxia* TV series set the tone and pace for his later action pieces. Significantly, he didn't produce a piece of local realism like Ann Hui's RTHK series *Below the Lion Rock*. Tsui's first feature, the supernatural *wuxia pian Butterfly Murders* (1979) parallels Johnnie To's debut *The Enigmatic Case* (1980): both are formally fresh treatments of a high-profile genre. Even Tsui's most obviously 'New Wave' effort, *Dangerous Encounters - First Kind* (1980), has a sensationalistic side rare in the purer art-house strain.

In short, we may now see Tsui as a studio-based filmmaker from the start, exploring a variety of options until *Our Man from Bond Street* found him his niche. He has said on many occasions that the New Wave had no guiding philosophy and it could not satisfy average audiences (in this volume, p 178). It seems that Tsui always wanted to reach the masses, and sought to do it through unbridled imagination.

That imagination wanted to break the mould, chiefly through a new fusion of East and West. Among all directors of his generation, he was most intent on retooling Chinese subjects and Hong Kong genres in ways which ran parallel to the efforts of the American movie brats. He seems to have had a taste for the low-budget splatterfests of Sam Raimi and Tobe Hooper (to which *We're Going to Eat You*, 1980, evidently owes a great deal), but he was most impressed with the special-effects extravaganzas of the late 1970s. Often compared with Steven Spielberg, Tsui emerges from this volume as even more like George Lucas. The most obvious connection is Tsui's effort to craft a personal mythology from Chinese

legend and martial-arts fiction, recasting it along sword-and-sorcery lines. *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983) emerged as Hong Kong's answer to Star Wars, and one collaborator calls *The Legend of Zu* (2001) a response to *Episode 1: The Phantom Menace* (1999), with Tsui hoping to underscore story differences between East and West (p 209). Like Lucas, Tsui sets himself special-effects problems and demands his crew to solve them. Add to this the overriding importance of comic books in his personal aesthetic. Like Lucas, as a youth he drew comics. He has continued to collect them and occasionally designed some himself (eg, *Red Snow*). Comics fed not only *Zu* and *The Wicked City* (1992), but also the grotesque look of many of Film Workshop's action pictures.

A self-portrait, Tsui Hark style.

Tsui has always been alert for ways in which local concerns could be repackaged with a new gloss. He updated the Wong Fei-hung saga and the wuxia pian, created polished romantic fantasy from *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987) to *The Lovers* (1994), and gave comedy and the historical action picture a new sparkle in *Shanghai Blues* (1984) and *Peking Opera Blues* (1986). What I had not noticed, until this book brought it to light, was all the ways in which his punchy visual design springs from his passion for special effects and cartoon art. His movies have a strikingly abstract look, favouring slashes of brilliant colours and overripe costumes. (A pity that *Peking Opera Blues* could not find room for a scene showing Brigitte Lin in the wild outfit she models on p 42.) Tsui's fondness for the wide-angle lens gives even ordinary dialogue scenes a comic-book distortion. Who else would embellish the final cooking duel in *The Chinese Feast* (1995) with steep crane shots? Who else would give *The Blade* (1995) - surely one of the great Hong Kong films of the decade - such a ragged, scorched look? Who else would include in *Time and Tide* (2000) a postcard which comes to life and a rappelling sequence that bounces the viewer, Spiderman-fashion, across

the surface of an apartment block?

Neither a realist nor an overt social critic, he has been primarily, even in the tabloid steaminess of *Dangerous Encounters*, a fantasist. In an age when Asian cinema seems to be celebrating stasis for its own sake and Hollywood (eg, *Traffic*, 2000) takes spasmodic nervousness for energy, Tsui has not forsaken his belief that cinema can create its own reality-distortion field, one which makes life splendidly vibrant. Truly, this swordsman has created his own dizzying and dazzling *jiang hu*. [•]

David Bordwell is Jacques Ledoux Professor of Film Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (2000) is his most recent book on contemporary Hong Kong cinema.

New Publication

My Cathay Story

Grace Ng

There once was a faded calendar hanging on the wall of our old sitting-room. Replacing its original date-telling function was the limited space it allowed for my mother to jot down phone numbers, of groceries and laundries in the neighbourhood, and of our many relatives. In the middle of the calendar is a colour portrait of a glamorous beauty. Her garish image is heightened by her long hair and distinctive features. They called her Julie Yeh Feng, and talked enthusiastically of her marriages to two actors. That was also the first time I heard of a film company called Motion Picture & General Investment Co Ltd (MP & GI; its parent company being Singapore's Cathay Organisation). My knowledge of the company and its galaxy of stars was further enriched by subsequent visits to my relatives, digging into piles of old movie magazines.

It wasn't until the Hong Kong International Film Festival in 1993 I watched on the big screen the glamorous Yeh Feng and other MP & GI stars. And the regret immediately sank in. Not only had I missed out on a truly spectacular era, the intricate story had too become obsolete with the passage of time. Just when I thought the 'Cathay Story' would end on a same disappointing note, life's delightful surprises greeted me on the first day of my work at the Hong Kong Film Archive. My first assignment was none other than rendering translation for *The Cathay Story*. My connection with Cathay and its films as a mere audience had taken a detour. I was involved in the very process of Cathay reinventing itself in the course of history!

Edited by Wong Ain-ling. Priced at HK$130.

The Cathay Story kicks off with the genesis of the company, the story of its creator Loke Wan Tho, and ends with a light-hearted anecdote written by film critic Sek Kei on his Cathay days as an assistant at the art department. In between are chapters devoted to exploring the intricate relationship between Cathay and the Hong Kong film industry, examinations of the operation of the Cathay studio, scholastic studies from the socio-cultural point of view, and the philosophies behind MP & GI's mixed culture operation. Film veterans playing key roles in creating the Cathay myth have offered memoirs on their Cathay days, from which we can catch a glimpse of a most important slice of Hong Kong film history. However short-lived it might be, the myth Cathay created is one close to our hearts and time. The Cathay story might have ended on a saddening note, yet an overtone of vitality persisted throughout, and the evergreen story embraces the aspiration and pursuits of a new era and lifestyle that never fail to withstand the testing of time.

My Cathay experience is a long and enduring one, beginning from a mere fading portrait, to dazzling filmic images, to personally getting involved in a tribute to the company some fifty years later. Many out there may share a similar journey. And so the never-ending Cathay story continues. [•]

Grace Ng, film critic, translator, and project researcher of HKFA.

Wondering What Happened to Those Films

Wong Ain-ling

Napping and drifting off are 'only human' during the three-day packed schedule of the 58th FIAF Congress. Every now and then, the participants are treated with tear-jerkers based on real-life stories. The listeners are naturally moved, unless... unless those who don't love films at all.

Story One: Even though Indonesia has its own film council, resources are so scarce that they can't even foot the electricity bill (perhaps there are other complex reasons unspoken). Rolls and rolls of film are piling up inside the film vaults without temperature and humidity regulations of any kind. To quote from Mr Ray Edmondson, President of South East Asia/Pacific AudioVisual Archive Association (SEAPAVAA), 'Indonesian classics are literally melting.' Back in 1990 when I was the programmer of the Hong Kong International Film Festival, we organised a programme on three Asian actresses __ Shangguan Yunzhu of China, Hara Setsuko of Japan and Tuti Indra Malaon of Indonesia. In preparation of the event, I flew over to Jakarta to watch a number of Indonesian classics at the National Film Council, and spent a wonderful evening in the green-shaded back yard of the house of Teguh Karya, the Indonesian film master. Tuti Indra Malaon was his favourite actress. Five of their collaborated works were selected for screening at the event. Wondering what happened to the films that once captured our hearts.

Story Two: Mr Peter Scarlet, Director of La Cinematheque Francaise, has recently made the trip of a lifetime. His destination was the war-torn Afghanistan. Images of any forms were prohibited under the Taliban regime, and films naturally bear the brunt of terrorist sanctions. It is inconceivable that some people would risk their lives to store away film copies and negatives (many of which are priceless documentaries). Though they are deprived of cold storage vaults and modern technologies, they have achieved the very function of a film archive. The motto of Henri Langlois, founding father of La Cinematheque Francaise sums it up well: To save and to show films; aspired by the same spirit, Mr Scarlet personally brought to the schools in Kabul videos containing silent films of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. From the expressions on the children's faces, we witnessed the power of compelling moving images, and the breadth of mind of such visionaries as Langlois and his followers.

Inevitably, there are differences impossible to resolve. While under-privileged nations like Indonesia and Afghanistan are struggling to provide bread and butter to their people, the more 'advanced' nations are venturing into the 'philosophical' territory. At the 'Second Century Forum' held on the last day, renowned archivist David Francis envisaged issues regarding the disposal of filmic materials in the future from the perspective of a large-scaled film archive. With technological advances, films in twenty years?time will probably not be what they are now. In other words, films of today will become art pieces, like sculptures and paintings in museums. By that time, should we insist on providing the audience with a truly 'cinematic experience', or are we to adapt to a digital environment? If our choice is the former, our concern today should be of allocating resources to speed up training on film conservation techniques, and the setting up of an affiliated processing laboratory; a film archive by then will be the sole body responsible for passing on the knowledge of film technology. If our choice is the latter, we'll have to accept two facts: we must forever catch up with the ever-advancing technologies; and secondly, our future generations may never live to savour an 'authentic' cinematic experience.

Paolo Cherchi Usai of George Eastman House deduced in the same vein and cried out 'Film is Dead!'. If film production comes to a halt, we can't casually say 'So it's damaged? Don't worry. We can always develop another copy.' __ because there simply can't be another copy. Of course, we can infinitely reproduce a film in DVD or other formats, but they remain as mere copies, and pale beside the original work. Viewing films (as they are) will be strictly an elitist activity as a film archive can only selectively loan out film copies, or that films will be reserved strictly for internal screenings. Regular, large-scaled screenings will be a fargone luxury.

The Hong Kong Film Archive are facing problems represented by the two spheres of the film world. While enjoying the recognition from the public since its inauguration more than a year ago, we remain alert to the risks posing to us. Having returned from Seoul, I am laden with new queries on top of old unresolved ones. And I think to myself it might be a good start. [•]

Angela Tong (1st right) and Wong Ain-ling (1st left) of the HKFA with Chen Jingliang, Director of the China

Film Archive.

(From left) Lu Feii (National Chengchi University,Taiwan), Wong Ain-ling, Liu Dong (China Film Archive) and Kim Hong-joon (Puchon International Fantastic Film Festival).

Wong Ain-ling is the Research Officer of HKFA, having worked previously as programmer of the Hong Kong International Film Festival (1990-96). She is the author of *Xi Yuan* (a collection of articles on film, 2000).

HKFA Computerisation

In attendance: Angela Tong (Head, HKFA), Isaac Leung (Manager, IT Systems, HKFA); Pierre, Po Fung (Film Critics).
Collated by Po Fung

From left: Angela Tong, Pierre, Po Fung, Isaac Leung

Many members of the public are aware of the Archive's primary goal to preserve our film heritage. As users of its public services, we are naturally concerned with the way IT systems are employed to enhance the effectiveness of information retrieval. Can you tell us about the computerisation project being carried out?

Tong: Let's begin with its background. The Archive, with its permanent building installed just over a year ago, is a relatively young body compared with its overseas counterparts. That gives us the edge to exploit the latest IT technologies. We offer on-line information on most of our collection together with other film-related data, all classified and sorted. It enables overseas researchers, for example, to conduct background research on the Internet before coming to Hong Kong.

Leung: When first designing the system, there was no IT systems in the market specifically designed for processing filmic materials. We opted for HORIZON, essentially a library system. Its advantage lies in the capacity to process voluminous materials, such as the entire library collection. But customisation is mandatory when applying the system to the treatment of films. For example, we take a film instead of an item as a unit. Different concepts mean alterations and new set-ups to the system.

In addition to listing information on a film such as cast and crew, users can view on HORIZON its related materials held in the Archive collection, be they a film brochure, a handbill or other audio-visual materials. Our data is derived from widely different sources, sometimes from the film prints themselves. Discrepancies between primary sources usually lead to interesting discoveries.

We've come to learn supporting roles some major stars had played prior to their claim of fame, or other behind-the-scene roles they had engaged in. The entire process involves synchronising of names and tedious verification of primary sources. Inputting data into the IT system is not unlike research and editorial work! At the same time, we work closely with other sections, to constantly improve our system, to facilitate an even more user-friendly retrieval method and to infinitely correct erroneous information in our database. We welcome feedbacks from our colleagues and the public to help perfecting the system.

Po: What is your treatment to inconsistent data?

Leung: For data of dubious nature, we choose to ignore them. We choose not to conclude and judge but to add remarks for reference.

Pierre: Will you be working on collating information on foreign films released in the territory?

Tong: Our acquisitions are very much Hong Kong-based. We may consider compiling an index of foreign films released in Hong Kong and their Chinese titles in the future. Our focus at present is on Hong Kong films.

Pierre: Box office records are rather inaccessible. Are they available at the Archive?

Tong: We have subscription to *Box Office Record Report* published by the Hong Kong, Kowloon, and New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association (MPIA). They are on display for reference at our Resource Centre.

Leung: We have on hand box office records from the 1980s onwards, and we'll incorporate them into our system as soon as possible. WebPAC 1.3 for HORIZON has been launched a while ago but certain technical drawbacks mean conducting a search on the Internet is by far a less effective means compared to one made at the Archive. Indeed we hesitated to launch it on the Internet at its rather premature stage, but the overwhelming demand from the public made it mandatory for us to launch a pilot.

Tong: At last, we must stress that the Archive should play the role of a facilitator, not a solution provider. We are pleased to offer the paths to finding the answers but the rest must be undertaken by researchers and scholars themselves. [•]

Po Fung, film critic and the President of Hong Kong Film Critics Society. He is also a columnist for the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* and Chinese editor of *A Century of Chinese Cinema: Look Back in Glory* (2001).

If you have comments or enquiries about our computerisation project, please write to us at hkfaweb@lcsd.gov.hk.

EVENTS

Back to Dreamland

The evening on 4th April was a rare occasion for those who love MP & GI films to meet with its stars to relish the glorious days of the movie empire. Though many of its stars have bid farewell to the audience, the sense of nostalgic melancholy had to give way to the glamour ushered in by Kelly Lai Chen, dubbed 'Melancholic Leading Man', 'Girl with a Thousand Faces' Wang Lai, Hilda Chou Hsuan, the 'Fox Siren' Pai Ping and behind-the-scene singing talents Tsin Ting and Winnie Wei.

The Masters of Ceremony Mr Joe Chan and Ms Lee Mer's witty conversations lifted the curtain on the screening of a video comprising MP & GI classic film clips and tunes. It was followed by the performance of two popular Mandarin song numbers by members of the music oldies fan club. It was truly a celebration of nostalgia. The evening ends on a light-hearted note, with Joe Chan taking the stage to perform his comic version of 'Too Happy for Words'.

Guests attending *An Evening Back to Dreamland*. (Front row from left) Tau Hon-fun, Lai Chen, Lan Tianhong, Michael Lai, Lau Siu-ming and Chan Fung-chi; (back row from left) Wong Nguk-chung, Tsin Ting, Wang Lai, Pai Ping, Chou Hsuan, Qiu Ping, Chin Tsi-ang and Winnie Wei.

Stars of MP & GI/Cathay, Yeh Feng, Wang Lai, Pai Ping, Semon Liu and Lai Chen (from left), paying a visit to the Archive on 25th March to see the *Back to Dreamland* exhibition.

International Museum Day

Held for the second year running, the International Museum Day that ran from 17th to 19th of May found even wider popularity with the crowd, their enthusiasm clearly not dampened by the poor weather. This year, 'Acquisition' was chosen as our main theme, introducing to the public the different channels of acquisition as well as arrangement and verification of collected film materials. A seminar was held at the Archive cinema on 18th May with a focus on our acquisition endeavours, storage facilities, as well as the public services provided by our Resource Centre. [•]

Summary of The Acquisition, Conservation and Access of HK Film Materials seminar.

(From left) Monique Shiu, Edward Tse and Mable Ho on film acquisition and preservation.

Yonfan: Promenade in the Garden

In a materialistic world such as Hong Kong, Yonfan is a breath of fresh air with his endeavour in cinematic aesthetics. While the Hong Kong cinema has undergone the anxiety over 1997, the uprising of 'heroes' movies, the new genres of 'nonsense comedies' and the 'young and dangerous', Yonfan remains faithful to his signature aesthetic portrayals.

Since 1999, Yonfan has bestowed on the Archive film prints and stills of his directorial works. Yonfan: Promenade in the Garden, comprising a special presentation ceremony and the screening of Peony Pavilion held on 14th March was a token of appreciation to the director. It was also an opportune occasion to convey to the public the Archive's mission to preserve our cultural heritage.

Director Yonfan said in his interview: 'If a creator has treated every piece of his creation seriously, that creative piece will naturally be a masterpiece. If one fails to preserve it, one may as well entrust it to the good care of an organisation.' These sentiments are undoubtedly shared by other donors alike. Thank you all for your trust in the Archive. (Text: Yam Yim-lan) [•]


The theme of unforgettable love is embraced by Yonfan and is evident throughout his debut *A Certain Romance* (1984) to his latest *Peony Pavilion* (2001).

(From right) Yonfan mingling with guests Kenneth Tsang and wife Chiao Chiao, Linda Wong and husband.

Donors (2 - 5.2002)

China Arts (F.E.) Video Production Co.

Mandarin Films Holding Ltd.

PCCW

Television Broadcasts Limited

Mr & Mrs Bray

Ms Chan Kwan-yee

Mr Chan Chap-hung

Ms Shandi Cheung

Mr Peter Dunn

Ms Audrey Eu

Ms Ip Lai-ngan

Mr Lai Shek

Ms Lai Suk-chun

Ms Alice Lam

Mr Louis Liu

Ms Lee Mei-yin Maisie

Ms Gloria Leung

Ms Li Yizhuang

Mr Lo Kam-wah

Ms Miyazawa Rie

Ms Shing On-ki Angel

Ms Sit Ngan-sin

Mr Lot K.K. Sze

Mr Robert Tang

Ms Tse Mo-chong

Ms Joey Wang

Ms Phoebe Wong

Mr Wong Tim

Mrs Audrey Yan

Ms Yeung Wai-chun

Mr Yonfan

Mr Zhou Chengren

Summaries of HKFA Seminars

MP & GI Symposium

Jointly presented by the Centre for Humanities Research of Lingnan University and the Hong Kong Film Archive

Session 1: 'MP &GI and the Hong Kong Film Industry'

Date: 8th April, 2002

Time: 10.00 a.m. - 12.00 noon

Venue: Paul S Lam Conference Centre, Lingnan University

Host: Professor Kueh Yak-yeow (Lingnan University, Chair of Institute of Humanities & Social Sciences)

Speakers: Dr Stephanie Chung Po-yin (Department of Cinema and Television, Hong Kong Baptist University,) Absent, her paper was delivered by Mr Andy Liu Chi-keung
Mr Yu Mo-wan (Hong Kong film historian)
Dr Yeh Yueh-yu (Department of Cinema and Television, Hong Kong Baptist University) Absent, her paper was delivered by Dr Ng Chun-bong

Respondent: Dr Ng Chun-bong (Department of Cinema and Television, Hong Kong Baptist University)

(From left) Mr Andy Liu, Professor Kueh Yak-yeow and Mr Yu Mo-wan.

Stephanie Chung Po-yin: 'Loke Wan Tho and MP & GI'

Traditionally, distribution and exhibition are the two most competitive arenas in the movie business. Hollywood studios established a system of 'vertical integration', which combined production, distribution and exhibition (or cinema circuits). MP & GI transplanted this ownership style to Asia in 1950s, the issues arose are profound indication of its time.

The Chairman of Cathay Organisation, Mr Loke Wan Tho, was born in 1915 in Kuala Lumpur. He was educated in Switzerland and the United Kingdom. He returned to Singapore to take over the family business in 1940. Loke's interests

lied in literature and arts, history and movies, etc. Both his tastes and styles were westernised. It was due to his love for films that MP & GI was founded. In 1951, Mr Loke established the International Film Distribution Agency in Singapore, focusing on film distributions. In 1953, the Cathay Organisation established a subsidiary, the International Films Distributing Agency in Hong Kong. At the helm was Mr Albert Odell, a Jew of British nationality. Odell acquired the films' rights for screening in Singapore and Malaysia's theatres. Because Odell was familiar with the Hong Kong market, he set up the experimental Cantonese unit in 1953.

The year 1955 was a major milestone for Loke's movie empire. The cinema circuit International Film from Southeast Asia and the production company Yung Hwa Motion Picture from Shanghai were merged, with Loke at the helm. After Loke took over Yung Hwa Motion Picture Studios, he set up a Script Committee comprising and led by Eileen Chang, Yao Ke, Stephen Soong and Sun Junsan. The committee provided and selected movie scripts. Meanwhile, directors Evan Yang, Tao Qin and Yue Feng were invited to make Mandarin films. Key personnel of MP & GI's management were educated in Europe and America, for example, Robert Chung, who brought with him to MP & GI Western production and management practices when he joined the company as General Manager.

By late1950s, MP& GI had built up a more established structure of production and management. It had in its stable budding stars. Business was blooming. Feeling the threat posed by MP & GI, Shaws' Run Run Shaw planned to build a studio city and establish in Hong Kong the Shaw Brothers Film Company in order to feed its own cinema circuits. The two companies were arch-rivals. Though MP & GI had successfully bred many stars, its films weren't selling well and its profit marginal.

Robert Chung quit his job in 1962 to join Rediffusion Television. Loke Wan Tho took over the General Manager post. Loke increased the investment, and produced several widescreen colour films. Loke also expanded his empire to Taiwan. MP & GI and Shaws were in fierce competitions for years, but to avoid favouring a third party, they reached a 'gentlemen's agreement', declaring that they wouldn't 'poach on each other's scriptwriters, directors, actors, or key executives', and would 'put an end to the infamous competing versions' by having production heads of both companies to attend regular tea meetings to exchange ideas. This enabled MP & GI to bounce back.

Both companies were run by centralised leadership. Loke Wan Tho and Run Run Shaw were basically the companies. They both had absolute powers. Due to the 'hands-on' approach, Loke's untimely death in 1964 in an air crash in Taiwan resulted in a chaotic MP & GI. Choo Kok Leong, Loke's brother-in-law succeeded the leadership. In 1971, the company decided to withdraw from film production,

and Choo had arranged for Golden Harvest to take over the Yung Hwa Studios.

MP & GI's vertical integration ownership is a product of its time - the merge of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia's film industries, the funding/financing, distribution and production as collective efforts of the different regions, and the effect of political changes in mainland China and Taiwan on the market. The history of MP & GI is worthy for Chinese entrepreneurs to contemplate on.

Yu Mo-wan: Cathay Organisation and Hong Kong Movies

Cathay Organisation is a massive Singaporean Corporation. It was founded by Lim Cheng Kim, the fourth wife of Southeast Asia's magnate Loke Yew, and Loke's youngest son Loke Wan Tho in 1940s. Its subsidiary, International Film Distribution Agency was established in Singapore in 1951. Its major business was distributing movies from Hong Kong, Hollywood and from over the world. The acquired movies would be exhibited in its cinema circuit. Cathay-Keris was formed in 1953 to produce its own movies. During the same year, Cathay Organisation sent Albert Odell, the shareholder and one of the three partners of International to set up the slightly differently-named sister company, International Films Distributing Agency in Hong Kong. Odell also started to produce films in Hong Kong. The company had its debut Mandarin film production in 1955. At the end of 1955, the organisation financed Yan Jun and Li Lihua to set up Guotai Film Company, bearing the same company name 'Cathay' in Chinese.

Due to Yung Hwa's insolvent debt to International, they took over the management in 1956. In order to expand the company's production business, International Films was reorganised into Motion Picture & General Investment Co Ltd (MP & GI). MP & GI was headed by Robert Chung, and between 1956 and 1965, MP & GI had a total production of 102 Mandarin films. Among these, there were winners of the Best Picture Award at the 5th Asian Film Festival including *Our Sister Hedy* (1957), *The Battle of Love* (1957), *Calendar Girl* (1959), *Air Hostes*s (1959), etc. MP & GI was a major Mandarin films production company in Hong Kong. It held a significant status in the Hong Kong film history.

MP & GI was reorganised to Cathay Organisation (Hong Kong) in 1965 due to the untimely death of Chairman Loke Wan Tho. Loke's position was succeeded by his brother-in-law, Choo Kok Leong. The biggest crisis for the restructured company was the loss of key personnel. They tackled the issue by hiring newcomers and controlling the production budget. Despite this, there was no shortage of fine films. Though nothing compared to its MP & GI era, Cathay had produced such fine works as *The Home Maker* (1970), *From the Highway* (1970) and *Escorts*

over Tiger Hill (1969).

Raymond Chow formed Golden Harvest, assisted by Cathay Organisation, after his breakaway from Shaws in early 1970. Cathay Organisation's executives decided to withdraw its Hong Kong office from film production in 1971 and gave full support to Golden Harvest for production instead. Without the support of Cathay Organisation, Golden Harvest wouldn't prosper as it did.

After Cathay Organisation wrapped up its business in Hong Kong office, the organisation focused on film distributions in Singapore. The company made a profitable income from distributing Hong Kong movies. Cathay Organisation was listed on the Stock Exchange of Singapore Dealing & Automated Quotation Systems (SESDAQ) in 1999; this was Loke Wan Tho's wish and his niece Meileen Choo's efforts.

Yeh Yueh-yu: 'Taiwan: Cathay Organisation and Shaws Film Company's Battleground'

Cathay Organisation and Shaws Film Company fronted the studios system in its peak in the 1960s. This had a major effect on post-war Hong Kong's film industry. The two companies entered a period of vicious competition, when they both expanded transnationally.

After their businesses were secured in Southeast Asia, Cathay Organisation and Shaws Film Company moved to Hong Kong to produce Mandarin films. Before the war, the main market for Mandarin films was in Southeast Asia, but this has changed after the war. Following the decolonisation of Taiwan, and the subsequent change in official language, Taiwan became a major consumer market for Mandarin films. Because of this, the empire of Mandarin films has expanded. This provided an advantage for Cathay Organisation's transnational development.

The film business news in Hong Kong and Taiwan in 1963 was the breakaway of Li Hanxiang from Shaws Film Company to establish Grand Motion Picture in Taiwan. The deal was orchestrated by Union, Cathay's Taiwan distributor. While Li was at Shaws, his couldn't fully utilise his talents as his creativity was hindered. And at the same time, the competition between Cathay and Shaws was so fierce that they were producing separate versions of the same *huangmei diao* (Yellow Plum) opera. Cathay suggested Li to work in Taiwan, since the birth of Grand was hastened by Cathay and Union, the company's name was made up of the first Chinese character of the two companies.

It seems that Cathay and Grand's raiding of Li was due to the rivalries between Cathay and Shaw. But from an industry point of view, Cathay's instalment of Li in Taiwan was characteristic of a transnational operation. He was given the freedom to carry out independent studio productions in Taiwan.

Taiwan was emerging as an important Mandarin films market from the1960s. The film *The Love Eterne* (1963) showed its market potential. The local Taiwanese productions then were not mature, pushing Cathay to strategically export large quantity of Mandarin film productions and feed the market directly. A group of KMT members stationed in Hong Kong helped with Li's first film production, *Blood Stained Flowers* (1954). The Nationalist Government had been aggressively supporting 'right-wing' Hong Kong filmmakers and studios from the early 1950s to oppose the left-wing film companies backed by the Mainland government. And in 1956, a pro-Nationalist group was established in Hong Kong, a former body of the 'Freedom Association'.

The memoirs of Hong Kong movie personnel Wong Cheuk-hon have recorded the episode of Cathay's expansion to Taiwan in order to compete with Shaws. At the time, both companies had many productions of the similar genres and plots. Shaws Film Company had a studio city, a base, and an actor-training class. Though MP & GI had Yung Hwa Studios, it was still no match to Shaws. After the death of Loke Wan Tho, Grand lost its main supporter, Cathay lost its figurehead, and Taiwan lost the rich overseas connection. From then on, Shaws enjoyed the monopoly of the Mandarin film industry, and Grand was on the wane.

Later on, Union has a fallout with Li Hanxiang and both parties terminated their contract in 1967. After they lost Grand's production line, Union headhunted King Hu, another director from Shaws. Hu made a blockbuster, *Dragon Inn* (1967). Few years later, Shaws agreed to let Chang Cheh set up Changgong Company in Taiwan. Chang was shooting martial arts movies, the hottest genre at the time. Although Cathay began to withdraw, its flexible offshore production mode had become the small companies' model. It laid the foundation for future transnational film industries of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Ng Chun-bong: A Comparison Between Cathay and Shaws, and the Fall of Cathay

Many papers attribute the collapse of Cathay Organisation in Hong Kong to the untimely death of Loke Wan Tho. But even before Loke's death, the problem of competing versions of the same genre between Cathay and Shaws always

existed. Cathay failed to fully grasp its market, and the production direction was going astray. Cathay had an assumed formula of equalling lifestyle to movie plots and to audience preference. In fact, the literary value in film scripts doesn't guarantee that the films will be embraced by the general audience. Hong Kong in 1962 was still a poverty-stricken society, and MP & GI's films were obviously not closing on the real life.

The Taiwanese believed that the untimely death of Loke pushed the Taiwan film industry back by a decade. Could Hong Kong filmmakers possibly blend in with the Taiwanese culture? The Hong Kong companies which transferred their business to Taiwan couldn't breakthrough the Qing Yao's brand of romance - these drawing a huge gap with the Hong Kong film culture, and thus can be concluded that Hong Kong filmmakers may not be able to influence the Taiwanese culture after all.

Collated by Queenie Law; translated by Estella Fung

MP & GI Symposium

Jointly presented by the Centre for Humanities Research of Lingnan University and the Hong Kong Film Archive

Session 2: 'Music and Cinema'

Date: 8 April 2002

Time: 2.00 p.m. - 5.00 p.m.

Venue: Paul S Lam Conference Centre, Lingnan University

Host: Professor Lau Siu-ming (Head Professor of Chinese Department, Lingnan University)
P K Leung (Director of Humanities Research, Lingnan University)

Speakers: Professor Leo Lee Ou-fan (Department of Asian Languages & Civilisation, Harvard University)
Mr Wong Kee-chee (Hong Kong music expert)
Professor Yu Siu-wah (Department of Music, Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Respondent: Dr Li Siu-leung (Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University)

(Clockwise from top left) Professor Leo Lee Ou-fan, Mr Wong Kee-chee, Professor Yu Siu-wah and Dr Li Siu-leung.

Leo Lee Ou-fan: The Popular and the Classical: Reminiscences on *The Wild, Wild Rose*

Biopic is one common Hollywood genre and divas are of course worthy, and not infrequent, subjects. In such cases, their repertoire is prominently featured. Grace Chang is one rare local diva who, in her repertoire, had the distinction of giving Hollywood style renditions in Chinese productions. *The Wild, Wild Rose*

(1960) is itself an adaptation of *Carmen*, with Carmen as a songstress and the bullfighter gone, and in his stead, a down and out musician as the leading male character.

Critics Law Kar, Stephen Teo and Sam Ho coincidentally concluded that the film associated the original *Carmen* with the seedy side of Hong Kong at that time. One (Law Kar) stated that the songstress was a 'North Point Carmen', while another (Stephen Teo) put her in Wan Chai. All three, however, noted that the film's atmosphere was akin to Hollywood's film noir, and had, in fact, evolved into a musical noir (Sam Ho). It was a very insightful observation. A film's distinctive flavour should be the first and foremost in its studies, and in the case of *The Wild, Wild Rose*, almost all of its flavour comes from the songs, especially 'Carmen'.

Chinese Pop and Western Opera

Classical singing allows a certain degree of freedom in delivering, such as stretching between notes. However, stretching at the very beginning is a style not found in classical music and this is exactly what Grace Chang does in her rendition of 'Carmen'. By this deliberate stretching she manages to draw out the flavour of the song. The *Carmen* number is one of the most adapted operatic songs and the basic difference between opera, particularly Italian opera, and pop songs is that in opera, the presentation of song is in the form of aria and is not driven by beat. That is why it is difficult to dance to opera, while popular songs flow to the beat of dance steps even though the style of singing may vary, which explains why the most common accompanying instrument in popular songs is the drum. In *The Wild, Wild Rose*, the original song 'Too Happy for Words' is performed in the Mambo beat, and Grace Chang utilises all her skills at her disposal to perform the dance.

As in the original, in the film's adaptation of the song number 'Habanera', the lyrics (written by Li Junqing) similarly underline the paradoxical nature of love: 'Love is nothing more than a common plaything. Man is only an amusement to kill time…' Grace Chang's method of delivery is unmistakably Western, with a touch of Chinese characteristics. She has a very sexy voice that can only be brought fully out by her classical training. Hence, it can be said that *The Wild, Wild Rose* possesses attributes of both East and West. Her expressive face when delivering the song and the lyrics renders the adaptation to differ widely from the original, and that is to say, the emphasis given to the theme of love is made at the expense of playing down Carmen's untamed nature.

1. Attributes of Both East and West

The 'attributes of both East and West' were brought out in Chang's interpretation

of Carmen as both a seductive wild creature (the western side of her character) and a woman with a benevolent heart (the Chinese side of her character). In other words, the script added a realistic level to the original romance so as to make itself more credible to a local audience. The songs in *The Wild, Wild Rose*, though they take up quite a bit of the film's time, are indispensable, because they form the romantic core of the narrative. The story itself is conventional, even if one were to include the realistic background of Hong Kong; I don't think this is enough to arouse very many historical memories. In other words, without the songs performed by Grace Chang, I don't think we would be watching this movie today. The movie is not a masterpiece but it is definitely a classic of the romantic musical genre.

2. Other Classical Music Influence

Apart from the 'Carmen' number, there are at least three other classical numbers. The lyrics of all four numbers bespeak the theme of love, forming a common narrative thread. Adding Madame Butterfly and Carmen together strengthens the operatic qualities of the film. In contrast, the original number 'Too Happy for Words' has nothing to do with the narrative and its inclusion was probably made to appease the audience's interest in the popular dance form of the time.

Wong Kee-chee: MP & GI and Hollywood Scores

It would be unconventional to say that Yao Min's film music displayed a MP & GI style. After all, in the early days of the Mandarin cinema, that is, in the 1950s and 1960s, a handful of composers have predominated the movie music scene, with Kei Shang-tong and Yao Min writing the scores for the two major studios, as well as for independent productions. If there were a difference in their respective styles to speak of, it would be a difference in personal style between the two composers, rather than distinction of the production styles between MP & GI and Shaw Brothers.

Still, it would be legitimate to speak of a MP & GI style in Yao Min's score: it is most prominent in the numbers he wrote for the movies. If we listen carefully to the numbers he wrote for Hsin Hwa or other independent studios, or even for Shaws, it is easy to discern that they are all typically Shanghai in style, or distinctively Shanghainese Pops (or *shi dai qu*, the Song of the Times).

Yao Min's musical style is very much in line with the Shanghai style, exhibiting a subtle grace and underlying tenderness. However, he was also a very eclectic composer and could write in whatever style it was called for. He used to be a singer and thus had the sensitivity to take into account the strengths and

weaknesses as well as personal styles of individual singers. His adaptability hence gave the impression that he wrote exclusively for one or two studios. The numbers he wrote for MP & GI were mostly westernised songs, very much in the 1930s and 1940s Big Band style of Glenn Miller.

MP & GI boasted some musically talented stars in their stable and the highly distinctive impressions they cut were not insignificant in perpetuating the Yao Min's MP & GI style. It is worth noting that the three numbers (theme song 'The Wayward Husband', 'Every Family Has Their Share of Troubles' and 'Wild Flowers Smell Sweeter') he wrote for the MP &GI production *The Wayward Husband* (1959), sung by singer Poon Sow-keng for leading lady Julie Yeh Feng, deviated greatly from the usual MP &GI fare. Those numbers he wrote for Grace Chang, one MP & GI leading lady reputed for her singing and dancing, on the other hand, were very much in line with the MP & GI style. 'I Love Cha-cha' that Chang came to sing in *Mambo Girl* (1957), and 'Flying up the Sky' and 'Bell Tolls from the Temple' *in Air Hostess* (1959) had not only became her signature songs, but also representative Yao Min screen works. In fact, Yao Min's music featured prominently in some of the most significant MP & GI productions. Yao was responsible for the score and numbers in *Calendar Girl* (1959), regarded as the landmark in Mandarin musicals. The 1960s was the age of *huangmei diao* (Yellow Plum Opera), and many such MP &GI productions scores were again written by Yao Min. His huangmei diao was a mixture of indigenous operas, Ping Ju and folk songs for easy dissemination. Most of his more prominent huangmei diao works were invariably done for MP & GI and they include 'The Irresistible Tease' (Ping Ju melody) from *Love in Bloom* (1962), the Pekinese Drum Songs from *A Story of Three Loves* (1964), 'Nine Young Men' (northeastern folk song) from *Forget Me Not* (1966), and the numbers ('Do You Know?' was adapted from a Guangxi folksong) from *Gunfight at Lo Ma Lake* (1969). Even in such homogeneous genre as huangmei diao, every composer exhibits his own unique style.

Yu Siu-wah: Score in MP & GI Productions

Grace Chang had received Western vocal training and it is not surprising that her singing style was vastly different from the so-called indigenous Chinese style. However, it was not the *bel canto* style she came to utilize but the western musical style which helped to consolidate and define her singing career.

The numbers in *The Wild, Wild Rose* were cleverly and expertly arranged by Hattori Ryoichi. 'Carmen' was derived from Bizet's opera *Carmen*. The lyrics, beautifully written by Li Junqing, followed the original closely. As for its musical arrangement, it begins with the Tango beat and shifts to Rumba or Cha-cha at the

hint of 'What is love?' More praises have to be given to Li's lyrics. It is not easy to match each note with an appropriate word. When writing for 'Madame Butterfly', words simply failed him near the end and he had to fill out the rest with the syllable 'la,' resulting in a rather amusing discrepancy between the lyrics and melody. Through her interpretation, Grace Chang successfully brought western classics to life on Chinese screen. Credits also have to be given to Hattori Ryoichi for introducing western classical repertoire to local bourgeoisie. The influence of Mandarin *shi dai qu* was given a new lease when many of the songs made famous by Zhou Xuan and Grace Chang were adapted into Canto-pop.

1. A History of Chinese Songs

Chinese songs had its origin in *xiao diao* (or ditty); then western musical elements were incorporated, as in *xuetang yuege* (classroom songs). *Xuetang yuege* were first introduced into China by people such as Shen Xingong or Li Shutong, intellectuals who had gone to study in Japan. They brought back songs sung in Japanese schools and re-wrote the lyrics into Chinese. China at that time had just taken the first step in westernisation and musical education was, of course, in the most primitive stage. The available music was invariably homophonic, with the most basic piano accompaniment. Piano accompaniment was all there was even when Zhao Yuanren tried to introduce art songs into China. The accompaniment became more diversified and richer only when commercial films and scores came into being. Songs from Japanese schools, themselves westernised, played a significant part in the evolution of songs in China; it was only appropriate that Hattori Ryoichi was one of the first to introduce more sophisticated western elements into the scores of local Mandarin films in the 1950s and 1960s.

2. The Role of Grace Chang in the History of Chinese Songs

Chinese songs began with the *xiao diao* style of singing popularised by Zhou Xuan and Wu Yingyin, and then Li Xianglan (Shirley Yamaguchi) who also had received vocal training brought her western influence to the scene. Grace Chang was more akin to Li Xianglan but they exhibited some difference. Her rendition of 'Carmen' might be uninhibited, but her voice was pure and tame. It was only at the last segment that she flattened her voice a bit to imitate the sultriness of Bai Guang. Chang was the successor to Li Xianglan and Bai Guang. She was an archetypal diva in the 1950s and 1960s. She had sung 'Never on Sunday' in English, a rare attempt among Mandarin singers, and the bilingual numbers 'Sneeze!' with the German expression *Gesundheit!* and 'Whatever Will Be Will Be'. The lyrics of 'Riddles that are Girls' by Sito Ming deserve some words - 'When the wind weeps and the willows refuse to leave, the Moon gives out a melancholic beam.' Its lyrics is obviously derived from has the Peking opera movie 'Yang Heroines' of the 1960s. It can be seen that Hong Kong culture at that time was already very much

a mixed product of Japanese, Western and Mainland Chinese influence.

3. Conclusion

Hong Kong culture borrowed heavily from Western culture and it was not surprising that musicals of the time danced and sang to western tunes. Grace Chang was unapologetically western, and that made her stand out and distinctive from others.

Open Discussion

Li Siu-leung: The three speakers had something in common. They all touched on Chinese modernisation, westernisation and the mutual influence between East and West. Professor Yu attempted to put Grace Chang in the historical perspective and saw in her the interaction of popular and classical music. He put the heterogeneity of Hong Kong culture on a high regard. However, he seemed to have left out the subversive tendencies in Hong Kong culture. It is precisely her subversive traits that made Grace Chang so alluring. Wong Kee-chee expounded on the necessity of keeping a balance between individual style and studio style when studio specifically asked for certain style for certain movies. Even in today's Hollywood, composers manage to maintain and exude their personal style in their scores. Did Yao Min manage to do the same in his works?

Wong Kee-chee: Yao Min's compositions are distinguished by their subtle grace and tenderness, and in them a touch of jazz. Take the interludes in *It's Always Spring* (1962) and *The Loving Couple* (1960) for instance, the style is unmistakably that of Jazz Piano. He, of course, tried to meet directors' specific requests. The collaborations, however, worked on the base of mutual respect.

Li Siu-leung: The 'Song of Spring' in *Calendar Girl* is nothing but cacophony.

Yu Siu-wah: Since the days of piano accompaniment, the focus of the Chinese has always been on melody and lyrics and not accompaniment. Yao Min had long pioneered on mixing Western and Chinese instruments, putting *pipa*, clarinet and *erhu* on the same stage.

Li Siu-leung: The mixing of Western and Chinese elements might result in a very harmonious effect. Sadly 'The Song of Spring' is not one of those cases.

Wong Kee-chee: Sometimes discords result with the composer leaving the execution of the score to the Filipino musicians.

Audience: MP & GI popular songs of the 1950s and 1960s are rich and varied in style. People of those days learned to sing their favourite songs from score sheets. I would say that popular songs of those days are much more refined, music and lyrics wise. Artistic workers in those days had some degree of literacy in music. Our westernisation process had been ongoing throughout the 20th century and culturally speaking, even the mass had had contact with Western music. Filmmakers in

those days almost all possessed some knowledge of Western music. Hence, the employment of western music in Chinese movie was not purely accidental.

Collated by Queenie Law; translated by Teri Chan

MP & GI Symposium

Jointly presented by the Centre for Humanities Research of Lingnan University and the Hong Kong Film Archive

Session 3: 'Literature and Film'

Date: 9 April 2002

Time: 10.00 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.

Venue: Paul S Lam Conference Centre, Lingnan University

Chair: Professor Chan Cheung-ming (Director of Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies, Lingnan University)

Speakers: Mr Law Kar (Programmer, Hong Kong Film Archive)
Professor P K Leung (Director of Humanities Research, Lingnan University)
Professor Shen Shuang (Department of English, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey)

Respondent: Mr H C Li (aka Shu Ming, film critic, Senior Assistant Librarian, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University)
Professor Xu Zidong (Department of Chinese, Lingnan University)
Ms Wong Pok (Department of Chinese, Lingnan University)

Guest: Mr John CHAN Koon-chung (Cultural Worker, former Chief Editor of City Magazine)

(From left) Mr Law Kar, Professor Chan Cheung-ming, Professor Shen Shuang and Professor P K Leung.

Law Kar: A Glimpse of MP & GI's Creative/Production Situation: Some Speculations, Some Doubts

1. Formations and Characteristics of the MP & GI's Literati-led Creative Line

In the 1920s and 1930s, quite a number of literary figures were recruited to help boost Chinese cinema, and studios like Mingxing, Yihua and Lianhua, in time, became the stables of 'left-wing' writers. After the war and prior to the Liberation, southbound filmmakers, culturati and writers from Shanghai set Hong Kong on a new cultural trend. MP & GI inherited the Shanghai practice of involving literati or

culturati in studio administration and production. However, MP & GI productions differed widely from those of the southbound or local studios both in style and execution. Arising from their strong sense of history and mission were the nostalgia and beliefs of the uprooted intellectuals as well as worries on the plights of China, the people and cultural concerns reflected in work of Great China (Dazhonghua) and Yung Hwa productions, whether they were period or contemporary pieces, comedies, or features set in Hong Kong. Despite the involvement of famed Chinese cultural, stage and literary figures such as Stephen Soong, Yao Ke, Eileen Chang and Sun Jinsan, such sentiment of hardship, common among traditional Chinese intelligentsia, were not visible in MP & GI productions.

Learning from the mistakes of Great China and Yung Hwa, and sensing where the wind is blowing, MP & GI was formed with the premise of following a different creative line. In 1957 (when MP & GI was already officially established), the political situation in China was a settled affair. With the mainland market definitely closed, local productions had only the local and Southeast Asian markets to rely on. Themes dwelling on the plights of the country and the people, or of similar heavy sentiments no longer had market appeal, and thus not conducive to business development. MP & GI turned to Hollywood for inspiration and decided on making warm-hearted or romantic works injected with dances and songs that were then popular in Hong Kong. They were pleasing works modest in ambition and light in subject matter. The man at the helm planning and steering this course was probably Stephen Soong. Acknowledging cinema to be essentially an entertainment, he strived to produce quality, classy entertainment that was not total fluff. He himself actually admired works such as *Spring River Flows East* aka *Tears of Yangtze* (1947) and *Spring in a Small Town* (1948), but he had to make a market decision and mass appeal prevailed.

The MP & GI creative team were made up of erudite men steep in Western and Chinese culture. In introducing Western or bourgeoisie tastes into their works, they still insisted in keeping traditional values as the core. The affirmation of one's own tradition is actually in line with the bourgeoisie ideology. The middle class is flexible in thinking and open-minded, but they will never resort to using any extreme measures. They value the good tradition, but not above allowing some comparison, modernisation, improvement or sanctification. In the same rein, MP & GI comedies are funny but not farcical, and would not cross the line to being subversive, dark or absurd.

2. The Rivalry between MP & GI and Shaws

MP & GI productions were steered by cultured men of letters who were not film-smiths that treated films as their bread-and-butter. How did they fare when facing

competitions and changes in trend?

MP & GI outputs were stable in quality, but the company was not splashing on creating new genres or new trends. The scripts of MP & GI are indeed outstanding, but the director always played second fiddle and was all too often no more than an executor of the script. MP & GI productions are undoubtedly classy, exquisite, and great to watch, but they are not works of grandeur. Shaws was different. Run Run Shaw was a shrewd businessman who only invested in stars for a greater return, and kept a tight reign in employee benefits, as well as on directors and scriptwriters. But he was willing to make big investments in trying out new directions. As a result, Shaws was able to establish itself as the studio of grand scale historical epics, palatial intrigues and period pieces. It also ushered in new style martial arts and directors such as Chang Cheh and King Hu became new masters. By being a trend-setter, Shaws consolidated its position as the major player in local cinema. When MP & GI finally jumped onto the epic and period bandwagon, it suffered from lacking period sets or period film experience, and the productions didn't measure up to Shaws products.

P K Leung: Eileen Chang, Nellie Chin Yu and the Urban Imagination

Hong Kong Culture of the 1950s and 1960s and Literati Involvement

In retrospection, it is clear that in the 1950s and 1960s, local culture was undergoing a transition. It was the time when an urban culture and a cultural identity began to take shape. These changes were recorded or reflected in the scripts written by stage and literary figures such as Stephen Soong, Eileen Chang, Yao Ke, Sun Jinsan, Wang Liuzhao and Nellie Chin Yu, who were recruited by MP & GI as its creative talents. A film, of course, is larger than a script. However, as MP & GI took scripts, and the literati seriously, studies of scripts penned by figures such as Eileen Chang and Chin Yu offer more than glimpses into our road to urbanisation and modernisation: the adaptations done by Chang were very much exercise in urban imagination. Such imaginations reflected and helped shape the subtle changes in our perception of family and interpersonal relationships, the collective self and the individual.

The Urban Imagination of Chin Yu and Eileen Chang

In the scripts they penned for MP & GI, Chin Yu and Eileen Chang usually focused on the changes in ethical concepts, interpersonal or family relationships brought fourth by city life, such as the subtle and gradual shifts in the traditional roles of the sexes. They always tried to add in some refreshing elements in the melodramas they were hired to write, rendering it a new style, adding modern touches such as a fuller character development, or more urban outlook, such as

battle of the sexes, or feminine independence made possible by city life. Many of the urban scenes in these films are imagined than real. Characters in these films are almost exclusively leisured class. The society in the 1960s was, no doubt, already highly diversified; social mobility, on the other hand, was also more pronounced. Comparing with the Cantonese films of the 1950s, ethical concepts, marriage and love or the family were more predominant in MP & GI productions, and they were made to underscore subtle changes through the employment of urban imagination.

In *June Bride* (1960), through the portrayal of a bride (played by Grace Chang) who insists in marrying for love, Eileen Chang was able to slip in elements of feminine independence. *Father Takes a Bride* (1963) is amusing for Eileen Chang's refreshing twist given to the evil stepmother story common in Cantonese films. The stepmother-to-be (played by Wang Lai) is a vivacious teacher and cliched plot such as abusing her stepchildren does not take place. Personally, I rate it as her best screenplay.

As a film, *Devotion* (1960), adapted by Chin Yu from a story by Chi Ren, left much to be desired. Nonetheless it does give a portrayal of a woman undergoing subtle transformation. In *The Bedside Story* (1960), Li Mei first appears as an evil woman who is given a leashing by the model gentleman Chang Yang. In the later twist, however, the duplicity of Chang is revealed as he is actually suppressing his inner desire. Li at last helps him find his love. The film does not put the male on the moral high ground.

Refreshing Famous Works with New Ideas

Sun, Moon and Star (1961) by Xu Su is actually a tale of an epoch in which the War of Resistance looms larger than any characters. Still, in her adaptation, Chin Yu managed to enrich it with more details, mental shifts, and additional developments. The three females are thus more vivid in character and more convincing in development. The greatest change is done to the character Moon, played by Grace Chang. She is given a bourgeoisie background and ways of life: she goes to church, keeps a family dog and plays the piano. She is also allowed to express her feeling through a much more modern means, by singing it out in the song Hazy Moonlight, and spared the embarrassment of reciting some anachronistic old poem, as in the original.

In the adaptation of *A Story of Three Loves* (1964), the political and social criticism part is reduced to give greater development to the love story. The original by Zhang Henxhui was serialised in a newspaper, and he used it as his daily column to vent his criticism on current affairs and on the warlords. The film instead focuses on the love story, especially on Fengxi (Grace Chang) and her

subsequent degeneration into dementia after her marriage to the warlord. It is a description of the female mindset from a modern perspective.

Conclusion

The modernisation of Hong Kong, or the modernisation of the literary arts is an ongoing process in which many people play a part. Each time they re-write traditional or well known stories or adapt them into films, they inject new life into them and enhance them with new ideas, and by so doing, intentionally or otherwise, touch up urban life and culture.

Shen Shuang: Yao Ke - from Shanghai to Hong Kong, the Multiple Hybridisation

Yao Ke (1905-1991) was a scriptwriter, but he is also one of the most important modern Chinese playwrights. However, in contemporary studies of modern Chinese Literature, he is often overlooked or forgotten. The neglect, to a large extent, is a result of his hybrid identity: he was a Shanghai school writer, Hong Kong writer, and Chinese expatriate in America. Here I try to give a brief look into the ways in which the two linguistic environments provided by Hong Kong and Shanghai play out in his cultural activities.

'Multiple Hybridisation' and Modernisation through Home Improvement

'Multiple Hybridisation', 'hybridisation' and 'hybrid' are words given to describe the ways in which new cultural forms come into being, or the process that hastens their formation. Theories on this topic abound, but I myself prefer the explication given by the researcher of Latin American culture, Néstor García Canclini. In *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, he links hybrid with modernisation, and maintains that the modernisation of Latin America is a continual and creative renewal of indigenous cultural structure and tradition and not a total replacement of indigenous influence and traditional culture by outside influence. He sees modernisation as a home improvement project or renovation project. Such a description is equally applicable to Shanghai or Hong Kong. Back to Yao Ke, he himself was an embodiment of multiple hybridisation, first of the hybridisation of East and West in his Shanghai period, then of the hybridisation of his literary aspiration and popular culture, and when he was in Hong Kong, there was yet another level of hybridisation, that is the hybridisation of the cultural centre and marginal region.

Migration of Consciousness

Yao Ke was a native of She Country, Anhui, but he was born in Amoy, Fujian, and grew up in Suzhou. He had a very strong sense of attachment to his homeland,

yet he was widely travelled and had a rich experience of different cultures. He had studied abroad. In the 1930s, he took a tour of the USSR and Europe, and then went to study Drama at Yale University. He came back to Shanghai in the 1940s but left for Hong Kong in 1948. In 1968, he again left for America and, until his death in early 1990s, had spent time in places such as Hawaii and San Francisco, including a teaching stint in Wisconsin. Though a typical migrant to a certain degree, he was, more correctly, a migrant of consciousness.

Yao Ke and Shanghai - Cultural Practice in a Metropolis

In the early 1930s, Yao Ke had given help to Angus Snow in his editing of the English edition of *A Selection of Modern Chinese Stories* while working as an English to Chinese translator. His original and translation works were published in the English magazine *Tien Hsia*. Intellectuals at that time, such as Yao who were steep in and had a deep affection for traditional Chinese culture were invariably very nationalistic. Writing in English, to these westernised intellectuals, was an attempt to reach out to the world. In 1933, his retrospection of the New Cultural Movement was published in *Zi Lin Xi Bao*. In the article, he raised the issue of the lingua of modern literature, and smashed the bipolar concept predominate in the 1920s which pitted the old against the new, left against right, and West against East. He put forth the concept of the people, the acceptance of people as the ultimate test of any linguistic practice. Among his cultural activities in Shanghai was some very insightful thinking into the inter-relationship between Western theatre, Shanghai and local audience, which evidently entailed a home improvement overtone.

The 1950s in Hong Kong - Cultural Practice in a Booming Economy

In 1948, Yao Ke moved to Hong Kong. It was a decision based purely on economic necessity. Shanghai filmmakers were embraced by local cinema and they, making full use of the material conditions of Hong Kong, in turn boosted local film industry. Indeed, these filmmakers had participated in the imagination of Hong Kong. Their dialogues with Hong Kong subsequently became part of the 'Made in Hong Kong' heritage.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Yao Ke was very active in local cinema. I have not seen any of his movies and so I can only give some factual information here. First of all, Yao was an intellectual who had such a thorough understanding of the West, it was only natural that his works exhibit influence of Western culture and literature. Take for instance his film adaptation from Dostoevsky's *The Insulted and Injured* in 1950. Though it tackled social issues, the development was not a strict following of the class analysis and perspective. When it was shown, it was attacked by left-wing critics. The social description appeared excessive; and to the typical left-wing critics who were used to mechanical analysis, it was

unnecessarily complicated. As an artist who dared to tackle the social reality and who had not allied himself to the leftist camp in the 1950s, Yao Ke was destined to take fires form both left and right.

A Strange Woman (1950) penned by Yao is again a realistic film inspired by Western literature. Directed by Li Pingqian and starred Bai Guang, the story takes place in the time of the Northern Expedition, not such a distant past from the 1950s. Yao Ke wanted to tell a love triangle befallen a modern woman, a subject matter commercial films are fond of. It is evident that even in bowing to commercial demands, Yao still could not let go of his historical and ethical burden. And the reason is, he bore both the concerns of a literary man and a filmmaker.

The Play within a Play in a *Dirty Alley* - Reflection on Realism

Dirty Alley is the play that Yao Ke wrote in Hong Kong, and a story which would aptly serve as a summary of his passage from Shanghai to Hong Kong. *Dirty Alley* is about drug addiction and it takes place in the Kowloon Walled City based on observation of the real life of Hong Kong (especially the life of the lower strata). The Walled City had a large congregation of mainland immigrants, many of whom had a Shanghai past. One of the characters whose archetype was actually a filmmaker Yao was well acquainted with, is a down and out Shanghai star named Bai Ping, who is reduced to living in this slum because of her drug addiction. Once spotted by a reporter in her shabby state, Bai immediately makes up a story and laughingly denies, 'How the hell would I live here?' She is here, as she explains, to see first hand how people in slums live, because she is making a film quite similar to the pre-war film *Angel in the Street* (1937). Through Miss Bai, Yao reminded the audience that the Hong Kong depicted in the play is not a transparent nor one-dimensional place. I think *Dirty Alley* gives realism a new explication: realism is generally understood to be the passive copying of reality, but through the play within a play, Yao tries to see reality through a succession of frames. His realism is not just the depiction of his comprehension of the complicated inter-relationship between Hong Kong and Shanghai; it is also a direct explication of identity crisis.

Conclusion

Yao Ke was always marginalised, whether in Hong Kong or in the mainland. He was not a man who was nostalgic for nostalgia's sake. The marginality and transience exhibited in his movies or plays are the manifestation of his acute sensitivity and critical reflection. He himself was the embodiment of the continuity between Shanghai and Hong Kong, and this continuity is essentially the Western-Eastern cultural issue he had always been pondering: the uniqueness of Shanghai had practically nullified the bipolar antagonism of East and West, and the introduction of a Cantonese linguistic environment would further chip away at the

Chineseness, if there was really such a thing.

Responses

H C Li: I would like to add some words on Yao Ke's cultural undertakings in the cinema and on the stage. He wrote about his undertakings in cinema and on the stage and reading his own words would greatly help us understand his perspectives on cinema. In the two English articles, published in 1937 in Tien Hsia magazine (see Chinese Movies by Yao Shennong, Tien Hsia , April 1937), he tries to pinpoint the reason behind the sudden boom experienced in Chinese cinema in 1936 . He attributes it to the massive participation of the literati, who finally gave their nod to cinema.

Yao believes in craftsmanship, yet only more so in innovation. His aspiration is to be an original writer, and he tries to add some personal touches to his adaptations of Western literature, to make them his own. In his correspondence with Edward Gunn, he states that his life-long pursuit is the 'wedding of Chinese dramatic form with Western craftsmanship'. His plays may lack the grandeur of Cao Yu, but his words are rich in classical flavour reminiscent of traditional plays.

Xu Zidong: The explication of both Law Kar and Professor Leung focuses on the interrelationship between the film industry, literary history and cultural trends. They both elaborate on how film literature was forced to make the transition into film industry. Why did Shaws come out the winner and not MP & GI? Is it because genuine bourgeoisie taste never existed in Hong Kong, or even China? The upper and the lower classes dominate popular taste, at the expense of the middle class. MP & GI productions are representative of the bourgeoisie taste, yet they could not survive the onslaughts of productions that sell gore, violence, sex and scandals. How come?

Wong Pok: Cinema and literature are both realms of the imagination. The three scriptwriters we discussed today, Chin Yu, Eileen Chang and Yao Ke have something in common. That is, they all contributed to the urban imagination, which is, essentially, the blending of the Western and Eastern urban culture. Marginal culture was discussed in one of the speeches. Except Chin Yu, the two other scriptwriters we discussed today were from Shanghai. However, I don't agree that their works depict Shanghai, and not Hong Kong. For instance, the MP & GI production Gloomy Sunday (1956) was adapted from Sunday, a novel by Xu Xu. Xu wrote it in 1951 in Hong Kong. It is actually a work with distinctive Hong Kong flavour.

Law Kar: We may discuss a bit more on the question raised by Xu Zidong.

Successful local businessmen or the lower class are much more sensitive to the shifts in social trends than professional writers, or even artists. Businessmen depend on it for their business to survive and grow. Their business in their life, not their ideal. They have to change to follow the latest trend and popular. It may finally pay off for literati who instil in their work their ideals, but they may not have the immediate endorsement of the general public.

Why Shaws was the winner? It was because television had taken over as the provider of warm-hearted melodramas of human relationships, love stories and light comedies. To lure in audience, a film had to pack in as much as possible allowed by a ninety or hundred and twenty minute time span. The only way to go was more and more sensual stimulation or the latest gadgets. Comparing to Cathay, Shaws had the advantage of being acute to the pulse of the times, social shifts and public opinion. By so doing it won the people over. New genres such as youth films or martial arts were introduced because they were what the people wanted. The period between 1963 and 1965 was a time of rapid social transition. The post-war generation was now in their twenties, and hedonism and individualism began to raise their head. This generation of young people turned to vices such as drugs, gambling and sex to channel their discontent. The suppressed anger was finally given its full vent in the 1967 Riot. Youth films echoed the rebellious and anti-establishment sentiments of the young, and their emphasis on friendship. It became more and more popular. Furthermore, Shaws did not depend on one or two genres, such as literary or comedy, alone. Thus, it was the studio left standing.

P K Leung: The passing away of one industry does not mean that cultural development will immediately meet its demise. Look at it from this perspective: MP & GI didn't exactly die out, as its bourgeois tradition was given new lease of life in other channels. For instance, Wang Tianlin was able to remake *A Story of Three Loves* at TVB. In fact, former MP & GI talents switched to work for Shaws continued to produce films very much in the style of their former studio. I would say the legacy of MP & GI lives on, though the studio did not. As to whether genuine bourgeois taste ever existed in Hong Kong, or whether our literati ever participate in cinema, these issues would be more satisfactorily answered by John Chan Koon-chung who is also present here.

Shen Shuang: I would like to give the marginal issue a conceptual clarification: it is questionable to make margin and centre an automatic, albeit an opposite, pair. All too often, with the mentioning of the margin, centre, as its supposed half, immediately comes to mind. Actually, my margin means the contact zone, as skin is to the body. Skin is the organ most sensitive to outside stimulations. In the sense of a contact zone, marginal zone is the region most sensitive to the outside

world. My margin is the margin in this sense, not the margin relative to the centre.

John Chan Koon-chung: When I was small, I didn't like MP & GI films at all. I grew up watching MP& GI films against my wishes. My family moved down from Shanghai after the Liberation. We were the typical target audience of the MP & GI studio. My mother and three older sisters were ardent fans. I was then a boy eleven or twelve years old. I refused to go with them. '*Our Sister Hedy* (1957)? It's for girls…' My father and I preferred masculine films, and we didn't watch Cantonese films either. Boys were rarely attracted by MP & GI films. Boys like us growing up in a non-Cantonese family who would very soon Hong Kong-nised, could only have fun watching some so-called low brow Cantonese films, horror films or action films. In the 1970s, Cantonese remakes of every genre surged: from comedy to gangster to martial art; I could identify with all those films. I would say my growing-up was very typical and MP & GI films had not much influence on boys like me.

I only began to watch MP & GI films such as *The Wild, Wild Rose* (1960) long after I really knew films. Towards the end of the 1960s, besides American films, Cantonese films and Mandarin films, we had a new choice: European films. Then we went to college and went abroad and our taste in films again changed. After I came back, I watched *The Wild, Wild Rose*, and films by stars such as Grace Chang and You Min. It is such a pity that local cinema after the 1970s was a retrogression from, at least regarding the treatment of woman, the Mandarin movies of the 1950s and 1960s which were much more progressive. The local cinema after the 1970s reverted to masculinity, a conservative, and male centred masculinity that extended to every genre: action, noir, or even erotic films. Then my viewing of some queer European films at that time diluted my identification with such masculinity. My appreciation of MP & GI productions took a very circuitous route, and I share it with you as a footnote to today's discussion.

Collated by Jennifer Lai, Liu Suet-wan; translated by Teri Chan

MP & GI Symposium

Jointly presented by the Centre for Humanities Research of Lingnan University and the Hong Kong Film Archive

Session 4: 'Transnational Cinema'

Date: 9th April, 2002

Time: 3.15 p.m. - 6.00 p.m.

Venue: Paul S Lam Conference, Lingnan University

Host: Professor Meaghan Morris

Speakers: Dr Mary Wong

Respondent: Professor Leo Chan Tak-hung (Department of Translation, Lingnan University)
Mr Leung Chan (Hong Kong film critic)
Professor Fujii Shozo (Department of Chinese, Tokyo University)

Professor Yomota Gorky Inuhiko (Meijigakuin University)
Mr Momma Takashi (Japanese film critic)

Dr Mary Wong.

Mary Wong: Women Who Cross Borders: MP & GI's Project on Modernity

1. The Transnational Female Figure

I'd like to share with the audience where the ideas of my paper came from and the reasons behind my studies. In April 2000 before I left for Japan, I saw the film *Star of Hong Kong* (1962) at the Hong Kong International Film Festival. There're two things I found impressive about the film. It was the first time I saw in a film the notion of 'transnational' was being projected as a filmic image so

elaborately. Many of you are familiar with Hong Kong films of the 1950s and 1960s, such as those starring Josephine Siao and Nam Hung. In one of those films, Nam Hung is an architecture graduate returning from America. These returnees, however, often find themselves in conflict with the traditional Cantonese society because of their western background. But this element of 'the transnational' is always something suggested in the film, something not visible or explicit. *Star of Hong Kong* struck me then and still strikes me now in its bold attempt to project the 'transnational image', so elaborately, and the way it relates to the feminine object - Lucilla You Min.

The second thing to note is the 'modern' ending of the film, which was uncommon among Hong Kong films of the 1950s and 1960s. You Min (the character) finally decided to see Takarada Akira (her boyfriend) off at the airport, but she narrowly missed the plane or rather, the person himself. Of course you may dismiss this treatment as a mere gimmick designed to draw the audience to what was to follow. But the ending here is neither tragic nor promising, unlike most Cantonese features from around the same time. Comparing the film to *Madame Butterfly* (1956) starring Li Lihua, another HK-Japan co-production in which the female lead was prescribed a different destiny. She is 'imprisoned' in Japan, failing to go to Hong Kong to visit her lover simply because she doesn't have the capability to. The sense of tragedy comes from her incapability to be mobile. On the contrary, You Min with her extremely high mobility is refreshingly delightful.

2. Modernity and Mobility

During my stay in Japan, two of my friends, Peter Dunn and John Chan sent me the book *Cathay - 50 Years of Cinema*, the only publication on the company at the time. In it, there is a photo of Loke Wan Tho, the boss of MP & GI taken in 1946. The setting was Loke's office. Loke's demeanor is more of a scholarly figure than a typical businessman, the latter an impression one would conveniently associate with the bosses at Shaw Brothers. It is interesting to compare it with the second photo taken in 1963, the primetime of MP & GI and the peak of its collaboration with the Japanese film company Toho. Here, Loke is seen talking on the phone, which was a fashionable item in Asia at the time. Behind him is a world map. The fact that Loke surrounded himself with modern equipment and symbols of the latest technology is the very indication of him positioning Cathay as a transnational company. The third, also my favourite picture here is of Loke working on a typewriter. The heater beside him suggests he was not working from his hometown Singapore but in a hotel room-turned-mobile office. There's an air of modern aesthetics associated with Loke, echoing those and the mobility, transnational images projected by MP & GI's films like *Star of Hong Kong*. The aeroplane as a facilitator of modern mobility achieved similar purpose. Not only it takes you from one place to another across Asia, it takes you beyond Asia, as

seen in *Hong Kong, Tokyo, Honolulu* (1963).

3. Situating the Female Figure in a Modern Setting

I have discussed four films in my essay, one of them being *Her Tender Heart* (1959). What stands out from the film is the representation of the mother figure. This time, it's the mother who is returning to Hong Kong, on board a plane from Italy. The camera then shows her meeting her daughter who was abandoned 17 years ago. In term of Cantonese films norms, she is all an out-and-out bad mother, even notorious I would say. She abandoned her daughter in order to run away with her boyfriend, a rich one significantly, for love and for her dream. But somehow the film takes pity on her and gives her sound reasons to leave, sympathises for her agonising choice of leaving with her boyfriend and pursuing a music career in Italy over her daughter and husband in Hong Kong. This is a rather revolutionary treatment at the time.

4. The Woman Caught In-between

Because of the limitation of time, I'd like to skip the discussion on *Air Hostess* (1959) here. Coming back to *Star of Hong Kong*, again towards the ending, You Min is seen attending the funeral of her father, jiggling for time to rush to the airport to meet her lover. Lin Chong (the character), her father's right-hand man, urges You to go and find her own happiness, promising to take care of the family business. She takes her time and a taxi only to see the plane taking off at the runway. The last scene is of her pondering and overlooking the city from the peak. My impression is that she ends up neither belonging to Japan nor Hong Kong. While both the Japanese and the man from Hong Kong have found their feet in their own country, You is indefinitely caught in-between. It is also interesting to see it in the light of gender relationship.

The audience might laugh at the 'transnational' process made so readily accessible and available in the film. Characters travel from one place to another in smart attire, no sweat, no pain. The last of the three films starring Takarada Akira and You Min, *Hong Kong, Tokyo, Honolulu*, to me, is a response to this. It is dedicated to explore communication breakdown due to historical and cultural differences, specifically between the Chinese and the Japanese.

5. Hong Kong, Tokyo, Honolulu

The film centres on the character played by You Min, a second generation Chinese having won the title of Miss Hawaii and a round trip ticket to Japan, Hong Kong, and Hawaii. Takarada Akira plays the brother of her college friend who accompanies her to Hong Kong. It is later revealed to You that her real parents had died and that she was raised up by her foster parents. She goes to Hong Kong and meets her sister who was adopted by a Hong Kong family. This remains

a secret to Takarada Akira to the very end, even when they announce their wedding.

The story of You is the very history of China, of the wars and immigrations of Chinese in the post war era. In one episode toward the end of the film, an anxious Takarada Akira slaps You, who has gone missing in the streets of Tokyo. You sees it as the way Japanese men express their love. She returns to him the slap. Viewers may compare it to the slap of Li Xianglan (Shirley Yamaguchi) in *China Night* (1940). She falls in love with a Japanese man after he has slapped her. It was a sensational scene, and some regarded it a disgrace to the Chinese. This slap in the 1960s in a way is a response to that episode in history.

Open Discussion

Leo Chan Tak-hung: three questions on 'Women Who Cross Borders' I am interested in three concepts as presented in Dr Wong's paper. First, transnational border-crossing. Second, women and modernity. Third, transnational cinema. Three of the female leads end up not crossing the national boundaries. In *Her Tender Heart*, You Min decided to stay in Hong Kong to take care of her stepfather instead of leaving for Italy with Wang Lai, her birth mother. In *Star of Hong Kong*, again You Min ends up separated from rather than marry to her Japanese lover. In *Hong Kong, Tokyo, Honolulu*, You Min, born a transnational, eventually marries Takarada Akira, the two choose to return to Hawaii where they first met. Even though the air-hostess Grace Chang can continue to enjoy her job, one would be hard put to say that she has done anything more than nominally crossed national boundaries. At the end of the movie, the audience sees Grace Chang introducing foreign cultures to her customers ironically through her songs. The movies seem to espouse a rather superficial transnationalism. I am tempted to put them in a category of travel movies. Dr Wong has mentioned that the international relationship is far from prefect. And the obstacle stands out as clearly as the effort at mutually communication. From a theatrical point of view, can these movies be regards as truly transnational?

This brings me to the second question, how can the woman characters be said to be modern. We are all aware of the many definitions of modernity. And recently the debate has been reopened by the three books by Leo Lee Ou-fan, Tang Xiaobing and Si Shumei. One of the most important qualities appears to be a 'consistent reflection upon oneself' which You Min and Grace Chang are obviously engaged in. There are also repeated references to the assertive, spirited, cheerful, and strong-willed characters of You Min and Grace Chang in the various movies. Others qualities which constitute a modern woman include the perusal of love and achievement of liberation through a satisfying career and so on. But I am not sure whether the definition of modernity in this paper is so encompassing that even the rather introverted character of You Min in *Star of Hong Kong* can be considered as such. I wonder why Grace Chang who is set to be a more modern woman than

You Min is not given a much attention she seems to deserve. Isn't there a hint here that transnational experience itself somehow constitutes modernity? In what way can transnational experiences be viewed as equivalent to modernity? That appeared to me a rather narrow and debatable definition.

The third question concerns the nature of transnational movies produced in 1950s and 1960s by MP & GI. Considering the fact that both *Star of Hong Kong* and *Hong Kong, Tokyo, Honolulu* were directed by Chiba Yasuki and written by two Japanese scriptwriters, I think it would be necessary to see things from both the Japanese side as well as from the Hong Kong side. Dr Wong said that in You Min, Hong Kong woman is idealised as subservient and gentle, which served as warning to the modern Japanese women that they should not give up their traditional role or they'll lose their men. Equally, the Chinese audience is supposed to think of Takarada Akira as the ideal lover, the gallant prince charming. I would like to consider other possibilities. Wouldn't the Chinese audience be relieved to see You Min has decided not to marry Takarada Akira? Wouldn't the Japanese be confided that the Japanese woman is not defeated by a Chinese woman? The really interesting question here is how in a transnational film production a balance be found by the scriptwriter so that diverging audience expectation can be catered to at the same time. Given the antagonism between the two countries in WWII, the movie producer must have had a difficult time negotiating between the competing cultural forces. The reason for the success of movies like *Star of Hong Kong* as well as the popularity of You Min deserves further investigation. Do the Chinese and Japanese cultures meet at some point, or do the two audiences look at different things when seeing that movie? What specify, do we see from the success and failure of movies like *Star of Hong Kong*, *Hong Kong, Tokyo, Honolulu*, *Madame Butterfly*, *The White Rose of Hong Kong* (1967) and so on? Do we see what works and what does not work in Chinese and Japanese co-productions? I await further studies of these movies from Dr Wong.

Leung Chan: The Script Committee at MP & GI

Dr Wong's essay touches on the role of the Script Committee at MP & GI. This tradition went back to the post-war years of the 1940s and 1950s, when companies like Dazhonghua (Great China) took the same initiative, headed by Han Beiping and other distinguished personnel from the mainland. Another company is Great Wall, not in its early days under Zhang Shankun's leadership but after Yuen Yang-an took over the company and established the department to proofread and supervise scripts. Yung Hwa was the third, with a script committee comprises such renowned figures as Zhou Yibai, Zhang Junxiang, Ke Ling, and Wu Zuguang. The fourth is MP & GI, essentially its Mandarin film unit. After the war, there was Grandview headed by Chiu Shu-sun, a filmmaker returned from America to open the company's Hong Kong branch. Lau Fong was its manager, heading the script department comprising Ng Wui, Chun Kim, Lee Fa, Mok Hong-si, and Mak Tai-fei. The sixth is The Union, with a committee making up of Lee Sun-fung, Chun Kim, Ng Wui, Lee Tit, Wong Hang. The advantage of the script committee is the streamlining of the entire process, from the submission of scripts by individual

directors to their approval and execution by the production department. At MP & GI, it was the job of Stephen Soong, overseen by its general manager Robert Chung who was often credited as the executive producer of its productions. Throughout the years, MP & GI had produced much less films than its closest rival, Shaws. One of the reasons which may account for MP & GI's relatively low productivity is the way its personnel meticulously discussed every step of its production with the boss Loke Wan Tho. Loke's movie empire constitutes a relatively small part of its business empire and could only afford to devote a fraction of his time on the company. Dr Wong's essay addressed this issue well. Shaws' vigorous purchase of Japanese films compelled MP & GI to follow suit. Collaborations with Toho, led by Kawakita Nagamasa seemed to offer a quick solution. And that's how business deals with the Toho were struck up.

P K Leung: I think Dr Wong's paper is not so much on transnational cinema but rather the problems of a transnational cinema. At parts, it resembles an airline commercial, others so calculated as to avoid offending both sides. Yet, it is significant to look at these past examples, such as these films from the 1060s, to see how the two production companies not only negotiating with each other, but the dynamics of their respective cultural heritage, and the different audience reception in the light of present discussions on national cinema.

Mary Wong: It was exactly the 'travel' elements of the film that I find interesting! After all, air travel was a rarity in the 1960s in both Hong Kong and Japan. This film serves two groups of audience and fulfils their dreams. But there's a serious side to this travelogue theme. My focus is on the difficulties transnationalism poses to the audience, who are economically deprived.

Fujii Shozo: How Men see Women Who Cross Borders

My question to Dr Wong is how men see women who cross borders. *Star of Hong Kong* seems to be a warning from Japanese men telling Japanese women not to give up their virtues or they'll lose their men to girls from Hong Kong. The trilogy begins with a tragedy and ends with a happy ending for its male protaganist. In the first film, Takarada Akira, the journalist dies in Cambodia similar to the protagonist in *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955). In the second, some hope is left to Takarada Akira with You running after him at the airport; in the third, he gets married to the girl, though not without the slap. How do the three groups of male audience in Japan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia respectively, respond to the trilogy having gone through the Japanese's invasion and colonisation of China in the 1940s, and the Korean War in the 1950s?

With the population of Hong Kong increasing from 1.5 million in 1946 to 2 million in the next year largely due to immigrants from Shanghai, what impact did it have on the local Hong Kong cinema? Did film personnel from Shanghai contribute to its success?

Yomota Gorky Inuhiko: Two Actresses, One War

The actress You Min is resonant of the notorious character played by Li Xianglan (Shirley Yamaguchi) in *China Night*

(1940), a story of Shanghai after the invasion by the Japanese army. A Japanese sailor (Hasegawa Kazu) saves an orphan girl from being sexually harassed by the Japanese army. He takes her to a hotel, but she resists out of fear even though he is a good person. To me the theme echoes Hasegawa Kazuo's famous line 'teasing and teaching Japanese-ness'. As the story develops, one of his relatives kidnaps her but he sets her free again. There he slaps her to make her come to her senses. Li was arrested for treason because of her portrayal in this film. Turns out she is really a Japanese national and was released.

Toho was one of the big five film companies in the 1960s. The industry at the time boosted production of two films per week, totalling five hundred films a year. Toho's films are essentially portrayal of the bourgeois, the life of the middle-class people. In this sense, MP & GI shares a similar mentality with Toho. Its boss Kawakita Nagamasa imported many French films to Japan. He studied for a year at Peking University and founded China Film Company, Shanghai to film *The Opium War* in 1943. In the late 1940s, it was rumoured that he went out with Li Xianglan. He was also the producer of Toho's *China Night*. Between *China Night* and *Star of Hong Kong* was the war, but Toho survived, thanks to middle class sentiments it clung on.

Hokkaido, the Utopia

Hokkaido has been filmed many times in Japanese films, and there are two stereotypical images attached to the place: the utopia dream of the lost Manchuria. When I was a child, I thought Hokkaido must be in America as it represents everything Western, cowboys armed with guns to fight the bandits. To people in Hong Kong, a snowy place has a connotation to Beijing, the lost country in the north. Travelling in the 1960s was difficult. To Japanese, the West is Hong Kong, and the East end is Hawaii. The title *Hong Kong, Tokyo, Honolulu* means 'all the world' to the Japanese audience. A foretelling film!

Momma Takashi:

Towards a Chronology of Asian Cinema

Chinese films were not available in Japan, except co-productions like these. I saw three of them in this conference, and am fascinated by the dream-like realm they portray. You Min is the second Chinese actress to break through the Japanese market after Li Xianglan. Indeed she was labelled as 'Li Xianglan the second' at the time. It relates to my studies of the image of the Chinese in Japanese films and of Japanese in Asian films. Dr Wong's paper sheds light on the studies of these films from a Hong Kong perfective.

At the moment, publications on the history of local cinema are abundant. Yet they are very specific, containing no regional references, and the documentation of co-productions is often neglected. There were border-crossers abound. Comedian Liu Enjia had learned Japanese and had filmed in Manchuria. Tadashi Nishimoto, photographer of many Bruce Lee films, You Min, Wang Yin and so on all warrant further studies. It is my wish for countries like Japan, Hong Kong and Korea to bridge their own boundaries and collaborate on writing a chronology of Asian cinema.

Collated by Agnes Lam and Jennifer Lai

MP & GI Symposium

Jointly presented by the Centre for Humanities Research of Lingnan University and the Hong Kong Film Archive

Session 5: 'Studio Style'

Date: 10th April, 2002
Time: 10.00 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.
Venue: Hong Kong Film Archive Cinema
Chair: Law Kar (Programmer, HKFA)

Speakers: Shu Kei (Hong Kong Film Researcher / Critic)

(From left) Mr Shu Kei and Mr Law Kar.

Shu Kei: Studio Style

The word 'studio' is taken after the Hollywood 'studio system' during Hollywood's Golden Era (1930 - 1949) when the Big Eight film enterprises (Paramount, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 20th Century Fox, Warner Brothers, Radio-Keuth-Orphem, Universal, Columbia, and United Artists) reigned the film industry in America. All of them adopted the so-called 'vertical integration' management style, that is to harness production, distribution and exhibition, the three core components of the industry, to achieve maximum profits and control.

Loke Wan Tho appreciated the importance of these three interrelated units even at the dawn of Motion Picture & General Investment Co Ltd (MP & GI, later restructured as Cathay), and despite the many production opportunities opened up to him well before the establishment of MP & GI, Loke would only venture into production after strengthening its exhibition and distribution networks.

1. A comparison of MP & GI's Structure and Hollywood Studio System

1.1 Power transfer

MP & GI's deployment of personnel is a feature that distinguishes itself from other Hong Kong companies also modelling on the Hollywood studio system (like Shaws, Yung Hwa, Great China). Since Loke's diversified business empire spread across Southeast Asia, the film business constituted an relatively insignificant part. Loke's power transfer to a lower level was rather unusual at the time when the principles of traditional Chinese family business ruled.

1.2 Tailored-made but non-archetypical roles

Like Hollywood, MP & GI had a star system. Hollywood studios would sign a contract with members of the cast and crew and create tailor-made roles for their contracted actors and actresses based on their unique temperament and personality. The stars' images and their performances on screen nursed by such a system are perhaps MP & GI/Cathay's most remarkable achievement to date. It is even more remarkable that each of the actors and actresses would have their own distinguishable persona without fallen into archetypes.

1.3 The roles of scriptwriters

MP & GI held a similar view to scripts as Hollywood studios did, but there are some interesting discrepancies. Hollywood sees script as the most important part of the entire production cycle. Even directors were seen as mere executioners of the scripts. At MP & GI, the emphasis too was on the script department and its pool of scriptwriters. But later development would tell a different story. In Hollywood, the script itself held the pole position, and the scriptwriters were relegated to secondary role. On the contrary, the scriptwriters were valued over the scripts at MP & GI. The creative direction and ideas were advocated by the scriptwriters, always gaining the full support of the creative department and the management. The best illustration is *The Wild, Wild Rose* (1960). According to its lead actress Grace Chang, the original idea of the film came from one of MP & GI's key scriptwriters, Nellie Chin Yu. Chin intended Chang to play a role utterly different from her previous ones. The character and the way Chang played it was an overturn and challenge to the moral values of the old society. The way MP & GI provided full support to a creative idea advocated by a scriptwriter was indeed rare in local and overseas cinemas.

1.4 Genre films - urban comedies and musicals

Another characteristic of MP & GI that parallels Hollywood studios is the production of the studio's own brand of genre films. Influenced by its creative team, MP & GI productions are mostly contemporaries, with its strength lying in urban comedies and musicals.

2. The Reasons behind Its Fall

2.1 Focus on Mandarin Films

The phenomenon of Mandarin films dominating a primarily Cantonese-speaking market (the majority of the Hong Kong population are Cantonese-speakers) is itself an odd case. Judging from the natural course of societal development, the production of Mandarin features was all but a transitional product of a particular era. Even Shaws, MP & GI's biggest rival, had since 1973 slowly given up on the Mandarin market, which eventually ceased to exist in a few years' time.

2.2 The petit bourgeois debate

The society presented by MP & GI/Cathay's films was a society that was undergoing changes at real time, and not the one that was fading away. It was a lengthy process evolving from a poverty-stricken post-war society, through the 1960s to the petit bourgeois society portrayed in their films. It was in MP & GI's films that this evolutionary development was first presented to the mass. That societal reality in motion is the very process of modernisation, of a poverty-stricken society crossing over to becoming a metropolis.

Cantonese cinema, at the same time, had taken on a bourgeois and youthful outlook. This transition had a lasting effect, bearing enormous influences as seen in the Kong Ngee era and Josephine Siao/Chan Po-chu era. It ran parallel to MP & GI, so it's rather inappropriate to attribute MP & GI's ultimate failure to its isolation from the reality. Rather, MP & GI had always been in touch with time.

Open Discussion

Professor Yomota Gorky Inuhiko (Meijigakuin University): From my observation, MP & GI seems to have a certain preference: the Peninsular Hotel and Island South, two familiar settings in MP & GI films, appeared to the audience to be the centre or pivotal point of Hong Kong. I think it involves the ideology of space. Did the shift of cinematic settings occur in Hong Kong cinema in 1967? And if yes, was it related to the decline of Cathay/MP & GI?

Shu Kei: After Cathay's closure, the sentimentality attributed to the growth of a city or the process of a city growing up had by large disappeared on the screen. The role had been taken up by other media. The New Wave directors are more sensitive towards the geography of Hong Kong and such a sensitivity was bred during their TV tenure.

Law Kar: In fact, both the Cantonese and Mandarin films of MP & GI were equally responding to societal changes. Their only difference lies in their approaches. MP & GI embraced the notion that the society was absorbing outside influences, becoming increasingly commericial, modernised and urbanised. The Cantonese camp sensed that direction, too. Many a Cantonese film produced in the late 1950s and the early 1960s featured in its opening scene the clock tower in Tsim Sha Tsui and the camera gliding over to the ferry across the harbour; it was the same Central and the same story of a working class character seeking his living somewhere in Central. It was a common sight among The Union's films, and Kong Ngee's films managed to yield an even more modern version. Yet, the two camps, both situated in and talking about the early 1960s society, had different points of view. The Cantonese camp resisted Western influence, the westernised style of living and capitalism. They clung to set moral standards, and valued a harmonious existence among families and people. Yet their resistance to urbanisation cannot be dismissed as an absence of societal portrayal in their films.

I agree that there's a large degree of realism in MP & GI's films and disagree that they were out of touch with the society. Indeed, they had a vision of what would become of Hong Kong, and the adjustment the society would make to accept the Western ways of living and modes of thought. That we consider Cantonese films to be conservative was the resistance it made against a foreseeable capitalist lifestyle the society would inevitably adopt. They resisted new changes and were even afraid of them. The Cantonese camp adopted a conservative attitude and class-consciousness synonymous to the so-called 'progressive thinking' of the 1930s and 1940s, which when applied to the 1960s, was clearly outdated with its bias towards the rich and favouritism towards the poor. It is clear that the two camps represented two mind sets towards the society.

Collated by Liu Suet-wan; translated by Agnes Lam

MP & GI Symposium

Jointly presented by the Centre for Humanities Research of Lingnan University and the Hong Kong Film Archive

Session 6: 'The Film Genres of MP & GI: Wuxia and the Musical'

Date: 10th April, 2002

Time: 2.00 - 5.00 p.m.

Venue: Hong Kong Film Archive Cinema

Host: Sam Ho (Hong Kong film critic and researcher)

Speakers: Stephen Teo (PhD candidate, RMIT University, Melbourne)
Li Siu-leung (Associate Professor, Cultural Studies Department, Lingnan University)

(From left) Mr Sam Ho, Dr Li Siu-leung and Mr Stephen Teo.

Stephen Teo: Cathay and the Wuxia Film

My topic refers to the wuxia films produced by Cathay Organisation (Hong Kong) after the studio was renamed from MP & GI in 1965. This is an important benchmark because it relates to the question of style. The MP & GI studio produced relatively few wuxia films and the studio style was focused on modern genres such as musicals, youth movies, urban comedies and family melodramas. Cathay, on the other hand, focused more on period movies, including wuxia films. It was no accident that Cathay would make wuxia films since its rival, Shaw Brothers, had launched its campaign to make action movies in the so-called 'new school' wuxia form. The term 'new school' was derived from wuxia literature published by authors such as Jin Yong (aka Louis Cha) and Liang Yusheng. In the late 1950s, Cantonese cinema had first started adapting the works of new school authors. In the Mandarin cinema, Shaw Brothers had begun making 'new school'

wuxia movies in 1965, such as *Chang Cheh's Tiger Boy* (1966), Xu Zenghong's *Temple of the Red Lotus* (1965) and *The Twin Swords* (1965). However, it was the left-wing Great Wall studio that made the first adaptation from a new school wuxia novel: *The Jade Bow* (1966), taken from a Liang Yusheng novel.

1. The Impact of Wuxia on Cathay

Cathay responded slowly to the wuxia craze because it was undergoing a transitional phase. From 1965-1966, the studio produced a series of costume movies, such as *huangmei diao* (Yellow Plum Opera) operettas, historical chamber movies, and *Liaozhai* ghost stories. Such genres were already made popular by Shaw Brothers and were going out of fashion by the mid-60s. However, Cathay could not but respond to the challenge of making wuxia films, and in 1966, produced *The First Sword*. The studio discovered that it lacked the talent to portray macho muscular heroes of the yang gang style as propounded by director Chang Cheh at Shaw Brothers. Neither an established star such as Chao Lei, nor Charles Chin and Peter Chen Ho, younger talent that the studio trained could convey the magnetism of the younger stars working at Shaw Brothers, such as Jimmy Wang Yu, Luo Lie, Ti Lung, David Chiang.

The First Sword, released in 1967, successfully established a wuxia niche for Cathay. The movie was written and directed by Tu Guangqi from his own novel. It is quite original, establishing a wuxia style for the studio, with an emphasis on mood and atmosphere, and elements such as the use of poison, the projection of deadly rays from the palm, the use of booby-traps, clan conflict and intrigue. The film alters certain formality of traditional wuxia novels adaptations and can be seen as a variation of the crime detection novels known as gong'an (meaning 'public case'). As for Chao Lei's performance, he succeeded in conveying himself as a wuxia hero despite his middle age and plump appearance.

2. Variations on the Heroic Prototype

The Smiling Swordsman (dir Jiang Nan, starring Chen Ho,1968) and *Mad, Mad, Mad Sword* (dir Wang Tianlin, starring Tian Qing, 1969) were conscious spoofs of the genre. They sought to parody the image of the hero and contained many allusions to wuxia classics, such as Chang Cheh's *The One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) and the Japanese Zatoichi (Blind Swordsman) series. These two films are not Cathay's most outstanding but they are significant as forays into parody at a time when the genre had reached a peak of development (the period from 1965 to 1967) in the Mandarin cinema as a whole. They may be seen as the precursors of the kung fu comedy of the late 1970s and early 1980s starring the likes of Dean Shek, Sammo Hung, Karl Maka and Jackie Chan. However, even as parodies, the two films had still to function as action pictures. Cathay would insist to contain conventional action sequences in a portrayal of the wuxia hero.

Escorts over Tiger Hill (1969) and *From the Highway* (1970) are the two most important of Cathay's wuxia films. The lack of a *yang gang* hero compelled the studio to modify the heroic prototype. In *Escorts*, Roy Chiao plays a monk, an ex-guerrilla recalled into service to escort a group of prisoners over Tartar territory. The enemy ambushes the escort and Chiao's character breaks the taboo of killing. The sequence showing Chiao killing the enemy in an anguished frenzy has psychological overtones. The display of violence to question the character of the protagonist is a rare insight in the wuxia films of the period. *From the Highway* is the next key work in the Cathay wuxia pantheon. In the age of the sword fighting wuxia film, From the Highway offers a variation of combat styles, showing its characters using their fists and other parts of their body as weapons: the hero relies on nothing but his bare fists to fight the villains, one of whom uses his pigtail, and the other his bald head. Although interesting for its details of northern Chinese regional cultures and the lifestyles of communities living within vast fortresses, its significance lies in its initiative to transit from wuxia to kung fu. Its box office success led Shaw Brothers to follow the same trend, releasing movies such as *Vengeance* (170) and *The Chinese Boxer* (1970), both of which featuring bare-fist fighting in northern Chinese settings of the early Republican period. These movies constituted the pre-Bruce Lee kung fu trend.

3. Conclusion

Ever since it was restructured as Cathay in 1965, the studio was on a down slope. There was talk of a merger between Cathay and Shaw Brothers but this came to nothing. *Escorts over Tiger Hill* and *From the Highway* were unprecedented big-budget productions. They were clearly attempts to try to preserve the fortunes of the studio and stop its decline, but were finally unable to stave off the inevitable collapse. The studio closed down in 1971, the year Bruce Lee appeared in the scene to set the certain on the kung fu craze. Cathay's existence coincided with the rise and decline of the wuxia resurgence from 1965-1971.

Li Siu-leung: MP & GI and the Musical Film

The musical is well defined in the West, but in the Chinese-speaking world, the musical or the singsong movie refers to films that insert segments of singing and dancing. MP & GI's musicals include films such as *It's Always Spring* (1962), *Cinderella and Her Little Angels* (1959), and *Calendar Girl* (1959). Films like *Mambo Girl* (1957) and *The Wild, Wild Rose* (1960) are affiliated to the musical but are not full-fledged musicals as such. There are many non-musical films that contain mere inserts of song segments. This type of film will not be discussed here.

1. The Development of the Musical Film in Hong Kong

The musical as a cinematic genre existed in Shanghai before the 1950s. In the 1950s, Shanghai migrants such as Evan Yang and Tao Qin developed their careers in Hong Kong. The first musical produced by MP & GI was *Calendar Girl*, a colour film directed by Tao Qin. The film reflected the kind of Hollywood influences already absorbed in Shanghai by the director and other personnel working in the studio such as the producer-writer Stephen Soong. These people were mainly responsible for the rise of the musical film in MP & GI. Based on these premises, and on clips of MP & GI's musical films that I will show, I will raise several points for discussion:

2. The Pursuit of Modernisation, Westernisation, and the Rise of the Middle Class

Many scholars have pointed out that MP & GI's films are very 'middle class'. Their musicals bear this out. The musical form is essentially an imported product, and the musical film could be seen as an imported commodity that relates to entertainment and leisure for the middle classes. The musical film evidently reflected the middle class's pursuit of modernised lifestyles. In *Mambo Girl*, many scenes of singing and dancing are set within the confines of an elite boys' school; in *Our Sister Hedy* (1957), the Julie Yeh Feng character learns how to draw oil paintings, Jeanette Lin Cui learns how to fence, and so on. In *Cinderella and Her Little Angels*, Linda Lin Dai plays a model who hails from a conservative orphanage run by a Christian church. Though Lin Dai's chosen career poses a contrast with her conservative upbringing, what is interesting is the fact that there are little traces of Chinese culture in her world. Even the conservative characters in the film are from the West. The main theme is naturally that of a conflict between modernisation and a conservative morality. Lin brings out the character's pursuit of modern and western lifestyle values perched on consumerism, as she is often seen in ever-changing attire and multi-cultural settings.

3. Affinity for Identity and Culture

In the pursuit of modernisation, a crisis of identity arises. Which culture should one belong to? How should one construct one's identity? This is the theme of Mambo Girl. Many commentators have pointed out that the film defines Hong Kong's identity. Law Kar has suggested that it was in this film that Hong Kong cinema had properly cast away Shanghai's shadow. The mother in the film symbolises China while the stepfather symbolises Hong Kong. Grace Chang chooses to return to her stepfather.

4. Cultural Hybridity

The Grace Chang character in *The Wild, Wild Rose* is like Lin Dai's in *Cinderella and Her Little Angels*, a fluid character. She is adept in Spanish and Japanese dancing, and appears in various national identities. In musicals such as *Cinderella and Her Little Angels*, *The Wild, Wild Rose* and *Calendar Girl*, their settings become, in postcolonial term, places of convergence. The interaction of cultures has not produced a situation where one culture could dominate or suppress another. Even relatively weaker cultures have their space and place to negotiate. This is when 'the Other' becomes prominent and nationalism is discarded and forgotten.

5. Youth and Enjoyment

In the musical films of the 1950s and 1960s, youths are often shown enjoying themselves. How does this relate to the concept of the nation as the wider entity? Youth and enjoyment are weapons to be exempted from the burden of a nation. What is youth for? Is youth to be spent in the service of the country? A song lyric written by Zhou Cong says that youth is for oneself. I am not saying that musicals cannot handle serious subject matter, but the MP & GI musicals express an overwhelming theme of youth and enjoyment.

6. Let's Dance

I'd like to quote the signature line in the programme *Yan Can Cook* which is 'Yan can cook and so can you!' Applying this to the MP & GI musicals, the line could read, 'Grace Chang can dance, and so can you!' or 'Chen Hou can dance, and so can you.' The implicit meaning here is that these actors did not use doubles for their scenes of dancing. Naturally, they spent hours in rehearsal and training but they were not professional dancers. In their scenes, they appeared accessible, like one of us in the audience. You come out from the cinema thinking you too can dance.

Open Discussion

P K Leung: About the special characteristics of Cathay's wuxia films. Are *The Smiling Swordsman* and *Mad, Mad, Mad Sword* the earliest forms of parody in the wuxia genre?

Stephen Teo: I believe these were the earliest parodies of the genre. Cathay lacked the stars to convey the *yang gang* element. In addition, when the studio started making wuxia films, the genre was over its peak and this allowed the studio to experiment with the archetypal image of the hero. They created a parody of the hero to raise laughter, as in the characters portrayed by Tian Qing in *Sword* and Chen Ho in *Swordsman*. Tian Qing's image in *Sword* is a spoof of the heroic archetype portrayed in *The One-Armed Swordsman*. In *Swordman*, there are also echoes of *Dragon Inn*. Clearly the film was trying to send up these classics.

Mary Wong: I have seen very few Cathay wuxia films. You said there were psychological overtones in the Roy Chiao character in *Escorts over Tiger Hill*. Was this one difference between Cathay's wuxia films and that of Shaw Brothers?

Stephen Teo: I am not saying that Shaw Brothers films don't contain psychological overtones. The Roy Chiao character in *Escorts over Tiger Hill* is another attempt to question the heroic type. This was made imperative because Cathay lacked the stars to portray yang gang. The director could under this condition question the concept of xia. In describing Roy Chiao's monk as he breaks the commandment against killing, we see the director using a freeze frame of the monk's face as he cries, rushing out to face his enemies. He wipes out dozens of soldiers in a relatively short time frame, but the director uses superimpositions of imaginary enemies to show the character's perhaps distorted frame of mind since he has resorted to violence. In previous sequences, the character had used his sword to fend off the enemy but the sword remained sheathed in its scabbard. The whole sequence of the monk's resort to violence is not protracted. This kind of treatment, I believe, was a sign of the director's intention to portray the contradicting emotions within his character. If Chang Cheh had handled the sequence, the character might have appeared naked to the waist to face his enemies. The whole sequence would be a protracted massacre sequence, involving the hero's disembowelment at the climax and elaborate opera-like gestures.

Law Kar: I would like to say something about the variations on the heroic image in wuxia films. The 1960s was a time when the Italian 'spaghetti westerns' were popular in Hong Kong. Many people have said that the spaghetti westerns were a variation on the Kurosawa samurai pictures, particularly *Sanjuro* (Sword for Hire, 1952) and *Yojimbo* (1961). The Italian westerns made fun of the samurai image. The hero went about with his unkempt look, but in fact, he is a powerful warrior, waiting for an opportunity to show his mettle. This kind of variation made the films very popular. The Italians created this new heroic image: a hero who had bedraggled looks and you can't distinguish whether he's a good guy or bad guy. Sometimes there are heroic, but often they are cynical and vulgar and may kill for money. This type of image contravened the conventional image of the cowboy hero who stood for law and order and high ideals of justice and fairness.

These films had a huge influence on Cathay or Shaws. From the Highway was adapted from a novel by Sima Zhongyuan but the influence of 'spaghetti westerns' is apparent. The character of the lone stranger, played by Yang Qun, keeps himself on the sidelines and won't show his hand until he is ready - somewhat like Clint Eastwood in his spaghetti western films. You can't tell whether he's the good guy or the bad guy because he just observes. Occasionally, he intervenes, but not always, and he remains in the sidelines until much later when he shows he's really the good guy and that his mission is one of revenge but also to help the weak against the strong. I have not read the book, but this type of treatment in the film already shows the influence of the Italian western. I think such influences are worthy of further study.

Sam Ho: One key influence coming out of the Italian western genre was also seen in the kung fu film, and this was the way in which the hero valued money. The 'man with no name' persona created by Clint Eastwood was very money-conscious. In Hong Kong, this type of money consciousness wasn't seen until the 1980s, which is also indicative of how Hong Kong society had changed its value system with the amassing of wealth. A clear example is Jackie Chan in *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (1978), where different schools of martial arts compete for students because they want to make money.

Wong Ain-ling: I would like to refer to what Dr Lee said in his report on the MP & GI musicals on the way musicals treat the concept of traditional culture. One could compare MP & GI's Cantonese film, for example, Tso Kea's *The Sorrowful Lute* (1957) with the Mandarin musical *Calendar Girl*. There is a musical segment in the opening of Lute, set in the early Republican period. Fong Yim-fun leads a band of song-girls in dancing 'On the Peach Blossom River' number. The girls are wearing short dresses and look very sexy, but they look dispirited. After the show, Fong Yim-fun changes clothes and goes to watch Cantonese opera, and her face brightens up. It turns out that traditional Chinese opera is her true vocation. *Calendar Girl* on the other hand moves along on the beat of popular Mandarin songs from the 1930s and 1940s. From these two segments, we can see different reactions to the issue of modernisation and imported culture. There is a sense of resistance in Lute. It is conscious that its cultural legacy derives from traditional opera - this may have something to do with the fact that its lead star is a Cantonese opera diva, Fong Yim-fun. *Calendar Girl* is not altogether derivative of Western culture. The character Luo Wei plays is an old-fashioned kind of choreographer who is enamoured of 1930s and 1940s period culture. Though that may still be modern, compared with the 1950s and 1960s, it was already out of fashion and could be regarded as traditional. I think there such dialectics that come out of the films themselves are very rich and interesting.

The 'June Bride' fashion show in *Cinderella and Her Little Angels* is also informative. They are wearing Chinese traditional wedding gown. In this construct, China is the 'Other'. As people residing in Hong Kong, wearing white wedding dress is very Hong Kong, an element in its lifestyle they identify with. On the other hand, in *It's Always Spring*, a sequence showing Li Mei dressed in traditional Chinese costume singing the 'Wanton Song' number. In a Western environment, the dress looks very exotic.

Li Siu-leung: China doesn't really exist in the examples that you have cited. It's an imaginary China or a lost China. Westernisation had already reached a transparent stage and it was already natural for people to be 'Westernised'. There's a difference between idolising foreign ways and the process of Westernisation. The musicals of MP & GI don't give me an impression of idolising foreign ways, rather it is an accepted lifestyle.

Stephen Teo: The concept of 'old China' or 'abstract China' can be differentiated in the names of MP & GI and Cathay. Cathay of course symbolises 'old China' and it venerates traditional ways. This is one reason why I wanted to clearly define MP & GI from Cathay because it relates to the question of style. MP & GI were transparently modern-minded and progressive while

Cathay was more conservative. When the studio changed its name, the style changed too, and Cathay signified more of an adherence to traditional genres.

Sam Ho: Wong Ain-ling's comment that 'China has become the other' leads me to think of how Hong Kong raised the same line in the 1980s because of the 1997 question. Then, the line became, 'How to look at China as the other'. In Hong Kong films in the 1980s, 'China as the other' was a running theme which involved many conflicting and anguish emotions. Therefore, when we now look back at the MP & GI films of the 1950s and 1960s, the theme of 'China as the other' was dealt quite differently from the manner which Hong Kong films dealt with it in the 1980s. This is a display of how culture and history is evolving.

Collated by Liu Suet-wan; translated by Stephen Teo

MP & GI Symposium

Jointly presented by the Centre for Humanities Research of Lingnan University and the Hong Kong Film Archive

Session 7: MP & GI's Cantonese Productions

Date: 11th April, 2002

Time: 10 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.

Venue: Hong Kong Film Archive Cinema

Host: Wong Ain-ling (Researcher Officer, Hong Kong Film Archive)

Speakers: Sam Ho (Hong Kong Film Scholar)
Li Cheuk-to (Hong Kong International Film Festival General Manager/Film Critic)

Guest: Tau Hon-fun (MP & GI staff member)

(From left) Mr Sam Ho, Ms Wong Ain-ling and Mr Li Cheuk-to.

Wong Ain-ling: MP & GI is generally known for its Mandarin films rather than Cantonese films. However, MP & GI's predecessor in Hong Kong, the International Films Distributing Agency ('International' in short) produced its inaugural film in Cantonese. MP & GI has produced quite a few outstanding Cantonese films, such as those directed by Tso Kea and Mok Hong-si. We are honoured in this session to have Mr Tau Hon-fun with us. Mr Tau was a staff member of MP & GI in its heyday and is knowledgeable about the operation of MP & GI's Cantonese group. I would like to invite him to tell us about some background of MP & GI's Cantonese productions before we begin our reports with Sam Ho and Li Cheuk-to.

Tau Hon-fun: I joined the film industry in the 1950s. I didn't have any formal training in the film art but was accepted into The Union Film Enterprise Ltd. One or two years later, I joined the International, an affiliated establishment of

Singapore's Cathay Organisation which had a vast theatre network in Singapore and Malaysia. The company needed a steady supply of films to maintain this network and thus got into film production. There weren't too many staff members then. The chief task was to buy films in Hong Kong that had an appeal to the market in Southeast Asia. This included both foreign films and Hong Kong's productions, including films such as Tso Kea's *My Wife, My Wife* (1955) and *Sweet Dreams* (1955) produced by Koo Man-kuen (the wife of Leung Sing-po). We handled the films of The Union for distribution in Singapore.

In around 1955, Cathay decided to expand International. They restructured it and registered a new company, Motion Picture & General Investment Co Ltd (MP & GI). Robert Chung was the managing director and it was decided that the new company would produce films in both Mandarin and Cantonese. At first, only three or four Cantonese pictures were produced annually. We didn't produce more than five pictures per year in the following years. Tso Kea directed most of the films. He signed a contract with us on a per-picture basis. We worked well together. He directed almost all our films in the first two years. He would talk to us the moment he had an idea or a script. Later, he joined Cheung Ying's production company Overseas Chinese Films, and couldn't work with us on a regular basis.

When International bought *My Wife, My Wife*, an embryonic Cantonese film unit was already functioning. This was because the production companies whose films we were buying had to seek our consent before hand and clear up the copyright. So distribution rights were presold before the picture would go into production. From commencement of shooting to submission of the finished film, we had the right to go to the set to oversee the production.

Sam Ho: My View of MP & GI's Cantonese Films

When I was a child, I was fond of watching MP & GI's Cantonese films. I had the opportunity to watch a lot of the studio's Cantonese films recently because I was editing the book *The Cathay Story*. I noticed that there were differences between these Cantonese features and the studio's Mandarin films as well as Cantonese films produced by other studios. The unique features of Cantonese pictures include stringent production and a sophisticated visual style, particularly in the films of Tso Kea.

1. The Making of Bitter Lotus

I will focus on the film *Bitter Lotus* (1960), directed by Wong Toi. This is a very special film, which was very successful on its release. The story is not far different

from the average Cantonese film dealing with a good-hearted married woman and her litany of humiliations. However, its treatment of the story was very meticulous. The conception of the story didn't come from Li Ngaw but from a novel that was sent to MP & GI from Taiwan. When it was decided to adapt the novel, Tau Hon-fun suggested that they find Li to write a radio script and broadcast it as an 'airwave novel'. This was already a sign of how the studio had done its market research and launched its plan to sell the story in a more popular way through mobilising various production departments. Hollywood later adopted this strategy of promoting a film via multiple channels. Quite a lot of people opposed this at the time, but Tau Hon-fun insisted that the story would be appropriate for Li Ngaw to use as an 'airwave novel'. Consequently, when the story was broadcast, it was a sensation, which in turn made the film a box office success.

2. Space and Depth

The story begins with Law Kim-long and Christine Pai Lo-ming throwing a wedding banquet at their home. The opening shot is quite different from a lot of Cantonese films: a large group of guests arrive, with the camera dollying along with them. The camera at once captures the group, which is to say that from the start, we see characters movement and camera movement. Next, we see how the mise-en-scene revolves around a sense of space and a sense of depth. There are many details to be glimpsed within the shot between the camera and the characters, which contributed to creating the depth of field. Such a style necessitates a lot of attention. Then the focus shifted, to the characters. 'Where's Master (Lam Kwun-shan)?' they asked. 'He's inside, drinking.' The use of off screen introductions of characters through dialogue also heightened the sense of space.

MP & GI's Cantonese films were very particular about the sense of space, and you can see that a lot of work and resources were spent on a sequence. The opening sequence in *Bitter Lotus* helps the audience to work out the characters and their relation to each other through the use of space and depth. The mise-en-scene helps the audience to grasp the inner frictions of different characters and anticipate the changes in their relationships. MP & GI's Cantonese films were quite adept in expressing the evolving relationships of characters through the way they stand, sit or move. Another unique characteristic is that in monologue scenes, the characters would always be near windows or on balconies. This is to let the audience see the characters in other spaces in their living environment. This kind of method is quite consistent with that used in MP & GI's Mandarin films.

We might compare *Bitter Lotus* with another Cantonese film bearing similar story,

Chan Pei's *A Mad Woman Goes Hunting for Her Son* (1955). Both films feature large ensembles or group scenes. The latter film uses a lot of wide shots to handle its crowd scenes, and I would say, the results are average. The former film mobilises its actors through sitting and standing, individuals or groups of people walking by and passing each other. The sensation of variation is palpable. There is more a sense of space and of dimension.

3. Character Types

We finally see the old patriarch in *Bitter Lotus* who was introduced off screen in the opening through dialogue. He's very bitter in his speech: 'He'd rather drink moonshine than brandy, marry a factory girl rather than an heiress!' In Cantonese movies, we often see malevolent mothers-in-law as stock character types, but not malevolent fathers-in-law. This is one sign of how MP & GI's Cantonese films try to depart from the norm.

Another characteristic is the emphasis on individuality. Both the female protagonists in *Bitter Lotus* and *A Mad Woman Goes Hunting for Her Son* suffer the same humiliations of having their children taken away from them. They are treated badly, but in the latter, the protagonist (Tang Bik-wan) cannot shake away her image of the weak woman, deprived of dignity, which is another stock character type in Cantonese movies. In *Bitter Lotus*, Pai Lo-ming is quite different. She shows her rages (in a close-up). The background music underlies and changes with her changing moods. She retains her dignity and self-respect. One can see in these examples, the progressive and meticulous nature of MP & GI's Cantonese film style.

Li Cheuk-to: My View of Tso Kea's Films

I will concentrate on the works of Tso Kea and Mok Hong-si.

1. MP & GI's Cantonese Film and Its Milieu of Development

The Mandarin and Cantonese cinemas in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s were two quite different worlds. This was the background against which MP & GI's Cantonese films were made. International Films Distributing Agency was set up to buy movies to supply the Cathay Organisation's vast theatre chain in Singapore and Malaysia. Rather than purchasing other people's movies, Cathay decided to make their own. Therefore, they put into practice the system of vertical integration whereby they would produce, distribute and exhibit their own films. When International was restructured into MP & GI, Robert Chung concluded that it could also make Cantonese films. This was because in Hong Kong, the market for Cantonese films was much bigger than for Mandarin films, backed up also by a

market overseas. However, the company made only five or seven Cantonese films at most each year. According to Mr Tau Hon-fun, in the 1950s, the Cantonese cinema produced up to 200 films a year and this caused a problem among companies competing fiercely for leading actors. That's why MP & GI did not produce more Cantonese films.

In the case of Mandarin films, the situation was the opposite. The market price for Mandarin films in the overseas market was always much higher, and it occupied a much bigger market. In addition, Cathay's big boss, Loke Wan-tho, and many of its managers, including Stephen Soong (head of the script committee), were educated in the West, and their tastes were quite different from those of the grassroots, petty urbanite Cantonese audience. Having chosen Mandarin films as a base of development in Hong Kong, they poured in every resources and efforts. This situation may explain why MP & GI's Cantonese films only had one female star Pai Lo-ming, whereas in the Mandarin unit, there was a plethora of female stars.

2. The Characteristics of MP & GI's Cantonese Films

2.1 A Comparison with Other Cantonese Films

MP & GI possessed the resources to render high production quality. The normal budget for a MP & GI Cantonese film was around $50,000 or $60,000. The shooting schedule was from 15 to 20 days. Compared with the 'seven day quickies' of the normal run of Cantonese film production, MP & GI's Cantonese films were big-budgeters. Favourable production circumstances naturally influenced the quality of the films. Director Tso Kea made many other outstanding pictures such as *The Sorrowful Lute, Love Lingers On* (1957), *The Tender Age* (1957), *Memories of Love* (1958), etc.

On the whole, MP & GI's Cantonese films dealt with bold subject matter in a creative way, without interference from high management. Once a subject was approved, the filmmakers were given their freedom to make it. Even if a film were to fail, the consequences were not serious. So long as one drew lessons from the failure, one could carry on without recriminations.

Memories of Love has a rather bold subject which might lead to its failure at the box office. Adapted from Hollywood's *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing* (1955), the film tells the story of a middle-age artist (Ng Cho-fan)'s adulterous affair with a young woman (Pai Lo-ming). The film's reception on its first day of release was satisfactory, but it immediately flopped into the second day. Ordinarily, Cantonese films would have avoided such 'box office poison' subject matter. MP & GI was not an ordinary Cantonese outfit. It dared to experiment. *The Sorrowful Lute* was also

adapted from a Hollywood movie, *Love Me or Leave Me*. Fong Yim-fun plays a stage actress who, for the sake of achieving fame, comes under the control of a gangster (Ng Cho-fan). Later, she marries him. This was a departure of style for the actress Fong Yim-fun, who normally played benevolent female roles without moral blemishes. *The Tender Age* was adapted from a novel by Zheng Hui. Lai Cheuk-cheuk plays a Madame of a high-class brothel who lures her three daughters into prostitution. At the time, such subject matter was quite sensational, and MP & GI made a very good film out of it.

2.2 A Comparison with MP & GI's Mandarin Films

Because Cathay's high management placed more importance on Mandarin films, all the resources and hard work were devoted to this area. This led to the company paying more attention to the script, which had to be vetted by a script committee. No matter whether or not a director had a strong style or a weak one, MP & GI's Mandarin films were quite obviously directed by a 'house style'.

MP & GI's Cantonese films were not distinguished by the house style. Rather, they depended on the style of the individual director. Tso Kea clearly was a strong director, who would write his own scripts. He was very meticulous and worked well with a repertory cast including actors Ng Cho-fan, Cheung Ying, Mui Yee, and Tsi Lo-lin. You could recognise a Tso Kea film at once. His style was uniform with those films that he made outside of MP & GI, demonstrating that he had a style of his own.

Under the same circumstances, the works of director Mok Hong-si turned out to be disappointing. Tso Kea worked more consistently in the melodrama genre, while Mok worked mainly in his signature comedy but also made melodramas such as *Bitter Romance* (1963). This tended to diffuse his style. Mok was also unfortunate in that he tended to use more mediocre actors.

Mok failed to realise that the comedies of the Mandarin unit were quite a different tendency from the Cantonese comedy. Early in the 1950s, Mok was a competent director of Cantonese comedies such as the 'Broker La' series. These films were critically and financially successful. However, when he joined MP & GI, his comedies *The Inspectress General* (1961), *False Alarm* (1962), and *Make It Mine* (1963) were not up to his early standards. It is not clear whether it was because of his own faults or whether he had been subconsciously influenced by the Mandarin comedies. He was clearly trying to break away from the tradition of the grassroots comedy in Cantonese cinema, but lacks sensibilities of the middle-class and the style of sophisticated comedy. The most important element in comedy was the quality of gags and comic performances, not the quality of production standards. Mok did not learn this lesson and was somehow misguided

by absorbing certain qualities of Mandarin comedy that weren't suitable in the Cantonese milieu.

Open Discussion

Shu Kei: Why did MP & GI decide not to make any more Cantonese films? Did they make a decision all of a sudden to stop or did they gradually phase out Cantonese film production? Is it because the market for Mandarin film was bigger?

Tau Hon-fun: Cantonese film was in decline from the mid-60s onwards. I left MP & GI in 1964 and that year, it appeared that they had already stopped making Cantonese films. I was involved in the production of several Cantonese films and they switched one or two of them into Mandarin. My impression was that Maggie Li Linlin belonged originally to the Cantonese group, and later switched over to making Mandarin films. At the time, Mandarin films had the addition of the Taiwan market. This was not so for Cantonese films.

Li Cheuk-to: When MP & GI's Cantonese films were shown in Malaysia and Singapore, were they dubbed into Mandarin? If not, did the local audience understand Cantonese?

Tau Hon-fun: Our films were rarely dubbed into Mandarin when released in Singapore and Malaysia. We wanted to make Cantonese films on the same standard as Mandarin films. In this way, we could replace some Mandarin films, and decrease the budget costs. Of course, we were not successful.

Collated by Liu Suet-wan; translated by Stephen Teo

MP & GI Symposium

Jointly presented by the Centre for Humanities Research of Lingnan University and the Hong Kong Film Archive

Session 8: 'Stars of MP & GI: Image & Impression'

Date: 11th April, 2002

Time: 3.00 p.m. - 5.30 p.m.

Venue: Hong Kong Film Archive Cinema
Chair: Law Kar (Programmer, HKFA)

Speakers: Peter Dunn (Cultural Worker/MP &GI's Child Star)

Guest: Grace Chang (Actress, MP & GI)
Hilda Chou Hsuan (Actress, MP & GI / Cathay Organisation)

(From left) Ms Hilda Chou Hsuan, Mr Peter Dunn, Mr Law Kar and Ms Grace Chang.

Peter Dunn: The Image of MP & GI's Stars

I can't think of a better word than 'gentlemanly' to describe MP & GI. Mr Loke Wan Tho was himself a gentleman, his flair and style influencing the entire company. Other MP& GI's executives such as Robert Chung and Stephen Soong were highly educated, and were the perfect gentlemen in every sense. The company they created, and later the films they produced sent forth a gentleman-like aura. By coincidence, MP & GI cultivated a group of home-groomed talent, and most preciously, they all had their own unique style and temperament. Each of them was radiant and each was equally complementary to each other.

Many say that Lucilla You Min encapsulates MP & GI, but I don't fully agree to that. The MP & GI stars we miss are not just Julie Yeh Feng, Grace Chang or You Min. It's the combination of all of them and others. So who is MP & GI's best symbol? I can think of one, and she starred in almost every MP & GI's picture.

She is Wang Lai. A versatile actress, she played each role convincingly. She would strive to display the noble side and dignity of the characters she played, be they a shrew or a courtesan, and would never surrender to vulgarity. This is essentially the MP & GI spirit and the 'gentleman-like manner' I referred to. In this era of exaggerations and gimmicks, the style of MP & GI is truly something I miss.

Grace Chang: Proud by Association

MP & GI was indeed a 'gentleman-like' company, I am proud to be part of it. MP & GI didn't treat us as tools. We were well respected and were regarded as artists. We were given a lot of power, even the right to make certain decisions. Unlike some of today's companies which treat actors and actresses as commodities and money-spinners.

Hilda Chou Hsuan: The Fall of the Empire

When I joined MP & GI, the company was about to be reorganised to become Cathay Organisation. At first I was with Shaws' Nanguo drama training class. Our boss Mr Loke died in a plane crash months after I joined MP & GI. Yeo Ban Yee and Choo Kok Leong took over the helm, determined to make a comeback. Yet the movie business was badly hit by the rising popularity of television, and the company suffered. Nonetheless, we had some big productions: We had been location filming for eight, nine months along Taiwan's National Freeway for *Escorts over Tiger Hills* (1969). The production cost was a staggering HK$1.2 million and the film was considered a major production 30 years ago. Sadly there were no other big budgeters to follow, and the company went downhill. That's why I broke away from my acting career, and got married.

Law Kar: We have many scholars, film critics and MP & GI movie lovers with us today. Let's hear from them their impressions of MP & GI.

Shu Kei (director and film critic): MP & GI had its unique way to groom budding stars. Many studios or independent producers focus on making stars and household names of actors and actresses, at the expense of their individuality. MP & GI's edge was to make films which were based on each lead's unique personality and talents, which in turn allowed the actors to take the stage by storm. It is due to this respect for individuality and personal flairs which established MP & GI's stature in Hong Kong's film history.

Sam Ho (film researcher and critic): To me, the stars of MP & GI were larger than life. They ingeniously project and magnify a lifestyle which is yearned for by the audiences. Ever since the 1950s when the wars were just over, Hong Kong

films have never ceased to reminisce about the sufferings of the past, a sentiment which persisted throughout the next three decades. Yet MP & GI's movies were trailing a new path, displaying a new kind of placid lifestyle enjoyed by the emerging bourgeoisie, and this is what I meant by 'larger than life'.

Open Discussion

Takashi Momma (Meijigakuin University): *In The Wild, Wild Rose* (1960), the song 'Carmen' was written by Hattori Ryoichi of Japan. Your sliding tone of expression, was it his request?

Grace Chang: When the script of *The Wild, Wild Rose* was almost completed, the company contacted Mr Hattori. I called on him in Tokyo; Shirley Yamaguchi (Li Xianglan) introduced us. Mr Hattori liked my songs, and I have a lot of respects for his music. After he came to Hong Kong, he guided us through our rehearsals, singing practices, and even down to every breathing point in the song.

Audience: What was it like with Cathay Organisation's training with new talents? Did they have any special training programmes?

Hilda Chou Hsuan: No, MP & GI didn't have any special programmes installed. Instead they sent newcomers to the sets as script continuity persons. That was good training. I loved to act, and didn't want to leave after work. I liked chatting with actors and crew members. I learned by observing them. I think it's a long path to achieve stardom, interests and perseverance are the prerequisites.

Chow Ying (Independent star web pages producer): Miss Hilda Chou, how did you view MP & GI stars while you were in Nanguo drama training class? Did you think differently after you joined the company and had contacts with them?

Hilda Chou Hsuan: I've always aspired for working in MP & GI. I liked all the MP & GI stars. I didn't have many chances working with them after I joined the company. But they were professionals with the best working attitude, including punctuality and the way they treated the crews. They never patronised others. And now, even the starlets are surrounded by a team of attendants. The stars back then were very independent, at most they had a maid. They shone on their own, and needed no support from the crowd surrounding them.

Audience: Miss Grace Chang, could you please talk about how realistic the MP & GI movies were ? Which role did you like best? Does that role resemble your off screen character?

Grace Chang: We took filming very seriously, and we held many working meetings before the filming of each film. Back then we didn't have any costume or image consultants. We were responsible for our own wardrobe for each scene to make sure the script continuity would be intact. While filming *The Wild, Wild Rose*, I disguised as a man and went to a nightclub with the director. I observed the atmosphere and environment, and how the dancers were like in action. That experience helped me a lot

with my role.

Mary Wong (Hong Kong film researcher): Miss Grace Chang, after you received a script, how would you prepare for your role? How did the company assist you?

Grace Chang: The company treated us well. We were cultivated and assisted most attentively. If we called up anyone from work, they would help you. If you had problems with the lines, you didn't necessary have to talk to the director, someone would take down your questions and bring you the answers the next day. I appreciated that the company assisted in every way; and not just threw us the script and let us deal with it on our own.

Collated by Liu Suet-wan; translated by Estella Fung

2002 Hong Kong International Museum Day Seminar
'The Acquisition, Conservation and Access of Hong Kong Film Materials': A Summary

Date: 18 May 2002 (Sat)
Time: 5.00pm - 6.30pm
Venue: Hong Kong Film Archive Cinema
Speakers: Mable Ho (Acquisition Unit, HKFA)
Edward Tse (Conservation Unit, HKFA)
Monique Shiu (Resource Centre, HKFA)

Mable Ho: Acquisition of Hong Kong Film Materials

The Acquisition team is responsible for seeking and scouting films and film materials so as to lay a foundation for the preservation, arrangement and study of Hong Kong cinema. Film prints, videos, audio tapes, scripts, stills, brochures and posters, etc are within our scope of collected items, drawing from divergent sources and spanning a wide time spectrum dating back to 1913 when the first ever Hong Kong film was produced.

1. Source of Collected Items
The generous donations by the public form the core of the Archive collection, which is well preserved in our world-class storage facilities. Through acquisition campaigns, we hope to enhance the public's awareness of the pressing need to preserve our cultural heritage, and to encourage like-minded collectors to join in our rank of donors.

In the past few years, there have been a number of delightful discoveries abroad. As a full member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), many film relics dispersed outside the territory have made their homecoming journeys back to the Archive thanks to joint efforts by FIAF members on an international scale. Besides, the transfer of film-related objects can be arranged with ease, with consent of the donors, from major museums and libraries to the Archive which all are under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department of Hong Kong. Purchase of rare and precious private collection is a lesser-used alternative to voluntary donations. Each purchase will be scrutinised by a process of evaluation, selection and professional consultation.

2. Transportation and Arrangement
The transportation of all films and related materials has to be executed and monitored by specialists under the stringent control of temperature and relative humidity as well as protective measure against light, dust and quake. Upon their

arrival at the Archive, each of the acquired items has to be inspected for its condition and initial cleaning and packaging is mandatory. Verification of contents then takes place before relevant data can be inputted into our on-line system for public access at our Resource Centre.

Edward Tse: Film Conservation

Our scope of collection includes films and film-related materials but it's the conservation of the former I'm going to discuss today.

1. Active Conservation and Passive Conservation

Film conservation encompasses two notions: active and passive conservation. Passive conservation efforts involve the application of film conservation methodologies and techniques to facilitate a most ideal environment for film storage. Active interference is called for when restoring damaged film prints due to long-term exploitation and over-usage.

Preservation works also include duplication, copying, and reconstruction of film prints and reels originated from dissipated sources. We will compare film prints from different sources to earmark the most faithful copy, and will put together film jigsaws to form the most complete picture of a film. In cases where the films are seriously shrunk, broken and torn, rendering projection impossible, restoration and duplication of both the visual and audio data are required. Duplication and storage techniques have to be constantly improved to meet with ever challenging demands.

2. Storage Environment

Low temperature and humidity together with zero acidic condition are prerequisite of an ideal storage environment. Our special regulatory system provides a stable storage environment of a temperature at 4°C and a relative humidity less than 30%. Our acid-removal mechanism will minimise or eradicate the adverse effect it has on films. It is because acid released by rotten films will in turn promote the self-catalytic deterioration (the Vinegar Syndrome).

Fire hazard poses the greatest threat to any film vaults. We have installed fire-extinguishing system which sprinkles not water, but special gas form of fire extinguishing agent. 90% of our film collection are 'safety' films and are relatively hazard-free compared with the flammable cellulose nitrate films. There are two kinds of safety films: cellulose acetate and polyester, the former making up 89% of our film collection which inevitably creates stability problems.

3. Objective and Tools

The prime objective of a conservation effort is to enable previously damaged films to be projected on a projector or a Steenbeck. Indeed, the life cycle of a film print is shortened with each and every winding, viewing and projection. Instead of using the original film, we transfer images on films onto videos for general use. A splicer and splice tape are ideal tools for repairing torn or broken film; where suitable, a film is put through an ultrasonic film cleaning machine with a special cleaning solvent to remove greases, stains and dust on films.

Monique Shiu: Access to Film Materials

Film materials constitute an indispensable part of our cultural heritage. Echoing the objectives set out by the UNESCO and FIAF respectively in 1980 and 2000, it is of utmost importance to promote film culture, to facilitate historical research and to encourage the promotion of education and culture through the collection and preservation of films, as well as film-related documents and materials. These objectives are not to restrict the use of film materials but to promote an awareness of treasuring them. There are two conditions to fulfill in order for an acquired item to be made accessible for the public at our Resource Centre: firstly, we must ensure adequate preservation given to the item, through routine inspection and conservation prior to permitted public access to it; secondly, we must obtain consent from the copyright owners. Many items that are kept away in closed shelves at our Resource Centre are largely under the restrictions of the rights owners' or donors. We're striving to make long-absent films available for viewing by the public through various channels.

1. Accessing Items at the Resource Centre

The Resource Centre collection is made up of books, magazines, film programmes, brochures, scripts, and handbills, etc. To meet the needs of different types of film researchers, we acquire books and magazines of a wider scope of film subjects covering historical, theoretical and technological elements published locally and overseas. For retrospective magazines dating back to the 1930s, restoration work is required. Sole copies of these precious printed materials are kept in conditioned stores but duplicated access copies are made available to users despite the time consuming process of reproduction.

Our closed stack collection also comprises graphic and audiovisual materials. For graphic materials, there are movie stills, photographs and posters. For audiovisual materials, there are videotapes, videodiscs, phonographic records, CDs, etc.

Access to most of the materials and services provided in the Resource Centre is free. However, patrons need to pay fees for viewing audiovisual materials and requesting reproduction service. The charges for a viewing card are HK$50 for a day card and HK$300 for a year card respectively. Reproduction charges are various dependent upon different formats of reproduction.

2. Future Plan for Expansion of Information Services

We're constantly on alert to the latest information technologies which may help improve our services to the public. Below are some general directions to our plan for improvement :

2.1 Digitization of visual images to improve accessibility.

2.2 Internet service to enable users to visit film-related websites via the computer terminals at the Resource Centre.

2.3 Purchase of electronic databases such as CD-ROMs as reference tools.

2.4 Compiling newspaper clippings and enabling users to click onto Wise News, a local newsclippings website subscribed by the Archive.

Open Discussion

Audience: Do you have any criteria for purchasing VCDs?

Monique Shiu: VCDs of Hong Kong productions are within our scope of purchase. We will, however, handle Mainland releases with care as some of them may involve infringement of copyright.

Audience: There used to be numerous incidents of interruptions during screening due to torn films. The situation seems to have improved in recent years. Is it due to an improved quality of films?

Edward Tse: Indeed many factors attribute to this improvement. Polyester-based films, widely used only since the 1980s, promise a longer span because of its toughness and flexibility. Also, exhibitors nowadays splice up several reels of films into one large reel for screening. Exhibitors of an older generation and the Archive would stick to project film reels on twin projectors. It is to minimise damages done to the film in the process of splicing and splices removal. To ensure a smooth screening, we would normally spend up to three times of the running time on preparation work and test screening.

Audience: Splice tape was opted out by other organisations. Is it money or other reasons you are still using it?

Edward Tse: We would use an ultrasonic splicing machine only on polyester-based films. This process, however, will make the splices on acetate-based films brittle and they usually fall off rather easily.

Audience: Does the Archive, like other museums, have its policies regarding acquisition of materials? How many of the films released recently have you required?

Mable Ho: Acquiring each and every film relic is our ultimate goal. Because of limited resources, priority will naturally be given to films produced in earlier years, which stand a higher risk of being lost and dissipated with the passage of time. Acquisition work also has to be executed and readjusted in view of programming and research needs. At present, we are devoting more resources in retrieving old films and artefacts but we are certainly not lax in lobbying film companies for their donation of recent releases, an initiative that is often in conflict with commercial interests.

Audience: Besides films, printed materials and photos, are there any special gems in your collection? How would local producers dispose their exhibition copies? Any truth in stories telling how some exhibitors would dump copies of films of the 1950s and 1960s on the roof like trash?

Mable Ho: Recently, director Yonfan has donated to the Archive some sixty sets of costumes from his critically-acclaimed film Peony Pavilion (2001). The largest donation of a similar kind to date, Yonfan has demonstrated his trust in the Archive to preserve his creative works in a most ideal condition.

The reasons behind improper disposals of film prints are multifold. To start with, a commercialised city such as Hong Kong is ill equipped with an awareness of cultural preservation. From an exhibitor's point of view, the life cycle of a film will have come to an end when the screening at film circuits, releases on VCDs and the selling of the film right a television channel are sealed, and the films warrant no further investment, let alone their preservation. From the Archive's point of view, the birth of the film coincides with the end of its public screening when reviews and study are just about to launch. The Archive serves as the budding ground for these images to thrive for years to come. Lacking an awareness of heritage conservation drives most film companies to cast aside these films while remaining reluctant to donate them to a proper body. Despite these obstacles, we will keeping on lobbying and publicising to film companies and the public alike the merits of donating film copies to the Archive.

Collated by Liu Suet-wan; translated by Agnes Lam