

## Foreword

Yu Mo-wan, original name Yu Kar-lung, a native of Taishan, Guangdong. Shortly after his birth in Shanghai on 24th November 1930, his family moved back to Guangdong. He split his childhood between Hong Kong and his hometown where his parents practised medicine, and developed a passion for film and Cantonese opera.

A journalism graduate of Zhongye Academy in Hong Kong, he returned to the mainland to join in the war of liberation, enlisted himself in the Jiangxi, Hu'nan, Dalingshan column of Dongguan. At the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, he was assigned to work at the People's Government of Taiping Township, Dongguan City and subsequently the Guangzhou Development Bureau. Married in 1958 with two children, Yu began to pursue studies in the history of Chinese cinema, and made Hong Kong his permanent home where he left his family to seek treatment for hepatitis in 1964. Yu and his wife agreed to a divorce after a long separation.

Inspired by Weng Lingwen's article 'A Hong Kong Cinema Without History', he embraced the study of Hong Kong film history as a lifelong endeavour. With the support of Lau Siu-ying whom he married in 1967, he quitted his full time job to engross himself in his pursuit. His private collection of Hong Kong film artifacts began to take shape, and his many interviews with big names of the film industry through the renowned film publicist Lam Kam, a personal friend, slowly filled the pages of a Hong Kong cinema history book.

Yu's ties with the Hong Kong International Film Festival started in 1978 when his research works and articles were published in its publication. It was followed by a seven-year spell as a researcher with Sil-Metropole Organisation. Between 1995 and 2001, he served as the Hong Kong Film Archive's Programme Coordinator/Research Officer of the Research Unit, laying the foundation of a fast growing library of research archives, launching the *Hong Kong Filmography* series, and curating a series of topical screening programmes and exhibitions during his tenure. Ten of his publications were released between 1985 and 2001, including *Eighty Years of Hong Kong Cinema* and five

volumes of *Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema*.

In 2001, he received the Honourable Medal, a prestigious accolade given by the Hong Kong SAR government for lifetime contributions to the community. He was feted by the Hong Kong Film Awards in 2005, receiving the Profession Spirit Award. A tireless, dedicated professional, he had served as advisor to the Hong Kong International Film Festival, the now defunct Urban Council and Regional Council, and as advisor of Film and Performing Arts (Chinese Opera) for the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. His encyclopedic knowledge of film had benefited numerous individuals and organisations over the years. In 2000 and 2001, he was invited by the Foshan Cultural Bureau to assume an advisory role for the establishment of the Wong Fei-hung Museum and the Cantonese Opera Museum in Foshan.

Yu died of a heart attack at 76 in Guangzhou on 8 April 2006. A selfless researcher and collector, he had entrusted the Hong Kong Film Archive with his prized collection of tens and thousands of magazines, brochures, handbills and stills in recent years in the hope of sharing the body of lifetime work with people who share a similar vision. A pioneer of Hong Kong film research, Mr Yu Mo-wan will be remembered for his passion and vigour with the gratitude, respect and admiration of many.

(Translated by Agnes Lam)

## **Oral History Interview with Mr Yu Mo-wan**

**Date: 29 January 2001**

**Place: Hong Kong Film Archive**

**Interviewer: Donna Chu**

**Collated by Janice Chow**

### **The Early Years**

**The Dragon by the Clouds** My original name is Yu Kar-lung (literally family-dragon); Mo-wan is my school name. The phrase 'cloud dragon' probably comes from the image of dragons flying among the clouds. The name 'Mo-wan' was given to me by Lam Kam's big brother Lam Sai-hung. It's the name on my ID card by which I've been known since.

I was born on the 24th November 1930. I am a native of Taishan, Guangdong. Both my parents were doctors. I was born in Shanghai where my mother practised medicine while my father was still a medical student. When my father graduated, my family moved back south to Guangdong and settled in Guangzhou. My family was well-off. Being renowned doctors in the area, my parents were too busy tending to the patients to take care of us.

I have always loved film and Cantonese opera. It would be hard to explain my love for them. With a deep pocket I could see every show I fancied. Chinese films were a rarity in those days, so were local Hong Kong productions. Western pictures were the mainstay. Tickets were cheap at a few cents.

**Living with the Lams** I am a Yu but grew up with the Lam Family. My little brother was classmates with Lam Sai-ching. One time, I was looking for reference books for one of my boy scouts assignments. My little brother told me that his classmate's home was practically a library and brought me there. Sai-ching's eldest brother Sai-hung is a book lover and got us to copy books manually for him, since there was no copiers then. He could teach us how to read and write, and introduced us to poetry and prose. Under his guidance, I fell in love with books quickly and gained a grip on classical Chinese literature. I found a second home in the Lams and had since been staying over at the

family, for six years in total, from age 12 to age 18.

I called Lam Kam ‘Fifth Brother’. Originally names Lam Sai-chung, he was fifth in the family. Lam was first involved with stage play and crossed over to film upon meeting the director Wong Tat-choi, working in publicity like Weng Lingwen. There were only three film studios in Hong Kong: Yung Hwa, Grandview and Nanyang. Publicity work took Lam to the film sets where he developed ideas for promotional pieces. I tagged along, seeing filmmaking in action and meeting Ng Cho-fan, Lee Tit, Ng Wui, Wong Man-lei and other great names of the cinema.

**Shuttling Back and Forth Guangzhou** During the civil war in 1946-47, many renowned literati such as Mao Dun headed south to Hong Kong and three universities were subsequently founded, Zhongye Academy being one. I chose journalism out of the different disciplines because there’s something in my personality that drew me to it and I seemed to have a gift for writing. But I never went into journalism, and the stint as editor of *China & Overseas Movie News* in the 1980s was my only journalistic experience.

I went to the mainland for work in 1948 and met my first wife there. In 1964, I returned to Hong Kong, but unable to bring her along, we were separated for some years before we agreed to a divorce. We were both young, in our thirties, and our son and daughter were left to the care of my mother in Guangzhou. My wife later married a fellow student at her teachers’ training college, and I also remarried.

## **Hong Kong Must Have Its Own Film History**

**The Trinity of Film Studies** I was inexplicably hooked on history, besides film, and began delving into Chinese film history in around 1958, 59. I was then mature enough to conduct proper research. Working as an official at the Guangzhou Development Bureau, I began purchasing books on the subject which slowly took up every free inch of space of my house. Chinese cinema history was my forte and I devoted all my time and energy to it. It was my calling.

From 1959 to 1964 when I returned to Hong Kong, I had some five, six years of research experience under my belt, understanding that Chinese cinema encompasses three places: Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Cinema of the Mainland was first researched properly and compiled by Cheng Jihua into *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema* (1963). Studies in Taiwanese cinema were pioneered by Lü Su-Shang who wrote the inestimable *History of Cinema and Drama in Taiwan* (1961). Only Hong Kong cinema alone hadn't been properly researched. The idea of a missing chapter in the history of Chinese cinema caused me unease. Then the article 'Hong Kong Must Have Its Own Film History' written by Weng Lingwen dawned on me. I was determined to retrieve the missing page of Chinese cinema, and from 1965 onwards, focused my research on Hong Kong cinema.

I followed the 'trinity' principle from the very beginning. First and foremost, I watched films; Second, I interviewed film workers; Third, I researched on textual material, including film-related publications, magazines and all printed material. I went through a spell of binge film-watching and was really lucky to have seen most pre-war releases, though memory has escaped me. Hong Kong films were given the right-of-way when I set my goal on studying Hong Kong cinema. I tagged along with Lam Kam, who was well acquainted with players of film, Cantonese opera, and newspaper industries, and specialised in film and only film.

Without having mastered the art of conducting interviews, I only had casual talks with film veterans. Then I started building up my collection of film literature. Film magazines were flourishing and you simply couldn't get them all. But the number dropped sharply in the 1970s, and there are even fewer now.

**Compiling the Hong Kong Filmography** I didn't set out with a plan but to watch any film that came along, talk to as many people as I could, and buy any book that hit newsstands. But after three, four years, I was able to put them into some kind of order, and to map out a plan, that is to compile a filmography of Hong Kong films. To study Hong Kong cinema, one must have knowledge of the number of films produced over the

years, the types of films, etc. Containing such basics such as when the first film was made, and names of prominent film companies, directors, trends, etc, a filmography would sketch out the development and history of Hong Kong cinema.

It was 1965. Approximately 7,000 titles had been released so far. I designed an index, complete with serial numbers, years and dates of release, companies, screenwriters and directors, box office records and footnotes. I gathered that film didn't arrive in Hong Kong until 1896<sup>[1]</sup>, and the *Chinese Mail* was the major local newspaper launched in 1895, beating the territory's first film by a year. With this information, I went to the University of Hong Kong to hand copy every film-related piece from the *Chinese Mail* chronologically, day by day, month by month and year by year, all the way until 1924.

There were always one or two influential broadsheet dailies of an era. *Wah Kiu*, *Sing Tao* and *Kung Sheung* were the three most important newspapers of the time, with *Wah Kiu* launched in 1925 being the most comprehensive in its coverage, especially in entertainment news. Hence, my research from 1925 onwards had been based on *Wah Kiu Yat Po*. The Wah Kiu HQ was situated on Hollywood Road. I haven't met Shum Wai-yau (founder of the newspaper) nor his men before but somehow summoned up enough courage to knock on their door. Mr Shum agreed to a young lad's request to do some research at their office and even found me a seat in the editorial room. They had a room full of old newspapers, organised into six-month bound volumes. I spent half a year inside that room, beginning with the first headline of 1925. My boss is an old friend of mine and eventually I quitted my job to devote more time to it, splitting my time between Hong Kong University and the Wah Kiu office, devouring papers from the 1920s to 70s. *Oriental* eclipsed *Wah Kiu* in importance from the 1970s onwards, so *Oriental* and *Apple Daily* are the major newspapers I fall back on these days. I kept copying film-related info, from decades of newspapers, to the last detail, and my patience never ran out.

Breadth and depth is prerequisite, so is concentration. This is the golden rule, and how I taught my *protégée* Yuen Tsz-ying. To be well-learned means you have to know a great deal before you can claim to have mastered the subject area; Research, however, is a

specialised discipline. I have been studying Hong Kong film for decades, and a full seven years went into compiling a filmography alone. Of course there was proofreading to be done. The tentative filmography had to be checked against the indices obtained from the film distributors, numbering more than twenty and each distributing several hundred titles. All film magazines had to be cross-checked too. Seven years passed, and the Hong Kong Filmography was born, and with it came a concept of Hong Kong cinema.

**The Problem of Phasing** Then I progressed to the second stage. How does one approach a cinema with over eighty years of history? I moved ahead to the right direction, that is to study the problem of phasing. How many phases is a cinema of eighty years of history divided into?

I wrote an article entitled 'Notes for a History of Hong Kong Cinema' in 1978 collected in the 2nd Hong Kong International Film Festival retrospective catalogue. Based on the information in hand, I did indepth analyses of the different phases. Early Hong Kong filmmakers were predominantly foreigners, and I called the time *The Edison Shorts* were made the 'Initial Period'. Then came the 'Nascent Period' beginning from 1913 when Lai Man-wai and others made *Zhuang Zi Tests His Wife* (1913/14) and *Rouge* (1925); The 1930s was the 'Growing Period', followed by the 'Developing Period' and the 'Prosperity Period', and four others.

Embarking on the third stage of my search, it wasn't very long before I realised these assumptions were overgeneralised. Hong Kong cinema was made up of Mandarin, Cantonese and Chaozhou films and documentaries, among many others, and the 'Prosperity Period' of Cantonese film might not coincide with the boom of Mandarin cinema, and such categorisation was therefore inconclusive, if not arbitrary. Therefore I abandoned it for a cinema timeline by the decades, starting from the silent film period, which would give a more precise description.

**Ties with the Hong Kong International Film Festival** The story all began with a letter to Mr Lin Nien-tung, the programmer of the 2nd edition of the Festival. I caught

wind that he was curating an exhibition of film-related literature at the City Hall and decided to write him a letter offering my private collection for display. He was thoroughly impressed and some of his first words I still remember to this day: 'I would never think that Hong Kong has a hidden dragon like you!' By then, I had been burying myself in my research for over a decade, oblivious to outside distractions. He wondered why I didn't get my work published, getting my hands dirty with practical work. But I believed that all those socialising would be a waste of time and wouldn't do my search any good.

After that, I was commissioned to write a couple of articles for the catalogue. Lin's focus was on Cantonese cinema and we talked about the Big four, namely Sun Luen, The Union, Kong Ngee, Overseas Chinese, but he missed out Grandview, which had a longer history and an even more significant presence. Sadly it was never mentioned before, until my article came out. The other article on the different phases of Hong Kong film history contained insight, thoughts and ideas from my researcher diary.

My collaboration with the Festival and its programmers Lin Nien-tung, Lau Shing-hon, Shu Kei, Li Cheuk-to and Law Kar had never ceased. I would provide different topical presentations with chronologies and stills, or contribute articles, biographies and indices.

The Festival is noted for two of its presentations: its excellent retrospective of the local cinema which put Hong Kong on the international map, and its outstanding programming of Asian cinemas, such as Iran and Indonesia, over the years. From what I know, many film workers had especially flown to Hong Kong to see these Asian films and it's an incredible achievement.

## **Work**

**Behind Every Successful Man** I had had many jobs, mainly in the handbag industry. My boss was a friend of mine and I had worked for him for nearly twenty years. Being the head left me plenty of time for film research. I met my present wife Lau Siu-ying there. She made handbag samples, and soon I fell in love with this clever and capable



woman. She knew my film research work long before our marriage and, founding it a meaningful thing to do, had been very supportive all along. She was financially independent. I had a job but all the money I made went to my research, but she had no qualms. I didn't bring home the pay-cheque but she took care of me so well that I could concentrate on my work. The fact that we had no children of our own meant I could devote to my studies wholeheartedly, for over thirty years. I am thankful to my wife who deserves as much credit as me, if not more. If I were to thank only one person in my life it would be my wife.

**A Researcher at Sil-Metropole** Before joining the Hong Kong Film Archive I had a seven-year spell with Sil-Metropole Organisation, through the introduction of Cheng Jihua. Cheng was then a leading figure in Chinese cinema and culture, and an authority on Chinese film history. My twenty years of film research, published articles and papers caught his attention.

Mr Cheng came to Hong Kong in around 1980. Through Ma Fung-kwok working at the publicity department of Feng Huang Motion Picture Co, he asked to meet me. From our first meeting it was obvious that we had a lot in common, both being film researchers. Finding me a talent, he left the Sil-Metropole chairman Liu Yat-yuen the words, 'You must get this guy.' Then Lau Fong approached me with an offer. I was able to negotiate the job on my terms, that is I would only do half-days and only on research and cataloguing work. I was one of those lucky people who got paid to do their hobby.

Sil-Metropole subscribed to almost every newspaper of Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. I clipped and filed film-related pieces and submitted the files every week. I made copies for each of the eight board directors and saved them reading the whole lot.

There were also ad-hoc assignments. When *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) took the box office by storm, they wanted a report on what made it work. And I was asked to compile a filmography of the 600 titles released under its subsidiaries of Great Wall, Fung Huang, Sun Luen and The Union. The board of directors reshuffled every several years and it

was my duty to brief these bosses from the mainland on Hong Kong cinema.

**Hong Kong Film Archive** The beginning of the Archive had only three people in it: Mr Tony Ma, Mr Richie Lam and Mr Tong [Dennis Tong]. We contacted with each other, particularly Lam and Tong who always dropped by and had a chat.

Being part of the Archive from 1995 to 2001, I'm just so happy to see the Archive growing, both in its collection and reputation. Everything was built from scratch, thanks to the hard work of my colleagues and support of so many people and organisations.

My colleagues had been wonderful. Never had I in my long career come across a team that got on so well together. My assistant Janice Chow was very competent and we made a good team.

I'd got some solid groundwork done at the Archive, notably the Hong Kong Filmography series, and the three annual exhibitions. I put my heart and soul into my work, and was pleased with them. As my partnership with Ms Chow grew stronger, each exhibition excelled the previous one, and I'm quite proud of the retrospectives of Tong Tik-sang, Wong Fei-hung, and Bruce Lee.

The production of a filmography that spans 70 decades, from the silent film period to the 1980s, however preliminary, owes a great deal to the hard work of many people, in particular the staff at the Hong Kong International Film Festival and the Hong Kong Film Archive. Still a lot of work has to be done. Many artifacts and documents of early Hong Kong cinema were dissipated and thought lost and it was only in recent years that some important findings had been made in the Zhongshan Library in Guangzhou. Regrettably, a lot of this information eluded the first volumes of the filmography. Guangdong and Guangzhou are the main market for pre-war Hong Kong films. Newspapers of the two cities, including *Guangzhou Daily*, *Shimin Daily*, *Tien Kwong Morning News* and *Ling Sing* are all important sources of information to be researched on for the revised edition of the first three volumes.

## On Hong Kong Film

**What is film?** Film, and Hong Kong film more than any other, is essentially a commercial product, which is contemplative and has its own aesthetic and entertainment values. Whether good or bad, its theme has a certain impact on the viewer. A film's aesthetics are expressed in screenwriting, directing, acting, photography, editing, etc, and the quality varies. The importance of entertainment values simply cannot be overlooked. A business investment or mass entertainment void of mirth and enjoyment would be a flop. Marrying didactic and entertainment values you would have a film that is both critically acclaimed as well as commercially successful.

**The Lost Pearls** Hong Kong film had since its inception made for overseas Chinese. Natives of Guangdong, namely Cantonese and Chaozhou natives made up the largest population in overseas Chinese. Most Chaozhou natives congregated in Southeast Asia, which explains why Chaozhou-dialect films were rarely released in Hong Kong. The over three hundred titles I gathered only constituted about half of the total production. The production of Chaozhou and Amoy dialects films ceased in around 1965 and no one knows exactly how many of the total 1,000 were made in Hong Kong. The journey of discovery would take one to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, The Phillipines, Taiwan and perhaps as far as the U.S.

Taiwanese, Amoy of Fujian, Chaozhou and Hainan are all variants of the Min language group. Fujian migrants made up the majority of the Overseas Chinese population. Thanks to the familiarity of its tongue, Amoy dialect films made in Hong Kong were warmly received in Taiwan. However, sooner or later, people in Taiwan would want the money for themselves. A boom of films made in Taiwanese ensued, the credit of which must go to Hong Kong film. This is one of my findings.

Chaozhou-dialect film had a huge impact in the Chinese Diaspora. When *The Story of Lau Meng Chu* (1965) was released in Bangkok, Chaozhou shopkeepers reportedly closed their doors and flocked to the cinemas, causing quite a stir.

**Shelved ‘Overseas Films’** Several categories of films still eluded us. Firstly, films made in Hong Kong which were solely for overseas distribution, like the over three hundred titles produced by Tongyong. No one in Hong Kong could get hold of the complete list yet. There must be more companies of this nature out there but exactly how many no one really knows.

Besides, there must be hundreds of films that never made it to the screen. This is another challenge for film researchers. When I said the number of Hong Kong films has topped the 11,000 mark it really isn’t an overstatement.

**A Fine Tradition** With over thirty years of research under my belt, I had arrived at an initial conclusion as to what made Hong Kong cinema tick and what are its deep-rooted problems and shortcomings. By its fine tradition, Hong Kong film is contemplative—‘patriotism’ in the pre-war era, which aroused in the people anti-aggression passion against the Japanese. *At This Crucial Juncture* (1938) represents a united resistance movement mounted by Hong Kong film workers. Not a single soul would work with the Japanese, and it’s a remarkable episode in our history.

‘Human relations’ was the common thread that weaved pre-1960s productions together. It remains central to the Chinese morality and family melodramas were the mainstay of Mandarin, Cantonese, and Chaozhou cinemas, represented by such exemplary works as *Mutual Understanding* (1954) and *Festival Moon* (1953).

The third tradition is edification, which I learned from the film veteran Moon Kwan Man-ching. Kwan, Chiu Shu-sun, Lai Man-wai and others made only films that are edifying, and in which the good guys are rewarded and the villains punished. This accounted for the majority of the 7,000 films made prior to the 1960s, whether in Mandarin or Cantonese.

**Shortcomings** What lie in the dark side of Hong Kong film? Run-of-the-mill works

and crude imitations.

The 1970s was the watershed moment in Hong Kong film history. Before the 1970s, the cinema embraced Chinese culture for moral integrity but slowly succumbed to the worst of Western culture—pornography, violence, rebellion without a cause, psychopathy and superstition.

Both the volume of production and quality suffered at the ebb of Hong Kong cinema from the 1970s. Hong Kong film used to be the favourite of so many places in the world, particularly in Southeast Asia, Japan and Korea, so why did it lose its foothold in the market after 1993? The poor quality is to blame. The days of making big money were gone and buyers were deterred by making one bad purchase after another.

**Reviving Hong Kong Cinema**      There's still hope of a revival, though it's not going to be easy. Hong Kong people are too smart to let Hong Kong cinema die, but reviving the industry is an arduous journey which will require the tireless effort of many people. We need screenwriting talent. Script is the soul of a film and without a good script there won't be a good film. The drought of screenwriters was the last straw and only proper grooming can fix the problem.

Secondly, the development of on-screen talent. We need movie stars that are worshipped and adored but sadly we're losing them to Hollywood.

## **Research and Published Works**

***Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema***      I turned my pen to writing upon meeting Lin Nien-tung in 1977. After that, my first film essay was published in the *Ming Pao Monthly*, entitled 'On *Chinese Communist Moving Pictures History*'. I wrote a review on the book written by Zhang Litao. And once I did, there was no holding back. A score of essays and ten film-related publications had been published over the next three decades.

My writings on the silent film period were initially compiled into *Anecdotes of Hong*

*Kong Film* (1985). The text was rewritten and published in the first volume of the *Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema* series, a sponsored publication of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, and four volumes had been produced so far, documenting Hong Kong cinema up to the 1950s.<sup>[2]</sup> With the enormous breadth and depth of Hong Kong cinema I dare not contemplate writing its history. But at age 70, I feel the urge to at least put into words the anecdotes of people and events that are worth knowing about, for the reference of future film historians and researchers.

The Sam Tung Uk Museum (then belonged to the Regional Council) publication *Eighty Years of Hong Kong Cinema* (1994) was the most significant of the one million words published so far. In it, I outlined the milestones in Hong Kong cinema history, complete with many appendices, including ‘One Hundred Film Workers’ and ‘Awards’.

The ‘Film’ chapter (1991) of the *Encyclopedia of China* is another work of mine that has academic and historical merits. It takes a team of well-learned writers to accomplish the formidable task. I was working for Sil-Metropole when *Encyclopedia* was scouting for writers in Hong Kong. The name of Yu Mo-wan popped up. I went on to compile dozens of articles for the volume, including ‘Hong Kong Film Industry’, ‘Taiwanese Film Industry’, company profiles, and biographies of actors and directors.

But the body of essays and topical studies has yet to be compiled into a single volume. Besides being published in the Festival catalogues, my works also appeared in *Nanbei Ji*, *City Entertainment* and *Film Appreciation Journal*, among others.

**Three Missions** In film studies, besides compiling filmographies and delineating its history, people also warrant an indepth study in the form of a ‘Who’s Who of Hong Kong Cinema’. My life goal is to accomplish three tasks: First, to compile a complete Hong Kong filmography. It had been the priority of my work at the Archive since 1995, and the result was the *Hong Kong Filmography* series, an ongoing project. The second task is the event-based *Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema*; Last but not least is a ‘Who’s Who’ that contains stills, profiles and filmographies of important figures of Hong Kong cinema. The three series would path a smoother path for future studies, with the filmography

providing a quick index, the anecdotes for a chronicle of events, and the Who's Who for people references.

Time only allowed me to set the first two missions in motion. I have lots of other publication ideas such as a *Hong Kong Film Dictionary* and by sharing my thoughts with others I hope to pass the torch. The dictionary will provide exhaustive coverage of people, events and indeed any entries deemed appropriate. These ideas represent our common goals. And there's still so much more to explore out there.

## Studying Film

**A Lonely Road** Film research is a meaningful but painful work. Things have got better with the establishment of the Hong Kong Film Archive and my five years here had truly been a blessing. I was all alone for decades, paying for film tickets, interviews, and everything else out of my own pocket and asking little in return.

Researchers lead a boring and monotonous life. Imagine spending ten hours every day over the past twenty years doing paper work! Of course when it comes to one's interest, it's an entirely different matter. My son asked to learn from me but I refused. I would never let him walk in my shoes. It's a lonely quest and certainly not for the faint-hearted.

Thought of giving up never occurs to me. I've made it my mission because Chinese film history would never be complete without Hong Kong film history. I take pride in documenting the achievements of our predecessors, which is the one thing that fuels me through decades of work. And I know I am born for it.

It takes decades-long work to bear fruit. One is still very much a beginner in the initial ten years, and to achieve recognition takes a lifetime of work.

**The Master and His *Protégée*** Having said that it's a lonely, boring and all-consuming task, why did I still take a *protégée*? Call it fate, or chance. Like me, Yuen Tsz-ying is a film buff, obsessed with Hong Kong film since her teens. She had always

followed my moves. About eight years ago, she asked if I would take her under my wing, studying film. She's quitted her work, prepared to give it all. It's down right silly for someone to dig into Hong Kong film, paying everything out of her own pocket, for over ten years! I was impressed by her zeal, as well as her knowledge of Cantonese cinema, and took her in.

Several months later, I received a grant from the Arts Development Council to publish the five volumes of the *Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema*, which included an assistant fee. The time was just ripe for Yuen to help with the preliminary research. I became her mentor, both professionally and personally. All in all I am happy with her progress.

**Attitude to Research** Film research takes two things. First, you have to be immune to pain and boredom, coupled with an insatiable interest. Second, you have to be well versed in the culture and knowledgeable. After all, film studies doesn't exist as a stand-alone discipline but has to be dealt with in connection with other national cinemas, of the US, Japan, France, Italy, Taiwan and Mainland China. It's important to get a grip of their history and culture in order to better understand Hong Kong cinema.

Studying Hong Kong film takes the knowledge of several other disciplines, Cantonese opera for one. One tenth, that is nearly 1,000 titles of all Hong Kong's 10,000 productions used Cantonese opera as their source and it's possible to understand these films without first understanding their origin. Also, one must develop an eye for reading as there are over 1,000 film adaptations of Chinese and world classics.

Film historians must be objective, unbiased and composed. Often we are confronted with the question of stance-taking. I wanted Sub-Culture to publish *Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema* because of the gentleman agreement I reached with the publisher (Mr Pang Chi-ming): Not a single word can, or should, be edited. Publication first, criticism later. I am extremely careful not to take sides and write for the benefit of Chinese readers. I think it's only here and now in Hong Kong that you can examine things objectively.



One of the few people I respect is Sek Kei. Penning film criticism is what he does everyday. His knowledge and expertise wins my admiration and praise. Unlike many criticisms which are biased and slanted, his reviews are objective and fair.

**Retired, But Not Retiring** I had announced my retirement twice before. The first time was quitting Sil-Metropole in my sixties and now a decade later, I retired from my job at the Archive. But I'll continue to work regardless, because work is the only thing that keeps me going. I seek neither fame nor money, only something that interests me and is meaningful. I'll work till the day I die, considering it a blessing even, but I can say for certain that the task that won't be accomplished then. You can only do your best.

(Translated by Agnes Lam)

#### Editor's Notes

1. According to Mr Yu Mo-wan, film was introduced to Hong Kong in 1896 (See *Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema, Vol 1, 1896-1929*, Hong Kong: Sub-Culture Ltd, 1996, pp 5-9). Other scholars suggested that it didn't arrive until a year later in 1897 (See Frank Bren, 'Photography and Electricity: A New Chronology of Hong Kong Early Cinema', *Hong Kong Film Archive Newsletter*, Issue 6, November 1998, pp 7-10; Zhou Chengren, Li Yizhuang, *Early Hong Kong Film History, 1897-1945*, Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2005, pp 10-14, in Chinese).
2. *Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema, Vol 5, 1955-1959* was later published in August 2001.