

The 'Directing' and 'Acting' of Melodrama

Several years ago the Archive became the proud recipient of the late director Lee Sun-fung's private collection of film notes and photo albums, which form the basics of our forthcoming publication *The Cinema of Lee Sun-fung*. Decades after Lee's death, we are invited to probe into the ideological origin of his visual imagery, and the insightful, yet conflicting reviews by the director of his own works that aptly reflected the aura of his time. The 'Novel · Drama · Melodrama' retrospective will showcase the masterpieces of Lee alongside those of his contemporaries including Lee Tit, Ng Wui, Chun Kim and Tso Kea. A glimpse of the star-studded cast sheds light on the enigma of Cantonese cinema and its stars - Ng Cho-fan, Pak Yin, Cheung Ying, Mui Yee, etc - who teamed up with talented screenwriters and directors to dazzle the audience with vivid portrayal of the stories of their time.

Shaw and MP & GI stars may be larger than life, but the audience never seemed too convinced that Linda Lin Dai could play a vain woman bad to the bone. Yet Cantonese stars Ng Cho-fan and Pak Yin were the actors next door who played out *our* lives. The stately Ng Cho-fan could be weak and helpless in one film, but overbearing or heroic in others. The handsome Cheung Ying switched between his dandy and perfect gentleman personas almost effortlessly. The decent and upright Pak Yin had surprised us with her *femme fatale* roles. The trio might have been cast in one too many melodramas together but in each film they took on a different demeanour. Their grace, laughter and tears, joys and pains will strike our tearful eyes in a series of events held in April and May. As a preview, Mary Wong shares with us some thoughts on literary adaptations (pp 3-6), and Wong Ain-ling has the answer to 'Why Lee Sun-fung?' (pp 7-8). [clkwok@lcsd.gov.hk]



Some of Lee Sun-fung works to be showcased in the 'Novel·Drama·Melodrama' retrospective: (from left) *It Was a Cold Winter Night* (1955), *Sunrise* (1953), *Rainbow* (1960), *The Lone Swan* (1955) and *Anna* (1955) (cover).

Photos courtesy of Cathay-Keris Films Pte Ltd, Sil-Metropole Organization Limited and Mr Lee Sil-hong.

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Novel·Drama·Melodrama

Some Thoughts on Adaptation

Mary Wong

Hong Kong cinema and literature has been a recurring topic of interest to local researchers. The Hong Kong Film Archive's upcoming 'Novel · Drama · Melodrama' topical screenings and the monograph *The Cinema of Lee Sun-fung* will enhance the public's understanding of the interrelationship between the two media. Also, Lingnan University's Literature and Cinema Research Team, which launched its research and publication project earlier last year, will release its first publication soon. The collective effort of these bodies will help discerning the essentials of the many facets of Hong Kong cinema and literature. I had the privilege to take part in the compilation of the filmography to document the momentous changes in various historical phases. The findings of my fellow researchers together with my own observations of literary adaptation in Hong Kong cinema prior to the 1970s are outlined in the following paragraphs.

East and West, Cultivated and Popular

According to the *Hong Kong Filmography* series, many of the pre-war Hong Kong films were adaptations of period classics, the most popular being *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (*Rouge*, Lai Pak-hoi, 1925). Others included *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*The Witty Sorcerer*, Lai Pak-hoi, 1931), *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Farewell, Flowers*, Kam Pang-kui, 1936), *The Golden Lotus* (*The Modern Wu Dalang*, Kwan Man-ching, 1937), *Journey to the West* (*Mayhem in the Crystal Palace*, 1939), and *The Water Margin* (*The Love of a Woman*, Wang Yin, 1940). Vernacular stories taken from the 'Three Words' edited by Feng Menglong, including *Tenth Madam Du Sinks Her Treasure Chest in Anger*, were embraced by early filmmakers such as Kwan Man-ching, who directed his own version of the moral tale in 1939.

Action-packed chivalry and cause c ẽ l ẽ bre novels *Seven Swordsmen* and *Five Altruists* and *Cases of Judge Peng* were commonplaces in early Hong Kong cinema. As in other countries, Hong Kong cinema owed its development to literature, even more so in the department of scriptwriting, and found a ready audience in popular folktales. Apart from these two favourable factors, as this generation of filmmakers was transplanting stories to the screen, they were also internalising the intrinsic moral standards and values themselves.

Pre-war Hong Kong cinema also took its cue from Western literary works, including the mythology *Arabian Nights* (*The Magic Lamp*, 1939), Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* (Wong Toi, 1948), Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* (*As the Heart Desires*, Chiu Shu-ken, 1940) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (*To Die for Love*, Hui Siu-kuk, 1940). This Western trend continued well into the late 1950s, delighting audiences with its adaptation of a string of classics - Dostoevsky's *The Insulted and Injured* (film of the same title, screenplay by Yao Ke, 1950), Maupassant's *Boule de Suif* (*Flora*, screenplay by Bai Chen, 1951), Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (*Anna*, Lee Sun-fung, 1955). One can assume that our film workers' diversified attempts were nourished by their solid literary background and embraced by an open-minded commercial film market. But rather unfortunately, this Western influence was slowly relinquished as our cinema developed.



The Union Film Enterprise Ltd debuted with a Ba Jin Overseas Chinese Films released a number of adaptation, so well received that a string of other Zhang Henshui adaptations in 1961 and 62, most of literary adaptations followed including *It Was a Cold* them directed by Tso Kea and starring Cheung Ying, *Winter Night* (1955).

Pak Yin (left) and Ha Ping (right). Still from *Many Aspects of Love* (1961).

The 1950s and 60s were the heydays of Hong Kong cinema, climaxed with the unprecedented conjugality of cinema and literature of the 1950s. During this time the mainstay of classics adaptation was gradually replaced by popular novels that beat with the pulse of modern life. The works by novelists Hau Yiu (*The Desert Flower*, 1937), Kit Hak (*The Red Scraf*, 1940), Mong Wan (*Poor Souls*, 1940) were first serialised in local papers shortly before making their screen appearances. Novels of different genres were introduced to Hong Kong cinema beginning from the late 1940s.

In quest for new topics, post-war screenwriters scoured the enormous pool of popular novels set against a contemporary backdrop. The sizable readership enjoyed by newspaper serialised novels spurred a new surge of adaptations: Chow Pak-ping's *Hot-tempered Leung* series serialised in *Hung Luk Daily*, Yi Hung Sang's *Sing Pao* serialised novels, Sam So's *Broker Lai's Diary* and *Strange Cases of Sima Fu* serialised in *New Life Evening Post*, and of course the hugely popular Universal Publishers' 'Three Dime Novels'.

Screen adaptations of the 1950s and 60s were kaleidoscopic, encompassing popular literature, airwave novels, Western classics, ancient and contemporary Chinese literature, and the romantic 'mandarin duck and butterflies' literature in vogue. Zhang Henshui's bestsellers *Wasted Years*, *A Tale of Laughter and Tears* and *Clans at the Qinhuai River*, etc had been repeatedly adapted for the screen. At the same time, gracing the screen were May Fourth Movement classics such as *The True Story of Ah Q* by Lu Xun and *Wintry Night* by Ba Jin. Nowhere else but Hong Kong boasted this unique scene after 1949.

The dominance of *wenyi* screenwriters and writers was usurped by martial arts novels and subsequently sci-fi fictions which were bursting onto the scene from mid-1960s onwards. The influence of Hong Kong cinema and literature in the 1950s began to wear off following the closure of film companies, market adjustments, and the changes of time, and finally came to a definitive end in the early 1970s when the film industry became monotonous. Li Han-hsiang belonged to the elite school of orthodox literary directors in the 1970s; Shu Shuen and King Hu were a rare breed. New wave screenwriters like Lilian Lee, Joyce Chan, John Chan Koon-chung and Fung Suk-yin emerged in the late 1970s and early 80s and brought about a literary revival in cinema.

Thoughts on Adaptations

Having referenced the chronology of adaptation, I will now return to the subject of 'adaptation'. In previous discussions, 'adaptation' is used as a generic reference in order to facilitate a discourse on our available research materials. But we might ask: what has really been adapted? An author whose book was published years ago would have no knowledge of his/her work becoming a screen adaptation at the time of the launch. A screenwriter is free to choose between being faithful to the original or giving things his own twist. Classically, adaptation has been regarded as the bilateral relationship between two texts - the original and the adapted, with the former always appearing before the latter. However, the dynamics of literary adaptation in the 1950s and 60s remained largely unaccounted for by this simple hypothesis. Let me give an example.



Airwave novels of Li Ngaw (1st left) reached the height of their popularity in the 1950s. He also produced and debuted in the semi-autobiographical *Plum Blossom in the Snow* (1951).

Famed airwave novelist Li Ngaw writes in *Li Wo Jianggu (Li Ngaw's Storytelling)* (2003) that the broadcast of his airwave novel *Flame of Lust* on the radio in 1949 was to coincide with the publication of its five monthly volumes. Fans eager to read the latest plot would rush to the newsstands every month to snap up the copies. We can therefore say that both the broadcast scripts and the novels were 'in the making' at the same time. *Flame of Lust* was so popular that it was wanted for both the stage and the screen. The film, titled *Crime Doesn't Pay* (1949), was written and directed by Yam Wu-fa. If we are to discuss *Crime Doesn't Pay* as a literary adaptation, we will also have to look into other associated texts such as the scripts of the radio play and the Cantonese opera. The question of what is an original text is no longer possible to answer. In fact, *Crime Doesn't Pay* was only one of the many adaptations involved in this multilateral relationship which makes their studies all the more challenging and interesting.

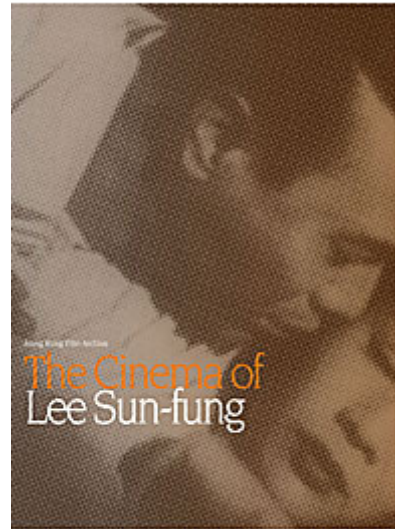
Like nowadays, there were frequent crossover ventures. Cultural workers were engaged actively in different media, like Yam Wu-fa, who was newspaper publisher, novelist, screenwriter-cum-director in one. Yi Hung Sang was a newspaper editor as well as novelist whose works were regularly serialised in *Sing Pao* and adapted for films. He was also hired to write and direct his own works. And the list goes on: Mong Wan, Law Bun, Ko Hung, Evan Yang, Yao Ke, Ngai Mun. These cross-cultural workers were icons of their time, jolting with ease between two media and defying the constraints of time and space with their creativity and passion. The fruit borne by their painstaking efforts will be dismissed if the readers are only to study adaptation from the traditionalist perspective. ●

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Why Lee Sun-fung?

Wong Ain-ling

The Cinema of Lee Sun-fung is one of the Archive's principal publishing projects this year. Lee made his mark in the 1950s and 60s, alongside his illustrious contemporaries Ng Wui, Lee Tit, Tso Kea and Chun Kim. As early as 1994, our planning office then located in Mongkok organised a tribute to Ng Wui, Lee Sun-fung and Lee Tit in a retrospective entitled *Time for Tears*. This year, our programme section will be presenting a Hong Kong literature and film retrospective 'Novel • Drama • Melodrama'. We have, therefore, chosen to centre our research and studies on Lee Sun-fung.



Lee excelled in adapting literary works for the screen. His adaptations encompassed Chinese and Western, ancient and contemporary classics, and his achievements were widely acknowledged by film workers. Among his three Ba Jin adaptations *Spring* (1953), *It Was a Cold Winter Night* (1955) and *Humanity* (1959), *Spring* was awarded the Films of Excellence Award (1949-1955) presented by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, and *It Was a Cold Winter Night* was voted an all-time Chinese classic by local critics. *Anna* (adapted from Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*) and *Rainbow* (adapted from Mao Dun's novel of the same name) were bold and daring works in which Lee took the liberty to refashion the archetypal characters Anna and Madam Mui to keep them in tune with the conservative society of the 1950s and 60s. Despite the alterations, his heroines exhibited an independent spirit that set them apart from quotidian female roles at the time, aptly embodied by Pak Yin - an actress best remembered for her solemn and resolute demeanour.

I was first informed by programmer Winnie Fu of the late director's precious collection preserved in the Archive, including photos and notebooks, donated by his son Sil-hong in 1999. Going through Lee's archive, I was most amused by the interviews in which the director talked about his self-invented film study tool - using a mini Leica camera to record film sequences shot-by-shot - in the time when VHS and DVD were unavailable to film enthusiasts. An old album of Lee's displayed an array of stamp-sized black-and-white photos, neatly arranged after the related handbills. A family album unfolded snapshots of Lee and wife Lee Yuet-ching, actor

Ng Cho-fan and actress Tsi Lo-lin taken during the location shooting of *The Lone Swan* (1955) in Japan. The pictures showed as vividly a crew of professional filmmakers and actors in kimonos as a bunch of curious tourists in their everyday attires. Recently, I had a chance to talk to Mr Lee Sil-hong, who recounted to me amusing anecdotes during the shooting of *Love of Malaya* (1955): satay, a local delicacy, was a regular feature on the dining table of overseas Chinese in Malaysia, but more often they disappeared without a trace in front of the camera - even before a scene is completed - into the stomach of Tsi Lo-lin! Lee's albums also caught glimpses of the screen goddess, in her glamorous woollen overcoat, fur muffler and high heels, snacking at Japanese roadside food stalls in her self-indulgent moments.



A snapshot of Lee Sun-fung with wife Lee Yuet-ching, and Tsi Lo-lin (1st left) roaming the streets of Japan.

There were also tiny notebooks scribbled with Lee's remarks, most of them penned in the early and mid-1950s, which touched on drama, *d è coupage*, and most interestingly, the director's reviews of his own works. In accounting for the failure of *Anna* and *The Lone Swan*, Lee offered an insightful analysis: 'As for *Anna* and *The Lone Swan*, their production, script, directing, acting, mise-en-sc è ne, and the overall standard weren't poorer than those of the other three films (i.e. *Spring*, *The Good Earth*, *It Was a Cold Winter Night*), and yet they were disastrous at the box office. The films themselves aside, Union's bad luck was largely to blame for the poor receipt. Therefore, a film's success or failure depends on three factors - gimmick, genre, story - and in that order of importance. Of course, Kei-shu's love for the married woman Anna did little to win the sympathy of the audience, who tended to perceive it as immoral and quickly dismissed the pains suffered by the lovers. The lovelorn hero of *The Lone Swan*, a monk who had taken his vow of celibacy, also failed to win over the audience. Still the beautiful and poetic scenery of Japan alone was worth watching. At the end of the day, it all boiled down to Union's declining popularity. Some indeed bought the ticket just to see the exotic scenery, which explained the \$20,000 receipt in its opening week. But as the film failed to appeal to lowbrows, the hype soon died down.' In a few lines, Lee had summed up the dialectics of the content and art of film with the audience and the larger environment.

Albeit the enormous time constraint, we are both thrilled and anxious to share with film lovers the legacies of our film pioneers in a most systematic manner. This eagerness and enthusiasm, I believe, is the biggest driving force behind encompassing the task. ◆

Editor's Note: Look out for the publication of *The Cinema of Lee Sun-fung* in April 2004. A selection of Lee's films and private collection will also be showcased at HKFA's upcoming 'Novel • Drama • Melodrama' retrospective.

Wong Ain-ling is the Research Officer of the HKFA



Film Conservation Jargons (2)

Preservation Versus Access in the Film Archive

Edward Tse

The film archiving movement was started by small groups of interested people and enthusiastic individuals (we call them film collectors) with the mission to preserve films and related materials for the enjoyment of their own or their descendents. Preservation was once the main and only concern of these collectors. With regard to the priority of preservation, limited budget and resources meant that the early film collectors tended to give emphasis to the preservation of the image (or the content) over that of the film material (the carriers). Very often, the films in these collectors' possession were found to have undergone reduction printing from 35 mm to 16 mm in order to save space and the cost of storage. Such practice is not uncommon in nowadays collectors' communities. As the collected materials so preserved were only meant for their private enjoyment, there were hardly any needs to systematically arrange them so long as the collectors could remember where to locate a film and its relevant information.

As time goes by, more and more film materials are acquired by sizable institutions, like regional or national film archives and museums. Preservation is no longer the only concern of the archivists because they have to account for every cent of the public money that goes into the institutions. The purpose of film preservation has been changed to public access. It is obvious that conflicts will arise from these two different notions of film archiving: preservation versus access. It is a fundamental dilemma for an archive to preserve films on one hand, while allowing access by the general public on the other. Every time a film is accessed, it is inevitably 'damaged' - either because of the normal wear and tear of the film material when going through the projection machine, or the mishandling of film material by some careless personnel in the process.

In order to resolve these conflicts, two areas of action, each retargeting at a different medium, are to be taken. The objective of film preservation is to preserve the original film materials as soon as they enter into the archive collection. To facilitate public access, the original film materials are to be preserved in the form of duplicates and that access is only restricted to the duplicated information content. In other words, preservation work carried out by the film archive is to preserve the original content and original carrier, and access normally means access to the

duplicated content only. Access to the original carrier is only allowed in very rare occasions.

As a consequence, the need for quality duplication arises. In addition to providing access copy, it is now the general practice in a film archive to duplicate film materials to a new carrier since the original material may one day perish. One may argue further that the new carrier will also gradually phase out in the market as technology advances and support from manufacturers will cease towards the end of a normal product lifecycle (it is usually shorter than the normal life span of the material of the carrier), and such duplication process will go on and on. It is true that the most important consideration in the decision of migration is also access. Thus one can see that the whole issue of access does not only create conflicts with the preservation process but also the issue of long-term content migration.

However, if a film can be accessed through its duplicates, the need to access the original will be largely minimised, which in turn will help its preservation. Better and more convenient access to a film can indefinitely help promote the awareness of our film heritage and gain wider support for the work of film archiving. ◆

Edward Tse is the Assistant Curator I (Conservation) of the HKFA.

New Acquisitions

Ancient Discoveries

Mable Ho

Working in the field of film acquisition, I always abide the principle of 'embracing the ancients and respecting the contemporaries.' While ongoing negotiations can be made with the 'contemporaries' on preservation initiatives, many film relics belonging to the 'ancients' have been dissipated and are nowhere to be found. Ancient discoveries brought back from each 'excavation' always bring a surge of joy.



Liu En-zei and his steel wire

In July 2003, we had the honour to meet the renowned sound recordist Mr Liu En-zei. A graduate of radiotelegraphy, his film career began in Shanghai at Hsin Hwa Motion Picture Company, after which he was hired to work in Hong Kong by Yung Hwa Motion Picture Industries Limited. In 1952, he founded the Hong Kong United Sound Recording Laboratory which was responsible for the post-dubbing of nearly all local productions. He also invested in filmmaking alongside other business interests including catering and plastics. Having gained an understanding of the roles and objectives of the Archive, the visionary and selfless Mr Liu pledged to donate to us film prints, equipment and artefacts that had been in his proud possession for over half a century, among which was a reel of steel wire¹ frequently documented in film history chronicles but was commonly thought to be nonexistent in the territory. Unfortunately, the accompanying phonograph is lost for good, and precious recording on the tape cannot be readily accessed. We are arranging to send the reel overseas for decoding and are expecting more surprises!

Another momentous discovery was made in October 2003 when a certain Ms Lo returned from Canada to launch her family history research. Ms Lo, daughter of Mr William Lo, one of Hong Kong cinema's pioneers, paid a visit to the Archive library with the hope of collecting film anecdotes on her late father. She graciously added to the admittedly inadequate Archive collection film stills and a poetry collection written by Lo. Lo was born in the turbulent late Qing years.



His early aspiration was to join the military but his talent landed him a career in the theatre business instead. He was

William Lo (middle) in *Join the Army and Live* (1926)

an equally gifted director, having directed *The Calamity of Money* (1924), *Two Doctors* (1925), *Lovers in Wartime* (1925), and *Join the Army and Live* (1926) in which he also acted. But the massive strike that broke out in Hong Kong and Guangzhou in 1925 curtailed his filmmaking career. He sought a new life in Vietnam where he practised medicine and wrote poems in his leisure time. There had been no news of Lo since. This chance encounter with Lo's daughter not only filled in the blank pages of Lo's remarkable career but also brought back to us the sole surviving film still from *Join the Army and Live*.

Renowned scholar Wang Guowei once wrote that knowledge thrived on its 'acquisition, study, and circulation',² and added that 'new knowledge had always been bred from new discoveries since ancient time.'³ Though we had known so little of Hong Kong film history, we believe that your support will open the doors to yet more ancient discoveries vital to the research on Hong Kong cinema and the survival of our cultural heritage. ◆

Notes

1. Basics of magnetic recording using steel wire was put forth by the American mechanical engineer Oberlin Smith in 1878. Originally used by the military, the technique was later used for commercial purposes in the 1940s after numerous revisions and was replaced by magnetic tape in the 1950s.
2. Wang Guowei, 'Xue Tang Jiao Kan Qun Shu Xu Lu Xu'/'Preface, A Collection of Xue Tang Revisions'.
3. Wang Guowei, 'Zui Jin Er San Nian Zhongguo Xin Faxian Zhi Xue Wen'/'The Knowledge of China's Latest Discoveries'.

Mable Ho is the Acquisition Manager of the HKFA.

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Thank You!

Early Cinematic Aesthetics and Reception Modes: A Contextual Review

Linda Lai

Many people equate Early Cinema with silent films, but the distinction between the two terms is worth further discrimination. Silent films marked the birth of cinema into human culture and remained the major form of cinema worldwide until the 1930s. As for 'early cinema', it was specially coined since the late 1970s by revisionist film historians, including Noël Burch and Tom Gunning, to refer to films made before 1906-08, arguing that earliest films were not just an elementary stage of cinematic evolution, the infancy of an art form, but an open approach to cinema with a conception of space, time and narrative form different from that in the standard classical Hollywood narrative. The term also refers to a special moment in history when the moving images became a new form of popular entertainment with diverse reception, and before the many filmmaking possibilities were closed off to standard practices.

Cultural Grounded-ness of Cinematic Aesthetics

There is no one single, general history possible for Early Cinema. Each regional cinema had its own contexts and sources of inspiration - be they literature, drama, painting, technology or popular entertainment - which contributed to its



Linda Lai (right) and Bede Cheng

uniqueness through cultural appropriation and re-integration. For example, cinema found its habitat in tea houses immediately after its entrance into the urban landscape of Shanghai. Popular and folk art elements such as Peking opera easily found their way on to the screen, and a phenomenal curiosity with images and lives in foreign lands became a convenient impetus for the hunt for broader content. A lively portrayal of ordinary people, *The Love of Labourers* (1922) interestingly gave a self-reflective reference to the tea house as an indispensable facet of the city life. In Britain, film also found a ready audience treated to visual toys like magic lanterns that had become part of everyday culture since the 17th century. The 19th century France witnessed the rise of new public spheres in places such as salons and cafés, which provided the Lumière brothers with the most convenient and publicly accessible screening spots. Thomas Edison's ventures in film clearly benefited from

his own ingenious inventions. The kinoscope, one of Edison's inventions for optical entertainment, was the natural evolution of the peep show - already a popular, mass-consumed visual toy. At the same time, the influx of new immigrants created a new grass-roots work force that came with a healthy appetite for leisure facilities. The rise of cinema as a mass entertainment appropriately answered the quest of this new class of consumers.



The self-reflective reference to the tea house in *The Love of Labourers* (1922) was indicative of its indispensability to city life.

Cultural Backdrop and Characteristics

As David Bordwell noted, 'The cinema may have been an amazing novelty in the 1890s, but it came into being within a larger and varied context of Victorian-era leisure-time activities.' (Thompson and Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, p 12). It was a time when diverse public entertainments were available. In fact most towns had theatres that provided the venues for staging plays and

travelling lectures animated by magic-lantern slides illustration. Vaudevilles - a variety show comprising animal performances, juggling and slap-stick comedies - catered to middle-class audiences. Though having compilation character similar to vaudevilles', burlesque shows, on the other hand, were less family-oriented leveraging their major attractions of vulgar comedies and occasional nudities. The Victorian era thus marked cinema's entrance into these existing sites - dramas, nonfictions, actualities, sciences, travelogues, and on top of that, cinema provided spiced-up alternatives of current events to non-illustrated newspapers.

Films of early cinema usually consisted of a single shot (though multiple-shot films came out in as early as 1899). Camera was kept still at one position, shooting at a speed of 16 frames per second. *The Barber Shop* (1893, Edison Laboratory, 50 feet) utilised a fixed frame to create a distinct tableau-theatrical space where the characters entered and exited the frame with the main activities taking place in the centre, calling for intra-frame concentration. The early filmmakers had no problem at all manoeuvring their cameras to create depth and space, unhindered by the cumbersome equipment made available to them. Many of the so-called technical deficiencies were easily overcome: lowering the camera from eye level to waist level,

for example, gained greater depth of field (as in some of the works by Biograph, Edison's competitor), whereas the heavy immobile camera could track when placed in a boat or on a train in motion. In fact, *The Georgetown Loop: Colorado* (Lumière, 1903) was shot on a locomotive. None of the constraints undermined the strength of their story-telling. The flexible sequencing ordering of individual self-sufficient scenes and the many possibilities they could be strung together lend fluidity and openness to Early Cinema narrative, thus enabling exhibitors to edit the chronology of the stories as they pleased. A fixed medium shot captured *The Kiss* (1896 & 1900) in its entirety, exhibiting all vital elements of powerful storytelling. *Life of an American Fireman* (1903) testified to the early filmmakers' mastery of self-sufficient narrative and editing to either observe or disrupt the narrative continuity in order to render a brand new viewing experience. They were auteur directors without overbearing authority. It is interesting to note that avant-garde film movements until the 1980s (including the Fluxus Art Movement of which Yoko

Ono was a member) had paid homage to early cinema techniques like static framing to maximise the movement of people and objects within frame, and long-duration

shots to reflect real-time. The infinite possibilities of cinema were closely re-examined.



The title scene in *The Kiss* (1896 & 1900) exhibited all vital elements of powerful storytelling.

From 'Cinema of Attraction' to 'Cinema of Narrative Integration'

Film historian Gunning argues critically against the historical necessity of story-telling and film as film-novel being the standard, proper form of cinema beyond the 1910s. He invokes the term 'cinema of attraction' to characterise Early Cinema's mode of direct address and confrontation, which contrasted with the 'cinema of narrative integration' in classical narrative. Gunning borrows the term 'attraction' from Eisenstein, stressing that fascination with visual experiences and the viewer's self-conscious gaze at the object and/or character should be discriminated from Classical Hollywood Cinema, which relies on the relation between shots for effects of continuity and absorption of viewer into the diegesis. Cinema of attraction strove to invoke immediate psychological response by employing photographic effects (fixed frames and single shots) to explore spatial relations, framings to heighten theatrical effects, elaborate staging within a frame, body movements and tableau scenes to create spectacles, and other ways to multiply intra-frame possibilities, whereas narrative progression - the cause-and-effect emphasis in classical storytelling - was of secondary importance.

The diverse early cinema modes had, after 1908, found a new focus - the task of storytelling - and family melodrama in particular. Only until 1915 was film considered as worthy of art and a form of upper-class entertainment. Since then, the ideal narrative was defined as establishing a coherent narrative space and time, and drilling into psychological interiors of characters. Invisible/continuity editing was exploited to condense time and space, ensure narrative coherence, and achieve spatial-temporal continuity.

D.W. Griffith's first full feature film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and the 1916 propagandistic *Intolerance*, both grandeur epic pieces with complex narrative structures, were hailed as the definitive works that raised cinema's social status to that of an art with their remarkable achievements in integrating elements of architecture, theatre and painting in a subject matter of epic value. The post-WWI French cinema was disappointed with rational cinematic techniques and shared the Surrealist artists' penchant for the fantastic elements and style. Feuillade's *Les Vampires* (1915-16), by contrast, traded on the popularity of the serial novel and signalled the first step toward commercialisation of the French cinema. But the film, devoid of Griffith-style epics and dynamic montage, was not seriously taken nor incorporated into the dominant history of French cinema until around 1944 when it finally won over the critics in the uphill battle against the French avant-garde

movement. The 'revival' of Feuillade in the mid-1940s coincided with the rediscovery of location shooting in the Italian neo-realist cinema and its infatuation with deep focus composition and mise-en-scène. The German expressionist's iconic imageries of shadow and fog metaphorically and literally cast a long shadow over the poetic realism later in France and the film noir in America. Soviet directors like Eisenstein and Vertov devoted themselves to argue for a cinema at the service of nation-building, churning history's most vigorous film theory to define cinema's role in politics and public life.

For over a century, our cinema has been dictated by storytelling as *the* institutional mode of practice. But as our films grow increasingly tired and clichéd, it is perhaps time we look back to uncover the many possibilities inherent in film. ●



The definitive work that elevated cinema's social status to that of an art - D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916).



Les Vampires (1915-16) traded on the popularity of the serial novel but shared no less the penchant for the surrealist elements and style.

Editor's Note: Linda Lai was a speaker at the 'Early Cinematic Aesthetics and Reception Modes' seminar held on 10 Jan 2004. This article is a summary of her presentation paper.

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Artistic Achievements in Early Italian Cinema

Cabiria (1914), the opening feature of the Archive's 'Early European Cinema - Italy' screenings, epitomises the artistic achievements of Italy and its neighbouring European countries in the early years of the last century with its grandeur set pieces fanned out on the most dazzling sets. A seminar titled 'Artistic Achievements in Early Italian Cinema' organised by the Archive was held at the Lecture Theatre of the Hong Kong Central Library on 26 December 2003. Our speaker, film critic William Cheung, invited the audience to delve into the aesthetics of early Italian films with references to the body of fine art publications that he had brought along.

Historical epics, many of them big-budgeters, were the mainstays in of early Italian cinema. Exuding an air of Homer's epic poetry, *Nero* (1909), *Spartacus* (1913) and *Cabiria* are widely regarded as exemplars of the genre. The vast library of classical paintings, sculptures, operas and dramas, from which Cheung selected a few as illustrative aids, became the muses to the early filmmakers in shaping a new landscape of the story, scene and spatial design of early Italian cinema propagated from thousands of years of prestigious fine art traditions and cultural legacies. Let's begin from *Cabiria*. Boosting inter-titles written by the Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, the film assimilated the expressive mode of the Italian opera into its script and mise-en-scène, resulted in a remarkable style and plot development that elevated its status to that of an epic, and awed the viewers with the distinct theatrical space where the characters entered and exited the frame initiating a sequence of embellished bodily movements. The graphic design of the intermittent illustrations was clearly influenced by the works of the early 20th Century British illustrator Aubrey Beardsley, with its wielding of an ornamental stroke to depict episodes of the film plot and mimicry of the decorative style of Art Nouveau noted for its exuberant, stylised floral patterns, and grotesque imagery of swords and beasts. The pattern depicting a lion gnawing into a horse is reminiscent of a Roman sculpture which shows a lion about to devour a screaming man; the film minimised on filming grandeur set-pieces with moving shots but capitalised on the symmetric spectacle created by shooting at a diagonal angle favoured by the Art Nouveau artists.

The set design also took its cue from African and Latin American visual images to create spectacle after spectacle, coupled with an array of exotic Oriental artefacts and icons such as fortresses, temples, statues, and masks. Cheung's own research also confirmed the source of the queen's exquisite wedding gown and head pieces - a painting by the Symbolist painter Gustave Moreau -

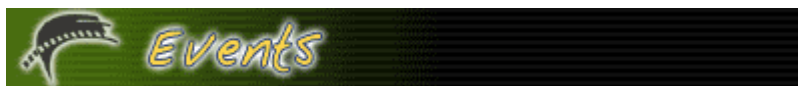
which further accentuated an aura of exoticism and mystique. The Palace of Carthage constructed on Tunisian soil oozed North African flavours, complemented with Egyptian reliefs and murals gracing the décor; the sun-moon pattern carpeting the throne and the lion head decorating the handle were so meticulously carved that they rivalled the golden treasures excavated from the tomb of King Tutankhamun, arguably the most famous Egyptian pharaoh.



William Cheung (right) and Bede Cheng

The Faun (1917) demonstrated the Italian's mastery of manifesting various artistic forms and images on the celluloid: a lovesick model falls in love with the god of love, a statue of a human-goat hybrid, which comes alive in her dream. It was by crafty design rather than by mere coincidence that this deity should adopt the form of a faun, god of the woods and herds in Roman Mythology (also known as Satyr in Greek Mythology), with legs, hooves, horns of a goat and the torso and head of a man which had fascinated generations of painters and was regularly featured in their works.

Early Italian cinema has spawned one masterpiece after another and scaled cinematic heights with their creation of dream-like realms, breathtaking scenes and extravagant sets. Their attempts at infusing different artist styles into their films should not be overlooked. Italian filmmakers should be hailed for their boldness and devotion to amalgamate, revise, and if needed, vulgarise the existing art forms to suit their own purpose of reinventing cinema and displaying to the world their proud cultural and artistic origin dating back to ancient Roman times. Historical values aside, Cheung believes that this to be one of the most meaning artistic exercises in cinema. (Collated by Kiki Fung.) ●



The Opening of 'Early European Cinema - France'

The 13 February not only marked the opening of the 'Early European Cinema - France' retrospective, but also an occasion to pay homage to Georges Méliès, magician-turned-cinema great, whose vision and legacy lived on through great granddaughter Madame Marie-Hélène Lehérissey-Méliès and her son gracing the event as moderator and pianist respectively. In her witty and animated narration against the backdrop of Méliès images, Madame Lehérissey-Méliès recounted the story of an exceptionally talented artist who devoted his life to film and painting with fervid enthusiasm. Mr Chung Ling-hoi, Assistant Director (Heritage and Museums) of the LCSD, presented a token of appreciation to our guests of honour from France.



Madame Lehérissey-Méliès giving a speech before the première.



Chung Ling-hoi, Assistant Director (Heritage and Museums), presenting a special gift to Madame Lehérissey-Méliès



(From left) Madame Leherissey-Méliès, Angela Tong (Head of HKFA) and Prof Leung Ping-kwan

Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards Presentation Ceremony

A galaxy of stars and behind-the-scenes talents attended the 10th Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards presentation ceremony held at the Archive cinema on 18 February. The Archive offers excellent venues for holding film-related activities and welcomes joint initiatives with interested parties and individuals to promote film culture.



Winners of the awards. (From left) Alan Mak, Andrew Lau, John Chong, Andy Lau, Cecilia Cheung, Wai Ka-fai, Yau Nai-hoi, Au Kin-yee and Yip Tin-shing.