

### Life-long Love

A retrospective usually means 'an intensive screening activity commemorating a topic, a person or a period of time, recounting the development and summing up the achievement of such.' But our retrospective for a filmmaker at her prime gives new definition to the word. As she says, 'The retrospective is just a beginning!'

On the day of the 'Sylvia Chang's Shining Days' seminar, the waiting audience filled up the stairways and beyond. They say, 'Your films strike a chord in my heart.' In the end, she appeals for consideration of others' efforts, appreciation of others' achievements and leading a happy life. That's why her works are always optimistic and her love for the cinema is just as passionate.

The Film Archive will also present some historic works of Li Lihua made in the fifties. Li Lihua, undisputedly one of the divas of Chinese cinema, enjoyed a long popularity, striding from the 40s to the 70s. Sylvia Chang's cinema career is equally impressive. From her first foray into cinema in the 70s, she has been working in front and behind the camera for three decades. But this thirty years' work makes up not her life achievement but the starting of her career that is still going strong. Li Lihua was the screen goddess of her time. Though she did set up her own film company, she never went behind the camera. Screen goddess of today means career woman like Sylvia Chang who is full of passion and creativity for self-expression. Her story, with her trials, transformation, and growth, is material for a classic film. The moving story is made possible by her unwavering and persevering love for cinema, and made more shimmering because it is told in the first person. [[clkwok@lcsd.gov.hk](mailto:clkwok@lcsd.gov.hk)]



Cover: Sylvia Chang directing *Princess D* (2002) (Photo: Jupiter)

(Photos from top) 20: A melodrama star was born; Sylvia Chang won the Best Supporting Actress in the 13th Golden Horse Award for her performance in *Posterity and Perplexity* (dir: Li Xing, 1976); 30: New Wave muse; she could be a high school student or the perfect woman (*That Day, on the Beach*, dir: Edward Yang, 1983); Life starts at 40 (*20 30 40*, dir: Sylvia Chang, 2004)

### **Acknowledgements**

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## A Woman of Many Roles: Sylvia Chang



Grace Ng

In a film career of more than 30 years and counting, Sylvia Chang had played the roles of actor, scriptwriter, director and producer. This is extremely rare in Chinese cinema, especially for a woman. Retrospectives of her work had been staged in the U.K. and Canada, the Berlin International Film Festival had invited her to serve as juror and she had starred in such Western films as *Soursweet* (1988) and *The Red Violin* (1998). Yet interviews with Chang and writings about her in recent years are mostly concerned with her personal life and experience. Though her aspirations in film are sometimes mentioned, they are clearly not the focus of the reports. Chang doesn't seem to mind, however, comfortably offering accounts of her life every time while expressing a dedication to film throughout.

Chang, who started her career as an actress, admits that she was born in the wrong time. When she entered the film industry, it was dominated by either violent kung fu films or the so-called 'three-room films' (sitting room, dining room and coffee 'room'), both not exactly her forte. What's more, Raymond Chow, head of Golden Harvest, once said that Chang was a good actress but not born to be a star. But Chang was nothing if not smart. She knew that not every actor can be Brigitte Lin but if she concentrated on developing her acting skills, she would find opportunities to show the world her worth. Indeed, she was crowned Best Actress at the Golden Horse for her performance in *My Grandfather* (Ko Chun-liang alias Ko Chun-Hsiung, 1981) and won the Hong Kong Film Awards Best Actress twice with *Passion* (Sylvia Chang, 1986) and *Forever and Ever* (Raymond To, 2001).

The awards recognised Chang's acting abilities, which came from her audacity to try different roles, which in turn gave her opportunities to express herself. In *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Li Han-hsiang, 1977), she plays the cherished role of the lead female character Lin of the Chinese classic *Dreams of the Red Chamber*. Playing her love interest, Baoyu, the novel's beloved male role, was the eternal Brigitte Lin, who nonetheless was unable to snatch the spotlight from her. Later, in Cinema City's *Aces Go Places* (Eric Tsang, 1982), she was cast against her romantic melodrama type in a comedic role. Accepting the challenge, she worked hard at capturing the rhythm of Hong Kong comedies. The labour paid off beautifully as she charmed her way into the hearts of the Hong Kong audience with an energetic portrayal of her tomboyish policewoman character. She surprised the audience again in *Queen of*

*Temple Street* (Lawrence Ah Mon, 1990), playing the clean-cut madame of a cheap Temple Street brothel. 'There was really a Queen of Temple Street and that's the way she was. Those who made their living on Temple Street were not necessarily shabbily dressed.' She captured the dignity of these characters. In *Full Moon in New York* (Stanley Kwan, 1990), with its subtle story, Chang played a Taiwan citizen who led an exiled life. She embodied the character's sense of cultural displacement and refusal to accept her fate, providing perfect compliment to her costars Maggie Cheung and Siqin Gaowa, who played, respectively, a Hong Kong woman and a Mainlander.

From the teenage Lin of *Dream of the Red Chamber* to the middle-aged woman in the recent *20 30 40* (2004), Chang had played characters of different backgrounds and different ages, yet all of them share a certain stubbornness and confidence. Still, her characters cannot be easily categorised and grouped into certain types. They are not necessarily charming, but as Chang herself had said, one can always look at people or situations from different angles. Her performance may not please everyone, but the audience always knows she had given all she has. She is dedicated to total professionalism.

Perhaps driven by this professionalism towards film, she very early on tried writing scripts. She felt that scriptwriting was the weakest area of Chinese films and was determined to improve on the situation. She did not have a smooth ride on her road to scriptwriting. Her debut on scriptwriting and directing was *Once Upon a Time* (1978). It was considered as a total failure. When told she was not born with star quality, that didn't stop her from trying. Likewise, when confronted with a failure in writing and directing, she soldiered on with dedication. The result of her determination was two scriptwriting awards, for *Siao Yu* (1995, at the Asian Pacific Film Festival) and *Tempting Heart* (1999, at the Hong Kong Film Awards).

Chang's scripts are focused. They are all about pressing issues for women. Those issues include friendship and love in *Passion*, the love and marriage of professional women and their independence in *Sisters of the World Unite* (1991) and the predicament of unmarried mother in *Conjugal Affairs* (1994), a young girl's puppy love in *Tempting Heart* and, of course, the reality and dreams of three generations



Sylvia Chang and her protagonists Ren Li (left) and Lee Sinje at the Berlin International Film Festival venue

of women (the middle aged, the young and the teenaged) in *20 30 40*. All of these films are concerned with the feelings of women and what they care about. This obviously is due to the fact that Chang is a woman. She had said that she only deals with issues familiar to her in her films, using her own perspective to offer glimpses of the female experience. Although her scripts often have very complicated, multi-layered structures, they are also sharply developed with narrative clarity. She had said that she likes to use different characters to connect the different narrative levels, offering comparisons to each other. In doing so, she actually complicates what is originally simple, with the expressed purpose of providing diversified perspectives to look at things. Such a mode of storytelling is rich in texture, not only presenting everyday life without falling into cliché but also exudes an attitude of openness and a pathos for tolerance.

Chang's work behind the scene is not limited to writing scripts. Throughout the years, she had served as producer or director on many films. In this regard, she said she was most indebted to director King Hu. When she acted in Hu's *Legend of the Mountain* (1979) in Korea, she realised how the knowledge and dedication of a true filmmaker had on the quality of a film. She remembered that the film took a whole year to make, stopping and going as Hu laboured at creating the best results, often waiting days for clear, cloudless sky. For a piece of 'china blue' paper, he searched all over Japan, Korea and other areas, and when it was finally found, it only appeared in the film for a brief moment. Because of his knowledge in the study of history and art, Hu was meticulous about every minute detail, whether it was a costume, a piece of fabric or just a belt. Witnessing Hu's total commitment and the film that came out of that dedication, Chang learned that to make good films, one must have an earnest attitude and a respect for one's work.



Regarded by Sylvia Chang as her mentor, King Hu opened her eyes when she starred in his directed work *Legend of the Mountain* (1979)

Chang admits that she has a long way towards reaching the level of a master such as Hu, but as director, she has developed her own approach. She would familiarise herself with every single detail of the scripts, until feeling confident she has a firm grip on it. She not only reads scripts carefully, but would actually copy them through, from the first scene to the last. Copying the scripts, images appear in her mind, as the mannerisms of characters and the mise-en-scène of scenes materialise in that process.

Although she is an actress, she seldom demonstrates to her actors. She hopes that her actors would develop clear understandings of the story and then express themselves through that understanding. For her directing career, Chang feels that she had been making only films of contemporary settings, which she feels do not give her enough fulfillment. She hopes to eventually take after her mentor Hu, branching out to costumes films.

Early in her life, Chang had made a determined decision to be a filmmaker. Working on both sides of the screen, she had served as director, writer, actress and producer. One of her early producing efforts is the Taiwan film *Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing?* (1983), which became a popular hit in Taiwan and Hong Kong. A later project is *Conjugal Affairs*, in which she was producer, screenwriter, director and actress all in one. In recent years, she had cut down on screen appearances, because as a middle-aged actress, her choices in the Chinese film industry are limited. Yet on the other side of the camera, there is still lots of room for her multi-faceted talents. May her film career continue to blossom. (Translated by Sam Ho)



Archive staff interviewing Sylvia Chang. From left: Winnie Fu, Bede Cheng, Grace Ng, Sylvia Chang, Law Kar, Angel Shing and Richard Yu

**Grace Ng** is project researcher of the HKFA.

## Fame • Flame • Frame - Jupiter Wong Foto Exhibition

Jupiter, real name Wong Kin-man; he spent the 80s working for Asia Television Ltd as continuity person, scriptwriter, director and coordinator. He turned to cinema in the 90s and had worked as assistant director, post-production coordinator and producer of making-of documentaries. In those days, he also worked as photographer for *City Entertainment*, taking pictures of featured stars and capturing behind-the-scene moments. He has taken stills of more than fifty local productions during their filming. In 1999, he became an official film stills photographer for the first time, for *Gen-X Cops*. In the same year, he published *Private Moments, Public Exposures*, his collection of his best shots taken over all those years. His masterpieces of behind-the-scene and in-front-of-camera shots can be seen in the 'Fame • Flame • Frame—Jupiter Wong Foto Exhibition', to be held in the Hong Kong Film Archive Exhibition Hall from 4 September to 24 October. A demonstration in the capturing of expression and ambience, the photo album *Fame • Flame • Frame—Jupiter Wong Foto Exhibition* will be published in conjunction with the exhibition. (Translated by Teri Chan)

### Jupiter Speaks



My personality is what you see in my photos. I have no personal style. I picked up photography techniques from the cinema. (Jupiter at the shooting location of *One Nite in Mongkok*, 2004)





I love shooting action scenes. (*Gen-X Cops*, 1999)



I take snapshots; I am not an all-round stills photographer. I shoot when there is 'good stuff' around; when there is none, I end up with no good pictures. (Shooting location of *Little Cheung*, 1999)



Zhou Xun in a quiet moment; the silence is particularly captivating. (*Baober in Love*, 2003)

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## Speaking of Jupiter



Ann Hui: Jupiter with a camera is just natural. Life goes on and he goes on with what he is doing. And he does it well.



Fruit Chan: Jupiter wants to be a director. With camera in hand he thinks he is a director. The pictures make up his storyboard and they reveal his world. His pictures are his directorial creation. (Shooting location of *The Longest*

Summer, 1998)



Cecilia Cheung: Jupiter is an egoist, he knows what he wants and he is not afraid to try it out. I respect him for that. His vein carries film. (*The Legend of Zu*, 2001; interview conducted at the shooting location of *One Nite in Mongkok*, 2004)

*Extracted from interviews with Jupiter Wong conducted by Winnie Fu on 30 March and 2 April 2004 unless stated otherwise.*

## In Search of Li Lihua in Foreign Lands



Law Kar

To cinephiles born after the 1970s, Li Lihua is probably a distant name only heard of or read about occasionally. Her films are rarely shown on local TV, if at all; and she has never been subject of sensational headlines such as Linda Lin Dai was after her tragic suicide. And while the local radio stations continue to play the old hits of Zhou Xuan, Bai Guang, Grace Chang and Julie Yeh Feng once in a while, Li has hardly been heard singing over the airwaves for years.

Only since Shaw Brothers began to reissue its old films on VCD and DVD, it has become possible for the general public to discover or rediscover some of Li's films produced during the 1960s and after. These films, however, were made when Li had already past the prime of her life and was arriving at the last apotheosis of her long acting career.

It was in Japanese-occupied Shanghai that Li made her début on the silver screen in 1940 at the age of 16 with *The Three Smiles*. This film is today untraceable. One copy of another of Li's earliest films, *The Heroes* (1941), has survived but is as yet fully restored. Li became soon one of the hottest stars in wartime China. By the end of the war in 1945, she had already some twenty films to her credit. Of these films, only *Qiu Haitang* (Parts One & Two, 1943) have preserved in an overseas collection. (The version that can be seen today is a merger of the two films.)

After the war, Li was brought under investigation for alleged 'collaboration with the enemy' but all charges against her were later dropped. She was invited to co-star with Shi Hui in *Phony Phoenixes* (aka *The Barber Takes a Wife*, 1947). The film became a hit all over China, following a protest by the barbers in Shanghai against it (for insult to their trade), and re-established Li's superstar status. As Li Zuyong assisted by Zhang Shankun, the so-called Chinese 'King of Movies', set up Yung Hwa Motion Picture Industries Limited in Hong Kong, in 1948, Li Lihua was invited to take up the principal female role in *Our Husband* (1949) by Yung Hwa, and thus commenced her acting career in Hong Kong. Zhang Shankun soon quit Yung Hwa and founded his own production company, Great Wall Pictures Corporation. Li participated in several of Great Wall's films, such as *Awful Truth* (1950), *The Victims* (1951), *Modern Red Chamber Dream* (1952), etc. She also played in two films produced by Dragon-Horse (Loon-Ma) Films founded by the directors Fei Mu and

Zhu Shilin, namely *Flower Girl* (1951) and *Should They Marry?* (aka *Spoiling the Wedding Day*, 1951). These films have all become classics of Mandarin cinema.

From the early to mid-1950s, Hong Kong's Mandarin film production was at a low ebb. Li, notwithstanding, formed her own company, Lihua, and produced several films between 1954 to 56, including *The Great Wall* (1954) and *The Beauty and the Dumb* (1954). She went on to co-found Jinlong Company with Yan Jun, which produced notably *No Time for Love* (1957) and *Humiliation for Sale* (aka *Laughter and Tears*, 1958). By then, Zhang Shankun and his wife, Tong Yuejuan had revived Hsin Hwa Motion Picture Company in Hong Kong. Li played in several Hsin Hwa (HK)'s productions, such as *The Dawn of China's Revolution* (1953), *General Chai and Lady Balsam* (1953) and its sequel *Lady Balsam's Conquest* (1955), *Camellia* (1955), *Black Tulip of In-ka-bough* (1956) and *Madame Butterfly* (1956), etc. She played also the leading female parts in a series of melodramas and comedies produced by Cathay and Shaw and Sons Company respectively. (These early films of Shaw and Sons have unfortunately not been reissued on DVD.)

In the 1960s, Li signed with and worked henceforth mainly for Shaw Brothers. She won twice the Golden Horse Best Actress Award (1965 and 69) during this period, and reached a new apogee of her career. She cut short her career, however, in 1973 when she emigrated to the US with her husband Yan Jun, returning only a couple of times to take part in films directed by her friends in Hong Kong or Taiwan. She retired completely from the world of cinema in the 80s. A familiar name for the generations over fifties, Li is today the oldest living superstar, an evergreen legend of Chinese/Hong Kong cinema.

No one has so far been able to establish an exhaustive list of all the films that Li made during the forty years of her acting career, which are estimated to be close to 120. Most of the films she made in the 1940s are today lost, only a few - in unique or fragmentary copies - are preserved in film archives in Beijing, Taipei and France. Her works of and after the 1950s were for a large part produced by Shaw Brothers. Those of the 1950s have been lying unattended in Shaw Brothers' warehouses, their condition unknown to us. No wonder then that the audience today has had so few opportunities to appreciate Li's prime performance at the heyday of her career.



Acclaimed the Evergreen Tree and captivated the audience for forty years, Li Lihua is the emblem of the screen goddess.

Film festivals have been the only occasions for the public to get a chance from time to time to admire Li's performance. Since the 1980s, a number of Li's masterpieces, such as *Phony Phoenixes*, *A Bright Clear Day* (1948), *Awful Truth*, *Should They Marry?* (aka *Spoiling the Wedding Day*), *Flower Girl*, *Modern Red Chamber Dream*, *General Chai and Lady Balsam*, *Tokyo Interlude* (1955), *Madame Butterfly*, etc have shown up once in a while at the Hong Kong International Film Festival and various thematic film programmes organised by the Hong Kong Arts Centre and Hong Kong Film Culture Centre. Such occasions have been far too rare, certainly, but enough to drive many cinephiles, film critics and historians alike under Li's spell.

It's thanks to the effort of a foreigner - Mme Marie-Claire Quiquemelle - that we have had the chance to rediscover many of the films quoted above. Mme Quiquemelle, a French researcher dedicated to the collecting and preservation of Chinese/Hong Kong films, is co-founder and currently director of Centre de Documentation sur le Cinéma Chinois (CDCC) in Paris. Since the 1970s, she has been coming to Hong Kong regularly to look for collectible Chinese-language films, besides her own film projects. She was introduced to Tong Yuejuan, Miu Hong-nee, Weng Lingwen, Li Lihua and Barbara Fei. With their trust and help, she acquired a

good number of films produced or distributed by them and brought them back to Paris. A part of our cinematographic heritage was thus salvaged, at a time where Hong Kong had as yet set up its own film archive.

I have known Mme Quiquemelle since the early 1980s. She was then teaching and doing research at the University of Paris and ran the CDCC almost single-handedly. She organised regularly projections of works from CDCC's Chinese films collection both for teaching purpose and enjoyment. Sometimes she lent out some of them to film festivals in other countries. I first met Marie-Claire when I was a part-time organiser of thematic Chinese films programmes for the Hong Kong Film Culture Centre. Through her, CDCC contributed a considerable amount of films to the 1982 Chinese Cinema Retrospective in Turin organised by Mr Marco Müller, one of the largest Chinese film festival ever staged overseas, with over 100 films produced both on the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, most of which were borrowed from the China Film Archive in Beijing and the CDCC. I was asked to give a hand too and helped the Retrospective to borrow several local Mandarin films. In 1983, a similar retrospective of Chinese films was put up under the curatorship of Marie-Claire at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Since then Marie-Claire and I have become good friends. I have also come to understand how difficult it has been for her to keep the CDCC going for nearly thirty years, in spite of a constant lack of funding and human resources. She has been able, nonetheless, to bring forth a considerable number of exhibitions, research projects and publications with the images and textual documents preserved by the CDCC, and has never hesitated to lend them out to film festivals in various countries, contributing thereby directly or indirectly to promoting Chinese cinema and Chinese culture in the world.

The CDCC possesses probably the largest overseas collection of Li Lihua's films, most of which were produced in Hong Kong during the 1940s and 50s, including many of those mentioned above, some of which featured in various film festivals or thematic programmes in Hong Kong over the years. Quite a few of the films in the CDCC collection are unique copies. Three of the films preserved by the CDCC, for instance, namely *The Great Wall* and *The Beauty and the Dumb*, produced by Li's own Lihua Company, and *No Time for Love*, produced by Yan Jun's Jinlong Company, are very likely the only surviving copy. These three films were entrusted to the CDCC by Li Lihua herself in the 1980s, with Weng Lingwen acting as intermediary. The Hsin Hwa (HK) productions in the CDCC collection were entrusted to it by Tong

Yuejuan. A certain number of these films, including some unique copies, were transferred in 1993 by Tong to the Chinese Taipei Film Archive (CTFA) for restoration and duplication.

The HKFA will be holding 'Treasures from Overseas: Films of Li Lihua' in September. Most of the films on the programme are lent to us by the CDCC. Four of them have been in the CDCC collection since the 1980s; three others, all Hsin Hwa (HK) productions, are either from the CTFA, or from the CDCC collection but restored and duplicated by the CTFA.

Several films on the programme come from the HKFA's own collection: *Our Husband* was among the first lot of films acquired by the HKFA from the USA in the 1990s and has been carefully restored. It is the only surviving copy of the film. As for *Awful Truth* and *The Dawn of China's Revolution*, their copies in the HKFA collection are the duplicates of the copies preserved at the China Film Archive.

So for a fuller appreciation of Li Lihua's early films, one has to go overseas for searching. But then this is only one of many similar stories. (Translated by Choi Hak-kin)

**Law Kar** is a renowned film culture researcher and has been a programmer for the Hong Kong International Film Festival between 1991 and 2000. He is now Programmer of HKFA.

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## Chinese Cinema and I

Marie-Claire Quiquemelle

I have liked cinema since I was young, but my special interest in Chinese cinema blossomed when I began learning Chinese in 1965. At the time I had the privilege to see two films which deeply impressed me: Xie Jin's *The Red Detachment of Women* (1961) and Wan Laiming's *Uproar in Heaven* (1962). Soon after they suffered criticism and disappeared in the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, China was shut to the outside world and, for us, it was getting more and more difficult to learn Chinese.

In the beginning of the 70s, I organised weekly Chinese film programmes for students, including French and Chinese, which had been held at the Paris University



for more than 20 years. Since there were only a few Chinese films available in Paris (apart from the revolutionary operas and some *wuxia pian* from Taiwan and Hong Kong), we looked for something more cultural and found out that some old Chinese films were still available in Hong Kong. I had been introduced to Wu Xingzai and Tong Yuejuan and we became good friends. Since then, I went to Hong Kong every year by that time and acquired some copies of old Chinese films to show to the students in Paris. A few copies had been given to us and we bought most of them. All copies were stored in the French Film Archive in Bois d'Arcy for conservation. At the same time, we collected all sorts of documentation on Chinese cinema.

**The Female Gaze in *The Enchanting Shadow***

Lane

*Bones in jade and flesh clear as ice,  
A body so cool never perspires.  
Winds come and fill the lakeside Palace with fragrance discreet,  
Twitch open the embroidered drapes,  
Through which the pearly moon at the Lady peeks.  
The Lady lies awake, hair unravelled,  
Barrettes recumbent upon the pillow.*

*Get up and let's go promenade.  
Silence reigns in the garden and every dwelling.  
Rare stars cross occasionally the Milky Way.  
How late is it? It's midnight, the moon is dimming,  
And the Big Dipper downward turning.  
But as one reckons the arrival of the next Westerly winds,  
The flowing year is stealthily passing.*

When Nie Xiaoqian, the revenant incarnated by Betty Loh Ti in *The Enchanting Shadow* (1960), plays and sighs over her zither in the middle of the night, one is reminded of the above poem of the Song dynasty poet Su Shi. There she is, words coagulate on the tip of her tongue... Is it Ning Caichen (played by Chao Lei) who has entered her boudoir inadvertently? Or is it she who has penetrated Ning's dream? Nie wavers between her two identities: the bewitching succubus and the bereft daughter of a declined official family. When she is on the verge of tears, venting her deep sorrow in silence, she is lost in an identity tangle, more than lamenting her own lot. We can never forget the acceleration of our heartbeats when Betty Loh Ti undresses and throws herself into Chao's arms, her fiery red bodice (and her fiery heart?) barely concealed under the square of silk gauze covering her body. Nor can we forget her gaze - the most gracious of seductive gazes - when she leans over the shy young scholar to offer him a kiss. But at which moment of the film does Nie fall in love with Ning? Was her attempt to make love to Ning purely by order of the old witch? Or has she really gone 'crazy craving for men' under the spell of poetry? Even if every feeling she displays is faked, has Nie no affection at all for Ning at the very moment of seduction? How much is for real, or rather how much make-believe there

is, when she offers herself? And when Ning picks up her dress and asks her to leave, what lies underneath the sadness on her face? Is she embarrassed by her failure? Afraid of punishment? Ashamed of her indecorous behaviour? Upset because she has been unjustly slighted? Or grieved by her deplorable lot? She can't distinguish herself, probably.

It is such ambiguity that entices us into re-visiting the film time after time, as much as the desire to relive the titillating scene of seduction, and to decipher the hazy perplexity floating in Betty Loh Ti's gaze.

One cannot but think of *Vertigo* (1958), in which Kim Novak set out to seduce James Stewart by Tom Helmore's order yet ends up falling in love with her prey. Her love for him is genuine, indeed. But when the truth is finally revealed, we cannot help wondering if Kim's pledge of love, her tenderness for James was sincere or just part of the plot. Both perhaps, undistinguishably commingled.

In a similar vein, when, at her second visit, Nie tells Ning sobbingly, 'Please take me away from here, Sir... I can't act against my conscience, do things I don't want to do...', and offers him pieces of gold and silver, she is acting - even if by someone's command - according also to some sentiments lingering in her heart. One can also say that it's more or less through this 'identity', which allows her to put aside a young maiden's reticence and open her heart (and offer her tenderness) to a man she loves, that Nie seeks her 'reincarnation'.

We - with Ning - feel a sense of relief at last, when she rushes in to tell Ning, 'I've come to rescue you....' Our suspicion of her is nonetheless growing, since we now know she is a spectre, and we have witnessed the horrifying and sanguinary death of Ning's prurient fellow the night before. What is her real intention? Such thoughts make us break out in a sweat, and feel at the same time the cold blade of sex, as a Chinese saying goes, dangling over our head. We just don't know whether to believe her or not.



Her gaze rests upon a maze far beyond the reach of our sensibility. (Betty Loh Ti in *The Enchanting Shadow*)

How much of Nie's affection and caressing words is genuine? How much is play-acting? And how much can she tell herself between genuineness and simulation? (Is her final request to Ning to carry her ashes to her native town part of the old witch's scheme?) The riddle remains unsolved no matter how many times one may watch the film; everything remains moored to Betty Loh Ti's double-acting allures of maiden grace and voluptuous oomph. Such equivoque is what makes the film - and Betty Loh Ti - so fascinating. A look of love is captivating not only for the emotions it conveys, but for the eternal ambiguity in the gaze. (Translated by Choi Hak-kin)

**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. Got something to say? You too may click on line and share your views at [hkfa@lcsd.gov.hk](mailto:hkfa@lcsd.gov.hk).

## New Acquisitions

### Bringing Starlight Back to Hong Kong - The Return of the Cathay Films

Karen So

Legions of stars shone over the 1950s and 60s, among them were the unforgettable faces of Cathay Organisation's many screen idols: Linda Lin Dai, Betty Loh Ti, Lucilla You Min, Julie Yeh Feng, Grace Chang, Jeanette Lin Tsui, Peter Chen Ho, Kelly Lai Chen, Roy Chiao, Christine Pai Lu-ming... Two years ago, cinephiles had the opportunity to view or re-view some 50 of Cathay's classics selected for 'Back to Dreamland - Cathay Retrospective' organised by the HKFA. Today, those borrowed films, along with the rest of Cathay's Hong Kong production, are all precious parts of HKFA's permanent collection.

During the preparations of the retrospective, in fact, Angela Tong, head of HKFA, initiated a long negotiation to persuade Cathay to donate its films to HKFA. After two years of unremitting effort, both sides finally reached an agreement. In February this year, upon learning that Cathay's film warehouse lease was going to expire, HKFA

dispatched a team to move the totality of 213 Mandarin and Cantonese films (in 2,499 reels) as well as some 12,000 related objects (stills, posters, on-set photos and handbills, etc) from Cathay's headquarters in Singapore back to Hong Kong. It was the first time for the HKFA to undertake an overseas operation of such a scale. Our Acquisition team began by holding a series of meetings with their colleagues from the Conservation Section to work out the details of packing and transportation appropriate for the various types of materials concerned. In order to ensure that the films and the other objects would not be damaged by heat, humidity and undue force during the journey, the contractor had to be one with expertise and know-how in handling cultural relics. It should pack all the objects with anti-acid treated materials, transport them in climate-controlled trucks with thermo-regulator and good shock-absorbers.



Dorothy Ding (right) and Violet Kwan of Cathay-Keris Films Pte Ltd visiting HKFA in June.

Once the preparations were done, the Acquisition team set off on the 23rd March 2004 for Singapore. They set to work at full speed, for they had only one week to identify, record in details, clean, classify, number and pack thousands of objects. It was easier said than done. The numerous paper materials had to be handled with great care as they were more or less damaged with time. In order to facilitate the eventual restoration work in Hong Kong, the Acquisition team had to sort through the materials one by one, pick out those that were in relatively good condition, group and wrap them up according to the film to which they were related respectively. They selected thus some ten thousand of them to bring back to Hong Kong.



Inspection and packing with shock-absorbers before the shipping

For the Acquisition team, it has been a precious experience and useful reference for handling of similar jobs in the future. More importantly, the return of such a rich collection of films, most of which have Hong Kong as background, allows them to be preserved henceforth in good conditions, and continue to serve as witnesses to the history and culture of our city. The people of Hong Kong will be able hereafter to relive from time to time the resplendent memories of the 1950s

and 60s embedded in these films. (Translated by Choi Hak-kin)

**Karen So** is project editor of the HKFA.

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Mr Yonfan

Mr Yuen Chi-keung

Ms Winnie Yuen Tsz-ying

**Thank You!**



## **Acetate Film and the Vinegar Syndrome**

**Edward Tse**

The danger and drawbacks of using nitrate film in motion picture production, storage and projection were well recognised in the early days of cinema. During the following decades, scientists and engineers had been working hard to find a safer alternative material to replace nitrate film in the whole production-exhibition chain. Several materials were proposed, namely cellulose butyrate, cellulose propionate and cellulose diacetate. These materials were chosen for their 'non-flammable' nature, however, when stability of the material was a concern, they could not survive the selection process. It was not until 1949, when the acetylation process of cellulose was sufficiently mastered to allow mass-production of the cellulose triacetate film, did safety film prevail. This material possesses the necessary mechanical strength to produce a thin film capable of tolerating the wear and tear during projection and printing, and the desirable physical properties i.e. optical transparency and clarity, for carrying photographic images of a very high quality.

Starting from 1951, under heavy promotion by the major photographic film manufacturers, cellulose triacetate film completely replaced the nitrate film. Production of nitrate film was abandoned and its projection banned in some countries. When everyone thought that a safe and the best alternative was eventually found, a notorious problem associated with this new film material was soon discovered - vinegar syndrome. It arises from the hydrolysis of cellulose triacetate base due to moisture and heat, resulting in breaking up of its cellulosic polymer chain and the release of acetic acid vapours (with the pungent smell of vinegar). The film will shrink considerably. This acid accelerated decomposition process cannot be stopped once it is initiated by acid and moisture attack upon the rise of acidity to a certain level, making the film unsuitable for projection or viewing. So far, there is no effective way to return a deteriorated acetate film permanently to its original state. The only prudent approach is to duplicate the images on the deteriorated film onto more stable medium such as polyester film.



Over the years, with intensive research undertaken by the film archive community, some preventive measures have been developed to arrest the deterioration from advancing to the late-stage of vinegar syndrome. It is recommended to store the acetate films at a temperature of 4°C with a relative humidity of under 30%. The acidity level inside the film cans should also be monitored. When a film is found to present an acidity higher than the autocatalytic point, it should be isolated from the rest of the collection. The use of acid scavenger is also an effective but more sophisticated way to tackle the vinegar syndrome problem. For film archives that cannot afford acid scavenger and costly low temperature and low relative humidity storage facilities, the slow and labour intensive approach of accelerated air ventilation for infected film can be employed to deal with acetate film degradation.

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

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Back from his advanced studies in the States, Edward Tse shares his experience with LCSD staff in the seminar held on 31 May.

## Seminars

### Sylvia Chang & Co on Her Illustrious Career

24 of July was a hot summer day, but it was even hotter inside the Hong Kong Film Archive, when Sylvia Chang and her friends in front and behind the camera gathered together for the seminar on her illustrious career, part of the 'A Tribute to Sylvia Chang'. Flanked by guests Cheung Tung-joe, Jingle Ma, Yee Chung-man, Man Lim-chung, Cat Kwan, Edward Lam, Ren   Liu, Eric Got and Kate Yeung, Sylvia Chang was presented a souvenir by Mr Chung Ling-hoi, Assistant Director (Heritage and Museums) of the LCSD, before the seminar was kicked off.



(From left) Eric Got, Man Lim-chung, Yee Chung-man, Cheung Tung-joe, Edward Lam, Sylvia Chang, host Bede Cheng, Ren   Liu, Kate Yeung, Jingle Ma and Cat Kwan.

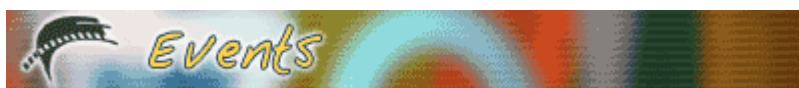
Sylvia Chang and Cheung Tung-joe first met when they were making *The Story of Four Girls* (1975) in Taiwan. Cheung Tung-joe praises her for her perseverance, without which, artistic creation will not be possible. Jingle Ma is Sylvia's long-time partner, and he sees her as his 'mentor'. It was she who gave him the first break as cinematographer in *Passion* (1986), but his first day at work was met with a hitch. Sylvia, however, just dismissed it with, 'It is all right, let's shoot it again.' He was deeply touched by her generosity and tolerance and has been working for her since. Her passion for cinema, her insistence in respecting cinema has greatly influenced Jingle Ma, who has lately taken up the director's helm.

Sylvia's talent extends to screenwriting and screenwriter Cat Kwan recalls how the stories were gradually formed from their chattings about life and relationships. Artistic director Man Lim-chung contributed a lot to the settings of *20 30 40* (2004). He says he was under no pressure, because Sylvia knows what she wants. Yee Chung-man is eager to know how Sylvia keeps her youthful look and beauty. Sylvia shares her beauty tips that beauty comes from a generous heart and self-confidence. Girls should always keep an open-mind and have self-respect.

René Liu had a rough start in her career. She was discovered by Sylvia to star in *Siao Yu* (1995). She jokes that she was very much a country bumpkin and didn't have high self-esteem. But Sylvia encouraged her, 'If I believe in you, you all the more have to believe in yourself.' To her, Sylvia always looks to the bright side, 'She lives life to the full.'

Johnnie To was not able to attend the seminar in person, but through a video clip, he recalls how Sylvia actively contributed to the creation of *All About Ah Long* (1989). Sylvia Chang says, 'Art is born in loneliness; dies of ostentation.' Creation may be a lonely pursuit, but she is never alone in her cinematic life. With her passion for and commitment to cinema, her impressive career will become even more illustrious.

(Written by Kiki Fung; translated by Teri Chan)



## **Research on 'Changes in Hong Kong Cinema of the 70s'**

The HKFA current exhibition theme on 'Time and Tide - Changes in Hong Kong Cinema of the 70s' is the concluding show of a research project jointly organised with the students from the Department of Cinema and Television and Humanities Programme of the Hong Kong Baptist University. Fourteen students started researching on the films of the 70s since May last year under the guidance of Dr Man Kit-wah, Dr Lo Kwai-cheung, Dr Lee Wai-sum, Dr Lo Wai-luk, Dr Ng Chun-bong and Dr Chu Yiu-wai. Besides their graduate paper, they also assisted in the contents of the Archive's exhibition. Here are the students' comments regarding their involvements:

**Amy Kong:** I thought that Hong Kong Film Archive would have every 70s film I wanted to see. It turned out that due to copyright and conservation issues, the 70s collection is much smaller than I thought. Then I realised the importance of film conservation. Thanks to Film Archive staff's dedication to and their effort in the conservation, we were able to enjoy local films made in the 70s, and enhanced our understanding on the interrelationship between erotic films, women's issues and society of the time.

**Jerry Ng:** I had the fortune to take part in the Film Archive's study of the cinema of the 70s. It was an exciting and enriching experience, both academically and in my understanding of the development of local cinema in the 70s. Here, I am grateful for the immense help Film Archive provided.

**Karen Yuen:** I am grateful to the Hong Kong Film Archive for the materials on Hong Kong cinema of the 70s. Born in the 80s, I had never properly seen a 70s film. After a year's research (I have picked Michael Hui's works as my research topic), I came to realise that the human world depicted was not dated at all. Most of Michael Hui's films are reflection of human nature through the perspective of the little guys. They all share this noble aspect that, despite their sadistic boss or tough luck, they still uphold their dignity as a human being. Their dignity is not based on fortune but on their mutual relationship, which is essential for human survival, regardless of the environments.

**Penn:** My thesis on Chor Yuen was a journey that started from scratch. After months of researching, I came to realise that the story of Chor Yuen was scattered in the sea of textual world. This analysis on Chor Yuen's Gu Long martial world was made possible by integrating the materials through some hard thinking, observation of his cinematic text and imagination. I hope that the inadequacies will be corrected by more discerning experts. In the process of going from zero to one, I would say the Film Archive's help amount to 0.1 of the total effort. But it was the starting point and the key that introduced me to Chor Yuen's cinematic world. Hence, I have to say, thank you.

**Lam Ching-man:** Before I started my research on Michael Hui's comedies of the 70s, my knowledge of it was practically zero. I was not so sure I could reach my set goal. I did encounter a lot of difficulties in the process, the greatest of which was the unavailability of materials. It was finally completed and elation was beyond words.

**Kate Lau:** I am really glad to have taken part in this collaboration with the Hong Kong Film Archive. I have thus gained a deeper understanding of the cinema of the 70s. The Film Archive not only lined up for us Michael Hui films made in the 70s and 80s, but also films that could tell us more about the social background of the 70s (such as films by Patrick Lung Kong). It greatly enhanced our understanding of the cinema techniques and social meanings of the time. Some of the materials are rare and hard to find. Lastly, I have to give my thanks to the staff that had given us so much help. Your hard work and contribution made this exhibition possible.