

Glamour Unlimited

November 2004 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the death of Yam Kim-fai. It was on an auspicious note that the preparation work of a retrospective and a topical publication dedicated to the stage legend went underway. Such is Sister Yam's charisma and enduring glamour.

Then the news of the death of Kung Chiu-hsia (1916-2004) dawned on us one day in September. An icon of motherly love who brought a cordial and gracious bearing to many screen classics, Sister Kung and her artistic legacy, including the memorable tune 'Beyond the Frosty Waters' will remain close and dear to the hearts of many (see pp 10-11 for Tong Kim-hung's article). Yet misfortunes never come singly, and with a sinking heart we pay respects to the late producer Mr Wong Cheuk-hon (1920-2004), a prominent figure in both Hong Kong and Taiwan film industries who founded Liberty Film, Lan Kwong and First Organisation during his immensely successful career. Further research will have to be undertaken to chronicle the achievements and endeavours of the three companies. (see Mable Ho's *Our 'First' Thanks* in *Newsletter* No. 19.)

Saddened archive colleagues mourned the loss of our systems manager Mr Isaac Leung, who passed away after a courageous battle with cancer. His departure is a vivid reminder of the hard and fervent days leading up to the Archive's official opening. It was one Saturday afternoon back in 1999 when Isaac carried around a huge bundle of network cables, inserting each into the ceiling panel and fixing the connection meticulously, and announced the birth of the on-line computer systems in our tiny temporary office in Mong Kok that opened up a whole new horizon for research, arrangement, verification, and information exchanges of film knowledge on the Internet...yet it's just mere groundwork. Besides catering to the specific needs of individual sections, the Systems Section was also responsible for the design and construction of an electronic catalogue of the Archive collection, accessible to the public online, which continues to improve in its efficiency and effectiveness through the inventive work of Isaac. (His articles were published in *Newsletter* Nos. 16 & 22.) Challenges abound to meet the growing demand for on-line data and to incorporate new additions to our collection - daunting task that now rests on the shoulders of Mr Lawrence Hui. We wish him the best of luck with his new job.

Still we should count ourselves blessed to stand on the strong foundation laid down by veteran filmmakers and dedicated professionals in their prime.

[clkwok@lcsd.gov.hk]

Photos courtesy of Mr Chan Su-weng, Mr Honsanawong, Ms Désirée Hu, Mr Li Shek-hung, Mr Tong Kim-hung, Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Company Ltd, Kong Chiao Film Co. and Sil-Metropole Organisation Limited.

Editor: Kwok Ching-ling

English Editor: Agnes Lam

Assistant Editor: Edith Chiu



Michael Lam

To talk seriously about a household name is not unlike reflecting on a neighbour one sees everyday for years. Where do one start? So close and so familiar, yet one cannot even describe what shape is his or her face. Mental files had never been established on a rational level; intellectual analysis had never been conducted.

Perhaps everyone feels the same way. Or else why would I have kept running into the same reaction when inviting articles for the book: No thanks! Frolicking in her wonderful voice and indulging in the bliss of her images, who would want to tackle the thankless job of deconstructing a modern myth that has remained every bit as vivid today as it was yesterday? Perhaps that also explains why, although all have agreed that she is the most important and most unique cultural icon of 20th century Hong Kong, there has yet to be a book devoted to her study. Yam Kim-fai is the most beautiful of our best kept secrets. Seeing her on television at late night is the most effective potion for a good night's sleep, listening to her singing in the morning is the most refreshing preparation for the grind of the workday to come.

Yet most of those brave enough to take up the task, though they had initially promised essays of three or four thousand characters, ended up turning in epics that reach into the five figures. Once started, there is no stopping it...just like talking about a former lover. Everything is supposed to be in the past, nothing new. Yet the deposit in the memory bank turns out to be deeper than expected, an endless supply when translated into words, which one cannot cut off even with the sharpest blade. She was not nicknamed 'Opera Fans' Sweetheart' for nothing!



The Red Robe (1965)

To call every writer presented here a fan may provoke protest; it may also mislead readers. While Law Kar's examination of Yam's film career, Lum Man-yee's outline on the development of female *wenwusheng* (actresses who play male roles that combine singing and acrobatic skills on the Cantonese opera stage), and Yung Sai-shing's analysis of *The Red Robe* (1965) are outstanding essays with a high mind, Victor Or's discussion of

Yam's interpretation of poet-scholars and Sam Ho's probe into the mystical sexual politics of 'fake woman or real man' are undeniably inventive readings of Yam's work, even *bona fide* fans like Sun Kee-sze, Ng Shok-mui, Lo Wai-luen and Cheung Man-wai manage to avoid the trumped up spins of the devotee, contributing instead thought-provoking pieces that provide much needed historical perspectives largely based on their own experiences.

The most unusual are the offerings of cartoonist Honsanawong, who pays tribute to a beloved artist through both text and image, and five wonderful paintings featuring Yam and her partner Pak Suet-sin, minutely-painted by French expatriate artist Christopher Cheung. And of course there are the memories of Pak, whose personal accounts are colourful footnotes that provide us with a first-hand guide to the fantastic pleasures of our reading. (Translated by Sam Ho) ◆



A comic portrait of Yam Kim-fai by Honsanawong

Michael Lam is a freelance writer now living in Paris. His published books include *Sex Text* (2000), *Oops...Here We Go Again* (2001) and *Single-Minded, Double-Entendre* (2003). He is the editor of *A Yam Kim-fai Reader* (published in November 2004).

A Decade of Edification - Yam Kim-fai in Macau



Chan Su-weng

Fifteen years have passed since the death of Cantonese opera legend Yam Kim-fai on 29 November 1989 in Hong Kong following an illness. Remembered as one of the artistic treasures of the territory, Yam made her mark in Macau as early as the 1930s and 40s when she underwent a decade of edification that developed her performing talent to an unsurpassed quality. Before she returned to Hong Kong after the war in 1946 to further her career, Macau was the sanctuary that protected her from the brutality of war and the holy ground where she engaged fervently in anti-Japanese war efforts. It also provided the backdrop against which Yam starred opposite Pak Suet-sin, which brought their iconic status.

Taking the Canidrome Centre Stage

When did Yam Kim-fai make her Cantonese opera debut in Macau? Her appearance on stage was tied in with the establishment of the Macau Canidrome Company in January 1932. Besides greyhound racing, the Canidrome decided to offer the added attractions of a teahouse and a theatre. The promotional poster suggested that the company's repertoire included mainly 'Liang opera' and 'Meng opera'. The all-female Flowers in a Mirror Opera Troupe featured a cast of nearly twenty acclaimed players, each specialising in a classic role that made up an all-rounded ensemble: *wusheng* (a martial male lead) Liang Shaoping, *xiaowu* (a young martial male lead) Lü Jianyun, *femme erotica* Peony Su, *qingyi* (a female role excels in singing) Yue Lanfang, *huadan* (a young female lead) Zhong Cuichan, Bu Fengying and Gui Huayuan, etc. Many of these stage roles, including *zhengdan* (a female lead), *jing* (a painted face role) and *chousheng* (a clown), have eluded the theatre today. Marshaling the all-female ensemble was the *wenwusheng* (a literary and martial male lead) Yam Kim-fai, who met the challenge of playing multiple roles with perfect ease during both day performances (for example, the Liang opera *Overflowing Jealousy*) and night performances (such as the Meng opera *Raccoon for the Crown Prince*, *Emperor Renzong Recognises Mother*), nimbly switching between the dual roles as Chen Lin and Emperor Renzong in the same play.

Besides the usual venue Wanjiale at the Macau Canidrome Company, the Yule Theatre and the Cheng Peng Theatre, the first of its kind in Canton, Hong Kong and Macau devoted to staging Cantonese operas, also played host to the Flowers in a Mirror Opera Troupe. Later the troupe's name was changed to 'Enticing Flowers in a Mirror' taking in male players and staging their performances in Macau before embarking on a short tour in Hong Kong. It was one of the most popular opera troupes in Hong Kong and Macau.

What and who sealed the partnership of Yam's troupe with the Macau Canidrome Company? It was Macau guru But Lui-kim, who also held a major stake in the Canidrome and gave the greenlight to the construction of the Wanjiale opera stage inside the racecourse. Both But and Yam's mother were natives of the But Village in Huaxian, and But's wife Mok Hong-sang was an ardent fan of Yam. It was upon But's invitation that Yam and the Flowers in a Mirror Opera Troupe became a resident troupe at the Canidrome. A longtime family friend of the But family, Yam also took residence at their mansion during her stay in Macau.

Yam's original name is Yuen-yee. Adopting the scholarly name Lai-chor, she and cousin Pak Wan-lung enrolled in a private school in Guangzhou. Her tomboyish traits were evident from an early age. The apprentice first learnt her trade under the mentorship of female martial artist Siu Kiu Tin and was later taken in by female *wenwusheng* lead Wong Lui-hap to learn the arts of the stage and the martial arts. At the mere age of twenty, Yam took centre stage - cross-dressing as the male *wenwusheng* - and captured the hearts of many film fans with her legendary image of the stately scholar, and the majestic, gallant hero appearing in the string of tie-in film stills. It's worth mentioning that the But family album contained a handful of precious film stills taken in Yam's early acting career and of the teenager in her rarely seen feminine costume.



A tender, feminine visage of Yam Kim-fai



A fear-inspiring image shoot taken in Yam's early career

Devoting to Anti-Japanese War Efforts

Macau was spared from the war wreckage devastating the mainland and remained a relatively safe haven during Yam's residency. Yet Anti-Japanese sentiments and patriotic passion soon rippled to the territory, leading to a surge of nation-saving initiatives. But Lui-kim was the chief coordinator of various relief organisations and manager of the national bond and trust committee, undertaking fund-raising activities. His wife Mok Hon-sang was chairman of the Macau Women's Relief Committee leading women volunteers to help with the war efforts. During her stay with the But family, Yam was affected by their patriotic sentiments to partake of nation-saving endeavours by contributing her artistic talents to fund-raising events. When the Joint Macau Relief Association was established in August 1937, Yam enthusiastically and actively supported the youth alliance and headed the drama section of the Publicity Department in launching a series of fund-raising performances.

Born in 1913, Yam turned twenty-four in 1937. Young and high-spirited, she felt compelled to join in the war efforts, including a charity event called 'Macau's Presentation of a Plane to Chairman Chiang on His Birthday' held in the same year. The *Income Report* reads:

'Victoria Dance Hall chief Mok Kai-hung initiated a charity ball to raise funds for the purchase of a plane and invited women volunteers to be dance partners. As a declaration of their patriotism, women in town responded to the call without hesitation. The news reached Yam Kim-fai of the Cheng Peng Theatre, who wasted no time to join the rank of the dancing girls.'

The event raised an impressive amount of \$9,420. Yam's husband Wong So, an influential character in Macau, was an executive member of the fund-raising organisation who had always held stage artists in high esteem.

The Legendary Yam-Pak Partnership

Yam and Pak Suet-sin forged an indelible friendship during their tenure in the Sun Sing Opera Troupe in Macau. Sun Sing boosted a cast of accomplished players, including *wusheng* Leng Chi-pak, *wenwusheng* Yam Kim-fai, lead *huadan* Chan Yim-nung, second *huadan* Pak Suet-sin, *chousheng* Auyeung Kim, alongside Yam Bing-yee, Luk Chung-ling and the budding talent Cheng Bik-ying, dubbed the 'Girl Prodigy'. The creative team consisted of Tsui Si, screenwriter Tsui Yuek-oi and Yam's brother Yam Pui.

Pak Suet-sin followed her father Pak Kui-wing's Sun, Moon, Stars Opera Troupe to Macau after the fall of Hong Kong. Shortly the troupe left for a tour in the region, but Pak chose to stay in Macau upon Yam's invitation. The Yam-Pak partnership had since gone from strength to strength. Resettling in Hong Kong after the war, the duo continued to thrive on the screen and the stage, and mentored new talents for the operatic arts. Yam revisited Macau for the location shooting of her last film *The Tragedy of a Poet King* (1968) to pay homage to the place where she honed her craft and nurtured her talents. ◆

Chan Su-weng is Chairman of the Association of History of Macau and an active participant of social events to promote the awareness of local culture. He has published widely in local newspapers on Macau history and culture, and his column *Macau Impress* has been running for 26 years. Writer of *Biography of Ho Yin*, the pictorial *Macau 99* and *Chinese Architecture in Macau*, and editor of *Lin Zexu and Macau* and *The History of Macau*.



So Long, Kung Chiu-hsia

Tong Kim-hung

Shortly before her eighty-eighth birthday, which falls on the autumn day of *bai lu* prior to the Mid-Autumn Festival, Kung Chiu-hsia (Gong Qiuxia), who shot to stardom with the release of the song 'Beyond the Frosty Waters' and had enjoyed growing popularity since the earliest days of the Chinese pop, bade eternal farewell to the stage and screen on 7 September 2004 in Hong Kong.

Originally named Gong Shasha and a Shanghai native born in 1916, Kung joined the Plum Blossom Song and Dance Troupe at the age of fourteen and was taken under the wing of a German mentor. She established herself firmly, and instantly, as one of the troupe's five star attractions dubbed the 'Five Tigress Generals' and subsequently followed the troupe to a five-year tour across nine provinces on the mainland. Dance choreography was a staple and distinctive element of the troupe, while singing was relegated to secondary importance. Kung's flair for dancing was given full display in the 1936's *A New Year's Coin*, now available on VCD format, where she tapped out audibly, and gracefully, up and down the staircase with the child star Hu Rongrong. The film also featured Li Minghui, widely acknowledged as China's first musical star, and Li Lilian, dubbed the 'Queen of Musical'.

Kung made her screen debut in *Parents and Children* (1936), directed by Hu Xinling, whose musical talent was given full rein in the scores and won him the heart of the promising young star. The couple tied the knot five years later. Kung also co-starred with 'Movie Queen' Butterfly Hu in her last film shot in *Shanghai, The Everlasting Smile* (1937). Since then, her acting and singing career had reached a new height. All the while she had been recording albums for Path 6 Records, including songs written by Nie Er, who composed the Chinese national anthem, among the first children's songs and rhymes sung by generations of parents and children, such as 'Newspaper Selling', 'Snow Flakes', 'I Love My Primary School', 'Horse Racing'.

The song number 'Flower Blooming Season' from the 1939 *Songs and Tears Stains* was among the countless memorable tunes Kung recorded during her heyday. Her favourite piece was 'Yearning for Home' from the musical *Shanghai Night* which was staged at the famous Lafayette Grand Theatre. The role of the female lead was double cast - chore shared by Kung and the star actress and singer Bai Hong.

'Golden Throat' Zhou Xuan once spoke publicly: 'Sister Qiu's title song from *Roses Blooming Everywhere* (1942) has always been my favourite along with "Don't Forget Tonight" from *The Concealed Moon* (1943), co-starred with Wang Danfeng.'

'Is It a Dream or Reality' from *Sad Wild Goose from Afar* (1943) was unmatched in terms of the beauty of melodic-rhythmic expression and melancholic sentiment among other compositions in Kung's *oeuvre*.

In 1948, Kung was cast alongside the most sought after star in China, Bai Guang, in *The Nightingale's Song Amid the Willow*. The two divas collaborated in the artistically accomplished theme song and two other songs 'Four-beat by the Lake' and 'Singing on the Lake', which remain classics to this day.

In her sentimental and tender voice, Kung serenaded the glamour of Old Shanghai in 'Encounter in the Dream', 'Moon by the Lake', 'I Can't Forget You', which had been covered by upcoming artists despite the passing of years.

In May 1945, the year the anti-Japanese war ended, Kung went on the dance stage for the first and only time with the distinguished ballet dancer Hu Rongrong, her sister-in-law then, in a three-night musical performance staged at the Shanghai Lyceum Theatre.

Kung's first notable acting role was in *Strange Case in an Old Pagoda* (1937), in which she performed her first hits 'Beyond the Frosty Waters' and 'Missing My Mother'. Following the initial success, she went on to star in over ten films. In 1942 she began a profound friendship with the three female co-stars Chen Qi, Zhang Fan, Chen Juanjuan in *Four Sisters*. Indeed, the four sworn sisters soon opened the Four Sisters Café on Fuxi Road (the present Yanan Road Central). Stars gracing the café stage included 'China Singing Queen' Chang Loo, who reached the pinnacle of success and became a household name in Hong Kong in the 1950s. The foursome again teamed up in Hong Kong to star in the post-war musical *Portrait of Four Beauties* (1948).

In *Victorious Wind* (1944), Kung successfully met the challenge of playing a young woman who matured into her advanced years; it was regarded as her best role to date. The first post-war Mandarin feature *Gone Are the Swallows When the Willow Flowers Wilt** starred Kung and Wang Hao as its leads. The role of an elderly woman played convincingly by Kung for the first time in the 1947's *You're Smart in One Way, I in Another* put her on the same pedestal as her co-star Zhou Xuan. It was also a bold attempt on the part of the filmmaker to cast the two divas without having them hum a note. *Blood Will Tell* (1949) juxtaposed the femme fatale encapsulated in the Bai Guang character with the virtuous woman played by Kung Chiu-hsia, and climaxed with the stark contrast between an attractive free-spiritedness that Bai imbued in the character and an air of composure lent by Kung. The theme song 'Blessing' best represented Kung's musical repertoire since her southward migration.

More than ten song numbers including 'Lullaby' were recorded for Dachangcheng and Pathé to the joint credit of Kung and Chen Juanjuan, the youngest of the four sworn sisters, during Kung's residency in Hong Kong. 'Reap As One Has Sown' was a new rendition of Zhou Xuan's vintage tune *Roses Blooming Everywhere* which first became a hit over a decade ago. Her solo effort 'There Was a Night' carried lyrics that profoundly depicted the poignant and solitary reminiscence of the lovelorn in the dead of the night.

After the liberation, Kung joined the restructured Great Wall Movie Enterprise Ltd to further her acting career, and while not working for the studio exclusively, she also made films for Feng Huang, gradually moving into old-aged motherly roles which largely characterised the latter stage of her career until her retirement in the 1980s. Kung also supervised the actor training class during her tenure in Great Wall, and nurtured a stable of budding talents including Betty Loh Ti, Kwan Shan and Chiao Chuang. Interestingly, she made an appearance as Yue Fei's mother in the Taiwanese film *Patriotic and Loyal* (1971), a single effort that almost passed without notice.

In 1990 she performed a charity concert in Singapore together with former colleagues, the 'Five Plum Blossom Tigress Generals', upon the invitation of Xu Canying who had migrated to the 'Lion City'. Three years later, she set foot on her native soil after an absence of more than four decades to take part in the Shanghai International Film Festival as a member of the South China Film Industry Workers Union.

Kung Chiu-hsia had close to a hundred films and more than that number of songs to her credit, and never failed once to deliver a penetrating performance. The departure of the 'rosy cloud at sunset (*qiu xia*)' leaves a void in many of our hearts.



Editor's note: *Swallows* was released on 14 December 1946; the Mandarin film *Flames of Lust*, starring Lee Ching and Ng Cho-fan and directed by Mok Hong-si with his Cantonese crew, was released a week earlier on 5 December.

Tong Kim-hung, film enthusiast and avid collector of film artefacts. He possesses an in-depth knowledge of Mandarin and Cantonese cinemas as well as popular songs of the 1930s to 1960s, and has long been an ardent admirer of Shanghai films and popular songs of the 1940s.

In Loving Memory of Our Colleague Isaac Leung

In achieving the objective of promoting Hong Kong film culture and heritage, one of the main tasks of the Hong Kong Film Archive is the design and implementation of a computer system and a movie database that are conveniently accessible to our internal staff for the classification and arrangement of our collection, as well as for the public and overseas users to retrieve information for research and further studies. Our IT Systems team has been playing a crucial role in its successful implementation and execution, and the mastermind behind the system management was its section head Isaac Leung, who sadly passed away from cancer on 20 September 2004.

IT Systems colleagues June Tse and Cheung Sik-hang recalled how the design and implementation of the existing information system owed its success to the dedication and commitment of Isaac, who facilitated the smooth liaison between their team with colleagues of the Resource Centre during the initial planning stages, and conceived the design and construction of a fully integrated information system that fully responded to the unique requirements of a film archive. Since there existed no archive-specific information system at the time of the establishment of our temporary office, the HORIZON software, a standard library protocol, was adopted by the Archive, and when Isaac took over the helm in 1999, he began to redesign and make alternations to the original protocol adhering to two cardinal guidelines: first, the catalogue would use 'film titles' as its entry unit instead of 'items' or 'material' for standard library/museum classification; and second, each entry of the catalogue would exhaust and include as many as possible the cast and crew members matched with their dramatis personae or positions.



The 57th FIAF Congress in Morocco. Isaac discussed the challenges of establishing and implementing a computerised film database.



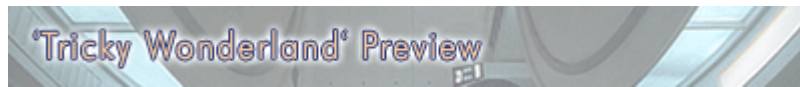
During the visit of director John Woo. Isaac (middle) and Archive Head Angela Tong showing the HORIZON system at work.

Utilising this integrated, film-based database, a single search will yield a result that contains information on all items related to and grouped under the main entry - the film title - such as stills, VHS, brochure and handbill, etc, which has significantly reduced the wear and tear that invariably occur if individual items were to be retrieved and accessed otherwise. HORIZON represents the joint effort between Isaac and his IT Systems team and colleagues at the Resource Centre over the years to create a database that currently contains a total of 120,000 entries of film personalities and 20,000 film titles and counting. WEBPAC, our on-line public access catalogue, attracts nearly 4,000 visitors each month. The Hong Kong Film Archive is currently the only establishment that adopts the on-line computer system among our Asian counterparts and our bilingual (Chinese and English) on-line public access catalogue is the first of its kind worldwide.

A consummate professional, Isaac was always sensitive and attentive to the needs of his co-workers and friends, and so diverse were his interests that he could easily absorbed into things ranging from information technology to film and indeed things around him. As a team leader, he was approachable and open, and treated everybody as equals. A down-to-earth civil servant who let his action speak for him, Isaac was voted Chairman of Association of Managers (Cultural Services), and worked dedicatedly towards an enhanced awareness of the professionalism and the general welfare of his peers during his tenure. Isaac was a popular figure with colleagues of other Leisure and Cultural Services Department offices and was

always ready to lend a hand wherever needed - be it administrative, personnel or venue arrangement - he was the life and soul of any social event who made a difference in the life of his co-workers. Isaac believed in creating a relaxed working environment that geared towards a teamwork attitude, which helped his team tackle the most strenuous tasks with ease during the hectic and pressuring few months towards the Archive's official opening. Despite the time-and resource-consuming work nature and mounting pressure, Isaac always made himself available for his colleagues to whom he provided the most useful foolproof troubleshooting tips. Isaac remained steadfast in his commitment to his work duties and constantly strived to improve our on-line public access catalogue through refinement and revision. These are testimony to the outstanding achievements of a dedicated professional who devoted his knowledge and life unreservedly to the Hong Kong Film Archive.

Isaac's kindness, perseverance, patience, courage and wisdom have impacted the life of many and will remain in the hearts and memories of his friends and colleagues at the Archive and beyond. It is with our deepest respect and admiration that we bid farewell to this beloved colleague of ours. (Text: editorial) ●



Chan Pik-yu

Without CG special effects, the optical tricks in cinema history would not have seemed so magical!

My first encounter with film special effects was during my studies at the Potsdam Film School in Germany of which film visual effects was a core subject. Back in 1994, there wasn't a centralised campus to speak of; various departments of the School took residence in lakeside villas in the atmospheric neighbourhood. With many of its teaching staff members hailing from the nearby Studio Babelsberg, the school continued to thrive on the studio's proud traditions - film visual effects being one. Traditions or not, there was always a hint of outmoded, perhaps primitive conceit. There was no mentioning of digital media during classes. Textbook knowledge was confined to discussions on the distance and relationship between the camera and the subject, or a mirror or model, which reminded me of the special effects deployed in Cantonese oldies - the Headless Empress in the East Palace, a role made memorable by Yu Lai-zhen, who wails and peddles in the dead of the night carrying her head in her hands; or Tso Tat-wah who releases a whirl of wind from his palms, and an array of palm weapons unleashed by martial arts adepts; of course, there was child star Fung Bo-bo's favourite gadget - the flying luminous cup that changes in size. It was then the idea of special effects being crude and primitive took root in my heart. The course ended on a more sophisticated note though. Theories aside, there were references to 'the classics'. Visual effects literally refer to the manipulation of visual perception to create an illusion of space. Take a scene in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) as an example: the jaded, tired workers walk up the stairs with mechanical footsteps leading to the exit, which transforms into the wide-opened jaw of a ferocious beast, gulping the workers one by one. Undoubtedly a visual spectacle, the scene was shot using merely a mirrored glass and a miniature set of no bigger than one square metre in size. Similarly, the grandeur rooftop of a big hall that spans thousands of feet is in fact the manifestation of a finely built miniature model. The first scene owes its magic to mirror effects, and the second the super-imposed images against a miniature set, and yet the achievement of both rival that of today's computer-graphic technology without the hassles and budget constraints of post-production work - simply flawless!

Once you learn the principles of visual effects, there are no secrets under the sun. Stanley Kubrick demonstrated in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) the filming of a scene in which the astronauts jog around the spiralling space station in one single continuous shot. On the screen, the astronauts walk their momentous space walk in a zero gravity environment; on the set, there was a gigantic barrel which spun around, allowing the actors to appear weightless in the earth's atmosphere. The ingenuity of the filmmaker is all it takes to create a visual masterpiece.

Nothing beats the fun of practical lessons and site visits. Prior to the practicals, I teamed up with my course mates to construct a model set complete with houses and bridges. With the model positioned by the lake and the lens of our camera fixed on our subject, we began the construction of our lakeside house and lake bridge and simply let our imagination run wild. Determined not to be left out of this visual spectacle, we became characters on the set, posing at a distant spot that fell between the house and the bridge in precisely the right proportion. The film, though amateurish, was greeted with unanimous applause. The set construction and shooting took no more than two to three days.

Set visits were a more memorable event. On the day of our visit, a short film was shooting on location in an ancient back alley behind the Potsdam Film Museum. A middle-aged man in overall was working dedicatedly on a glass pane measuring one by one and a half metres. He was one of the few remaining glass artists specialising in film superimposition in the industry. The artist carefully replaced the steel-and-glass world of modern architecture by meticulously injecting archaic colours and historical motifs into the old street frame. With a slight motion of leaning and slanting, the world of ancient mystique through the superimposed glass pane would instantly revert to the setting of the contemporary era. The magical charm was unforgettable.

Optical effects remained the most viable tool whenever a project called for the use of special effects: firstly, it was a cheaper option; and most importantly we were simply bewitched by the simple, yet magical craftsmanship. Yet in just a few years, the ancient trade made its sad exit from the school curriculum as well as the movie set following the emergence of digital technology.

The day I visited the visual effects exhibition at Studio Babelsberg I made a secret pledge to bring the extravagance to the local audience. Hong Kong cinema has never utilised visual effects to its full effect and the local audience has been denied the access to the craft. Jointly organised by the Hong Kong Film Archive and Goethe-Institut Hong Kong, and supported by Studio Five of Studio Babelsberg, the exhibition scheduled to be held from 10 December 2004 to 6 March 2005 will take the visitors through an adventurous journey in the tricky wonderland. ♦

Chan Pik-yu is Technical Assistant of the HKFA's 'Tricky Wonderland' exhibition.



Shrinkage of Film

Edward Tse

Motion picture film shrinkage is a phenomenon that can be observed as the change in the dimensions of the film material, most obviously along the longitudinal direction over time. It is a common misconception that shrinkage can only be found in old films. There is yet another common misconception that shrinkage can only be found in nitrate and acetate film. In fact, shrinkage in polyester film is an intrinsic property, although the extent is much smaller. Relatively speaking, shrinkage is not a problem in still photographic film since, unlike motion picture film, the shrunk perforations along the edge of the film are not used after development and processing, and all subsequent printing steps can tolerate shrinkage without difficulty. The fundamental difference between still photographic film and motion picture film is that the former does not need to withstand the tension that would otherwise be experienced during printing, viewing and projection of the latter.

The main cause of film shrinkage is the permanent loss of plasticiser, water or other small molecules (as constituents) from the structure of the film, mostly the base material. The course of shrinking is usually a gradual process, but when the film is stored in a high temperature, high humidity environment, the shrinkage rate may go up rapidly due to an accelerated chemical decomposition of the base material, the most common of which is referred to as the vinegar syndrome.

The extent of shrinkage can be measured precisely using an instrument called a shrinkage gauge or can be obtained by comparing the current measured length with the standard length of a piece of motion picture film. According to the SMPTE 139-1996¹ standard, every foot (12 inches²) of the 35 mm film should have 16 frames or 64 perforations (each with a distance of 0.1870 ± 0.0004 inches). Thus, if λ stands for the length of the film with 64 perforations per foot, the extent of shrinkage can be calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Shrinkage} = \frac{(12 - \lambda)}{12} \times 100\%$$

Some shrinkage gauge calculates the shrinkage rate using 100 perforations per foot so as to minimise any systematic errors. The latest digital shrinkage gauge allows direct reading by simply sticking the film onto the pins of the instrument, and is a

quick, easy and accurate means of shrinkage measurement.

Film shrinkage occurs immediately after the film is manufactured. The shrinkage of newly produced unexposed film is about 0.3%. Some processed print film may have shrinkage as low as 0.2% while the typical figure for film stored in the Hong Kong ambient environment over a period of time is about 0.8%. The general rule of thumb is as follows:

Shrinkage	Usage
≤0.8%	Still suitable for printing, telecine and projection
>0.8% and ≤1.0%	Suitable for printing, telecine, but may be risky for projection
>1.0% and <1.2%	May be risky for telecine and printing, and certainly not suitable for projection; precautions should be taken during access
>1.2%	Very risky for printing and not suitable for telecine and projection. Some specialised film laboratories can handle shrunk film of up to 2.5% shrinkage
>2.5%	Not suitable for any mode of access except direct viewing with manual winding table

It is a pity that film shrinkage is an irreversible process that once shrinking occurs, it is impossible to restore the film to its original dimensions; however, there are chemical treatments available to temporarily change film dimensions just long enough for duplication work to be performed. At the moment, there are still no reliable methods to treat shrunk motion picture film or reduce the rate of shrinking. The only remedy so far is to duplicate the image and sound content onto a new film stock or re-record them in some other formats while at the same time adjust the recording and allow for the reduction in dimensions by optical printing means.

Our recent film restoration project of *The Red Robe* (1965) for the retrospective 'In Memory of Yam Kim-fai' has also raised concerns over the shrinkage of original materials. Since the incomplete copy of the film in our collection has the shrinkage of around 1.0%, it would be very risky to run the original material through the projector. In order to strike a balance between film preservation and access, it was decided that the image and sound of the original material were to be duplicated onto a new film stock - polyester film which has a much lower shrinkage - via an inter-negative. (Translated by Choi Hak-kin)



A newly restored version of *The Red Robe* (1965) will kick off the Yam Kim-fai retrospective

- 1 SMPTE 139-1996 is the international standard published by the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers in 1996 for Motion-Picture Film (35mm) - Perforated KS. A full set of the standard for motion picture film is available at the Resource Centre, 3/F, Hong Kong Film Archive.
- 2 The exact standard distance for every 64 KS Perforations is 11.968 inches.

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

Writing in the Mist of Loss

Mable Ho

A stack of material amounting to tens of thousands of items pending arrangement can easily provoke a sense of anxiety: so many things to do, so little manpower and time.

Few would have gone out of school without establishing some research credentials, though the topics are often of a personal kind, focused and limited in scope, and rarely pose the abovementioned problem. Quite the opposite for a vast 'public treasure trove' though: to establish a permanent library which houses items encapsulating Hong Kong film history in its entirety can quite easily throw the handful of archival personnel into total disarray, leaving them at a complete loss.

Volume is everything with acquisition, and time as well - 'time and tide wait for no man' , as the proverb goes; but arrangement requires precision and accuracy, and there are consequences to bear if one rushes into it. Going hand-in-hand and yet radically different in nature, these two areas of work demand the dedication of a team of specialists with a split personality! My rough estimation is that each acquired item has to undergo a two and a half hour arrangement routine: scouring the entire content from front to back to determine the source, categorise and verify, remove surface dirt and soil, duplicate, packing and finally to record data down to the last detail. In addition, the sighting of insect damage will call for pest management, often in the form of chemical treatment that involves the use of nitrogen anoxia; expert insight will be sought for should the content be of sporadic nature; and if an item requires special treatment beyond the existing confines of local expertise, it will be delegated to overseas institutes and more time will have to be added to the meter...if the first decade of the setting up of a film archive is expected to yield a bumper harvest, the challenges of managing a bloom will immediate follow, and such a daunting, tedious task will easily consume a generation of daunting work, though it will eventually be accomplished - given patience and discernment. The yield will forever benefit researchers of Hong Kong cinema who otherwise will devote much of their time and effort in verification and validation alone.

Arrangement work often goes unnoticed since the results it produces are quantified as numerals presented in monthly spreadsheets, unlike the breakthrough discoveries from acquisition trips, or research works that promise long-term contributions. This devotion to the preservation of film heritage can only be sustained by a labour of love, and we are blessed with a team of unsung heroes who are knowledgeable and have genuine concerns about the preservation of our film heritage so much so that a pile of dusty, musty artefacts holds no fear. Still, the retaining and nurturing of these specialists will boil down to individual company policy and structure.

The establishment of the Hong Kong Film Archive and the bonding of archival specialists were long overdue - almost a century after the birth of our cinema - and it is important that we respond to the quest with a sense of urgency. Perhaps next time when you browse through these filmic materials you can spare a few seconds in silent recognition of those who dedicate their life to achieving this common goal.

Mable Ho is the Acquisition Manager of the HKFA.

Donors (8-10.2004)

Applause Pictures Limited

Cathay-Keris Films Pte Ltd

IFD Films and Arts Limited

PCCW

Pearl City Video Ltd

RTHK

Tsui Siu Ming Productions Limited

Universe Films Distribution Co. Ltd.

Mr Ken Chan Kun-sing

Mr Leo Chan

Dr Chan Sau Y.

Mr Chan Su-weng

Mr Chan Wing-mei

Ms Chow Man-sheung

Mr Chu Kin-kei

Ms Elaine Co

Mr John Fowler

Ms May Fung Lam

Ms Winnie Fung Tak-kwan

Ms D          Hu

Mr Kong Ho

Ms Kwong Yuet-ting

Mr Lai Shek

Ms Miranda Leung Lok-yan

Mr Liang Liang

Mr Kevin Ling Kok-hin

Mr Ling Siu-nung

Mr Lo Chi-keung

Mr Luk Bong

Mr Calvin Poon Yuen-leung

Mme Marie-Claire Quiquemelle

Mr Lot K.K. Sze

Ms Tang Wai-oi

Ms Tso Kuei-fang

Ms Wong Wan

Ms Dolores Wang Chuen-chu

Dr Denis K. Wong

Ms Teresa Wong Tien-lee

Mr Yonfan

Thank You!

Seminars

70s Hong Kong Cinema & Culture



(From left) Terry Tong, Clifford Choi, Lau Tin-chi



Tung-joe

Time and Tide: Changes in Hong Kong Cinema of the 1970s examined the refashioning of film genres and hit trends in an era when the movie industry was undergoing momentous transformation and the emerging television culture was sowing the seeds of a local identity and sensitivity. Organised by the Hong Kong Baptist University in association with the Hong Kong Film Archive, the international conference entitled *Cultural Identity, Gender and Everyday Life Practice* on 15 August 2004 began with an opening speech delivered by Professor Chung Ling, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, followed by moderator Dr Lo Wai-luk's introduction of the panel of speakers: HKFA Programmer Law Kar, film and cultural workers Lau Tin-chi, Cheung Tung-joe, Clifford Choi and Terry Tong. Professor Chung also gave a memorable account of his collaboration with the late director King Hu on location shooting in Korea.

Law Kar analysed the dynamics between film and television in the 1970s, when the two media partook of similar creative ideas, topics and personnel, and noted that Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) drama series released in 1975 and 76 reprised many of the melodramatic and romantic themes commonly found in their Cantonese cinema counterparts. The first years of TVB's establishment coincided with the slump of Cantonese cinema in the face of strong competition from Mandarin films, which hastened the migration of big screen talents such as Siu Sang, Leung Sing-po, Lydia Shum, To Ping, Cheung Ying and Wong Man-lei to the small screen. On the contrary, Michael Hui treaded into the film industry and took part in the making of *The Warlord* (1972) and *Games Gamblers Play* (1974) after producing his hugely popular *Hui Brothers Show* for TVB.

In the years after 1976 television stations began to open their doors to a host of overseas graduates whose fingers were kept firmly on the rhythm and pulse of the city. These hottest twenty-something recruits, including Ann Hui, Clifford Choi, Joyce Chan, Yim Ho and Ivy Ho, subsequently sought a career in the film industry, giving city sensibility a new lease on life on the silver screen. Their films successfully emerged from the shadows of old, tired film genres such as martial arts flicks and kung fu comedies to become a mainstay of the Hong Kong New Wave that flourished in the following decade. It was under this unique circumstance that the exchanges of personnel and creative mode took place. Despite dominating the scene in the 1960s, a sluggish atmosphere prevailed over the film industry until the emergence of television and its fine recruit that created a huge craze and drew over the audience of Cantonese films with their closer-to-life topics; the film industry also derived mutual benefits from the competition, attracting talents from television to reinvigorate their creative process.

Lau Tin-chi split his time between television and film in the 1970s. He regarded the 1970s as an era of paradigm shifts and proliferation - populist versus gracefulness, conformity versus dissidence and rebellion - when creative talents achieved breakthroughs that thrived upon traditions. Lau joined the television station in 1969, the year Selina Chow and Michel Hui launched on the box *Hui Brothers Show*, admittedly plucked directly from American gag show *Laugh-in*. Fast-paced and rip-roaring, the show was the perfect answer to a growing fast-food culture. Michael Hui sought the input of Thomas Tang to craft the 42 well-timed gags for every twenty-minute episode. At first, the duo helped themselves to ready, quick references such as *A Thousand Jokes*. In avoiding tabooed subjects such as sex, religion and politics, they drew inspiration from everyday life. The other drama series *73* was a carbon copy of the American sitcom *All in the Family* except that the topics were sourced locally. The big screen production *The Private Eyes* (1976), which followed the same formula of gag shows and comedies of the 1970s for success, has no plot or narrative structure to speak of but a random series of jokes and gags.

The 1960s and 70s sentiments struck a cord with Cheung Tung-joe, who first worked as a production assistant at Shaw Brothers before joining the production team and taking up a directorial role. Cheung had the privilege of working under the tutelage of King Hu on *Come Drink with Me* (1966). He has the greatest admiration for the director who gave a new definition to *wuxia* film. An ardent cinephile from an early age, Cheung made it a habit to re-watch Western classics such as *Blow-up* (1966) and *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). He also believed that Hong Kong directors have an edge over their mainland counterparts in making martial arts films since mainland film workers do not have the background and culture to fall back on as the production of martial arts film came to a complete halt after 1949; on the contrary, the tradition of action films continued to flourish in the territory, enabling Hong Kong directors to reinvent the genres with the conception of new routines and forms. King Hu's distinct cinematic rhythm and Chang Cheh's view on chivalry are the embodiments and exemplars of the elemental chivalric spirit of action films.

Chung Ling remembered the days King Hu travelled to Korea for location shooting. Hu scheduled the shooting of two period features, *Legend of the Mountain* (1979) and *Raining in the Mountain* (1979), in Korea between February 1977 and April 1979. Why did Hu choose Korea over the natural choice of Taiwanese studios? The answer was obvious. Korea is a vast country that offers plenty of locations for shooting the two films back to back beyond the confines of a studio set that rendered low-angle shots virtually impossible. The monasteries in Korea have the unique qualities of solid surface that couldn't be replicated in an artificially constructed set, although location shooting had its fair share of difficulties. Chung had brought with him sketches and notes that Hu made after the site visits, one of which was a college in Gyeongju later converted into the inn where Hsu Feng and Sylvia Chang took residence in *Legend of the Mountain*; the volcano crater in Jeju was transformed into the old monk's nirvana in *Raining in the Mountain*, as well as the backdrops for Shih Chun's first and last sequences in *Legend of the Mountain*.

Clifford Choi took an early dip into both media in the 1970s and 80s. Returning from America in 1975, Choi was recruited by Selina Chow to join TVB as screenwriter-director. With the launch of colour television, the production crew was still experimenting with the latest technology and was enjoying the freedom that came along with it. With only two steenbecks to go around and an editing schedule of three working days for a 48-minute drama, the high-pressure environment became the perfect breeding ground for filmmaking talents. Audiences who lived and breathed television series adored their stars and remained diehard fans for years to come. The prolonged slump of kung fu films propelled producers to raid the television companies for talents; Ng See-yuen spotted Clifford Choi and hired him to write the screenplay for *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (1978), which would be starred by Jackie Chan. With over ten kung fu films under his belt, Chan was used to playing big heroes but repeated failures at the box office earned him the undesirable 'box office poison' label. Taking its clue from the central character of Hollywood's *Little Big Man* (1970), the role of the honest, down-to-earth underdog was tailor-made for Chan. Riding on the phenomenal success of *The House of 72 Tenants*, *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* was the first action comedy dubbed in Cantonese and injected with a satirical element. Enjoying instant success, the film marked Jackie Chan's first commercial hit and was the precursor to the Cantonese kung fu comedy craze. Upon the invitation of Philip Chan, Choi made his directorial debut with *Encore* (1980). It was an out-and-out experience and unique experience since Chan himself was also a first-time producer teaming up with first-time screenwriters Lawrence Cheng and Manfred Wong.

Terry Tong is currently a producer at TVB responsible for the administrative and artistic decisions of a production. A director, he noted, has total control over creative matters. Tong directed *Search and Arrest* for the Bang Bang Film Company back in 1980 when the company was on the verge of closing down. At the time when the films of Bruce Lee and Michael Hui lost their appeal to the audience, Hong Kong cinema was rejuvenated with the collision of a new local culture with influences of mainland, Taiwanese and European cinemas; there was an earnest need for new directorial talents, many of whom were overseas graduates, to meet the growing demand for the four circuits in the territory. Since there wasn't a homegrown film industry in either Malaysia or Singapore in the 1970s, Hong Kong cinema exports filled the void of Chinese cinema across Southeast Asia and dominated the scene, laying the foundation for the industry in the 1980s and 90s.

Despite the decline of Cantonese cinema from 1971, Cantonese television programming continued to expand in audienceship, attracting more viewers than the cinema. Colloquialism and slang became the common language of gag shows and was itself a social phenomenon. The commercial success of *The House of 72 Tenants*, a Cantonese film, signalled the return of the audience to the native tongue and their new realisation of the lingua franca. Lo Wai-luk concluded that the 1970s was an era of proliferation for both film and television and the cradle for new creative initiatives and challenges. (Recorded and edited by Edith Chiu) ◆

HK's Film Industry and Social Changes in the 70s



(From left) Cheng Yu, Alex Cheung, Law Kar, Fung Ling-siu, Cheuk Pak-tong and Chan Siu-pang

Seminar moderator and HKFA Programmer Law Kar was joined by distinguished industry workers and scholars Chan Siu-pang, Fung Ling-siu, Cheng Yu, Dr Cheuk Pak-tong and Alex Cheung at the Hong Kong Film Archive on 17 August to examine the links forged between the film industry and the society in the 1970s.

A veteran martial arts director who had been active in the film industry since the 1950s, Chan witnessed the rise of martial arts stars Sek Yin-tsi, Yu So-chau and Tso Tat-wah in the 1950s, and subsequently the most sought-after Patrick Tse Yin and Wu Fung in the 1960s when film companies abandoned melodrama in favour of the action genre. Bruce Lee's vehicle *The Big Boss* (1971) initially provoked an ambivalent response but won praises following its test screening with its unleashing of fist and kick, and became the predecessor of 'real kung fu' extravaganzas.

Joining the Great Wall Movie Enterprise Ltd in the late 1960s, Fung Ling-siu offered his insights into the ideological paths treaded by Great Wall, Fung Huang and Sun Luen. Although branded as a leftist film company, Great Wall films crossed the ideological border and enjoyed the same popularity as Cathay in the early years, attracting major studios like Shaws and Cathay to rival for their overseas distribution rights. While most people attributed the momentous changes taking place at Great Wall to the 1967 riots, Fung believed that their creative directives were determined by the joint influence of the Cultural Revolution, local milieu and political stance of the British government in Hong Kong. During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing arbitrarily reinterpreted the viewpoints put forth by Chairman Mao during *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art* and underscored the importance of art to place the interests of peasants, workers and soldiers before those of the petty bourgeoisie, which had a ripple effect on leftist film workers. Fung cited *The Hut on Hilltop* (1970) as a satire to illustrate the hardship of a group of homeless builders. He emphasised the role played by the wider social context in determining the directives of the studios, in particular the hostile social conditions and the suppression of the proletariat resulting in the firing of bullets by riots police during the 1967 riots.

Film critic Cheng Yu attempted to study the local cinema through the demography of audiences: Cantonese audience favoured opera films, especially those starring Yam Kim-fai and Pak Suet-sin; northern migrants clung to Mandarin films; the more educated cluster preferred Western films; the three clusters of audience rarely overlapped. The 1967 riots mellowed out the audience of the older generation and craved out a market niche for new genres. Postwar baby boomers, who received English-medium education under colonial rule, were particularly susceptible to American and European films and cultures. Their apathy toward political issues on both sides of the strait after the riots was channeled into creative energies that were given full vent in filmmaking and band music, which in turn gave rise to the emergence of a new cinema. While Hong Kong enjoyed economic growth through the transformation from an entrepôt to a manufacturing hub, these baby boomers had more money to spend on leisure, which largely accounted for the growing moviegoing phenomenon. Filmmakers were careful to avoid taking a political stance. Although the handover of sovereignty to China became the subject of public discussions as early as the 1970s, allusions instead of direct address were made due to the sensitive nature of the topic and became a thematic undercurrent that ran through the New Wave cinema.

Dr Cheuk Pak-tong focused on the social backdrop of New Wave cinema and cultural products that embraced the plurality of political bodies and multiple voices. The economy survived the two oil crises in the 1970s unscratched to record double-digit growth; the positive outlook also gave the local residence a confidence boost reflected in the local cinema. The immensely popular *The Chinese Student Weekly*, Hong Kong Film Cultural Centre and the Hong Kong International Film Festival were safe-havens for artistic expressions, and a nurturing bed for new directors and fresh ideas, including the acclaimed director Fruit Chan. At the same time the film industry attempted to arrest the downward trend after the Bruce Lee and Hui brothers frenzies by supplying the Southeast Asian market with independent productions, resulting in the raiding of directorial and screenwriting talents by independent studios. After a decade in business, the television medium had nurtured a stable of creative professionals to fill the void in the film industry.

New Wave director Alex Cheung was born in the 1950s. The days of moviegoing were soon replaced by filmmaking on the set. Driven by pure passion, he was easily contented with delivering a film as a coherent narrative until peer influence from John Woo, Yim Ho, Patrick Tam and Ann Hui compelled him to strive for new cinematic expressions. Later he worked at TVB's film department under Liu Fanggang and Selina Chow, who readily delegated creative liberty to Cheung and his co-workers. Cheung wielded the department's 16mm camera to simulate the actual filmmaking experience and it wasn't long before film executives knocked on his door. He was swayed by the overwhelming recognition of his works to finally decide to 'give filmmaking a try'. The experience at TVB, the stimulating environment and the unconditional support of his superiors still hold close to his heart - daring and fearless were how Cheung remembered himself.

By examining the missing link between Hong Kong cinema, television and society in the 1970s from different perspectives, our panel of speakers provided a multi-dimensional portrayal of an important phase of the development of Hong Kong cinema. (Recorded and edited by Kiki Fung) ◆

Women Cinema According to Sylvia Chang



(From left) Edward Lam, Law Kar, Eva Man Kit-wah and May Fung

Women and femininity are subjects that have been handled with delicacy and sensitivity throughout Sylvia Chang's *oeuvre*. Dr Eva Man Kit-wah, Edward Lam and May Fung were speakers of the seminar held at the Archive cinema on 21 August 2004 to explore the unique attributes pertaining to the women's cinema of Sylvia Chang, a gifted actor who also directs and writes with a penetrating insight.

From the onset of the discussion, HKFA Programmer and the seminar moderator Law Kar delineated feminine aesthetics as different from feminist film or cinema that advocate women's rights. The characters Chang plays, writes or directs delve into the mind of a modern woman, who faces the challenge of city life and grows into maturity amid the tension rising between the generations. Embellished with delicate, profound details, Chang's films never take the viewer to a roller-coaster ride of emotions but strike a chord by her strict through-the-camera approach to realism: honest portrayal of the modern woman who strives to strike a balance between her role in the family and in the society among other pertinent issues addressed by women's cinema. As an actor, Chang has a full awareness of her forte and weakness, and gives due respect to the person in the director's seat. Indeed, Johnnie To praised her natural eloquence of clear thoughts and sentiments when they collaborated on the film *All about Ah Long* (1989).

Law believes that women's cinema does not seek to express the paradoxical nature of human relationships but the realisation of her own predicament along the path of self-searching. Through the arts, a woman writer gives her account of the values of society, living and growth; feminist writing champions political agenda by

addressing and offering solutions to social issues. Chang's films lack the subversive edge of feminist cinema, like the patriarchal *20 30 40* (2004) which depicts three women struggling with loneliness following the prolonged separation with their 'runaway' partners. Devoting the core of the plot to the woman characters, Chang's men are reduced to leading a phantom existence.

Eva Man Kit-wah talked fondly of her favourite director. Chang never admits to making films on women but being a woman who makes film. Offering variegated perspectives and advocations aside from a female one, her films attempt to explore interpersonal relationships and sympathise with the men who are bogged down by gender chains and shackles. While Chang centres her story and narrative on a woman character and delves into her thoughts, emotions, struggles and everyday experiences, she does not uphold the banner of women rights but chooses instead to give an honest depiction of a female sensibility. Chang's new woman challenges the stereotypical image projected by the camera and society, as her films depart from the established sexual aesthetics and visual stimuli traditions; Chang has undoubtedly offered the 'auteur' perspective and insight on women and the problems confronting them. Unlike feminist films that disrupt solidarity and oppress the viewer's recognition with the heroine, Chang's films instil in the viewers empathy as a feminist collective.

Edward Lam has been an ardent fan of Sylvia Chang and her films since his teen years largely because he wanted to steer clear from the Brigitte Lin frenzy. It was Chang to whom Lam projected his dreams and states of mind. As an actress, Lin only played one kind of role, but Chang would take up roles that Lin wouldn't. Starring almost exclusively in film adaptations of Chiung Yao novels, Lin was the perfect embodiment of the fragile and vulnerable heroine in the book. While lagging behind Lin in popularity and commercial success, Chang's aura was a far cry from the Chiung Yao woman and felt out of place in the writer's dream-like realm, though she did once play the lead in *Posterity and Perplexity* (1976). Chang left Taiwan for the US in her teen years and was deeply influenced by the American culture. Her first role of a Teddy girl at Golden Harvest took root in the viewer's heart so deep that the actress is never perceived in the same light as the screen goddess Lin whose idolisation reached its height in 1970s. Indeed Sylvia Chang and Brigitte Lin are two different types of actresses. Chang gave new definition to the intellectual woman and the spirit of self-emancipation, which had been reprised and reexamined in her later films and scripts. Her characters rose to the challenges of moral constraints and conflicts arising from gender-specific roles, which entailed

constant struggling and negotiation with their tied-in expectations. Lin's job was to project herself in the real life on the screen - the perfect embodiment of a college girl - and conflict played a lesser role in her characters. Chang's women and their psychological conflicts are inevitably born out of mother-daughter relationship, or between friends, sisters and husband and wife. Through film, Chang situated herself right at the heart of the conflict to seek a way out, sometimes without success. This pursuit has been undertaken by Chang from her early acting days to her later acting-cum-directing years. Throughout her career, she has only one story to tell, including *Passion* (1986) and *Tempting Heart* (1999), which clings stubbornly like a psychological complex to the motif of falling in love with the best friend's boyfriend. Chang's woman is forever engaged in an intense love-hate relationship with their peers - sisters or schoolmates - and the resolution of which is an issue that Chang has been striving to address.

Edward Lam also agreed that Chang's films neither fight for women's rights nor reflect the inequality of the outside world, which could be largely accounted for by her background, upbringing and class. Both *Tempting Heart* and *Passion* touch on a taboo subject of the female sex. The qualities of self-sacrifice and impartiality are intrinsic to women who are biological child-bearers. Indeed impartiality and sacrifice best encapsulate a mother's love. Nonetheless the heroines of *Tempting Heart* and *Passion*, played by Karen Mok and Chang herself respectively, risk being condemned as violators of the norms and in doing so, setting the debates on the role of women, emotions, identity and self in emotion. Their earnest desires are often socially unacceptable. Although not necessarily of a sexual nature, these desires are life cravings. Lam believed that Chang would personally 'demonstrate' the theme and role that she holds so dearly to her heart. *Passion* was a phase in her life, and the same conflict was dealt with and reexamined by Mok's role in *Tempting Heart*. The role played by Gigi Leung is not utterly devoid of personal interests. The definition that the traditional woman and the modern woman give to 'egoism' departs when the focus shifts to the pursuit of happiness. The Gigi Leung character pursues romance as a calling in her younger years until a world of possibilities opens up to her and the harsh realities of the real world force her to forsake these fanciful notions and lofty pursuits. As her life becomes more settled, she resumes her quest for romance. These psychological changes in the character cross path with Chang's mental journey, and the two films are revealing of her views and their changes.

May Fung has been careful to stand on neutral ground in viewing Chang's films. She found *20 30 40* a disappointing film and had reservation for its subject matter in spite of its free-flowing narrative. Prior to the seminar, Fung had reviewed some of Chang's older films. She found resonance with *Sisters of the World Unite* (1991), which struck her more as a film that deals with two persons' expectations in life than a feminist work. The honesty of the theme is touching and heart-warming. *Tempting Heart* and *Passion* are about choosing between friendship and romantic love. In *Princess D: I Believe the Day Will Come* (2002), Angelica Lee plays a new woman who holds no fear for anything and everything. A real fighter. Indeed, Chang admits that her films do not offer life experiences but simply a perspective. Fung saw a director whose personality was aptly reflected in her films as she explored the many facets of women from their everyday experiences and desires. It remains unclear as to whether these films are told specifically from a woman's perspective, but their sentiments are profoundly moving. Chang doesn't display strong political inclinations toward feminist subjects nor does she seek to turn her films into social accusations. As a woman director she represents and creates a reality pertaining to herself and centres her films around issues concerning women in general.

Eva Man Kit-wah added that women love telling their own stories and expressing themselves, but often hold back from sharing secrets. Chang's themes are reprised even within a film, for example the three women in *20 30 40* who essentially represent Chang at three different cross-sections of her life - in her twenties, thirties and forties. A lass always, Chang's evident fear of dumbness and ageing becomes the impetus behind the *20* instalment to express romantic love and impulsive feelings that are associated with the young and fearless. It is evident in *Passion* that Chang never wipe away episodes of the love-could-have-been. The *30* instalment is marked by chaotic life circumstances in which the woman searches aimlessly and futilely. The compromises and struggles in *40* differ from those of the two earlier phases but the woman is not ready to abandon a tired marriage. The presence of the 'lass' has towered over all three instalments.

Male images are treated with less profundity in Chang's films. The only exception is Kenny Bee's role in *Mary from Beijing* (1992), but the rest are negligible and lack a soul. Embarrassingly restrained in *Passion*, the director also refrained from explicit portrayal of passion and lust. Chang said *40* is supposed to be her most forthright and unconstrained work. A quasi-experimental attempt, the indulgence of passion is brought to an abrupt end by the humorous and comic situations Chang employed in creating distancing effects. On the contrary, feminist films highlight the proactive

stance that women take in their quest for passion, as well as desires that are suppressed and neglected. While Gua Ah-lei's awkward laughter in *Tonight Nobody Goes Home* (1996) isolates and suppresses female fantasy, the two 20 30 40 women in undergarments compose a scene both comic and unrestrained.

Eva Man Kit-wah also responded to Lam's earlier discussion of same-sex dynamics, explaining that females too use the male gaze to judge their female friends, and subject themselves to comparison with her peers constantly; yet the friendship of women is an indispensable part of their lives and a bondage that offers solace and support, thus facilitating the coexistence of friendship and hostility.

Law Kar concluded that Sylvia Chang's films do not necessarily offer emancipation but a form of representation. She does not like presenting women as men prosecutors but stories about ordinary people. (Recorded and edited by Edith Chiu) ◆

Perspective of Pan-Asian Cinema

Applause Pictures was established at the dawn of the new century to foster the making and distribution of 'Pan-Asian' productions. Capitalising on the geographical location of Hong Kong as the crossroads of Southeast Asia, the company is envisioned to forge new links between the film industries and filmmakers of the Asia Pacific region. The 'Donor's Showcase: First Round of Applause' screening programme was held as a token of appreciation for Applause Pictures' generous donations of their film copies to the Hong Kong Film Archive. Peter Chan, one of the founding members of Applause Pictures, was the guest of honour speaking at the 'Perspective of Pan-Asian Cinema' seminar about his experiences of sourcing financial support and expanding distribution network overseas as an independent filmmakers and producer. The seminar provided a platform for promoting independent film productions and filling in the details of an important jigsaw-piece of the Hong Kong film industry.

Chan had, as early as 1999, conceived the establishment of Applause as an initiative to foster exchanges between fine filmmaking talents in the territory with their Asian counterparts in an attempt to reverse the decline of Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s and the already saturated local market. Through collaborations, it was hoped that the participating filmmakers would gain an insight into the running and modes of film distribution of different countries, and that the newly formed partnership would in turn facilitate smoother collaborations. Understanding the role of trust and mutual respect in forming a solid foundation for cross-cultural collaboration, Applause sought the input of directors with whom the partners are personally acquainted without having to enter into negotiation for distribution rights with overseas distributors. *One Fine Spring Day* (2001) was a co-production with Korea and Japan directed by the Korean director Hur Jin-ho, a personal friend of Chan. In taking the directorial chore of the Hong Kong segment of *Three* (2002), Chan introduced Leon Lai fans and the average moviegoers alike to Thai and Korean productions and offered them exposure to the wider horizon, thus carving out a niche market for non-Chinese language productions in Hong Kong. Similarly, the moviegoing audience of the sixty thousand million population of Thailand and the forty thousand million population of Korea were exposed to a co-production infused with Hong Kong flavour when *Three* was released in the two countries. *The Eye* (2002) marked a turning point in the short history of Applause. Chan isn't a big fan of horror or ghost films, but an absence of dialogues, or a minimum of them, which characterised most horror films, seemed to fit the bill as the common tongue of the Asian market. The film grossed NT\$46,000,000 in Taiwan and was released in major cinemas in Italy, France and Spain, a testament to the border-crossing qualities of any good film.

Making films in Hong Kong, as Chan noted, is a daunting task. Many a time a less visionary investor would put filming projects to a halt when his/her investment fails to yield immediate returns. New directors, quality cinemas and publications are in short supply in Hong Kong; Hollywood, which is governed by a closely monitored, error-free system, put faith in new directors and continue to forge new links between independent productions and mainstream cinema which are still missing in the territory. Eric Tsang made a bold attempt to hire the new director Wong Ching-po for his film *Jiang Hu* (2004). Peter Chan also urged members of the audience who are aspired to become filmmakers in their own right to make not crowd pleasers but films that please themselves, and to strike a healthy balance between audience demand and artistic pursuits; there should be an intimate bond between the director and the viewers.

It is inevitable that Hong Kong cinema seeks to penetrate the mainland market following a prolonged slump. Chan, on the other hand, believes that the time is not ripe for undertaking the venture, indeed the later the better. He also thinks that mainland audiences show a higher tolerance to 'films with substance', compared to the relatively impatient local audiences. Chan's upcoming project will take him to the mainland next year when he will search for the topic that will strike a chord with audiences on both sides of the border. (Recorded and edited by Edith Chiu) ●



The picture shows Archive Head Angela Tong, Peter Chan, Programmer Law Kar (4th to 6th left), Acquisition Manager Mable Ho (1st right) and Archive staff



Opening of 'Fame, Flame, Frame - Jupiter Wong Foto Exhibition'

For once in his career, an absorbed, focused but elusive still photographer, who devotes himself to creating a world of glittering and dazzling colours wielding his mighty camera, emerged from behind-the-scenes to be embraced by his beloved shooting models. The star-studded *Fame, Flame, Frame - Jupiter Wong Foto Exhibition* unveiled at the Hong Kong Film Archive Exhibition Hall on 3 September, attracting an all star guest list including Wong's director contemporaries Ann Hui, Derek Yee, Fruit Chan, Henry Fong, Ivy Ho, and actors Eason Chan, Wong You-nam and Jo Koo. The photographer mingled with the guests Nansun Shi, Alex Cheung, Lam Wah-chuen, Wong Hung-fei and Crystal Kwok, while film critics Li Cheuk-to, Wong Ain-ling, Po Fung, Sek Kei, Shu Kei, Bryan Chang, Grace Ng, Lawrence Lau and Thomas Shin flocked to the exhibition hall joining by the one of Wong's favourite muses Karena Lam, who presented Wong with a fresh bouquet.



(Back row, from left) Tang Yat-ming, Crystal Kwok, Shu Kei, Jupiter, Fruit Chan, Nansun Shi, Henry Fong; (front row, from left) Jo Koo, Abe Kwong, Derek Yee, Ann Hui.

When Thomas Shin, host of the cocktail party, asked why his camera chased only female stars, Wong gave an answer that was far from ambiguous: 'I only love women!' Wong's favourite themes, apart from siren faces of glamorous stars, are snapshots of film workers labouring behind-the-scenes, which he feels compelled to capture as credit given to these unsung heroes drenched with sweat and tears in their largely unrecognised work.

Stills and movies capture two different worlds, Wong noted. Unlike his camera that freezes the distinct moments of impact on an action-packed set, a film doesn't offer full mobility. In a split second of time, and more often in the mist of chaos, the photographer and his camera's penetrating vision slice through an image and frame it the way the world will learn to savour. (Recorded and edited by Edith Chiu)

Film Education Programme for Secondary Students

The HKFA teamed with the Hong Kong Film Critics Society to present the 'Film Education Programme for Secondary Students' sponsored by Lee Hysan Foundation, an exploration of the interplay between Hong Kong cinema and the society that allowed local secondary school students to appreciate the many facets of local culture exhibited on celluloid with an astute insight. The first session held on 5 October at the HKFA cinema was accompanied by film clips taken from the 1950s and 60s classics *The Kid* (1950), *The Dividing Wall* (1952), *In the Face of Demolition* (1953), *Save Your Water Supply* (1954), *Three Love Affairs* (1963). HKFCS lecturer Keeto Lam and guest speaker Law Kar led the discussion down a fruitful path by involving the participating students in a retrospection to gain insight into the daily life of lower-class urban society, women and gender differences, and Western influences on the younger generation.



Keeto (left) and Law Kar