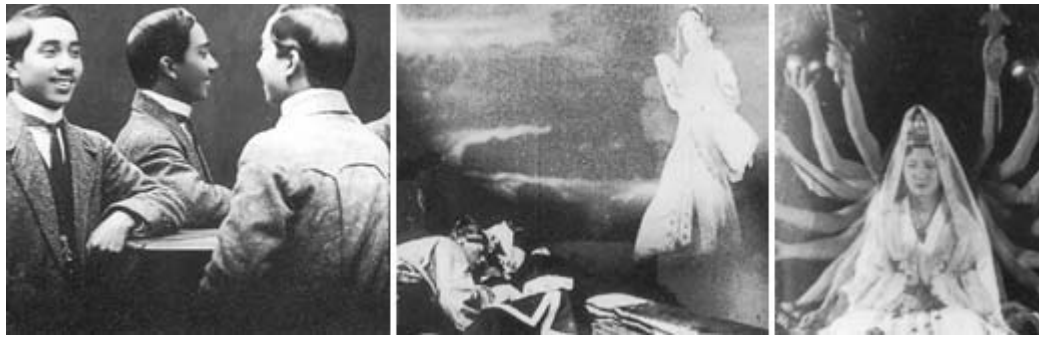


Home, Nation and Cinema

Lai Man-wai (1893-1953) and his brothers founded the China Sun Motion Picture Co Ltd in 1923 to herald the birth of Hong Kong cinema. Joining Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Alliance, Lai mobilised his wife and children to join the rank of filmmakers in reuniting a shattered nation with the art. The recent retrospectives organised by the Programming Section of the Hong Kong Film Archive to pay tributes to the 'Father of Hong Kong Cinema' Lai Man-wai and the pioneer of the stage and screen Lo Dun (1911-2000) are attempts to document their accomplishments while tracing the life stories of our cinematic pioneers and amassing a capsule of a century of Hong Kong cinema. Setting off on separate paths, the duo rubbed shoulders with many like-minded film workers: Lai Man-wai collaborated with key figures of the United Photoplay Service Ltd in creating a glorious epoch of the Shanghai film industry; Lo Dun's continuous partnership with visionary Cantonese film workers at The Union Film Enterprise Ltd and Sun Luen Film Company - all signalling monumental and groundbreaking events in the development of filmmaking. Even more awe-inspiring is perhaps their steadfastness in pursuing their common goals and dreams. Looking back from today, such an endeavour reminds us once again of the good old days when the cinema was as priceless as the nation itself and comrades-in-arts were one big family. Difficult times are a part of everyday life and only time can tell what is meant to leave to posterity. [clkwok@lcsd.gov.hk]



Lai Man-wai (back row, 1st right) with family, revolution comrades Liu Chung-hoi (back row, 3rd right) and his wife Ho Heung-ying (front row, 5th left).



From left: Self portrait, *Way Down West* (1927) and *Avalokitesvava's Way* (1927)

demonstrate Lai's creative flair in developing new cinematic techniques.

Newsletter Cover: Lai Man-wai

Photos courtesy of Hong Kong Film Company, Media Asia Pictures, Mr Jupiter, Ms Josephine Siao, Ms May Tse, and Mr Lai Man-wai's family.

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A Written Interview with
Josephine Siao on *The Spooky Bunch*

Editor's Note: The screening of *The Spooky Bunch* (1980) is one of the highlights of our August programme *The Yins and Yangs of Ann Hui*. *The Spooky Bunch* won the Best Foreign Film award at the London Film Festival in 1981. Its newly restored print is supplied by none other than Miss Josephine Siao, the film's executive producer-cum-lead actress. Siao wields her pen and tells intriguing tales of its restoration and production.



Josephine Siao (2nd right) and Lau Hark-suen (1st right) displaying their talents on the opera stage

You are one of the investors of *The Spooky Bunch*. The film has remained elusive to the audience since its premiere in the 1980s; why did you decide to have it restored?

The Spooky Bunch has been kept in a very safe place and it never occurred to me that the film print would have been damaged. It was only until in 2001 when a new copy was needed for entering a film festival that the extensive damage was noted. We started to look for restoration specialists everywhere. Finally we contacted the director of photography, Tony Hope, who was living abroad to introduce us to a restoration company.

Please tell us the process of restoring the film in the US.

Triage Motion Picture Services, which was responsible for restoring the film, is a Los Angeles based company specialising in the restoration of Hollywood classics. Before restoration, the negatives of *The Spooky Bunch* were dilapidated beyond repair - there were serious scratches and tears. Triage reviewed the report submitted by a Hong Kong processing laboratory and decided to give it a try. I communicated with Tony Hope, Ann Hui and people at Triage via emails for a good several months before sending out the negatives to Triage. None of us would have thought that Triage could manage to salvage the film print and restore it to its former glory!

This film was your brainchild - it was based on your idea and direction, being also its executive producer and lead actress. Please tell us your

participation in the film, such as your collaboration with the director, the screenwriter and the crew.

The original plan was to assemble an all-female crew for *The Spooky Bunch*. It was meant to be a celebration of the liberation of Hong Kong women from the kitchen, who had gradually achieved success in their careers. It was a rather unique 'selling point'. I flied over to the US, got this woman photographer and finalised details of our deal; but the Hong Kong immigration department feared that as a Czech national, she might be a Communist and wouldn't let her in! We eventually secured the service of the world famous photographer Tony Hope, who jokingly said that he wouldn't mind wearing a wig and tried to pass off as a woman working among the rest of the all-female crew! We were thrilled that Tony accepted the offer. It is because he is truly a top-notch photographer.

I don't remember the details too well, except that everyone was working very very hard. To this day, that cooperative spirit still gives me a 'spiritual high'.



Josephine Siao with co-star Kenny Bee (right) in *The Cast and crew of The Spooky Bunch*: Ann Hui, Tony Spooky Bunch - Siao's own brainchild.

Hope, Josephine Siao, Cheang Mang-ha, Rebecca Lee (middle row, 4th to 8th left); Kwan Chung, Stanley Kwan, Tina Lau (front row, 2nd to 4th left) and Kenny Bee (back row, 2nd right).

Now watching *The Spooky Bunch* again, what do you think are its merits, special features and weaknesses?

The Spooky Bunch no doubt has stood the tests of time - for over twenty years - be they the photography, directing, art direction and the cast of experienced players, including Tina Lau. It was a quality work. Of course, the stunts and action scenes would have benefited from today's computer animation and adequate capital, so would the script if more time was given for polishing the lines.



Costume design sketches by Rebecca Lee

The only bad stroke is really my acting, which was way over the top. Only a few shots warrant a pass. During the restoration of the film, I was forced to sit through it 5, 6 times, and each viewing made me feel extremely uneasy. I was close to throwing eggs at myself on the screen! It feels great to criticise myself publicly, and my thanks to the Hong Kong Film Archive for giving me the opportunity to do so! ◆

Josephine Siao, original name Xiao Liang, made her film debut in 1953 as a child star. She was crowned the Best Child Actor at the Southeast Asian Film Festival in 1955 for *The Orphan Girl*, and achieved stardom with *Nobody's Child* shot in 1958. Siao's acting repertoire includes roles in over 80 contemporary and period films. Venturing into the contemporary musical genre in 1966, she was voted Top Ten Cantonese Stars for the several years to follow. Her performance in *The Wrong Couples* won the Best Actress award at the Hong Kong Film Awards in 1988. Received the Silver Bear for Best Actress at the Berlin Film Festival 1995 for her role in *Summer Snow*. Headed the End Child Sexual Abuse Foundation which she founded in 1998.

The Phantom Realm of Ann Hui

Geoffrey Wong



Ann Hui directing on the set of *Visible Secret* (Picture by Jupiter)

The releases of *The Secret* (1979), *The Spooky Bunch* (1980) and *Visible Secret* (2001) - Ann Hui's phantom trilogy - spanned over two decades. While all three instalments are spine-chilling, dark and atmospheric psycho-thrillers, Hui injected in each of them her unique persistence of vision. The connecting vein that runs through all three instalments is the director's questioning of traditional beliefs and her ambition in relinquishing old, tired ties to embrace something new.

In the beginning scene of *The Secret*, Lee Yuen (Teresa Chiu) makes her first appearance at the grand matriarch's birthday celebration in which she kneels down to offer the elder tea. This gesture foreshadows Lee's doomed fate and her inability to free herself from the haunting shackles of tradition. Since then Lee is seen roaming around the mazes of winding alleys in the old districts leading up to her tragic death. Here Ann Hui experimented with an unconventional, omniscient third person narrative (through the voice of Sylvia Chang) to gradually delve into the mystique of Lee's death. The narrative that is subsequently intermingled with anti-chronological and multi-dimensional perspectives also helps to fashion the intricacy of the plot. *The Secret* and *The Spooky Bunch* were two of Hui's early ventures in filmmaking upon her initial success with several television productions for Radio Television Hong Kong. But rather haphazardly these experimental works heralded the Hong Kong New Wave Movement. Better described as a psycho-thriller than a ghost film, Hui's mastery of cinematic techniques creates in *The Secret* an imagery of a dark, gloomy and shocking existence, elevating a genre film to the status of art.

Albeit carrying an entirely different tone, *The Spooky Bunch* also takes liberties with the break from old, traditional ties. The location change to the remote island of Cheung Chau bolsters its credibility, so are the dazzling visuals comprising a small, folk opera troupe, 'Little Phoenix' costumes worn by the Chinese lady ghost and haunting story-telling by a medium. The ending opera excerpt 'Wu Song Kills His

Sister-in-Law' not only mirrors the real-life cause of events, it also brings the story to a climax. With this second instalment, Hui employs a traditional storytelling format to juxtapose its vivid characters and highly stylised scenes. Enjoying a warm reception, the film lifted the curtain on the comedy-thriller hit trend in the 1980s (such as Sammo Hung's *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* [1980] and Kam Kwok-leung's now classic television drama, *Don't Look Now*). It also demonstrates Hui's revolutionary and visionary interpretation of a genre with which she is at perfect ease.

Two decades later, Ann Hui's *Visible Secret* spawned another wave of horror ghost films; to Hui, it was the most opportune juncture to reexamine the past. Although the film has brought in a new filming approach, there is no shortage of elements reminiscent of the previous two instalments to offer an alternative reading. Geographically speaking, *Visible Secret* embarks on an itinerary which first takes the audience to a rave party and modern hair salon and finally invites them to the respective 'home' in the memory of the three characters. Indeed the journey ends with the director's return to her familiar turf. Eason Chan's home in the old districts, Shu Qi's home in Cheung Chau and the housing estates form a whirlpool of a collective memory, sucking the audience into the past of these characters as well as the creative space and private universe of the director. On the other hand, *Visible Secret* inherits the motif of *The Secret* and *The Spooky Bunch* of twenty years ago in expounding on old-fashioned morality and ethics that unleash the inner devils in a new generation of young people. *The Secret* deals with the inescapability of moral constraints; *The Spooky Bunch* depicts old feuds with Japanese ghosts; but the age-old demon is ultimately conquered in *Visible Secret* when the father's misdeed is redeemed by his son and that vengeance is sought out on a mistaken individual.



Visible Secret traces its roots to the old Western Districts, starring Shu Qi (right) and Eason Chan. (Picture by Jupiter)



The psycho-thriller *The Secret*, starring Sylvia Chang, Teresa Chiu and Alex Man (from right).

Visible Secret adopts the multiple narrative perspectives used in *The Secret* as well as eerie apparitions offered in *The Spooky Bunch*. Yet it revamps old approaches and develops a new creative path of its own. With *The Secret*, the director initially introduces a single point of reference but gradually brings in various perspectives and fragments of recollections to map out the truth of events. Similarly, the story of *Visible Secret* is told primarily by a third person (Eason Chan) but not without the questioning of truth (the similarity of the two titles actually registers this connection). As the third person narrator in *The Secret*, Sylvia Chang manages to follow the long trail of clues leading to the truth. But Eason Chan who plays Peter the narrator in *Visible Secret* is simply an innocent passer-by who finds himself caught in a web of mysteries. Suffering one setback after another, he finally realises that he has been concealed from the truth right from the beginning. The biggest irony is perhaps the experience of possession that the director skilfully masks from Peter as well as from the audience so that the latter is just as ignorant of the truth as Peter is given only partial vision of the truth.



The Spooky Bunch encapsulates the haunting folkloric traditions of a Cantonese opera troupe.

Visible Secret raises doubts of the supernatural and voices the director's refusal to believe in the obvious. This is highlighted in the scene which depicts Eason Chan's first encounter with Jo Koo and becomes petrified by her strange appearance (i.e. the 'Little Phoenix' dress which first made its appearance in *The Spooky Bunch*). Another irony is Chan's ignorance of Shu Qi's real identity despite

accompanying her all the time. Anthony Lau Wing's Taoist con man also pays tribute to the monk character who subdues the ghosts towards the end of *The Spooky Bunch*. Hui indulges in her superstition spree while examining her past but does so with a humorous and sarcastic touch. ♦

Geoffrey Wong, screenwriter and critic since the 1990s. A former journalist and tutor of comparative literature at the University of Hong Kong. Participated in the production of *Visible Secret* (2001) and was screenwriter of *Visible Secret II* (2002) and *Fighting to Survive* (2002).

Lo Dun - Stage and Screen Pioneer

Law Kar



Lo Dun - the pioneer of southern China's film and stage.

It has been more than three years since the death of Lo Dun (1911-2000). Instead of giving flattering remarks, this article will address Lo's contributions to Hong Kong theatre and cinema in their infancy, and the early interactions between the two media.

The theatre was not as vibrant as the cinema in the 1930s, but an underlying current of theatre movement was actively sustained by a group of young drama enthusiasts including Lo Dun, Lee Sun-fung, Ng Wui and Lee Fa who all received training from the playwright-cum-director Ouyang Yuqian. After 1931, these graduates from the Guangdong Theatre College of the Guangdong Dramatic Research Institute arrived in Hong Kong from Guangzhou to pursue a career in filmmaking. Still emotionally attached to the stage, they formed the Modern Dramatic Society in 1934 and invited Ouyang, just returning from his trip in Europe, to adapt and direct their debut *The Wet Paint*. The play was staged in Hong Kong and Guangzhou and established the milestone of early theatre.

After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Lee Fa, Ng Wui and Lo revived their theatre troupe on the wane by staging anti-Japanese 'National Defence Plays' on a regular basis. Theatre troupes, big and small, mushroomed, bringing Hong Kong theatre to its first climax. Film stars such as Ng Cho-fan, Wong Man-lei, Cheung Ying, Tso Tat-wah, Fung Fung, Lam Mui-mui, Tse Yik-chi and Wu Tip-lai crossed over to become stage regulars, even adapting the stage repertoire for the screen. This marked the first large-scale exchange between the two



Key Cantonese filmmakers of the 50s and 60s.
(Front row from left) Lau Fong, Lo Dun, Chor Yuen, Chun Kim, Fung Fung; (Back row from left) Chan Man, Ng Wui, Chu Kea, Lee Sun-fung, Pak Yin, Wong Hang, Law Chi-hung.

arenas.

Besides actively participating in the theatre movement, between 1937 and 1938, Lo also performed in a host of plays - *Thunderstorm*, *Guarding the Marco Polo Bridge*, *On the Eve of War*, *An Old City Roars*, *The Luminescent Cup*, and hastened their transformation into big screen productions. *The Wet Paint* became *Two Daughters* (1939); *Shadow over Shanghai* and *The Luminescent Cup* were adapted into Cantonese films of the same title. He directed and wrote the script of *Fiery Village* (1941), an adaptation of Chen Baichen's *Devils' Cave* (the title was changed to *Megalomania* when staged in Hong Kong). During this time, he also acted in *Under the Roofs of Shanghai* (shot in 1941 and released in 1943) adapted from a Xia Xian play and *My Motherland* (1940), directed by Situ Huimin.



Lo Dun and Mui Yee in *Everlasting Regret* (1948), a film which Lo also directed. Father and daughter degrade themselves by subscribing to forces of evil.

Lo often played the lead roles - from young men, middle-aged roles to antagonists - in the 1930s. After WWII, he took up more mature roles. Easily dismissed as minor parts, his presence formed the backbone of the story. Lo directed the post-war masterpiece *Everlasting Regret* (1948) and gave a convincing performance as the old patriarch that made even Cheung Ying pale in comparison. His role as the returned overseas Chinese in *The*

Prodigal Son (1952) shone alongside the title character played by Cheung. Even in ensembles like *In the Face of Demolition* (1953), *A Well-to-Do* (1956), *Thunderstorm* (1957) and *Feast of a Rich Family* (1959), Lo distinguished himself with his trademark acting and screen persona, obviously the fruits borne by the years of solid stage experience.

Lo's other merit as an actor is his focus on quality over quantity, acting in just over 100 films during a long career of fifty years (most Cantonese actors would have clocked up over 200 films in less than twenty years); the same applied to his screenwriting and directorial works. He prepared well for even the smallest parts and dazzled the audience with his signature old, crafty roles: from the over-the-hill warlord in *The Mysterious Murder* (1951), the tyrannical patriarch in *Family* (1953) and *Rouge Tigress* (1956), to the cunning, lascivious magistrate in *So Siu Siu*

(1962), the womanising husband in *Men and Women* (1964) and the mean boss in *Spring Summer Autumn Winter* (1969).

Lo Dun was an excellent coordinator. Mentioned previously was his organisation of a theatre troupe in the 1930s; during the Japanese occupation, he arranged for a group of 'national defence' stage actors to flee to the Mainland, giving performances en route to as far as Vietnam, and struck up a life-long friendship with Lee Ching, Yung Siu-yi, Ng Cho-fan, Cheung Ying, Mui Yee, Wong Man-lei and Tse Yik-chi during those turbulent years. In 1949, Lo co-founded the South China Film Industry Workers Union with Ng Cho-fan, Mok Hong-si, So Yee and Kwan Man-ching; two years later in 1951, Lo and Liu Yat-yuen founded the Sun Luen Film Company dedicated to shooting 'progressive' Cantonese films and uniting filmmakers in southern China. In these campaigns, Lo often played the role of an advocate. At an advanced age of over 70, Lo initiated the establishment of the Hong Kong Movie and TV Theatrical Society in 1987, bringing together veteran filmmakers Chu Hak, Ng Wui with a whole new generation of on and off-screen talents including May Tse, Wong Man-wai, Ng Sau-fong, Lo Wai-luk and Hung Chiu-fung to offer new renditions of such theatrical classics as *The Wet Paint*, *Thunderstorm*, *Sunrise* and *Under the Roofs of Shanghai*. Lo acted as the engine of yet another theatrical movement. ◆



At a banquet held by the Hong Kong Movie and TV Theatrical Society. (From left) Ng Wui, Lo Dun, Wong Man-wai, May Tse; (1st right) Feng Lin, (2nd right) Chu Sui-ping, daughter of Chu Hak.

Law Kar is a renowned film culture researcher and has been programming for the Hong Kong International Film Festival since 1991. He is now Programmer of HKFA.



Stephanie Ng

The 'Father of Hong Kong Cinema' Lai Man-wai was born on 25 September 1893. Who would have dreamed that over a century later we would visit the location of Lai's first feature film, *Rouge* (1925)?

Origin of the Journey

To commemorate the 110th birthday anniversary of the pioneering filmmaker, the Archive is organising a tribute which comprises screenings, an exhibition and a series of seminars. In preparation for the *Lai Man-wai's Footsteps* exhibition, we launched internally a mission dubbed 'In Search of Lai Man-wai's Footsteps': conducting research and compiling information from collections housed in the University of Hong Kong Libraries and Zhongshan Library in Guangzhou; shooting footage of the locations where Lai left marks of his early activities.



Lai Man-wai on a location set.

Trip to Guangzhou

With the assistance of Lai Man-wai's son, Mr Lai Sek, we embarked on the journey to one of the most important stops in our itinerary - tracing Lai's footsteps in Guangzhou of the last century. Lai used to reside in Dongshan district. Lai's wife Lam Cho-cho donated the estate to the government in the 1970s. The residence is now rebuilt as residential towers.

Dr Sun Yat-sen was a crucial influence on Lai. Lai followed Sun on the Northern Expedition, and prior to the expedition, filmed Sun's review of the troops on a ground which now stands the Guangzhou People's Stadium, as if to pay homage to the sport documentary Lai filmed in 1947, *The Provincial Sports of Guangdong*. In the same year, Lau made another documentary at Lingnan University, the predecessor of Sun Yat-sen University.

Another place frequented by Lai Man-wai and his crew was Xiguan - once home to Lai's China Sun (Minxin) Motion Picture Co Ltd, its acting academy and studios. Nearby was another important designated shooting location - Official Li Wentian's old residence. It's here that Lai shot *Rouge*, featuring his wife Lam Cho-cho as the female lead. Lai's elder brother Lai Buk-hoi was the screenwriter. Unfortunately the residence was devastated by bombs during the anti-Japanese war. Only a two-storey building survived the bombings. The sitting area is located on the ground floor, leading out to a small courtyard. The remaining home décor has preserved the original integrity of the building, including a portrait of Li Wentian and a newspaper clipping of Lai's filming at the house, though whether Lai shot *Rouge* in the surviving construction remains a mystery. I would like to express our gratitude to Ms Li Yizhuang and Mr Zhou Chengren for their assistance in obtaining permission from the current occupants to film the interior of the residence.



The old Official Li Wentian residence in Guangzhou where *Rouge* (1925) was shot.



A scene from *Rouge* (1925) - Hong Kong's first feature-length fiction film.

Lai Man-wai was still active in the film industry during the post-war years, assisting Luo Mingyou in the establishment of the Zhongguo Yingye Associate Company and Guangzhou Theatre. In addition, the United Photoplay (Lianhua) studio was installed on the ground floor of the theatre. Guangzhou Theatre remains in business today but the studio has been transformed into a game centre. Taitong Restaurant next to the theatre and Aiqun Hotel in the neighbourhood were two of the places where renowned Hollywood photographer James Wong Howe met Lai, Sit Kok-sin, Luo Mingyou and others during his visit to Guangzhou.

Restoration Saga

A series of restoration work has been conducted especially for this tribute. Among the restored film prints are the documentary *A Page of History* (1941) and the fiction film *Way Down West* aka *Romance of the West Chamber* (1927).



Dr Sun Yat-sen (2nd right), Sun's generals and Russian advisors on the ceremonial platform during Sun's review of the troops. (*A Page of History*, 1941)

A Page of History was filmed between 1923 and 1927. Lai was empowered by Dr Sun Yat-sen who presented him with a hand-written scroll, a Generalissimo order to follow the Nationalist army and shoot events during the Northern Expedition. It goes down in history as a monumental record. A re-edited version of the film was released in the 1920s.

After decades of migration, wear and tear, only 34 minutes of the original footage survived. We managed to track down another copy of the film recently, and

having extracted better images of this newly retrieved copy, our conservation experts amalgamated them with the existing one to provide a brand new copy for the screening.

Way Down West was a production of Lai's China Sun Motion Picture Co Ltd in Shanghai. It was also Lai's earliest surviving fiction film. Production of the film spanned six months, utilising a cast of over 1,000 actors and a team of fine art experts to study the props, costumes and sets to the last detail. Hailed as one of the most important works in early Chinese cinema, *Way Down West* made new attempts in integrating Chinese literature with special effects, indeed employing the latter to an unprecedented extent. The existing copy was acquired from the Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum. It was intertitled in French with a running time of approximately 50 minutes. Related brochures and newspaper articles of the time all suggested a longer original running time. The restoration work used the *Way Down West* film brochure as well as Wang Shifu's original story as references in re-arranging the film reels and fragments to give as faithfully as possible a restored print of the original one, supplemented by stills and intertitles. ◆

Stephanie Ng is Programme Assistant (Exhibition) of the HKFA.

Acquisition and Programming

Mable Ho

There has always been a special bond between the backbone domains of acquisition, arrangement, cataloguing and preservation of our archival collection and the frontline activities of screening, research, publication and provision of public services. One can best describe acquisition as a fountainhead that supplies an abundance of quality ingredients for the programmes to take shape. Take the preparation for '110th Birthday Anniversary of Lai Man-wai' as an example. Acquisition of artefacts related to the founder of Hong Kong cinema was a saga which spanned a whole decade, from locating film prints to lobbying for donations to the arrangement of acquired items. These painstaking efforts were paid off after all, with the full support of the Lai family. Among our overseas acquisitions, it took eight years to reach an agreement with the Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum for the film print of *Way Down West* (1927) to be shipped back to Hong Kong. It is through accumulative efforts and tireless acquisition endeavours that our programmes could have yielded the results today.

It may also be said that programming nurtures acquisition opportunities since many donation pledges are made by film workers whose assistance are sought for during the preparation of programming events. The bond established between the Programming Section and film donors thus lays down the basis for our follow-up acquisition initiatives. Unlike film archives in other countries which regularly receive legal deposits, every of

our collected item is attributed to the generosity of our film donors and the unrelenting efforts of our colleagues. Programming helps strengthening the tie between film workers and the acquisition team and opens up opportunities for enlarging our collection. Seizing the opportunity of *The Yins & Yangs of Ann Hui* programme held recently, we contacted Dr Rebecca Lee, art director of *The Spooky Bunch* and acquired from her many precious materials. Networking is undoubtedly more effective than our solo efforts! The complementary roles played by acquisition and programming increase efficiency on two fronts and must not be overlooked. ◆



The China Sun Motion Picture Co Ltd founded by Lai brothers

Mable Ho is Acquisition Manager of the HKFA.

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Thank You!

Audience Reminiscences

Editor's Note: When a film buff spots a familiar face in the audience during yet another screening, this is not merely just another odd coincidence. We've asked a few regulars to divulge their little universe of sight and sound. Got something to say? You too may click on line and share your views at hkfa@lcsd.gov.hk.

No Place for Solitary Viewing

Angel

I used to learn from old film workers and film buffs who remember fondly of their good old viewing days at Studio One, Phoenix Cine Club and other university film unions, and would lament that my birth in the wrong decade had excluded me from these alliances. But since the opening of the Archive, enthusiastic audiences old and new have once again congregated. Although you and I may be complete strangers, the friendly gazes and warm faces worn by members of the audience are assurances that you and me are not alone.

Human Dramas of the Old Times

Elbe Lau

Old faces and old times are often dearer to the heart, so are human sentiments and virtues revisiting the Archive screen. There was a time when I was totally submersed in the melancholy of *Spring in a Small City* (1948) listening to Wei Wei's mutterings of monosyllabic utterances; Hsia Moon's famous line in *Sunrise* (1956), 'The sun doesn't belong to the likes of us' seeped in. Watching Fritz Lang's *Destiny* (1921), I was treated to the impersonation of our folk hero by a German actor working in an industry where the sky's the limit! It's beyond my wildest dream that the classic *Dream of the Red Chamber* could have been adapted into *The Romantic Monk* (1956) starring Ho Fei-fan and Cheng Bik-ying, who deliver their lines rather creepily in the Cantonese dialect. For one second, I was led to believe that it was a scene from *The Haunted Castle* (1921) being played out in front of me! Occasionally I bumped into senior audience who patiently lined up to see Cantonese social-realist dramas of the likes of *Save Your Water Supply* (1954), releasing outbursts of anger at many of the social injustices portrayed.

Sentiments and Morals Abound

Mable

Ozu Yasujiro imprinted his perception and artistic thinking on his films, his life philosophy and aesthetics the common thread that binds together the overall design, from the form, theme, content and characters to a single bodily movement or an empty shot. No details escape the master's notice. *There Was a Father* (1942), for example, is characterised by its static frames of tranquil scenery. Its precision with geometry, proportion, distance, and the symmetry of the angles is in perfect accord with the upright and tranquil aura of the film. The music smoothes like the forever sun-kissed beaches. Cad in a haori, Ryu Chishu's father figure is as forbidding and distinguished as a heavenly god, his profile reminiscent of the dignified subject of a Renaissance portrait. Like an artist, Ozu painted with luscious colours and graceful strokes but economises on the *cine qua non* - by summarising the central theme in a single shot.

I am especially fond of those Ozu titles with stories to tell across time (like *There Was a Father*) - stories that evolve as the days go by, following the ebb and flow of life. This subtlety, elegance and breadth of mind are unique as much to the artistic expressions of the East as the director's knowledge of the wisdom of life. While Yamada Yoji's favourite moment of *Father* was the fishing scene, mine is the dining scene featuring the father and son, the latter lying down with his arms wide open after a big meal pondering where to venture out for fun, only to be lectured by the father on the meaning of life. This scene vividly depicts the segregation between the adult world and the children world as well as the dullness of life. Also painting the harsh reality, Cantonese realists often resort to a more rudimentary approach, offering remedies to a marred society by first exposing its scars; if this remedy does us good, we'll learn to come to terms with it. But shouldn't art be allowed to play a part in refining and immortalising our films so that they will be savoured in the years to come?

After Restoration

9

My friend turned up late for a Murnau screening at the Hong Kong Film Archive. Just as I was loitering about, my eyes were caught by a video being played on the TV set installed at the foyer introducing some interesting facts about the Archive:

—Precious film copies must be stored in a strictly controlled environment of heat

(4°C) and humidity (35%) that is sure to impress even the cigar and wine connoisseurs.

—Although badly bruised, many of the film prints have been restored to their former glory by the Archive's most knowledgeable restoration experts.

—Not only does restoration work demand enormous patience, it also requires application of chemical solvents. What an interesting tie between films and chemistry.

Film conservation and restoration is an interesting area of work but little has been mentioned about it. Since the Archive is effectively a restoration workshop, it should take advantage of its resources and expertise to educate the public of the importance of film restoration. In addition to publishing promotional material, workshops should be held for the public to learn about the actual restoration process. The public should be encouraged to make the best use of the Resource Centre. The Archive is not only a place of preserving our cinematic legacy but also the hub of cultural exchanges that promotes the public's active participation by means of utilising its facilities and resources.

The Return of Murnau's Soul

MY

I oppose defiantly against the idea that films will one day be replaced by another medium: a collective viewing experience which enables viewers all to sigh or laugh hysterically at just the same instant before the big screen is simply irreplaceable by a solitary pastime that is confined to a sofa in front of a 40"TV box.

Two years ago, I borrowed the tape of Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) from a friend but my mind went completely blank after watching it - the classic represents an uninviting world that bars my entrance. I didn't dwell on whether its distant release date or the quality of the images was to blame only that my first Murnau experience died a premature death. It wasn't until June this year when images of Murnau's enigmatic smile and Count Orlok's embracing gesture of his imminent death appeared on the promotional pamphlet of a retrospective organised by the Archive that Murnau's psychic labyrinth cast its spells on me so compellingly that I ended up watching the full retrospective. A follow-up to last year's Fritz Lang retrospective, the early summer month of June was again blooming with exuberant images beamed from an overly air-conditioned auditorium that guaranteed to chill the

audience to the bone. I could almost feel the vampire breathing down my neck. I ended up discussing *Sunrise* (1927) and *The Last Laugh* (1924) with my friend for over an hour. Murnau's profound sentimentality transcends ordinary storytelling, whispering the endless nightmares and desires through meticulous lighting and composition of movements and sets.

One night I saw a silvery moonlight creeping up above the cityscape from behind the clouds, I thought of Murnau and his vast, vast world without sound. 🍷

Murnau's Cinema of Sensation

Afternoon, 21 June. The celluloid 'vampire' taking temporary shelter at the Hong Kong Film Archive cinema was slowly dissipating to make way for the first Murnau seminar held later in the morning. Jürgen Keil, Director of Goethe-Institut guided the attendees to another journey of sensation with the eerie experience of his visit to F.W. Murnau's graveyard on the last day of the Berlinale earlier this year and haunting tales of the lost souls in Murnau's film world. Keil remembered how he was on the brink of abandoning the search after staggering around the vast forest for two hours just when the tombstone appeared right in front of his eyes. Was he experiencing a Hutter *déjà vu*? Keil revealed that several years before the making of *Nosferatu* (1922), a mutual friend of Murnau and his male friend, who was killed on the battlefield, dedicated a poem to the deceased soldier at the funeral using the pseudonyms 'Hutter' and 'Ellen' to allude to the gay lovers. 'Hutter' and 'Ellen' remerged in *Nosferatu*, a film generally regarded as a mournful dedication of Murnau's lost friend. 'Nosferatu' in Latin means an 'illness bringer', and many folk cultures share the belief that a devilish soul will return to haunt the living after its psychological death. Standing on the seafront, Ellen is as much waiting for her husband's homecoming on horseback as embracing the imminent return of a lost soul, a motif which fuels and inspired the film.

Dr Stephen Sze explicated according to the essentials of film language how Murnau achieved the most significant breakthrough after D.W. Griffith in narrative filmmaking. For instance, *The Last Laugh* (1924) employs an array of framing angles - low or underhand shots, high or overhead shots as well as eye-levelled shots - to sketch the fluid mental state of the protagonist and his degradation from a dignified doorman to a humiliated bootlicker of the establishment. The camera slants, shakes and staggers to parody an unsettling world. The famous drunken scene was shot utilising the ingenious design by the photographer, who sat the actor on one end and himself on another of a plank that could spin around the room. Special dolly designs allowed the camera to move up and down, as well as to track out to conclude a film of unusual viewing experience. Murnau's precise editing and elaborate camerawork had set the standard of narrative filmmaking well before Sergei M. Eisenstein made his mark with *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Sze also pinpointed the subjective and illusionary nature of Murnau film language. He attributed these weaknesses to the director's compromises with the reality and the

resolution of contradiction in happy endings without good reasons, as well as his sentimental storytelling and avoidance of rational social reflection. The high spirits of the original story of *Faust* (1926) faded in the director's hands and became a popular love story. The uncompromising ending of *Tabu* (1931) with its depiction of intricate social relations was Murnau's breakthrough piece but sadly also his posthumous work.

Critic Bryan Chang analyses Murnau from the Romanticist viewpoint. Murnau is an 'alternative' believer who plays by the rules of a 'not-too-realistic' world and sets his films in dream-like realms. In *Nosferatu*, vampire Count Orlok is an embodiment of the evil and plague caught in a whirlpool of dreams and illusions. Situated in a reality as muddled as the illusionary world, he falls into deep comas at life-threatening junctures but regains his consciousness in idyllic settings. Orlok and his castle exist in an outer space and time. Such a dream-like state can only lead to one assumption - the intense inner struggle of man's relationship with God, and the conflicting pursuits of God and freedom of mind - exemplified in *Faust* (1926), *Sunrise* (1927) and *Journey into the Night* (1920). Faust succeeded with the devil's help to end the plague but is spurned for resorting to evil forces; the physician questioned God's will in curing his love rival's illness through his own hands.... Are these the irresistible forces of nature that, like Orlok, both haunt and compel people to subscribe to that something called Fate? (Collated by Kiki Fung.)



(From left) Jürgen Keil, Bede Cheng, Bryan Chang, Stephen Sze

Murnau's Construction of Images

F.W. Murnau's unique school of visual aesthetic is a testimony to his mastery technique and governance over celluloid images. Delving into the depths of how images are constructed in Murnau's films in the first session of the Murnau seminar held at the HKFA cinema on 5 July were critic William Cheung, Wong Ain-ling, research officer of HKFA, and Winnie Fu, curator of this retrospective.

Citing *Faust* (1926) as an example, Cheung shed light on the artistry of Murnau's images by juxtaposing their construction with the canons of Western painting aesthetics: Gothic images of 'Four Horsemen from the Apocalypse' from the German

Renaissance painter Albrecht Dürer's Apocalypse woodcut series find their resurrection in the film's three allegorical horseman figures, representing war, plague and famine respectively. Murnau craftily married 'plague' and 'death' to illustrate how the devil had conquered the mankind. The scenario depicting Gretchen and her baby in the snowstorm woven on a web of parallels, diagonals, perspectives and vanishing points is testimony of the director's meticulous design and ambition to replicate the visual space on canvas.

Rembrandt van Rijn is another profound influence on Murnau. Rembrandt's *The Prophet Jeremiah Mourning over the Destruction of Jerusalem* applied the techniques of highlighting to paint the glow surrounding Jeremiah and then Chiaroscuro to achieve a heightened illusion of depth to probe into the inner world and religious conviction of the meditating prophet. Murnau also modelled the Faust figure on Rembrandt's drawings, in particular, his use of light and texture.



William Cheung (left) and Wong Ain-ling

Wong Ain-ling discussed the films Murnau made in Hollywood. *Sunrise* (1927), *The Four Devils* (1928), *City Girl* (1930) and *Tabu* (1931) inherited the approaches and subject matters of their earlier German cousins, only that the director had made slight adjustments for the benefits of the American audience.

Indeed, Murnau's depiction of the peasant's obsession with the city girl in

Sunrise echoes with the overwhelming desire for lust in *The Haunted Castle* (1921) and *Phantom* (1922) that transforms into an inner devil and sets an individual on a vampire trance. Wong also drew a comparison between the German made *Faust* and the Hollywood production *Tabu*. *Faust* is invested with picturesque and literary qualities thanks to its studious efforts in photographic shots, lighting and the design of the characters. *Tabu*, on the contrary, is a celebration of the liberation of mankind. The entire film was shot on the Tahiti islands with a cast of aboriginal actors. On the subject of 'youth', *Faust* expresses the suppression of 'youth' in Europe during the Middle Ages, while *Tabu* projects their yearning for the Utopian, idyllic world.

Winnie Fu's comments filled the void left by the director's dissipated works. His debut film *The Boy in Blue* (1919) draws the mind of an individual torn between good and evil. The second feature *Satanas* (1919) is best remembered for its settings and dexterous camerawork. The third feature *The Tragedy of a Dancer*

(1920) is about a Russian musician who tries to escape oppression in vain and ends up killing himself. *Janus Head* (1920) is an adaptation from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Its spellbinding psychological drama created the forefather of Dracula in the character played by Conrad Veidt and sets it apart from other thrillers. The U.S. made *The Four Devils* (1928) was adapted by a Danish director back in 1911 into a silent film centring on the performance life and romance of a trapeze performer. Wire was used by Murnau to assist in the spine-chilling flying trapeze scenes.

Speaking from different perspectives and contexts, the three panelists gave in-depth analyses and commentaries on the German master and his world of visual images and aesthetics. (Collated by Edith Chiu.) ◆

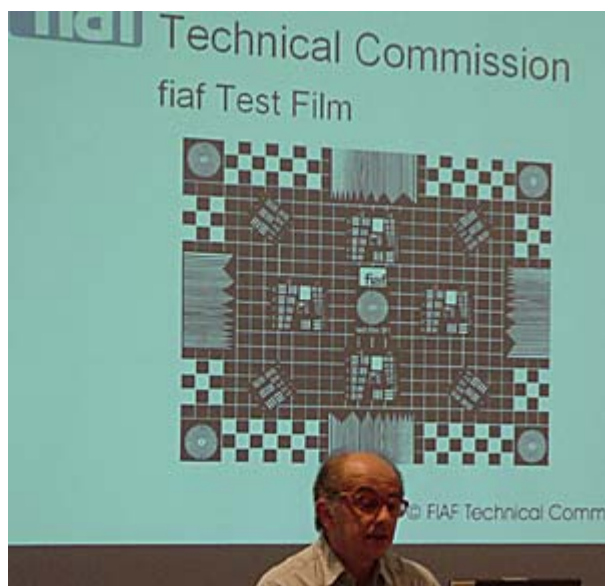
Events

The 59th FIAF Congress

It's a Scandinavian affair! Jointly organised by Sweden and Finland, this year's FIAF Congress took place from 1 to 7 June in the capital cities of Stockholm and Helsinki. Edward Tse, head of our conservation team attended the annual congregation assembling experts in the film archival community for the exchange of expertise and experience. The theme of the symposium was 'Fading Colour Film - Preserve and Restore'. The speakers dwelt on the history of colour films and addressed the contributing factors of discolouration and restoration methodologies illustrated by real case studies on celluloid. ♦



Swedish Film Institute played host to the sphere of events held in Stockholm.



João Socrates de Oliveira, President of the Technical Commission explains the properties of FIAF's newly designed test film, which will be available to members to assess and upgrade the screening facilities in their respective institutes.



Demonstrating the wonders of colour film restoration by the contrasting images of the restored print (left half) and its former self (right half).



Asian representatives at the Congress: Edward Tse (1st left), K.S. Sasidharan, director of the National Film Archive of India (3rd left), Chung Hong-taek, president of the Korean Film Archive (4th left), Ohba Masatoshi (1st right), Okajima Hisashi (2nd right) and Tsuneishi Fumiko (front row, 1st right) of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo and Teresa Huang (front row, 2nd right) of the Taipei Film Archive.



Representatives of the Vietnam Film Institute in Hanoi - the city hosting the Congress next year.

The Opening of *The Psychic Labyrinth of F.W. Murnau*



The Psychic Labyrinth of F.W. Murnau unveiled on a night of pouring rain on 13 June, adding to the eerie atmosphere and enigmatic quality of the master's film world. Inside the lobby of the Hong Kong Science Museum, however, the boisterous reception was graced by the presence of guests eagerly awaiting the screening of *Sunrise* (1927). In his opening speech, Mr Gerard Tsang (right), Acting Assistant Director (Heritage and Museums), affirmed the appeal of these silent classics. Mr Jürgen Keil (left), director of Goethe-Institut Hong Kong, was pleased to announce that Hong Kong was the first station after the Berlin Film Festival in February to hold the exhibition and retrospective, the latter of which featured a repertoire of newly restored prints. ◆

The Opening of *The Yins & Yangs of Ann Hui*



To accompany the Ghost Festival in July, Hong Kong Film Archive specially presents *The Yins & Yangs of Ann Hui*, showcasing the trilogy of supernatural/horror films by Ann Hui. From which the film print of *The Spooky Bunch*(1980) had been damaged for years. However, we are grateful that Ms Josephine Siao has provided a newly restored print for the opening of the programme. Ms Rebecca Lee, art director of *The Spooky Bunch*, generously donates the sketches of different characters of the film to the Archive. Lee also attended the opening held on 15 August and re-experienced the spooky journey of the film. The picture shows Rebecca Lee with Winnie Fu, the programmer of HKFA taken at the opening reception. ◆