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Costume Guru Hung Kuen-hoi

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The Touch of Gold—Jin Yong & Hong Kong Cinema

To Know Thymself—Jin Yong’s Musings on Films by Screenwriter Lin Huan

Po Fung

Before life as Jin Yong, Louis Cha was a screenwriter for Great Wall Movie Enterprises Ltd. under the pseudonym Lin Huan. Besides crafting screenplays, Cha also wrote film reviews under the various guises of Xiao Zijia, Lin Zichang, Yao Fulan, Yao Jiayi.¹ His reviews included Great Wall productions, even those penned by himself as Lin. Looking at these articles today, we see that they serve not only as precious autobiographical insights into Cha’s life as a screenwriter, but they also hold significant referential values. This text will be examining Cha’s reflections on films published in *Ta Kung Pao*, in an attempt to piece together Cha’s creative impulse and defining character, from his time as a screenwriter that carried onto his later literary works as Jin Yong in the *wuxia* genre.

Lin Huan’s first screenplay was *The Peerless Beauty* (1953), a film directed by Li Pingqian. Before its premiere, Cha released an article in the evening edition of *Ta Kung Pao*, *The New Evening Post*. Titled ‘Regarding *The Peerless Beauty*’ under his pseudonym Lin, he mentioned the *xiqu* and dramas that were themed around the story of Lord Xinling and Lady Yu before the emergence of the film version. The commentary also touched on the film’s theme of everyone being ‘inextricably linked’, with Lady Yu embodying the Mohist philosophical belief of universal compassion and non-aggression in curbing existential chaos.² Two days after the film’s release and under his other pen name Xiao Zijia, Cha discussed the film’s distinguishing features in *Ta Kung Pao*’s special column ‘Daily Film Talk’: ‘the central themes within the film dealt with patriotism and anti-war sentiment, while rendering on screen the intimate interdependence between people behind the proverbial idiom “without the lips, the teeth will be exposed to the cold”’. The screenwriter had researched history of the Warring States period, and was able to more or less transcribe the spirit of its times onto screen, while dialogues of the film’s main characters were largely drawn from classical texts. For example, some of Lady Yu’s words came from the *Mozi* philosophical text, whereas the debate between Lord Xinling and King Wei over rescuing Zhao state was partly taken from *Strategies of the Warring States*. In the film, no attempt was made to modernise characters’ thoughts from that era with contemporary thinking, in order to preserve historical authenticity. However, the use of modern language was somewhat unavoidable, such as when King Wei said to Lady Yu: “cry not, thou pleases me” (Don’t cry, I like you very much) would have been incomprehensible to most people today.³

In comparing the two texts by Lin and Xiao, we notice a lot of similarities in the details. *The*

¹ Li Yijian (ed), *Anthology of Hong Kong Contemporary Literary Works – the Jin Yong Volume*, Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 2016, ‘Foreword: Jin Yong and His Literary World’ p 28 (in Chinese).

² Lin Huan, ‘Regarding *The Peerless Beauty*’, *New Evening Post*, Hong Kong, 19 September 1953 (in Chinese).

³ Xiao Zijia, ‘The Peerless Beauty’ in ‘Daily Film Talk’ special column, *Ta Kung Pao*, Hong Kong, 24 September 1953 (in Chinese).

Peerless Beauty was in fact the only historical drama from Jin Yong's screenwriting days.⁴ From Xiao's reflections on *The Peerless Beauty*, we could readily observe that he contributed the success of a historical film to his aversion to 'modernise characters' thoughts from that era with contemporary thinking, in order to preserve historical authenticity'. This idea of 'preserving historical authenticity' was to prevent the creator from pushing the characters' thinking in ways that would have been impossible for that time, just to serve the film's thematic purposes. On the other hand, despite his emphasis on historical authenticity, he admitted to 'the need for present-day speech' in making the film accessible to contemporary audiences. Through this lens, we got a sense of how language was being considered and consciously adapted in relation to historical subject matter by Jin Yong early on. Even though dialogues had to be modernised to some extent, they must not adopt obvious contemporary lexicon. In his later work *The Book and the Sword*, he also 'tried substituting "ruminating", "pondering", "mulling over in secret" for "thinking" and "considering"; "keep one's eyes peeled" and "be careful" in place of "pay attention" etc.'⁵ From *The Peerless Beauty* to *The Book and the Sword*, Jin Yong's attention to details of language never wavered.

The review also touched on the film's songs, choreography, film score, and set and costume designs. All of which illustrated Jin Yong's wealth of knowledge in a myriad of cultural and artistic domains even then; these were to become the sources from which his *wuxia* novels would later take flight. In particular, his views on a musical scene in *The Peerless Beauty* were notable: 'the most beautiful image in the film's musical scenes, I believe, was when Lady Yu sang 'Guan Ju' from *The Book of Songs* while playing the Chinese zither. It was like a vision from a classical Chinese painting, but at the same time the audience knew that a great misfortune was about to befall her, thus clouding her simple and sincere pleasure with a tinge of tragedy that only adds to its bittersweet literary splendour. Inspired by movements and choreography from Peking opera, Lady Yu's colourful dance aimed to espouse the exceptional art of Chinese dance performance.' The scene he highlighted where Lady Yu (played by Hsia Moon) sang with the zither, indeed perfectly encapsulated the style of classical Chinese art, and 'at the same time the audience knew that a great misfortune was about to befall her, clouding her simple and sincere pleasure with a tinge of tragedy that only adds to its bittersweet literary splendour.'

Incorporating elements of dance and song into films was a common convention from the appearance of 'talking pictures' up till the 1960s. However, Jin Yong's vision of these musical elements in films was more sophisticated; for him song and dance were not merely there to elevate aesthetic pleasure or entertain, but also to bind with the film's emotional core. In *The Peerless Beauty*, this was to contrast the present bliss with the forthcoming sorrow. This erudite understanding of form and function would be applied to fighting scenes in his future *wuxia* novels, where provocative combat must always

⁴ Jin Yong also wrote the screenplay for another period film, *The Fairy Dove* (1957), an adapted folk tale that did not require special analysis in context of this era.

⁵ Jin Yong, 'Discussions Starting From an Actress' in *Jin Yong Essays*, Hong Kong: Ming Ho Publications, 2007, p 66 (in Chinese).

be infused with narrative emotions; the principal desire was to reach the Chinese dramatic ideal of enacting a military scene the civil way, where movement and performance must express the deeper emotional and narrative impulse. This first-person exposition on *The Peerless Beauty* hinted at Jin Yong's subsequent philosophy and approach to fighting scenes in his *wuxia* novels.

Lin Huan's second produced screenplay was the film *Never Leave Me* (1955) directed by Yuen Yang-an.⁶ Prints of the film no longer exist in Hong Kong, but here we present other information relating to the work: the story is set during the War of Resistance against Japan, Mu Sangqing (played by Hsia Moon) is separated from her husband Hu Jingren (played by Fu Che) while fleeing the war. Later, she receives news of his death. After the Resistance, Mu becomes a singer and meets a doctor Guo Shuseng (played by Ping Fan), who also loses his injured wife during a blackout in the war. The two help each other through the emotional traumas they have experienced, and eventually become engaged. But then Mu's husband reappears still alive. Overcome by the shocking situation, Mu dies from a heart attack. Starring Zhou Xuan and directed by He Zhaozhang, *An All-Consuming Love* (1947) had much the same narrative. Xia Yan's *Under the Roofs of Shanghai* also shared a similar story; the only difference being that the long-lost husband withdraws from the love triangle in the end.

Never Leave Me was released on the 14 July, 1955, on the same day Yao Jiayi published in *Ta Kung Pao* the article 'The Joys and Sorrows in Wartime, a Discussion on *Never Leave Me*': 'I watched the test screening of *Never Leave Me* with some friends and everyone agreed that it was a pretty good film in many ways, from its central message, artistic vision to entertainment value....However, the screenwriter Lin Huan himself commented: "there were many issues that could only be described as so-so." ...another young acquaintance objected to Mu Sangqing saying "Never leave me", he felt that it was weak for her to express that. However, I thought to myself: "If you ever truly fell in love with someone and she was to leave you, I wonder if those words would not also escape your lips?" Of course with his robust character, perhaps he would never utter those words, but I was sure that those sentiments must still linger inside.'

From these passages, besides observing that Cha had used a third person narrative for humble self-criticism on Lin Huan, he also commented: 'yet another friend who very much appreciated the characterisations and structure of the film; he remarked that besides the Japanese invaders, none of the story's main characters were bad people. Some had tragic pasts, others were eccentric, mentally ill or just plain disagreeable, but they were all victims of war. Anyone who looked deeper would sympathise with them.' Although the comment concerned the characters in *Never Leave Me*, the same could have as easily been said about numerous characters later created by Jin Yong, such as the 'Golden Serpent

⁶ Lin Huan's screenplay for *When You Were Not with Me* was already finished in 1953, even though the film was not released till 1958. For details, see 'From Lin Huan to Jin Yong – Louis Cha's Creative Trajectory From Screenwriter to Novelist', originally presented at *Hong Kong Literature and Culture of the 1950s Seminar Series*, hosted by Lingnan University's The Centre for Humanities Research. Later published on the *Hong Kong Film Critics Society* website. See Mathew Cheng (ed), *Jin Yong – From Hong Kong to the World*, Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2016 (in Chinese).

Gentleman' in *Sword Stained with Royal Blood*, the 'Golden Haired Lion King' from *The Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber* and Yip Yi-neung in *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils*. A character's painful past would render even the most intractable super-villain sympathetic to an audience. This passage perfectly illuminated Jin Yong's distinguishing quality in characterisations, as compared to other *wuxia* novelists.

Yao Jiayi also critiqued Lin Huan's next screenplay *The Three Loves* (1956): 'First and foremost, what this film brought to its audience was a breath of fresh air; its focus was not to preach or impart wisdom, but simply to tell fascinating stories. It endeavoured to bring something surprising, something 'beyond expectations' to its viewers, one might say that the most important part of these stories was their intentions. Such that even if you disagreed with the story's arrangement after watching it, I believe you would say: "Oh, so that's how it is, would never have imagined it.'" ⁷

'Its focus was not to preach or impart wisdom, but simply to tell fascinating stories.' On the surface, this may seem like a common enough remark, but when placed in context with the public discourse of *Ta Kung Pao* and Great Wall Movie Enterprises at the time, it becomes a significant and telling insight. That was because in those days, outputs from both *Ta Kung Pao* and Great Wall Movie Enterprises focused heavily on the moral function of cinema to 'preach or impart wisdom', an emphasis that was almost dogmatic. When Jin Yong expressed his desire to only tell interesting stories, we see that his creative ideology was very much incompatible with leftist notions of art and literature of the time. It was not surprising then that shortly after this review, *Ta Kung Pao* published a featured essay examining greater meaning of the film *The Three Loves*. ⁸ Jin Yong's self-commentaries as a screenwriter were very much about his creative process, which steered away from delving deeper into his preferences for specific emotions or plot devices. For this, you can refer to my further analysis 'From Lin Huan to Jin Yong—Louis Cha's Creative Trajectory From Screenwriter to Novelist'. ⁹

Besides writing screenplays, Lin Huan also co-directed the film *The Nature of Spring* (1958) with Cheng Bugao, another work without a surviving print. When the film was released, Jin Yong had already been writing *wuxia* fiction for several years and *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* was being serialised in newspapers. *The Nature of Spring* was a romantic comedy about the narrow-minded Fu Che, who looked down on women's abilities to work; a smart and capable new assistant Chen Sisi eventually changed Fu's prejudice and he went on to fall in love with her. The following extract is 'Jin Yong' commenting as himself in his special column 'Three Sword Houses Essays' on *The Nature of Spring*: 'After dinner, I went with a few friends to watch a comedy film, *The Nature of Spring*. The film's narrative and characters were clearly inspired by British novelist Jane Austen's renowned *Pride and Prejudice*. I chose "inspired" rather than "adapted", because despite the principal storyline and

⁷ Yao Jiayi, 'Amusing Flights of Fancy – Talking about *The Three Loves*' in special 'film discussion' column, *Ta Kung Pao*, Hong Kong, 19 September 1956 (in Chinese).

⁸ Li Muzhang, 'The meanings embodied in the comedy satire of *The Three Loves*', *Ta Kung Pao*, Hong Kong, 22 September 1956 (in Chinese).

⁹ Refer to footnote 5.

structure being roughly the same, the transposition to film and Hong Kong had rendered the material and plot completely different.’¹⁰ I believe many may have noticed the important influence of foreign literature on Jin Yong’s creations. However, the statement here was the most frank and direct reference the author had ever made, making this short passage a precious text indeed.

Another aspect within *The Nature of Spring* that deserved further discussion was the temperament of its heroine; her resemblance to the intelligent Wong Yung from *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* written by Jin Yong around the same time was very much evident. Lin Huan as co-director might very well had a hand in casting for *The Nature of Spring*. When Lin Huan later scripted *One Million for Me* (1959), the film’s muse was also fashioned out of a similar mould. In both films, Chen Sisi was casted as the heroine. If in *The Peerless Beauty*, Hsia Moon epitomised the simple and innocent ‘Princess Fragrance’ archetype for Jin Yong, then Chen Sisi from *The Nature of Spring* perhaps embodied the resourceful and adaptable ‘Wong Yung’ heroine ideal in his mind. (Translated by Hayli Chwang)

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¹⁰ Jin Yong, ‘Pride and Prejudice’ in ‘Three Sword Houses Essays’ special column, *Ta Kung Pao*, Hong Kong, 11 November 1958 (in Chinese).

Oral History

Costume Guru Hung Kuen-hoi

Date: March 30, 2017

Interviewer: Karen So

Collated by Jodie Hui

Chor Lau-heung, Luk Siu-fung, Princess Fragrance, Nip Siu-sin and so forth are names that immediately conjure up iconic images of film and television characters from the 1970s to 80s. But who was responsible for bringing these fictional characters to three-dimensional life from *wuxia* novels? Much of it can be attributed to the hard work and creativity of a costume designer. Let acclaimed master costume designer, Hung Kuen-hoi, reveal to us the secrets of his craft.

An Unsentimental Education

I was born in 1946 in Gaoyao, Guangdong. Based on Hung's genealogy, it was customary for members of my generation, like Hung Cheung-hei, to have the character 'Cheung' in our names. Although my mother was raised in rural China, she was quite progressive. She broke with tradition and named me 'Kuen-hoi' because, as the name implies, she wanted her child 'to break free from the pack.' After the Liberation, my father migrated to Hong Kong. My mother also planned for me to migrate to Hong Kong when I was only three years old.

My father previously owned a shop in Zhuang Yuan Fang, Guangzhou city that specialised in Cantonese opera costumes. After he moved to Hong Kong, his business shifted to making everyday, traditional *tanzhuang* (literally 'Chinese suit'). Occasionally, he would further process costumes and Chinese bridal gowns for other boutiques such as Chung Wah and King Wah. Many of Sun Ma Si-tsang's and Yam Kim-fai's costumes were made by my father. At the time, most costume rental contracts for Cantonese film productions went to Lai Chu or Chan Kwun. Through them, my father was often commissioned to create costumes for lead actors. I arrived in Hong Kong in 1957 when I was eleven years old. I witnessed how hard my father had to work and two years later, I decided to quit school and join the business to help him. I took night classes at Eton Evening College, but my teachers from Mongkok Workers' Children School, the previous institution that I enrolled in, were sympathetic towards me. My classmates were also concerned about my decision to drop out of school and wanted to help me. My primary schoolmates are all grandfathers now. We've become lifelong friends and still gather to celebrate my birthday.

We used to live in Sai Tau Village, Kowloon City. Due to its low elevation, the region was subject to flooding during heavy rains. The water would enter through our door, and even the cutting table would be submerged. I remember when we were contracted to create costumes for *The Love Eterne* (1963), starring Betty Loh Ti and Ivy Ling Po, my father's apprentice and I had to wait until the floods subsided before we could work against the clock again. We finally worked non-stop for two nights in order to meet the deadline. By the time I turned 13 or 14, my skills were quite advanced. I carried a small kit around with me to ply my trade. I began to accept freelance work from film costume houses,

and made costumes for film companies such as Motion Picture & General Investment (MP & GI). I also developed a passion for the craft.

Debut in *The Last Woman of Shang*

In 1962, the Shaw Brothers Studio was set to film *The Last Woman of Shang* (1964). The assistant director, Wang Xinglei caught notice of me; he saw a hard-working 16 year-old upstart with some talent, and recommended me to be the costume designer. I was given direct access to the Shaw Brothers Studio wardrobe facilities and still remember the day that I strolled my way to the studio lot, clutching my scissors and tool kit. I was singing to myself because it felt like I had just won the lottery.

Wang explained the design concept for the costumes and we began to work in earnest—we researched old books, selected fabrics, and designed embroidery motifs for the various costumes in each scene. Archives and reference books for ancient attire were quite rare in the 60s considering that even Shen Congwen's *Ancient Chinese Clothing Research* had yet to be published. Wang and I agreed that the costumes needed to be simple and elegant, yet still possess a regal quality so as to be authentic to the period. I pored through dozens of antiquarian books to find samples of ancient embroidery motifs and enlarged the scale of the drawings threefold to use for later reference.

The embroidery that we used for the decorative trim of the costumes for Shin Young-kyun (as Emperor Zhou) and Linda Lin Dai (as Daji) were actually prints. We used special moulds to create prints that mimicked the relief-like quality of embroidery. It was a clever way of quickly reproducing the embroidery effect. We sent our designs to the art department where they printed the motifs on paper to a workable length before handing them over to a flock master who created plastic moulds. Applying glue to the moulds, the motifs were then pressed onto the fabric. Once dried, they were ready to be cut out. We created a host of embroidery samples for the production team to choose from before matching them up with the fabrics and colours of the costumes for each character. Finally we printed the (faux) embroidery onto the selected fabric.

Countless Collaborations with Chor Yuen

At the time, my father was the boss of our company and I worked as his assistant. We were commissioned to produce costumes for the Shaw Brothers Studio. Today, it would be called outsourcing. We didn't sign any contracts. The Shaw Brothers Studio had a set wardrobe budget. The accounts department would pay us based on the number of costumes that we produced for them. Back then, we knew nothing about negotiating for such things as screen credit for costume design; we were just happy to be paid. I remember being commissioned for a costume for the character of Lu Hsiang-chuan (played by Yueh Wah) in *Killer Clans* (1976). There was no time to actually embroider the costume; therefore, I cut out embroidered motifs that I previously purchased from Yue Hwa Chinese Products Emporium and sewed them onto the costume. I made the entire costume by myself, but Liu Chi-yu was credited with the costume design. That being said, Chor Yuen truly treated me quite well; I was credited as costume designer in many of his films. I didn't know it at the time and only discovered it recently when I

reviewed some archival materials.

Chor Yuen appreciated my contributions. I served as the costume designer for the majority of his films, particularly his film adaptations of Gu Long *wuxia* novels. We were like a heroic trio. The three of us were a permanent fixture on those productions: novel by Gu Long, direction by Chor Yuen and costume design by Hung Kuen-hoi. Chor Yuen's films performed well at the box office and he never skimped on the wardrobe budget. I was given free rein in terms of purchasing materials and the design process.

In those days, everyone worked under an extremely tight production schedule; the wardrobe department was no exception. We were often given just one day's notice before the shoot to create all the costumes. Chor Yuen might start principal photography on a new film the day after the set was completed. Once I received notice, I would immediately source the fabrics and complete the sewing patterns, because costumes had to be ready the next day too. There was barely enough time to rest, let alone sketching designs. Fortunately, most of the TVB actors had worn costumes produced by our company. I knew the sizes of their clothes and shoes once they gave me the names, thus saving time on fitting.

Craft and Ingenuity of Costume Design

I took inspiration from foreign fashion trends and films, and injected elements of European fashion into (Chinese) period costume design. Chinese-style costumes tended to be heavy and more constraining, and did not possess much freedom and flow. Employing European cutting techniques and fabrics, I gave the Chinese period costumes a lighter feel and a richer palette, without sacrificing the authentic period aesthetic. Take Fu Hung-hsueh, Ti Lung's character in *The Magic Blade* (1976) for example. Apart from creating a distressed cape, we also put a lot of thought into designing the placement of his sheath and sword. In the past, swords were drawn from the back and the sheath was worn over the shoulder. I moved everything to the outer thigh. The concept was inspired by the iconic Western gunslinger popularised by Clint Eastwood; I gave it a Chinese twist and created something completely new.

I was constantly thinking of ways to incorporate new elements into the costume design. For example, chiffon was used quite often in period films. But the colour palette was rather limited because it was a difficult fabric to dye; the results were often quite blotchy. I wanted to open up the possibilities and began to experiment with sheer cotton fabrics. They were lighter, wrinkle-resistant, and most importantly, they could be dyed. I was therefore able to add colour and flair to the costumes. Using the same Chinese textiles over and over again was also monotonous, so I made regular trips to different countries to source different fabrics and textiles. For example, the TVB *wuxia* series *Chor Lau-heung* (1977) employed many types of Indian chiffon. For the costumes in *Treasure Raiders* (1978), we chose a kind of special, but extremely expensive fabric from Japan which was traditionally used to make kimonos; and we used Korean fabrics for the costumes in Commercial Television's *Meteor, Butterfly and a Sword* (1978).

Traditional Chinese opera costumes and period film costumes have different requirements. Chinese opera performers spend relatively less time in costume on stage, compared to screen actors, and their costumes tend to be heavier, more traditional, and have more layers. Film and television actors on the other hand, spend longer periods in costume while filming on set. They struggle to cope with costumes that have too many layers. That's why I modified the period costumes for film and television, making them as light and comfortable as possible. The grand armours in TVB's *Yang's Female Warriors* (1981) worn by the female characters, for example, were originally traditional Chinese opera costumes, imported from Beijing and later altered. They were still traditional period costumes but had been simplified significantly. Did the modified costumes deviate too far from the original? I was quite happy with the results. The costumes still adhered to period costume conventions but were now lighter and more functional for television production.

The best film costumes work in concert with all aspects of film production. If the script, set, and lighting, etc. do not compliment the costumes, it doesn't matter how beautiful the costumes are. For instance, I always ensure that the colour of the costumes do not clash with the main background colour of the sets. Filmmaking is a collaborative effort. You can determine whether a costume is good or not at a glance, but good costume design must also take the director's vision and the script into consideration.

'Ironman' Out of Dexterous Hands

I was quite pleased with my work in *The Butterfly Murders* (1979); I served both as the costume designer and associate producer. We were able to sign Tsui Hark as the director. The costume design on the film was quite groundbreaking; I invested quite a lot of thoughts into the process. Tsui Hark said he needed an 'ironman' that was able to fly, run, and handle fighting scenes after scenes. It needed to be light and flexible so obviously using iron was out of the question. I went to a department store in search of materials and found some non-slip rubber bathroom mats. I cut them up to resemble armour-plates before spray-painting them black. I also converted a baseball visor into a helmet. Within days, I churned out an 'ironman' costume unlike anything ever seen before.

I sometimes marvel at how I was able to come up with such crazy concepts, and to combine different materials from a variety of sources to arrive at a unique design. Costume design is essentially about creating the right look; but as costume designers, we're also constantly striving to create something new and to avoid repeating ourselves. Investing so much time and energy into each costume for the lead actors tends to be a money-losing proposition. But we're happy as long as we can earn enough to eat and purchase materials, and the film doesn't go over-budget. I didn't make big money, but seeing how well my work was received, was a reward in itself.

I also designed costumes for other films by Tsui Hark. The costume designs for *Zu: The Warrior from the Magic Mountain* (1983) were unlike anything I previously produced, a complete departure from my designs for Chor Yuen's films. The costumes in *Zu* were quite basic, but also fantastical at the

same time. Adam Cheng's (as Ding Yan) costumes started out as white and I dyed them over a dozen times before arriving at the right shade of grey. The wardrobe fittings and makeup tests for Brigitte Lin (as Ice Queen) at Golden Harvest took us over a month to complete. The end results were a testament to the amount of resources they were willing to invest in the film. Rather than rely on past methods, I was determined to make a breakthrough. They were still just costumes for another period film, but I wanted to give audiences something completely new.

When Tsui Hark decided to remake and shoot *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987) (directed by Ching Siu-tung, produced by Tsui Hark), he wanted the costumes to be completely different. Joey Wong (as Nip Siu-sin) was as tall as a basketball player, so I decided to use sheer muslin for her costumes. I began to experiment with different dyeing techniques and combinations. A little more than a month later, I arrived at Tsui Hark's workshop to conduct a costume fitting for Joey Wong. When she put on the costume, it fit like it was tailor-made for her. When we set up a fan and switched it on to blow in her direction, the costume began to flow around her; she was like an ethereal goddess. Her image left a profound impression and I advised Tsui Hark to sign her immediately.

Stepping into Production and Distribution for Film & TV

I started out in the wardrobe department but continued to advance, exploring each aspect of the film industry, including independent film and television production, distribution and producing. When I served as a film producer, I took risks in hiring new talents. Rosamund Kwan made her acting debut in *The Head Hunter* (1982). I was also responsible for discovering Flora Cheung and cast her in her first acting role (in *Return of the Deadly Blade*; 1981). I even produced Huang Xiaoming's first television dramas, *Storm of the Dragon* (2000). The list could go on...I chose Liu Wai-hung as the male lead in *The Story of a Refugee* (1980) and Tsui Siu-ming as director and actor in *The Buddhist Fist* (co-directed by Yuen Woo-ping, 1980). I didn't make a lot of money, but I helped a lot of people make fortunes.

I also worked in overseas distribution for television dramas. In the past, TVB dominated the overseas television distribution market with its Cantonese dramas. The drama series produced by RTV or the later ATV, sold for two thousand dollars per episode, at most. By collaborating with Cathay and using their brand name to sell the drama series, I was able to negotiate the price up to five thousand dollars per episode. Chiu Te-ken (ATV's board chairman at the time) signed a 20-million-dollar contract with me to distribute 300 hours of television drama programmes per year. I also advised them on which dramas to greenlight. For example, I was able to sell ATV's *Wong Chao Chun* (1984) (from the *Four Great Beauties* series) to Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, North America, Thailand and other markets, which led to my success in breaking into the overseas market.

I was also responsible for introducing Taiwanese television dramas to Hong Kong. At the time, I acquired the broadcasting rights for several Taiwanese television drama series in Southeast Asia. Not only did I sell the Hong Kong rights to ATV, I allowed ATV to pay me on a later date, usually two or three months after the first broadcast, so that the television station could collect revenue from its

commercial sponsors. In 1995, my company, ATV and Taiwanese writer Chiung Yao jointly produced 160 episodes of *New Justice Pao*. Each episode featured an iconic Taiwanese or Mainland artist, such as Liu Xiaoqing and Ruby Lin. My collaboration with ATV that time was quite successful. ATV previously nearly ran a deficit each year but as a result of the series, it finally turned a profit that year. I donated the money I made to primary schools in my home village so that they could build larger school halls and teachers' hostels.

As I list off my many endeavours: wardrobe, props, distribution, marketing and production, I realise that I've worked in many areas of the film and TV industry, including discovering many new talents. I fared better in some areas than others but that's down to fate. Having been in the costume design field for decades, I would say that this is something that I am most proud of, not to say the most rewarding and representative. To me, it is my rainbow bridge and my dream factory. Overall I'm quite satisfied with what I was able to accomplish. (Translated by Sandy Ng)