

*When the
Wind Was
Blowing Wild*

Hong Kong Cinema of the 1970s



1. **Bruce Lee in *The Game of Death* (1978)**
© 2010 Fortune Star Media Limited All Rights Reserved.
2. **(From left) Tina Ti, Michael Hui in *The Warlord* (1972)**
Still from the motion picture *The Warlord* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.
3. **Bai Ying in *The System* (1979)**
Courtesy of Mr Peter Yung
4. **Sammo Hung in *The Iron-Fisted Monk* (1977)**
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5. **Ricky Hui in *The Contract* (1978)**
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6. **(From left) Jackie Chan, Dean Shek in *Drunken Master* (1978)**
Courtesy of Seasonal Film Corporation
7. **Ti Lung in *The Blood Brothers* (1973)**
Still from the motion picture *The Blood Brothers* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Oral History Series 7

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Contents

- 4 Foreword // May Ng

Discourse

- 10 On the Eve of the Golden Age:
1970s Hong Kong Cinema
// Law Kar, Ng Chun-hung, Sam Ho
1. Social Realignment After the 1967 Riots
 2. New Media Landscape: Rise of Television
 3. East and West, Old and New, North and South
 4. Hong Kong Cinema and Indigenous Identity
 5. A New Path for Film Aesthetics
 6. New Social Ethics
- 40 Changes and Social Influences in
Hong Kong Cinema Post-1967:
A Comparison With Hong Kong Television
// Law Kar
- 58 Creating a Uniquely Hong Kong 1970s
// Sek Kei
- 74 From Detective to 'Ah Sir': The Birth of
Hong Kong Cop Films in the 1970s
// Po Fung
- 86 Finding Cecile: The Legend of
Tong Shu-shuen
// Shu Kei

Oral History

The Very First Blow of *Wuxia*

- 104 Sammo Hung: Making Kung Fu Comedies
to Showcase My Strengths
// Collated by Nicky Lam and May Ng
- 116 Lau Kar-wing: On an Era of Real Kung Fu
and the Martial Arts Wisdom of Lau Kar-
leung
// Collated by Po Fung
- 128 Ti Lung: A *Wuxia* Film Must Uphold the
Wuxia Spirit
// Collated by Nicky Lam
- 138 Chan Koon-tai: Shaw Brothers Wanted to
Make Me a Rival on par With Bruce Lee
// Collated by Wong Ha-pak

A Metropolitan Sense of Touch

- 148 Michael Hui: I Dream to Share My
Worldview Through Films
// Collated by Hui Pui-lam
- 162 Ng See-yuen: The Key is to Comprehend
the Ways of Survival in Independent
Cinema
// Collated by Po Fung

Hong Kong and Taiwan with Serendipity at Play

- 174 Joseph Kuo Nan-hung: Mutual Benefits From Exchange Between Hong Kong and Taiwan
// Collated by Simpson Choi
- 186 Bai Ying: Hong Kong and Taiwanese Productions in Korea Played a Role in Nurturing Korean Talents
// Collated by Cindy Shin and May Ng
- 200 Hsia Tsu-hui: Li Han-hsiang, a Good Teacher, a Good Friend
// Collated by Cheng Chuen-wai

Sensuality and Sex with No Borders

- 210 Yeung Kuen: How Many Cantonese Films Had the Guts to Toy With Sex?
// Collated by Eric Tsang
- 218 Ho Fan: Traversing Erotica and Art With a Spirit of Experimentation
// Collated by Wong Ha-pak

Undertow of the New Wave

- 232 Tong Shu-shuen: Making Films as a Response to Innermost Questions
// Collated by May Ng
- 240 Henry Chan: A Cinematographer Needs Ample Equipment to Tell Good Stories
// Collated by May Ng and Hui Pui-lam
- 252 Philip Chan: I Wanted to Redefine the Crime Thriller Genre
// Collated by Eric Tsang

Appendix

- 270 Profiles
- 285 Bibliography
- 286 Acknowledgements

Foreword

May Ng

1970s Hong Kong had weathered the 1967 riots. Society was in a state of panic. The government imposed a series of appeasement measures to ease social hardship, and also to alleviate discontent and anxiety. Economically the city continued to diversify industrial development and gradually reoriented itself into a world financial centre. The global economy, however, was plagued by crises, and Hong Kong was hit by the worldwide energy crisis and stock market crash. The film industry was similarly affected by the macro-climate. In the late 1960s, countries in Southeast Asia banned the import of Chinese-language films. This quickly ended the practice of block-booking¹ which had sustained small Cantonese film producers. Cantonese cinema went into a slump. This coincided with the rapid rise of free television which quickly replaced film as the most popular form of mass entertainment. Large numbers of Cantonese film actors, filmmakers and crew were recruited by television, making their way into thousands, millions of homes, further alienating the silver screen.

There's opportunity in every crisis—this has essentially been a footnote to what is known as the 'Hong Kong Legend'. The television industry had access to a pool of media elites and freshly-minted celebrities. Variety shows, in step with the times, featured sit-coms that exposed social evils, for laughter and stress relief if not much else, and to please the common folk. Even Cantonese film director Chor Yuen who had switched to Mandarin films at Shaw Brothers, took the skeleton of an old Shanghainese drama and fleshed it out with locally relevant satire and a huge cast of Cantonese and Mandarin film actors who played a mélange of acts in the exaggerated style of TV farce shows. This became the Cantonese film, *The House of 72 Tenants* (1973). Shrewdly borrowing the form of television to reinstate the spirit of Cantonese film, it was a roaring success that triggered the latter's revival.

In the early 1970s, Raymond Chow left Shaw Brothers to set up his own business. He deployed a flexible production outsourcing system and invested heavily in martial arts films.

1. Block-booking refers to the system of producers taking deposits from theatres or distributors before the film is made, with the aim of using the money to finance the shooting. See Chung Po-yin, *A Hundred Years of Chinese Cinema and TV* (Revised Edition), Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (HK) Company Ltd, 2007, p 141 (in Chinese).

He also created the Bruce Lee legend, challenging the reign of Shaws. In 1974, believing that the timing was right, Golden Harvest financed *Games Gamblers Play*, a comedy in the local dialect created by Michael Hui who had transitioned from television to film. Using mockery, the film depicts the fantasies of the nobodies in the city and the helplessness of the working class. It was a hit. The series of works by the Hui brothers that ensued became an important cultural icon in the construction of a Hong Kong identity.

Rising to the Golden Harvest challenge, Shaw Brothers became hugely prolific in the 1970s with productions in a variety of eclectic genres. On one hand, Chang Cheh, who unveiled a 'new century in *wuxia* cinema' in the 1960s, continued to forge ahead with sword and fist. On the other, returnee Li Han-hsiang unleashed a shower of soft erotica and swindler titles. Guaranteed to sell, this trend of 'the fist and the pillow' raged on, characterising this era in Hong Kong cinema.

As television brought to life crime, incidents of public interest and other curiosities via news reports and the like in a swift and timely manner, the illusory extravagance of the Dream Factory was no longer something on which viewers could project the rage, panic and confusion they felt in a rapidly changing society. Enter angry marginal youth and grassroots heroes. The actual slums where they lived, the mean streets where they operated began to appear on Shaws' colour widescreen. Though this simply meant swapping out an old setting for bloody conflicts for a new one, the quest for reality foretold the arrival of New Wave cinema which saw the camera leaving the studio for the streets.

By the mid-1960s, King Hu left Shaw Brothers for Union Film Company in Taiwan. Never one to confine himself to the set, he gathered a group of up-and-comers for *Dragon Inn* (1968), an eye-opener shot on location along the Central Cross-Island Highway and in studio as well. The epic brought a sea change to the period *wuxia* genre. Many other *wuxia* filmmakers jumped on the bandwagon to go on location overseas, thus fostering exchange between Hong Kong and Taiwan as well as other places in the world.

When the Wind Was Blowing Wild: Hong Kong Cinema of the 1970s is the seventh volume in the *Oral History Series*, following *An Emerging Modernity: Hong Kong Cinema of the 1960s*. Through interviews with film veterans, this volume strives to bear witness to industry development in the 1970s. It also endeavours to scrutinise this frenzied era in Hong Kong cinema through scholarly and expert discourse.

Previous HKFA publications *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study* and *Golden Harvest: Leading Change in Changing Times* explored the contexts of these studios' development in the 1970s. The latter, in particular, carried many interviews with important film veterans. There are also publications dedicated to brilliant directors like Li Han-hsiang, Chang Cheh, Chor Yuen, Patrick Lung Kong, and even Kuei Chih-hung. For this book, we decided to interview representatives from different specialist areas of filmmaking.

Since childhood, Sammo Hung had studied Peking opera at Yu Zhanyuan's Hong Kong-China Opera Institute. His early collaborations with famous directors, martial arts choreographers and actors affected him immensely. In the 1970s he quickly rose to fame, creating his own brand of crisply-paced action comedy that put to good use his martial prowess and resourcefulness. Lau Kar-wing came from a long line of martial artists. As a child, he apprenticed under his own father, and worked closely with his elder brother, Hung Fist master Lau Kar-leung, after joining the profession. Knowing inside out many schools of martial arts and the magic formulas to showcasing them on screen, he thrived in both Hong Kong and Taiwan throughout the 1970s, on both sides of the camera. Hotshot actor Ti Lung and virile action star Chan Koon-tai, both under Shaw Brothers, were icons of the *wuxia* and kung fu genres during the studio era. They were first spotted by Chang Cheh before collaborating with other directors, steadfastly forging their own paths to success.

The 1970s also saw the rise of filmmakers who won over audiences with their firm grasp on the pulse of society. Michael Hui and Ng See-yuen were the best examples. First cutting his teeth in TV, Hui won favour with Li Han-hsiang and found his niche as the master comedian, lending his voice to the working class with his tongue-in-cheek humour. Ng, on the other hand, took his cue from English-speaking films for his realistic true-crime dramas. He then branched into producing, opening new vistas for independent filmmaking in Hong Kong.

The film circles of Hong Kong and Taiwan had enjoyed intimate ties since after WWII. In the 1970s, a number of Taiwanese producers and filmmakers set up companies in Hong Kong, thanks to a boom in Taiwan's film industry and ironically tax measures. Best known among them, arguably, is Joseph Kuo Nan-hung who detailed to us that whole background and his own experience. Bai Ying of Union Film, who first caught attention in *Dragon Inn*, recounted shooting in Hong Kong and Taiwan with his master King Hu in the 1960s and 70s, as well as working with different studios. Li Han-hsiang, who returned to Hong Kong in the early 1970s, invited Hsia Tsu-hui, then scriptwriter and director at Taiwan's China Motion Picture Studio (CMPS), to join him as his assistant director. Hsia shared the intricacies of his longstanding partnership with Li, accounts that also illuminated the many creative interactions between the two places in the 1970s.

To show the different facets of Hong Kong cinema, we also conducted interviews with filmmakers who might have been overlooked locally. Erotica was a fad in the 1970s. Ho Fan, an internationally renowned photographer, joined Shaws as an actor, and subsequently shuttled between aesthetic erotica and romantic drama in his laborious directorial path. Yeung Kuen's career began in Cantonese films in the 1960s. As the latter

went into a decline, he navigated the sea of genres in hopes of finding a way to please the market without getting carried away.

Furthermore, the 1970s ushered in the New Wave. Baby boomers or the post-war generation, either educated at home or abroad, came under the strong influence of Western thoughts. Amidst all the rapid changes in Hong Kong cinema, they strove hard to inject new life into the art. Among them all, Tong Shu-shuen stood out as a breath of new air. After stunning the crowd with *The Arch* (1970), she did not follow the mainstream and carved out her own turf as an independent filmmaker. Her distinct body of work has gone down in history as masterpieces. In her interview, she gave us a detailed account of the explorations she had made as a trailblazer. *Jumping Ash* (1976), a New Wave pioneer, launched the career of its screenwriter Philip Chan, who gave up his 'steady paycheck' as a police officer to pursue his dream in cinema. Cinematographer Henry Chan, who grew up and learned his craft in the UK, described what it was like working the cameras for edgy directors Patrick Lung Kong, Tong Shu-shuen and King Hu.

Other than those covered here, there were still a number of film professionals who were active in the 1970s. Some of their interviews were included in the books mentioned above (see bibliography of this volume), while some of them were not interviewed or could not be reached in time. The 'discourse' section of this book bears witness to the varied contributions of all these important figures.

The discourse section sees Law Kar, Ng Chun-hung, and Sam Ho discussing the links between social changes and mass culture development in the 1970s Hong Kong; they also contextualised the era in history in the hope of deepening insight and introspection from the vantage point of distance. In addition, Law Kar wrote about the connections of post-1967 Hong Kong cinema to the zeitgeist, its reactions to it, as well as its comparisons to the emergent medium of television and how the two interacted with each other. Sek Kei explored the multifarious trends of the 1970s, which largely coincided with the Cultural Revolution ideology gripping the world, and showed how they eventually nurtured characteristics unique to Hong Kong with a far-reaching impact. Po Fung went right to the source, probing the birth of the local crime genre and its early development, from the perspective of Western influence and inspiration from television. Shu Kei shed light on the pioneering works of female director Tong Shu-shuen from the 1970s, citing various sources to trace her footsteps and examine her works' relevance to the times.

I am tremendously grateful to all the film personalities, critics and authors involved in this project, which would not have been possible without their generous support and input. Also, I feel most deeply indebted to the late Ms Wong Ain-ling, former Hong Kong Film Archive Research Officer and film adviser. Two years ago, I asked for her advice when I was deciding on the topic for this publication. With her pointers and encouragement, I found the direction the oral history of the 1970s should take. With the passing of this respected predecessor this year, I hereby express my affection and gratitude. [Translated by Piera Chen and Elbe Lau]





DISCOURSE

On the Eve of the Golden Age: 1970s Hong Kong Cinema

Speakers: Law Kar, Ng Chun-hung and Sam Ho

Date: 21 November 2017

Collated by Daphne Chan and May Ng

As a form of mass media, cinema at once embodies core values of a society and, at least to a certain extent, makes a certain demand on society. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the emergence of television as a new media, the decline of the Cantonese production system, as well as the 1967 riots, the public's recognition of indigenous culture and identity grew. It can be said that Hong Kong cinema had entered into treacherous waters, in great need of responding to the drastic changes in audience taste.

In November 2017, the Film Archive invited scholars and film researchers Law Kar, Ng Chun-hung and Sam Ho to participate in a discussion. The gist was to explore the intertwining relations between Hong Kong cinema and changes in society during the 1970s. Our speakers kick-started the discussion by examining governmental reforms after the 1967 riots, then turned the focus on the rising popularity of television, the emergence of new genres, the rise of indigenous culture, as well as new directions in film aesthetics. The following is a collated excerpt from the session, a discussion from different perspectives of Hong Kong cinema in the 1970s.

1. Social Realignment After the 1967 Riots

Ng: If the 1980s and 1990s were a golden era of Hong Kong cinema, the 1970s would be a necessary period from which the glory flew. Gold does not appear in a river without something trickling down from upstream. What made the golden era? Every decade in Hong Kong after WWII was unique and the 1970s can be considered as the 'post-60s and pre-80s' period.

Let's start with politics and economics. Politically, it was the time of post-1967 turmoil, after street protests had persisted for seven or eight months. The government's primary responsibility was to maintain colonial rule by stabilising the predominately-Chinese society. A series of measures were launched with the goal of benefiting the people. For example, the Home Affairs Department was made responsible for paying 'communal visits'. The greatest change, however, was the founding of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), which not only undermined the culture of corruption, but established that the government was willing to stand up and be counted.

The government had published the *McKinsey Report* (1973), compiled by a consultant company, reviewing the civil service structure and assessing whether it was capable of coordinating 'input' (public demands) with 'output' (policies formulated in response to the demands) in the colony. This marked the government's post-1967 attempt at self-assessment and presenting a capable, people-friendly image. The ICAC and the *McKinsey Report* led to the restructuring of civil services. The next Governor, Crawford Murray MacLehose, also formulated a number of social policies in areas such as labour and social welfare, most notably in housing and education. Oi Man Estate had thus replaced Shek Kip Mei Estate as a symbol of Hong Kong. The government's determination to do good can be seen in the difference between these two eras of Hong Kong's public housing. Shek Kip Mei Resettlement Area had long corridors, with a design reputedly modeled after the minimalism of prisons. Oi Man Estate, in contrast, was a 'brand-building' project. Reporters were invited to tour the property, to let the public know that this was a healthy, exemplifying model of public housing. The whole government was undergoing reform. In its interfaces with citizens, it carried out a lot of work a colonial government was not supposed to do, evoking the Fabianism that originated in the UK, with the government initiating improvement of people's livelihoods from top down.

This crucial setting was a key factor towards the rise of indigenous sensibilities in Hong Kong and was inseparable with reforms in housing and education. The 'Clean Hong Kong' initiative, the anti-corruption and anti-crime campaigns, as well as the *Below the Lion Rock* drama series (Note: a long-term drama series produced by Radio Television Hong Kong [RTHK], which started airing in 1972), had contributed to a decade marked by the successful development of social cohesion and the consolidation of the government's credibility. Why would people feel nostalgia for the colonial era in recent years? What happened during those 10 years was a key factor.

A second factor was drastic economic changes. Late 1960s saw the rise and eventual boom of manufacturing, in such industries as the production of toys, wigs, electronic parts and equipment. But the stock market crash of 1973 and the oil crisis in 1974 forced the government and the business sector to contemplate new directions. Could Hong Kong's processing-oriented manufacturing industry

continue to survive? Should other economic activities be cultivated, like the service and finance industries that could create white-collar jobs? Around 1974 or 75, one episode of *Below the Lion Rock* made comparisons between white-collar and blue-collar jobs. Blue-collar jobs had the benefit of developing expertise in their fields, but white-collar jobs, though their salaries weren't particularly high, had jobs that were less dangerous and with promotion possibilities. People started discussing the feasibility of other economic activities.

By 1979, the government had published the *Report of the Advisory Committee on Diversification*, with experts pointing out that Hong Kong's manufacturing sector could no longer rely on low cost to attract business, as neighbouring regions could go even cheaper. And the common practice of continuing to look for easy options was starting to backfire, causing for example the closing of many corporations. It was imperative that Hong Kong must develop a new economic model.

1979 was thus a time when Hong Kong's future was hanging in the balance. When China's reform and open-door policies were implemented in the 1980s, Hong Kong took the easy way out, adopting a 'shop-in-front, house-in-back' mode, with offices kept in Hong Kong while factories were moved to Shenzhen and other cities in the Mainland. It was an easy way to make money, but proved to be unsustainable. These were the two major background factors of Hong Kong at the time: the colonial government's better administrative competence and a search for a new engine to drive the economy.

2. New Media Landscape: Rise of Television

Law: Let me talk about the impact of television. Hong Kong's free TV stations started broadcasting in 1967. By the early 1970s, Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) had taken the lead and had accumulated enough resources for long-term development. Rediffusion Television (RTV), on the other hand, was still a subscription-based cable channel with black-and-white programmes. Its influence was much weaker. By 1970 and 1971, after Mandarin films had edged Cantonese films out of the market, many who worked on Cantonese cinema had jumped over to TVB (with a smaller number to RTV). *Enjoy Yourself Tonight* (Note: *EYT*, a long-running variety show, which started airing in 1967), in particular, was joined by famous Cantonese stars like Leung Sing-por. At the same time, the 1970s saw the return of talented young people who had studied abroad. They were interested in films, art and journalism but had failed to find an intellectual outlet in Hong Kong after 1967, opting instead to go overseas to study, for a change in environment and to broaden their horizons. They started returning in the 1970s, many of them going into television, including Ann Hui, Yim Ho, Tsui Hark, Allen Fong, Dennis Yu, Cheuk Pak-tong, Clifford Choi, Lau Shing-hon, Lawrence Lau, Clara Law, Alex Law, Calvin Wang, and Auguste Yam.

I joined TVB in 1974, but I had been writing for them since 1973. Michael Hui had gone to Shaw Brothers to work on film with director Li Han-hsiang, and his partners Lau Tin-chi and Thomas Tang ended up heading the creative unit. When Selina Chow took charge of TVB in 1974, she began recruiting new creative talents, such as Woo Sa, Tam Ning, Ng Ho, Wong Jing, Joyce Chan, and Lilian Lee. Chow tried to hasten the company growth by referencing UK and US production modes, first by putting an emphasis on live broadcasts and location shootings. News reports, for instance, were filmed and broadcasted live from 'microwave trucks'. Variety shows were also aired live. Her second initiative was to enhance the sense of reality in drama series. Previously, television dramas were more theatrical, adapted from folk tales and literature classics, all shot in the studio. Chow championed the use of contemporary local themes and real locations, even setting up a 'film unit', shooting television programmes like making films, the way Americans did.

Television, a brand new industry, had drawn in young people, particularly those who liked art, culture, and cinema. Shaws was already churning out standardised films, and had been dominating the Southeast Asian market since the 1970s. The younger generation didn't think much of them, nor did they want to work for the large studios. Selina Chow was by contrast open-minded and accepting, embracing novelty. As a result, television culture of the 1970s, not just the industry, was refreshing, vibrant and immensely creative. Even RTV (and subsequently Asia Television [ATV]) laid claim to a pool of talents, including Johnny Mak, Stephen Shiu, Philip Chan, Manfred Wong, and Michael Mak. Over at RTHK, Cheung Man-yea had recruited a number of newcomers and gave them free rein to make realist social dramas, while also acting as a buffer between them and her skeptical bosses. Soon, Commercial Television had also jumped on the bandwagon. The 1970s saw the TV industry at its most vital and thriving. Although quality might not be impeccable, it had given young talents the opportunity to experiment. Only by the 1980s, after competition among TV stations had stabilised and the winner was clearly established, did the industry became more corporatised, operating with factory-like uniformity.

Interactions Between Film and Television

Law: Let's also talk about the forces confronting the film industry. In the early 1970s, kung fu films became popular, eclipsing *wuxia* films. After out kung fu films made it to the European and American markets, studios in Hong Kong churned them out quickly and in large numbers, often with shoddy quality. In the few years after Bruce Lee's death, the market was saturated with works imitating his approach. That over-emphasis on one genre led to the negligence of other genres. Thus when the kung fu fever cooled down overseas, nothing was left to sustain the industry. Golden Harvest had the foresight to realise the need for new trends. In 1976, when police dramas *CID* and *The Big Hero* were aired on TVB and RTV

respectively, Raymond Chow, Leonard Ho and some studio owners started to pay attention. Although their ratings were not sky-high, the shows made a lot of noise with their refreshing approach, triggering debates in the media industry. Some critics thought that the prime-time airing of violence and soft erotica were unsuitable for family viewing. Others found the content too radical, even elitist. Some researchers believed that a new scene had emerged on TV, with dramas that addressed current social problems; alongside beauty pageants like *Miss Hong Kong* and *Miss Universe*, an indigenous awareness and an international identity was developing among Hong Kong people. Working in the industry, I noticed that after 1976, TVB's Board of Directors were not happy with Selina Chow's propensity for experimentation. Although she had the trust of the general manager, Andrew Eu, who had given her carte blanche, certain board members and shareholders were upset. The marketing/advertising department was not buying it either. For them, both ratings and earnings were falling short. There were internal conflicts and struggles. After Eu¹ died, Selina Chow lost her backing. The board took advice from the marketing/advertising department, resulting in her exit from TVB, in 1977, to join Commercial Television. During her time at the two stations, Chow had augmented the cost of management, allowing young professionals to tryout various new concepts. It was a vibrant time culturally and creatively, though failing to yield satisfactory results.

Many film personalities of the 1970s started out on television. The Hui brothers were a case in point and their entire team was in fact also from TV. Before the rise of New Wave cinema, there was *Jumping Ash* (1976), a collaboration of Josephine Siao, Leong Po-chih, and Philip Chan. Leong, the main director, had been a top player in television. Siao had returned to the silver screen after playing Lam Ah-chun (Note: referring to one of the characters in a segment of the TV show *It's Just That Easy* in 1977) to great acclaim on TV and scriptwriter Philip Chan had been shuttling between film and television. At the time, kung fu films were at a low ebb and in need of new blood to create new trends as well as a wider market. As a result, the film industry recruited a number of television personnel, developing new genres such as police-action films, thrillers, and teen dramas. It wasn't until the kung fu comedies of Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, Yuen Woo-ping, Karl Maka, Lau Kar-leung, and Lau Kar-wing that the genre would receive a new lease on life. Golden Harvest and Shaws also begun investing in larger productions, and the market looked up again. The appearance of kung fu comedy was related to the popularity of the Hui brothers' comedies and lessons gleaned from television. The plot structures and many of the gags of kung fu comedies were inspired by television shows and sit-coms. For instance, Sammo Hung's *Knockabout* (1979) had traces of *The Hui Brothers Show* (1971). Both *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*

1. Andrew Eu passed away on 11 December 1976.



Knockabout (1979), directed by Sammo Hung, combined actions from kung fu films with the Hui brothers' comedy sequences to create a hybrid of action comedies. It is an important early work of the new genre.

(1978), which blends martial arts skills of the northern and southern schools, and *Drunken Master* (1978), which depicts the life a young Wong Fei-hung, I believe were inspired by Clifford Choi, Ng Ho, and Raymond Wong's TV drama *Wong Fei-hung*, as well as its research on the northern and southern schools of martial arts. Raymond Wong, who had co-written kung fu comedies with Karl Maka and later founded the Cinema City, was originally a television writer.

3. East and West, Old and New, North and South

Ho: I wasn't in Hong Kong in the 1970s and didn't have much personal experience of the period. But I had kept track of Hong Kong films, going to Chinatown theatres every chance I got. I would like to raise a concept with which I had been considering Hong Kong, China and the world in recent years—the grind-and-bind between East and West, old and new, North and South.

Hong Kong in the 1970s was the most successful Chinese society in the world. Economically, Taiwan was way behind Hong Kong, the Mainland was still shut off from the world, and Singapore hadn't come into its own. Looking back, I'd even say that Hong Kong was one of the most successful Chinese societies in the history of civilisation in terms of integrating Chinese and Western cultures, traditional values and modernity. Hong Kong owed its success largely to the

quick-wittedness and adaptability of the people. We also benefited from the confluence of Cantonese and Shanghainese cultures.

I think the 1970s situation Ng mentioned was a continuation of the 1950s and 60s. Two important factors were at play, which can be considered in terms of our cinema—leftist humanism and free-market enterprise. Competition was a necessary condition of the free market and three examples can be cited. The first was the competition between TVB and RTV, mentioned by Law, with positive results in the 1980s. The second was between Shaws and Golden Harvest that Law had also mentioned. The third example was perhaps lesser known. It's the rise of Chinese entrepreneurs, with competitions between Chinese and British capitals. The rise of Chinese-owned businesses at that time was a key moment in the development of an indigenous identity in Hong Kong. It can be seen that during the colonial years, the Hong Kong people were already defying the ruling colonial power. They would resist on one hand and collaborate on the other. One of the most interesting developments was the gradual replacement of British-owned enterprises by Chinese ones. British-owned businesses were starting to lose confidence in Hong Kong and were withdrawing their capital. Local Chinese saw the opening and, despite great potential risks, began acquiring British assets at low prices. This played a big part in Hong Kong's future prosperity, but unfortunately, also enabled property developers to hoard land and exploit the city's housing market, leading to long-term problems for the people.

According to Liu Shuyong's *A Brief History of Hong Kong*,² Li Ka-shing's acquisition of Hutchison was the earliest and most vital power play between Chinese and British enterprises. The name of Li's company was Cheung Kong—in Chinese, Yangtse River—at once indigenous and evocative of Li's and Hong Kong's heritage. The name of another major company, Chinachem, obviously also contained the word 'China'. Cheung Kong's buyout marked a victory of Hong Kong Chinese over the British ruling class. Li's integration of different businesses into Hutchison Whampoa was thus a pivotal moment in the development of a prosperous economy. I'm not well versed in economics, but in my understanding, it was also the beginning of property hegemony in Hong Kong. Things that once made us proud have turned us into victims. Did we really win?

When I came back to Hong Kong in the late 1990s, I was surprised by how readily free-market capitalism was generally embraced. Growing up in Hong Kong, I was influenced by the leftist humanism of Chinese intellectuals. An anti-capitalism—even anti-merchant—current ran through our consciousness. Watching films of the 1950s and 60s at the Hong Kong Film Archive, merchant characters were often villains. And in leftist films, white-collar workers were portrayed as victims of

2. Liu Shuyong, *A Brief History of Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (HK) Co. Ltd., 1998 (in Chinese).

capitalist exploitation. Those of us born in mid-20th century had witnessed rampant collusions between the government and the business sector. Travelling regularly between Hong Kong and US since 1997, I was able to witness with more intimacy the benefits of free-market enterprises and became more accepting of capitalism tenets, such as the ideas of Adam Smith, who, incidentally, I was amazed to find close to being a household name in the SAR. The three competitions mentioned earlier were examples of the vigorous grind-and-bind within free-market economy. According to the book *Asian Godfathers: Money and Power in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia*,³ Li Ka-shing was a member of the elite, a 'godfather'. Ties with the British colonial government had contributed to the early phase of his success. But even in a colonial setting, Chinese capitalists upheld the traditions of Chinese merchants—they worked with the government and were never completely independent of governmental operations. The jury is still out whether the net result of that grind-and-bind was good or bad, but in the clash between Cheung Kong and Hutchison, we can see both the good and the bad.

Kung Fu Films in the 1970s Break Traditional Aesthetical Conventions

Ho: I myself have a tendency to neglect the importance of the 1970s, as I preferred the 1950s and early 60s, which I believed was the first golden age of Hong Kong cinema. And the second golden age would have been the 1980s. Caught between the two, the 1970s could have easily slipped through the cracks. Upon closer examination, I realised that the 1970s was of pivotal importance. For example, some of the issues discussed earlier can be considered as three of the most significant creative phases of the decade, represented by the actors Bruce Lee, Michael Hui, Jackie Chan. Jackie Chan's kung fu comedies were in fact an integration of Bruce Lee's martial arts and Michael Hui's comedy, result of a grind-and-bind between the two major developments earlier in the decade. I also found the large numbers of shoddy kung fu films made in the 1970s significant. When I was in the US, I would watch these 'lousy' kung fu flicks every chance I got, and really enjoyed it. Some Western critics had said they were attracted to Hong Kong's martial arts films because they were reminded of musicals, the work of Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire, especially Kelly, whose art energetically synchronizes body movements to music and film.

I used to love watching Bruce Lee films, but also felt that the techniques and structures were less than desirable. From a historical perspective, I now believe that Lee had broken the boundaries of conventional cinematic aesthetics. Such notions as plot development and characterisation were of little significance in his work. The key was performance. But before he broke all the rules and became an

3. Joe Studwell, *Asian Godfathers: Money and Power in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia*, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007.



Drunken Master (1978) is one of the classic kung fu comedies.

international superstar, Lee was an excellent actor. His performance had riveted audiences in, for instance, *The Kid* (1950), *In the Face of Demolition* (1953) and *The Orphan* (1960). But becoming an action superstar, he used little of those acting skills. He had in fact redefined the aesthetics of performance. I often told students, ‘You need to know the rules to break the rules.’ Some students believe that arts cannot be learned, and that art involves innovation and the breaking of rules. But for me, unless you’re a genius, you have to learn the basics. Even great talents like Tsui Hark and Ann Hui had to study in universities before they could let their imagination run wild. Bruce Lee was born in San Francisco because his father, Lee Hoi-chuen, was a Cantonese opera actor who was touring there. Bruce Lee had Chinese opera—and, to a larger extent, Chinese traditional culture—running in his blood. His father also acted in films, so he literally grew up on the opera backstage and film sets. But he was also cha cha champion of Hong Kong. Lee was therefore an embodiment of Hong Kong’s grind-and-bind between East and West, Old and New, North and South, the North represented by Shanghainese influence on our film industry and the South by not only Cantonese opera but also the style of martial arts he initially practiced.

Without the slapdash 1970s fight flicks mentioned earlier, the wonderful genre of kung fu comedies would not have been. It was part of an ongoing progression. No matter how low the budgets and how ‘sloppy’ the productions are, the fight scenes

in those films are carefully coordinated, like the choreographed dance sequences in Hollywood musicals. Two men may be engaged in fierce combat, but their fight was staged with congruous, complementary movement, which dulls and regulates the opposition. It was truly unique in aesthetic, cultural, even spiritual terms. Showdowns in Western cinema, by contrast, such as those in cowboy movies, have far less harmony.

‘Southern fists, northern kicks’ is a familiar notion. Let’s take a look at Jackie Chan. He is supposedly of Shandong descent and had learnt Peking opera from Yu Zhanyuan. Yet, in *Drunken Master* (1978), the Drunken Fist is a southern-styled skill. It was remarkable enough that Chan was using his ‘northern kicks’ training from Peking opera to play the classic ‘southern fist’ character Wong Fei-hung. Added to the equation were the slapstick action and low-rent humor meant as comic relief. The result was something uniquely Hong Kong—another kind of grind-and-bind. I remember seeing a Jackie Chan’s film with a martial arts expert and he sneered: ‘I can take Jackie Chan down in two seconds. He’s all show and no substance.’ I already knew a little about film then and understood that ‘art is heightened reality’ and that, paraphrasing Picasso, ‘art is a lie that tells the truth’. Chan might not have the ‘substance’ but his ‘show’ was exciting to watch. In films, kung fu that looks good is more important than kung fu that fights good. Of course, Bruce Lee was an exception who delivered good-looking kung fu with real fighting kung fu, which I believe had to do with his training in dance and opera.

Chang Cheh and Spaghetti Westerns

Ho: Another example is Chang Cheh. The violence in his films can seem ludicrous. The blood looked fake and not realistic. But we can compare Chang Cheh’s gore with that of Spaghetti Westerns, which appeared in the late stage in the evolution of the Hollywood Westerns. The Italian Westerns have an ambivalent and complicated approach to violence. In classic Westerns like *High Noon* (1952), protagonist Gary Cooper fires and kills his adversary. But there’s no blood and one only sees the other guy falling down. In Spaghetti Westerns, you see the blood, yet it would still look fake. They are called ‘Spaghetti Westerns’ partly because many were made by Italian filmmakers, such as Sergio Leone, and also because the blood reminded viewers of tomato-based spaghetti sauce. It’s in fact a product of the grind-and-bind between European and American cultures. Regarding Chang Cheh, instead of spaghetti sauce, we had red ink.

Americans used to describe its multi-culturalism as a ‘cultural melting pot’. It’s idealistic, as though everyone was soaking comfortably in a hot tub. That notion proved to be too unrealistic and had fallen into disuse. I believe the idea of grind-and-bind, translated from the Chinese phrase *mo he*, is a better description, because ‘grinding’ is painful and when cultures come in contact, pain is inevitable.

The word *he*—Chinese for ‘bind’ – has additional meanings, like ‘joined’, ‘combine’ or ‘mix’ but I used ‘bind’ because it rhymes better with ‘grind’. This is the way with which I’d been thinking about the ways we negotiate between Chinese and Western cultures, which I think matches our discussion of 1970s Hong Kong cinema.

Mind Games of Deceit and Suspicion

Ho: There were other important filmmakers in the 1970s. Let’s first talk about the ‘golden trio’ of Chor Yuen, Gu Long and Ni Kuang. Their work captured the culture of ‘deceit and suspicion’ that was related to Hong Kong’s embrace of free-market capitalism. Fair play is an essential notion of free market, yet trickery is often inevitable. In Hong Kong, the practice of capitalism naturally took on a Chinese character, often manifested in mind games of deceit and suspicion. An interesting parallel can be found in the West’s fascination with *Sun-Tzu: The Art of Warfare*. About 20 years ago, I started noticing different translations and annotated editions of the book in American bookstores, not in the ‘Asian Studies’ section but in the ‘Business’ section. Later I learned that it was actually taught in business schools. The West had apparently found a place for Sun Tzu in the free-market economy. Another way to put it: the West was undergoing its own grind-and-bind with capitalism and found inspiration from traditional Chinese wisdom.

I believed that mind games of deceit and suspicion had always been a part of Chinese culture and the Chinese people had always been striving to strike a balance between trust and distrust. The Chor-Gu-Ni golden trio was constructed with an interesting mix of sensibilities. Gu Long, an author from Taiwan, widened the mix with contributions from the greater Chinese diaspora; Ni Kuang was a Chinese intellectual who settled in Hong Kong; and Chor Yuen grew up in the colony, starting his filmmaking career in a Cantonese cinema deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture and leftist idealism. Their divergent backgrounds coalesced in the martial arts films Chor directed at Shaws, where he had gone after the demise of Cantonese cinema. With Ni’s writing and refining the skills he honed in Cantonese films, Chor translated Gu’s novels to film, animating the mind games of deceit and suspicion on the silver screen. Their work proved to be very popular in the Chinese diaspora during the transformative years of the 1970s.

Cinema of ‘Martial Arts Men’

Ho: We also must not overlook Lau Kar-leung. He was best known for his early-to-mid-80s works, but had in fact been directing in the 1970s, in films like *The Spiritual Boxer* (1975) and *Challenge of the Masters* (1976). I have great admiration for Lau. He began his career as a ‘martial arts man’ in Cantonese films, at a time when the regard for martial arts was not nearly as high as today. Toiling in the industry for

Kung fu films directed by Lau Kar-leung never fail to assert the code of ethics that martial artists live by. *The Spiritual Boxer* (1975) is one such example.



years, he eventually earned deserved esteem as a filmmaker and devoted his work to the promotion of *wu de*—martial arts virtues. We tend to dichotomise as opposing values the *wen* and the *wu*—the sword and the pen, or the literary and the martial—especially under the influence of Western culture’s penchant to polarise. But Lau was able to realise the virtues, ethics and spirit of Chinese culture through martial arts.

Another noteworthy ‘martial arts man’ is Sammo Hung, who had helmed a number of important kung fu comedies such as *The Prodigal Son* (1981) but started directing in the late 1970s, with such work as *Warriors Two* (1978), *Enter the Fat Dragon* (1978) and *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* (1980). I think it was pop culture, Chinese opera in particular, that had instilled the essence of traditional culture in him. From a historical perspective, Chinese opera, with its embedded moral values, played the vital role of instilling moral and ethics principles in the uneducated public. Hung, raised in the same Peking opera school as Jackie Chan, exemplifies the continuation of that moral function in modern times. He masterfully integrated Chinese pop culture, in which he was immersed since an early age, with Western comedy to produce a body of amazing works in the 1980s, one of them *Mr. Vampire* (1985), which he produced.

In a recent Beijing conference, a scholar mentioned that 1980s Hong Kong cinema had neglected Chinese traditions entirely. I did not agree. In *Mr. Vampire*, a big hit that spawned the popular sub-genre of ghost kung fu comedies, the vampires wear Qing dynasty robes. I remember watching another ghost comedy, the title of which I cannot recall, characters fend off vampires not by holding their breaths as those in *Mr. Vampire* do, but by holding up a crucifix. That’s a vivid example of Hong Kong’s creative manifestation of the grind-and-bind between Eastern and Western cultures. Perhaps such creative manifestation was shallow, which I believe we must acknowledge, but shallow does not necessarily mean negative. There is depth in the shallow.

4. Hong Kong Cinema and Indigenous Identity

Ng: My fellow speakers had put forward two crucial arguments: ‘grind and bind’ which Ho discussed in detail; and Law’s concept of turning points—things don’t always go from A to B, they could have gone from this point to that, and then to another one, and back, round and round, as TV and cinema took turns passing the baton to each other. The two ideas were equally important. The prequel to the golden era was indeed full of grinding and binding, twists and turns.

Characteristics of the golden era were rather simple. It was like a person standing gracefully, with features lucid and complete. This was exactly the state of Hong Kong in the 1980s and early 1990s, an age when indigenous identity had come into its own. The backstory was that local capital had replaced British capital, and the dominant ideology was one driven by the free market. The signing of the *Sino-British Joint Declaration* in 1984 was particularly of note as ‘evidence’ that capitalism had defeated socialism. China had yielded, agreeing to ‘one country, two systems’, as it was simply the best mode of social development and governance universally. There were three locally generated icons that seemingly projected Hong Kong’s superiority: Li Ka-shing, the famous quote ‘horses will race on and night clubs will stay open’, and Hong Kong cinema. Our films were called ‘Hong Kong films’ (literally ‘films produced in Hong Kong’, *gong chan pian* in pinyin, *gong chaan pin* in Cantonese transliteration) instead of ‘Cantonese films’, even though Cantonese was used just the same. What set these films apart was the fact that they were made by a generation of people who grew up in Hong Kong, portraying local themes that were close to the lives of people, with a sensibility-driven, boots-on-the-ground approach, on subject matters ranging from prostitution, gambling, drugs, triads, to ghosts. When discussing Hong Kong’s golden era and Hong Kong’s indigenesness nowadays, all features above had already been revealed in the films of the 1980s.

The 1980s was not an explosion that came out of nowhere, but something that had been brewing for over a decade. And the brewing process can be more enthralling than the outcome. A butterfly is beautiful, but its life as a pupa, before emerging from the chrysalis, is much more interesting. I love its molting state. The 1970s was our molting phase, before we reached the indigenous Hong Kong state that we’re used to and take for granted now.

Incubation Period for Masters

Ng: Looking at that era, one would find that indigenesness was very complicated, hardly a simple matter of pride and glory ‘made in Hong Kong’. For something indigenous to successfully appear, two conditions are necessary. First was grind-and-bind; at the very least, the success of the grind-and-bind between all aspects



When *The Big Boss* was filmed in 1971, Bruce Lee had just returned from the US. Though not yet a legend, a ready and eager Lee was on the verge of breakthrough.

Chinese and Western, North and South in the post-WWII era. The golden 1980s would not have materialised if not for that.

The most remarkable examples of grind-and-bind are Bruce Lee, the Hui brothers, Lau Kar-leung, and Sammo Hung. They took the plunge in the 1970s, before they were considered masters, including Bruce Lee, with *The Big Boss* (1971) and a few titles after that. The Hui brothers' *Games Gamblers Play* (1974), assisted by John Woo behind the scenes, was in fact an extension of the TV programme, *The Hui Brothers Show*. These masters, later hailed as fathers of indigenous cinema, were in their molting stage in the 1970s. It was under this condition that Lau Kar-leung, who was using wires and trampolines in Mandarin and Cantonese films of the 1950s and 60s, went from martial artist to martial arts choreographer to top martial arts choreographer, and finally a highly regarded master of his generation. The greatest thing about Hong Kong culture was its ability to turn historical heritage into something uniquely Hong Kong indigenous.

The second condition would be the turning points. History can be stated in simple terms. For example, 1950s and 60s was a period of post-war reconstruction, 1970s was economic take-off, and 1980s became a time of indigenous Hong Kong, with such emergence as Hong Kong-style luxurious nightclubs. Such a scenario suggests a linear progression. Truth is, development in the 1970s was not linear at all. Its trajectory was closer to that of a rollercoaster ride. Statistics indicates that just the manufacturing sector had experienced several phases in a



The House of 72 Tenants (1973) reinvigorated Cantonese cinema and made box-office history with its vivid, nifty Cantonese dialogues.

Still from the motion picture *The House Of 72 Tenants* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

short period of time. The 1970s was an experimental phase for the city, in terms of the economy and the government and, especially, pop culture.

I had been hosting the programme *Cantonese Films Rise Again* on RTHK, for which I interviewed a group of actors from the 1950s and 60s. This morning, I spoke with Kong Suet who had been with Kong Ngee Motion Picture Production Company for 11 years. She was the lead actress in 30 to 40 films. She got married in 1968 and left film in 1969. Then, on the suggestion of fellow actor Cheung Ching, she joined RTV to act in television dramas. That was a brand new experience for Kong—no storyboard, one set all the way through, live broadcast, memorising all the lines beforehand. If there was a change of setting, she had to walk to another set, such as walking from a kitchen scene to the next in the living-room. It was an unfamiliar medium for her. After working in film for over 10 years, switching to live-broadcast TV was like learning a new language. I interviewed Kong Suet, To Ping, and Tam Bing-man, who shared the same experience of ending up in television.

Destroying and Then Resuscitating Cantonese Films

Ng: Some say television destroyed Cantonese cinema, because there would be TV-reruns, simply half a year after the initial screening in cinemas. That made it difficult for the Cantonese film industry to compete. Television had also engaged a lot of film talents, who ended up performing comedy sketches and commercials on *EYT*. Hence the fall of Cantonese cinema was inversely proportional to the rise of TV. The funny thing was, in 1973, Shaws borrowed the sketch structure of *EYT* and cast stars from the show to make *The House of 72 Tenants*, using the same comedic approach and the Cantonese dialect to tell a story transplanted to Hong Kong from Shanghai. The film was marked by Cantonese word plays, such as a line



Inspired by television shows, *Games Gamblers Play* (1974) was a hit at the box office. It is an example of TV influencing films in a positive manner.

that features multiple meanings of the same word, prompting laughter with social commentaries. This film with an ensemble cast of television stars, led by TVB personality Ivan Ho, unintentionally led to the rebirth of Cantonese films. Such is the strange relationship between TV and film. On one hand, there's destruction and stealing of talent; on the other, the performing techniques for TV can be applied with great success to films. Cantonese films regained popularity in 1973 and 1974. Looking back at these turning points, *The House of 72 Tenants* stood out. Another stand out was *Games Gamblers Play*, with wall-to-wall jokes like TVB's *The Hui Brothers Show*, which writer Lau Tin-chi and Michael Hui often had to think of 30 ideas before landing on a good one. This method of brainstorming was deployed in *Games Gamblers Play*, featuring frequent jokes and fitting them into a loosely structured script. Shaws did not like the script and declined to invest, but Golden Harvest took it on, and the rest is history. This is a perfect example of how television had a positive impact on films and helped to resuscitate Cantonese cinema.

Another case study is *Let's Rock*, directed by James Wong, a 1975-hit that catapulted the group The Wynners to stardom. Their roller credits were fantastic, with the declaration 'a concerted effort by all of Hong Kong's film and television stars'. Featured are names of numerous TV celebrities and crew members, such as Beby Ng and folks from *EYT*. On the soundtrack are 14 Cantopop songs, further

helping to put Cantonese films back on its feet.

Formation of the Mass Audience

Ng: The importance of television was also manifested in the government's education and housing policies, which turned the Hong Kong people into a 'tribe', 'massifying' them, creating collective experience. Since the 1970s, half of Hong Kong's population had lived in public housing estates. Common experiences resulted from similar construction styles of public estates, similar smell of streets, the number of trees at entryways and the number of steps one had to take before encountering cops and robbers... Because of the public housing system, as well as the nine-year free education policy set in place in 1978 and 1979, it was easy to guess how the first 10, 12 or 13 years of a student's life would go. They were not refugee kids anymore, for the refugee period was over. They were all born in Hong Kong; they would go to a primary school and take the Secondary School Entrance Examination; if their grades remained consistent, they would stay in schools of the same level.

This was how a unified group of audience had been created, and they would all be watching TV. By 1972, television had penetrated nearly 90% of all households in Hong Kong. In 1967, when TVB was established, that number was less than 50%. Even if Leung Sing-por revealed on TV that he could fly, half of the city wouldn't have known. But after 1972, almost everyone knew that Sam Hui was handsome. People wouldn't have missed a celebrity performance on TV for the world. Television took in talents from the Cantonese film industry, played a part in transforming Cantonese films into a global sensation, and created a mass audience, resulting in the same group of people to have the same kind of artistic experience. Television had played a significant role in the grind-and-bind and the twists-and-turn.

Ho: *The House of 72 Tenants* is indeed an interesting case study. Cantonese cinema went from decline to demise, then eventual revival. This is very unusual from a historical perspective. For a long time, we thought that the failure of Cantonese cinema was due to poor production quality, but Law's research indicated the control of cinema chains by companies like Shaw Brothers was another possible reason.⁴ This issue of vertical integration is therefore also related to free market and crony capitalism. Perhaps the colonial government did not respond in time

4. See Law Kar, Frank Bren: *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross Cultural View* (Revised Edition), Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2012, p 179 (in Chinese). The original text talked about three main reasons for the demise of Cantonese Cinema, the above was the third; the other two were 'low quality films were eliminated' and 'the shrink of market for films that were suspected as leftist or pro-left due to political reasons, resulted in decline of productions'. Law Kar had also revealed in after-discussion that, in regards to Shaw's control of cinema chains in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, which gave a big blow to Cantonese cinema's distribution, was referenced from Yu Mo-wan's book. It was not purely his research.

with legislation to prevent this abuse of the free market, allowing Shaws to take advantage of the situation. Another factor is the film industry's relationship with Southeast Asia, where Shaws and other major theatre chains' control played a key role in what kind of films were produced.

The collective experience of the unified group of audience created by government policies was further informed by television. *EYT*, a variety show providing diversified entertainment, brought together different kinds of jokes, comedy sketches and performances, conditioning the audience to a pattern of consuming different kinds of entertainment in a condensed sitting. The audience also learnt about what they liked. This experience was gradually incorporated into film. 1980s filmmakers, many returning from studies abroad, had honed their skills through the television training ground, learning to gauge what made audiences laughed and what got them emotionally engaged. That was carried forward to their filmmaking practice in the 1980s.

Back in those day, my father wouldn't let me watch *EYT*, but I would watch it secretly, because it would be a conversation topic in school the next day. For example, before *The Big Boss* was released, Bruce Lee had already become a huge sensation with his appearance on *EYT*. I missed the show that night, but would hear my classmates talked about him with great enthusiasm for days. One can see the interaction between films and television, reinforcing each other through the power of pop culture.

There were also television dramas, which frequently dealt with family disputes or personal struggles. They became more refined after Selina Chow took charge. Family structures in earlier eras are more in line with the May 4th spirit, depicting conflicts in large, extended families with several generations under the same roof. By the 1970s, many dramas narrowed their focus to the nuclear family of only two generations, with horizontal expansion on the family tree to relatives such as siblings and cousins. Meanwhile, stories of personal motivation, promoting hard work and persistence would mirror real-life experiences, with ready success stories of those who hold onto dreams and goals, eventually realising success.

Discussions of Indigenous Culture

Ng: The subject of indigenouness was not only abstract, but often discussed in retrospect rather than in real-time, because we grew up here and would not think about who we are. Usually it would be done after some time had passed, by those who specialised in these matters. Filmmakers rarely make films about indigenouness. It would be the magazine writers, the teens who submit articles to publications, or media critics who run *The Chinese Student Weekly* or *City Magazine*. Did the idea of indigenouness come onto the scene in the 1970s? Interestingly, some people really were exploring this topic then.

There were three new cultural magazines in Hong Kong in the 1970s—*Close Up Magazine*, *Film Biweekly* and *City Magazine*. With cinema being a major driving force of Hong Kong culture, film criticism had an early role. Hong Kong was not a cultural desert, and popular culture was never neglected. What's special about *City Magazine* was that it believed that television was worth examining. In the early days of television, most people looked down on it. Sam Ho's father, for example, wouldn't let him watch *EYT*. Yet *City Magazine* would publish several serious 3,000-word essays on *Hotel* (1976) and *A House is Not a Home* (1977) shortly after its 1976 inception, offering an analysis of the shows from aesthetical and social perspective, connecting them with the times. That was a new kind of cultural media, with intellectuals using their own approach to look for a culture to examine. It was indeed a symbol of indigenouness.

The Hong Kong Arts Centre was established in 1977. The first Hong Kong International Film Festival was held that same year. The film scholar Lin Nien-tung also organised a retrospective of 1950s Hong Kong cinema around that time, proving that Hong Kong had its own art and cinematic traditions, with its own unique culture. A generation of local people started to feel that 'indigenouness' was no longer an abstract idea, but something that could be expressed in words, it could be continued and passed on. What's so wonderful about the 1970s was that for the first time, groups emerged to tell the world that indigenouness was real.

Ho: The Hong Kong New Wave was a wishful label, framing a movement in advance, with idealistic projections for the future of Hong Kong cinema. Writers and critics, with aspirations driven by traditions of the Chinese literati and high expectations for Hong Kong cinema, had put a lofty European label on Hong Kong cinema. Although the New Wave had disappointed those of us with hopes that were perhaps too high, it had given us great excitement. *Close up* and *City Magazine* came from the meeting of intellectuals and popular art, of Chinese-Western grind-and-bind. *The Chinese Student Weekly* was actually a chess piece in the Cold War, financed by the Americans, yet it influenced and inspired a generation of us. Then came *Close Up*, *City Magazine* and other magazines. Newspapers also saw a surge in the 1970s because of diversification, market demands and, to a certain degree, the division between leftist and rightist camps.

Melding Music, Film, Television and Radio

Ng: By 1978 and 1979, television and the revived film industry was working together, along with the pop music industry that we haven't talked much about. The actual renaissance of 'Cantopop' came after 1976. There were two hit songs in 1974, 'The Fatal Irony' and 'The Mischievous Duo'— theme songs from, respectively, a TV series and a film. Because of that, some historians consider 1974 as the year Cantopop was born. But these two songs were the only hits of the time. It wasn't

until 1976 that Cantopop records became a truly money-making enterprise. It even made The Wynners and Alan Tam switched from English to Cantonese. George Lam became Lam Chi-cheung, and Frances Yip became Yip Lai-yee. Everyone started singing Cantonese songs. Music, films, television and radio had melded into a unified mass-media circuit; singers who got popular began acting in films. Even if the films didn't do well, they could remain popular by winning a Jade Solid Gold Award. Stars became superstars, especially in the 1980s. If not for the mass-media circuit, what we called the golden era would never have happened. Take for example Anita Mui and Leslie Cheung, who could make deviant films—she playing the 'Vamp Girl' and he making *Erotic Dream of Red Chamber* (1978)—but remained popular. Since *Jade Solid Gold* (Note: a long-running music show produced by TVB, started airing in 1981) was broadcasted in every household, Hong Kong stars were not just movie stars, but enjoyed success in other sectors as well.

This came from going through the turning points and the grind-and-bind in the 1970s. Television and film used to compete with each other, and the record industry hadn't yet emerged. Sam Hui, who spoke Cantonese on television, was still releasing English records. The different media were still grinding and binding with each other, not melding until late in the decade, around 1978 and 1979. The 'molting stage' mentioned earlier happened during the entire 1970s, paving ways for the 'touch-and-gold' era that was the 1980s—whether you were in music, film or television, as long as you had a basic touch of talent, you could be gold. The market was booming. Anything that made it to the market would make money. And everything blossomed. This spectacular boom was coalesced from the struggles and grind-and-bind in the previous decade. People had melded the best of all worlds to create his or her own style of performance.

Another aspect of grind-and bind was the reaction from society. There were voices of dissent; particularly in regard to the content, means of expression, and aesthetics of film and television. Also controversial were the bottom line of social morality and that of personal principles. For example, an erotic scene in the prime-time airing of *Seven Women* (1976), with Liu Wing-seung and Wong Wan-choi frolicking on a pile of books in the library, drew complaints. Articles in *Ming Pao Weekly*, *Close Up* and other publications subsequently criticised sex scenes in the first two episodes of the show. Another case was a 1977 drama in the show *Teens*, with Chow Yun-fat wearing only a pair of tiny underpants on the beach. The scene was backlit and he appeared looking naked, causing public fury. There was also a lot of criticism against low-budget films and films with nudity and violence in the mid-1970s. Szeto Wah, leader of the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, and publisher Simon Chau Siu-cheung organised the 'Save the Children Campaign,' calling for the boycott of violent comic books and films with female nudity.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, reproach gradually turned into acceptance. As time passed, people started to realise that their kids weren't turning bad,

indicated by the crime rate dropping to a post-war record low. They began to accept a certain exploration of sexual desires and occasional violence. *Dangerous Encounter—1st Kind* (1980) was probably the last film to be condemned for its violence. Later, the blood-splattering in *Aces Go Places* (1982) was consumed as entertainment. A tacit consensus was reached in the early 1980s, that such were in fact the Hong Kong advantage and that we were different from the Mainland. Thus began the golden that would last for over a decade.

Ho: My understanding of 1970s Cantopop is limited, but I do know all the Sam Hui song of that period, having borrowed his records from Chinese American friends. He wasn't a great singing talent, but he was a great singing star. His star quality fit perfectly into the emerging celebrity culture of the 1970s. The kind of songs he sang were also extremely important. Those are songs that captured the times and represented an entire generation. Before he hit it huge with his Cantonese songs, he had a big hit, a cover of the British band The Zombies' 'Time of the Season'. It was an exaltation of love and desire but, with its sweet melody and tribute to the seasons, was evocative of the Chinese poetic dimension and Chinese longing for harmony between human and nature. Agnes Chan's cover of Joni Mitchell's 'The Circle Game' came out at around the same time, offering philosophical poetics with the innocence of a teenage girl. They were Western songs processed by Hong Kong singers with a shallow kind of wisdom, but their laments about life and time found resonance with the Chinese tradition of searching for meanings of life. Both songs were huge hits in Hong Kong, effectively localising Western pop culture through grind-and-bind.

5. A New Path for Film Aesthetics

Law: I wanted to talk about the evolution of aesthetics in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, as well as the evolution of indigenusness. Indigenusness was harder to deal with, but the changes in aesthetics were quite apparent. In the 1960s, films were still rather moralistic. Family and moral values were relatively conservative. However, major events like the 1967 riots, China's Cultural Revolution, the stock market crash and the Vietnam War had directly or indirectly affected Hong Kong people's way of thinking and their views on traditions. The films in the 1970s had gone from being preachy to be seeking sensory excitement. It was because of the television, which entered households. Parents would make the decision of what their kids could watch. Therefore, censorship was much stricter for television than for films. This in turn became market driven. If films continued to offer melodramas and comedies informed by family morality, they wouldn't be able to compete with television. That's why there were so many films featuring action, violence and sex. Nonetheless, moralistic preaching could not be entirely abandoned, and movies

often end with moral teachings to attract family audience. Little of that was left in the 1980s. This in turn led to the making of supernatural films, featuring stiff corpses, wizardry and spell castings. Horror, erotica and grossed-out comedies appeared around that time, things that were clearly not around before, deemed unacceptable by censorship authorities and the public.

Traditional Values Giving Way to Sensory Excitement

Law: Chinese and Hong Kong cinemas have a traditional emphasis on the moral function of films or, educating through entertainment. Take the example of Chinese opera, it taught lessons with fables, rather than in realistic manners of Western films. In Chinese opera, Peking, Cantonese or otherwise, stories would have historical backdrops, but would not be bounded to a particular period of time; it was about getting an impression across rather than recreating reality. Issues like moral values and principles guiding relationships between rulers and ministers, fathers and sons, countries and races were conveyed through formalised dramatic gestures. After the May 4th Movement, there was an influx of Western realistic art, drama and literature. Drama in Chinese films (especially leftist ones) were grounded with realistic settings, with specific temporal backgrounds and character development, unlike the symbolic movements, formalised developments and mask-like personalities of operas. This resulted in more realistic preaching in 1930s and 40s cinema. After the war, moralism gave way gradually to entertainment. It remained important in *wenyi* films, but would be bluntly inserted in martial arts films, thrillers, horrors and comedies to placate family audience and censorship. As martial arts films evolved into action comedies, satiric comments on contemporary society were often added. This is again due to the TV comedies. I believed that the proliferation of television had led to the decline of moralising and rise in sensory excitement. Later, the Hong Kong New Wave further advocated Western aesthetics, to examine truth and to highlight human relationship with society and the times. Emphasis was paid on dealing with reality by portraying emotions and situations, yet preserving the ambiguity of reality, refraining from moral judgment. This was a different direction from the aesthetics of Chinese operas.

Cantonese films in the 1950s and 60s still had traces of the Chinese opera. They were, of course, also influenced by Hollywood films, modern literature from China and the West, through grind-and-bind. I still remembered that in the 1960s, we admired Patrick Lung Kong, Chor Yuen and Wong Yiu, because they had utilised Western cinematic techniques such as montage, *mise-en-scène* and pacing. They used film techniques to tell stories, instead of theatrical narrative modes. It was the effort of this group of 1960s filmmakers that contributed to the more cinematic approach of the 1970s.

The Remnants of Chinese Opera: Kung Fu and Martial Arts Films

Law: Actually, Chinese opera and cinematic techniques could be combined. The modernisation of kung fu and martial arts films would be a successful example. It was also a splendid kind of grind-and-bind! It started with Chinese opera being influenced by traditional martial arts, developing into stylised stage performances. Then it was assimilated and transformed by cinema, as contemporary *wuxia*/kung fu films. It was the film techniques that had made stage-styled martial arts more diverse, new and watchable. Bruce Lee was a martial arts practitioner and his moves were spectacular, but they're even more amazing after being captured by film, with pacing, editing and sound effects. This kind of techniques was already very successful at the early 1970s. In the late 1970s, Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung and Yuen Woo-ping incorporated the martial arts skills of Peking opera into films, creating the kung fu comedy genre. It gradually evolved into supernatural kung fu films modern-day action films with horror and comedic elements, which were again the results of grind-and-bind between film techniques and stage-styled martial arts. Many martial arts choreographers had backgrounds in Chinese operas, where action sequences were originally dances and were meant to look elegant. After the martial arts became formalised and stylised, they were no longer violent fights but performance with both real and false movements. When this tradition was incorporated into films, it became a unique feature of Hong Kong cinema. The martial arts films made by Chang Cheh, King Hu and Lau Kar-leung in the 1970s had also, in various extents, turned opera skills and traditional kung fu into cinematic action, reaching the ideal melding of martial arts and aesthetics. This was as well a successful example of combining Chinese and Western aesthetics. We could even say, 'Chinese stage-style martial arts as essence, Western film techniques as application' (as a variation of the early 20th century notion 'Chinese learning as essence, Western learning as application'), capturing international recognition and gaining market shares.

Humanistic Concerns of the Hong Kong New Wave

Ng: The other direction of 1970s cinema was towards the everyday and towards reality. Probably influenced by television, films became more realistic without being preachy. An extreme example of everyday life is RTV's *Ten Sensational Cases* series (1975), with a realism at once social and lurid. More humanistic realism was offered by *Below the Lion Rock*, which had become a staple for RTHK. Talking about the New Wave, we're actually referring to a series of combinations. Some of them harkened back to moralistic and humanistic ideologies while becoming part of a new cinema movement. Filmmaking went down a new direction, shooting in real locations, showing people walking on the streets, exposing them to the wind and the rain. From the pain and trauma of everyday life came certain messages.

We can compare the production modes in the different phases of *Below the Lion Rock*. When the show started airing in 1972, up to 1973, 1974, Liang Li-jen was the script writer. Leung Ming played Uncle Tak, the main character. Frequently sharing the screen with him was Kenneth Tsang Kong, who played a social worker. Stories always began with the loud and pushy Leung being confronted with social problems, shooting himself in the foot insisting on his old-fashioned ways. In the end, Tsang would make an appearance to reprimand the audience. That was the structure of every episode. That practice went away when Cheung Man-yeek took over, although moral lessons were still found in the stories. Examples would be Ann Hui's critically acclaimed *From Vietnam* (1978), Allen Fong's *Ode to Un Chau Chai* (1977) and *The Wild Child* (1977), which eschewed social criticism and direct preaching. Still, watching *Ode to Un Chau Chai* made us upset, that the Hong Kong government wouldn't take action to take care of the living conditions portrayed in the programme. I remember vividly the sweat and toil of everyday life in the scene of Kwok Fung and Shirley Huang sitting on the stilt house. You couldn't smell it, but it was like you could see the smell. That kind of shooting style brought you into that world, without telling you directly what was going on.

Both phases of production are informed by the same spirit but the earlier shows would tell you what to feel and the later ones would reveal the characters' personalities and their lives to move you. The stories might have no conclusion, or different viewers would have different conclusions, but the most important thing was to capture the details and qualities of that world. This fine humanistic tradition was carried forward, at least in part, to the New Wave, particularly with the group of directors from the 1980s. Directors in the 1970s were, after all, young people, so they were telling their own stories. Their main concern was to express their dissatisfaction with the system. Tsui Hark's second film, *We're Going to Eat You* (1980), left a deep impression in me. That was real madness. Also his first film, *The Butterfly Murders* (1979), which is also about disrupting orders, with a sense of youth—what youth meant was that we no longer believed in rules, that everything could be overthrown. It was different from Hui and Fong's humanistic attitude, but both styles were exciting in their own ways. Of course, TVB film unit's *Social Worker* (1976) and *CID* (1977) were also worth mentioning.

The Blues and Cries of Young People

Ng: The New Wave was also significant in how it expanded on the theme of youth. The idea of youth was manifested differently in the 1960s and 1970s. A typical example would be *Colourful Youth*, starring Connie Chan Po-chu and Josephine Siao, depicting the 1960s generation of joy and anger. That was the generation of pop and mini-skirts. The film was still didactic, but young people born and raised in Hong Kong had welcomed this youthful vibe. Youth in 1970s cinema, especially in New Wave films, emphasised bluesy sorrow and anger. Gone were the mini-skirts

and the sense of fun and enjoyment of the 1960s. Last time, Ho and I discussed similarities between the Hong Kong New Wave and the New American Cinema,⁵ on how both played on mainstream genres while sharing affinities with the French New Wave. Both movements were marked by social criticism and concerns for the alienation between people. This kind of expression was found in the work of the Hong Kong New Wave but rarely seen in 1960s films. An interesting parallel can be found in the films of Patrick Lung Kong and Chor Yuen, whose work had a sense of social urgency and were not exempt from preachiness. Their films may feature youths, but they did not have that youthful rage and primal explosiveness in Tsui's films. Instead, the films of Lung and Chor raised doubts about society through self reflection. The primal energy in Tsui's productions could also be found in other New Wave films, like Alex Cheung's *Man on the Brink* (1981), which depicted the lives of young people and their public-housing environment, with the police presence, the undercover cops and the hooligans.

Use of Images to Stir Emotions

Law: Television or film, the New Wave's biggest achievement was mastering the use of contemporary cinematic techniques. Traditionally, local story-telling relied on dialogue, with words and language, as in Chinese operas or stage plays. But things didn't need to be said explicitly now, relying instead on the construction of scenes to express inner thoughts, to stir the emotions of viewers, or to subtly point fingers at their targets. Audience very much understood the message without being told explicitly. With the use of film language, realities would be heightened. I think this is what differentiated the New Wave with mainstream traditions, especially with kung fu films and traditional comedies. First, the new directors were trained in modern film techniques. Second, as society evolved, viewers were used to expressions with visual images and became more accepting of film language. In other words, society had reached a stage in which visual images were more effective than ever. In the fiery 1960s and 70s, we vent our dissatisfaction through actions, speeches and words, but films used another way to voice discontent and express public's opinion. Still, looking at the 1970s as a whole, there weren't many films that had employed artistic techniques appropriately, stirring people up without spoken words, moralistic preaching and slogans.

The Market Takes Over

Law: New Wave directors didn't care much about the market when they were in television; they just made what they wanted. Their films, however, were totally different. They had to consider who their audience was. They could no longer film

5. Referred to the words of Sam Ho during the seminar 'New Wave: The Social and the Aesthetic', held at the Hong Kong Film Archive for the 'Revisiting the New Wave' programme, 14 May 2017.

what they wanted.

The TVB film unit had given them creative freedom, allowing directors to have free rein with scripts and little interference during production. Even Selina Chow couldn't control what they did. That's why there were so much diversity, some of them were very close to crossing the acceptable line. I believed those directors and writers never thought about ratings or tried to please their viewers; they only cared about what they wanted to express and how to deliver it. Yet, this production model was no longer viable by the mid-1980s, and certainly not viable today. Television stations had become factories. Story-tellers could only change the details, but not the overall direction of the shows.

By 1979, Tsui Hark had made gutsy films like *The Butterfly Murders* and *Dangerous Encounter—1st Kind*. The latter was particularly amazing, with a stance against oppression, imperialism and colonialism, and supportive of violent resistance. They were all taboo subjects but Tsui was unable to continue down that road. With restrictions imposed by the market and censorship authorities, that kind of productions could no longer be made with funding from big studios. It was impossible to release a film like *Dangerous Encounter—1st Kind* in Southeast Asia and Taiwan, let alone the Mainland. Even *Nomad* (1982) was considered over-the-line. This group of artists was given free rein in television, but only for a short period of time, lasting only about three years. By the 1980s, they also had to play by the rules in film. There were breakthroughs in techniques with location shooting, improvement of sound recording and cinematography, as well as the use of special effects, but there were more limits on creativity, which had continued up to this day. Ann Hui felt that limitation deeply, and Tsui Hark had moved on to making blockbusters. The New Wave meant to maintain the spirit of creative freedom, but that kind of environment can no longer be found.

Ho: I believed it was a time when all the stars were aligned. And the young filmmakers found themselves at the right place and the right time. Those circumstances allowed them to shine without having to think about the bottom line. They also had bosses like Cheung Man-ye and Selina Chow, who indulged their creativity, protecting them by keeping the corporate suits at bay. At the same time, the audience was becoming more sophisticated, with better appreciation for quality and thus more demanding of better-made films. It was an extraordinary accident, when all that happened at the same time, contributing to a better Hong Kong cinema. In fact, much of the wonderful glory of Hong Kong cinema's great success was an accident, not by design. Back then, Hong Kong cinema had the great fortune of having a population of viewers much greater than the city's actual population, because our films had markets that extended far beyond our boundaries. Our film industry therefore enjoyed box-office revenues that should have been impossible. It was an exception in history that could not be replicated. What's happening today in Hong Kong cinema is merely a return to the normal.



The plot of *The Contract* (1978) revolved around the mayhem and comedic mishaps stemming from a titular agreement. It was a fitting allegory for the shift of Hong Kong towards the newfound capitalism during the 1970s.

6. New Social Ethics

Ho: In the 1970s, Hong Kong was searching for a new set of ethics. Michael Hui, for example, often played someone who is a little tricky and a little devious, but deep down, he has a good heart. It's great comedy but also a vivid portrayal of Hong Kong people of the 1970s. It was at once self-deprecation and self-examination. I think a lot of people could see themselves in those characters. Ethical tenets were simple and clear in the 1950s, adhering to traditional beliefs. By the 1960s, they became more muddled, as old ways began to seem out of place. Michael Hui's style of ethics corresponded with what the society was looking for, and the audience was able to relate or even found needed guidance in it. The Chor Yuen-Gu Long-Ni Kang films of the 1970s have a similar expression, portraying ancient China with the 'deceit and suspicion' of modern times. Perhaps this captured the way Hong Kong people were caught between the past and the present, struggling between tradition and modern values.

Contracts Between Capital and Labour

Ng: I'll use two examples to respond what you just said. The first would be Michael

Hui's films. His films seem to take place in a domain where the traditional order is no longer valid, yet a new order had not been established. They remind me of an article about small factories in Hong Kong, published in 1975.⁶ Kwun Tong at the time was full of factories, most of them small outfits run by Chinese owners. The situation was a manifestation of grind-and-bind. In line with modern capitalism, contracts were signed between employers and employees. But the contracts would be exercised with flexibilities, in Chinese ways. For instance, if you're late today, you could work extra hours the next day. If you slacked off today, then you would have to work extra hard tomorrow to make up for it. These flexibilities were similar to traditional Chinese family ethics. It was an 'Eastern' concept—with unofficial relations more important than official black-and-white ones. There were contracts, and there were also flexibilities. This flexible way of management enhanced the development of the Kwun Tong district, not relying on large Western-owned factories but on the many small factories. Most of Michael Hui's films are about the kind of 'tricky' ways with which people work around legitimate contracts. Such practices gave people room to be unorthodox while allowing them to return to conformity in the end. This was the case for *The Private Eyes* (1976), *Games Gamblers Play* and especially *The Contract* (1978), which, as the title indicates, is a story about contracts. Hong Kong might have been in full embrace with capitalism in the 1970s, but its society remained a Chinese one. As such, conflict was inevitable.

Sex and the Family

Ng: The second example had to do with sex and the family. At the time when the films of Kong Ngee were addressing issues like out-of-wedlock children and divorce, Hong Kong didn't pass laws prohibiting polygamy until 1971. Before that, it was not abnormal for men in this modern, thriving capitalist hub to marry three wives. It wasn't until 1975 that there were family-planning campaigns like 'Two is Enough'. When a civilisation had reached a certain point of development, it would try to adjust some of its longstanding traditions, such as polygamy, family planning and family budgets. However, the colonial government did not put those issues at the top of its agenda, not dealing with them until much later. Its top priority was to keep people contented, without stirring up troubles after the 1967 riots. Attention was given to whoever were loudest. For example, the debate over equal pay between genders took a solid 15 years. Society didn't have a clue on how to deal with sex and gender. *Ming Pao Weekly*, one of the more thoughtful entertainment magazines, began running a column by James Wong in 1973. Surrounded by serious discussions on the news and Western existentialism by renowned writers'

6. King Ambrose Y. C. and Leung D. H. K., 'The Chinese Touch in Small Industrial Organizations', Social Research Centre, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Occasional Paper, 1975.

columns, Wong's column featured sex jokes and innuendos. 1970s' society started a leaning towards liberalisation, promoting ideals of modern liberalism like monogamy, that husbands and wives would treat each other as equals, and to raise two children properly.

Law mentioned that films had to do what television couldn't. This was where sensationalism came in. Victory would belong to whoever had the fiercest fights, the reddest blood and the most nudity. Youths were growing up in such a world in the mid-1970s: stick to monogamy with not too many kids, then started planning for them; sex was not mysterious, and kids should read James Wong's column when they grew up, without feeling it was perverted. Sex was part of a culture of openness and freedom. But there was also overkill on the silver screen. Films like *Virgins of the Seven Seas* (1974) would be promoted for showing 60 naked women. People were bombarded with conflicting, contradictory messages. Liberalism could not be followed slowly. For sexual liberation, it had to be done with taste, rather than as disgusting like *Virgins*.

Erotic Culture and the Suppression of Sexual Desires

Ho: There was another keyword in the 1970s: indulgence. An indulgence of pleasure, that we could do anything we wanted. We could read erotic novels on newspapers and watch sex films in theaters. The rule of law was changing at the time and there was an inexplicable but exhilarating sense of freedom. There were no film ratings and no checking of IDs at theatres. We let loose of our carnal desires in our consumption of popular entertainment. But it could also be another kind of suppression of desires, as sexual mores had yet to catch up with the films. Indulgence under suppression or suppression within indulgence, it was part of the grin-and-bind.

Take Lui Kay's erotic films for example. They could be moralistic, with a narrative rupture, in which the story's conclusion contrasts with its logic. The film would start with indulgence of sexual desires but would step back at the end to preach that it was not good. I believe that art's role in shaping morality is limited. Would watching violent and erotic films make people more violent or perverted? Can that be proved? I think Lui Kay had said that he made those erotic films for livelihood. Perhaps while making them, he still harboured strong traditional moral values. The audience in turn didn't resist the moralistic preachiness at the end of the films because the didacticism of the narrative rupture addressed their sense of guilt and their struggle with new sexual attitudes. The 1970s was a time when we were squeezed between indulgence and repression, and there was indulgence in suppression and vice versa. The 1980s, by contrast, was less indulgent.

China and in fact the entire Eastern world had always been going through drastic turning points and dramatic grind-and-bind on the issues of sex and morality.

For example, the Ming Dynasty was quite open about sex. Erotic paintings and novels like *Plum in the Golden Vase*, although not embraced officially, was widely consumed or read. Sexuality became more repressed in the Qing Dynasty and the Republic era, especially among intellectuals of the Republic era, who were driven during those times of crisis to write about social responsibilities and humanism. Yet they had their indulgence too, reportedly with complicated relationships, like those depicted in Ann Hui's *The Golden Era* (2014).

7. Conclusion

Ho: The aesthetic accomplishments and breakthroughs of the 1970s had been overlooked. Although the era couldn't measure up to the 1980s in many ways, it had its share of artistic triumphs, with lots of good films.

Ng: I believe the 1970s was a new era, very different from the 1950s and 60s. It was filled with concerns for local culture and informed by local humanism. It also gave rise to new platforms, mainly television. It was all new, with TV dramas and live broadcasts like *EYT*, with producers learning on the job. The decade was a new era, marked by new media platforms and new talents. Sam Hui singing in Cantonese and acting in *Games Gamblers Play* were new to everyone. He had released English songs back in 1967, seven years later, he had switched to singing Cantonese songs like 'The Mischievous Duo'. When I interviewed him, he said he was clueless back then. He didn't plan it, but he was willing to try it. Because of one word—'Cool'! He tried it because it was cool. Other new talents were also trying new things with that word in mind. Another clear example was the new humanism that informed the Hong Kong New Wave in both films and television. They had moved beyond didactic moralism, conveying emotions with Western cinematic styles. That aesthetic achievement was never surpassed by later films. The same can be said of Jackie Chan. He had consolidated his style in earlier films; his *Project A* (1983), for instance, was merely an upscale update of *The Young Master* (1980). What we had in the 1970s was a new environment, with new media and a group of people who weren't necessarily young but were newcomers at heart. Together, they produced a body of works that, looking back today, is still glowing brilliantly. [Translated by Sam Ho, Piera Chen and Kevin Ma]

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Changes and Social Influences in Hong Kong Cinema Post-1967: A Comparison With Hong Kong Television

Law Kar

Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) began broadcasting in November 1967, ushering Hong Kong into the era of free-to-air TV. This was also the time when the 1967 riots¹ had just died down, as though foreshadowing the emergence of a new social order. To rejuvenate a society that's been scarred and fractured from the riots, the colonial government adopted a 'kid-glove policy' and made significant investments into infrastructure, welfare and public relations. To encourage a sense of belonging among Hong Kongers and to dissipate feelings of rage and vexation among youths, the government improved cultural and recreational facilities and held more arts and cultural events in the city. When the new Governor, Crawford Murray MacLehose, took office in 1971, he was keen to introduce reforms such as simplifying the government administrative structure; improving various areas like housing, welfare, healthcare, education, transport, and social service; and allowing greater freedoms of speech, including permitting a limited amount of peaceful protests (provided that they did not threaten the colonial, imperialist status quo). Finally, he reinforced anti-bribery measures—starting at the police force—so as to tackle crime and corruption head-on. These reforms began to show their effectiveness by the end of the 1970s. Thanks to those policies, Hong Kong society made significant steps forward despite economic uncertainties. This ten-year period was known as the 'MacLehose era', and in this article I will refer to it as the 'post-1967 era'.

1. In May 1967 a workers' strike escalated after leftist unions got involved and the government responded with force, and eventually sparked a full-scale anti-British protest. Communists in Hong Kong held large-scale protests and strikes across the city, which culminated into violence and ever-escalating riots. Many civilians were killed or injured from the violence, and many arrested. The riots began to die down in November of the same year. The events have been officially termed as 'the 1967 Riots' but leftists use the label 'anti-British struggle'. Here I use the term '1967 riots'.

Competition Between Broadcasters: Sense and Sensibility

These ten or so years also marked a period of rapid growth for local television as it transitioned from paid wired services to free-to-air wireless broadcasting. Three broadcasters emerged as commercial competitors: TVB, Rediffusion Television (RTV), and Commercial Television.² Public broadcaster Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) also stepped up its production quality. From a technical point of view, broadcasting changed from black-and-white to colour; from studio-based recorded and live broadcasts to on-site live broadcasts and satellite broadcasts. The tough competition eventually led to the demise of Commercial Television and constant financial losses for RTV, but it also propelled television to a widely popular medium within a short time. Television brought free entertainment into households, improving the morale of a frustrated population. It also facilitated the dissemination of news and information, broadening the horizons of Hong Kong audiences by bringing international events before their eyes in a prompt manner. However, by the late 1970s, television admittedly became a far more consumerist medium as the economy improved. It encouraged materialist pursuits and instilled the idea that everyone can become rich. The topic of how television influenced social change and the local cultural climate is a significant one and should be left for another day. In this essay, I will narrow my focus to the changes in Hong Kong cinema in the period following the popularisation of television. In the interest of gaining insight into some of 1970s Hong Kong cinema's main characteristics, I will compare how the two mediums reflected contemporary society and how they influenced each other.

First, some context. In post-war Hong Kong, the main forms of mass media platforms were print media and radio, followed by film and theatre. Although films and theatre (especially Cantonese opera) were popular, their primary objective was to entertain rather than to disseminate messages. This marked a significant departure from the wartime concept that films and theatre productions had to serve a patriotic agenda. Even before the emergence of television, print media and radio had already started transitioning from straightforward narratives to more figurative, dramatic, and sensational forms of storytelling through text, sound, and music. This was evidenced by the spike in the popularity of serialised *wuxia*, erotic, and crime stories in newspapers. Radio broadcasting also saw the rise of sensationalistic detective fiction and horror stories. Radio dramas with extensive casts of characters began to replace the single-narrator format to give the effect of watching a physical play. These shifts showed that print media and radio were trying to broaden their audience appeal by pushing the boundaries of text and sound with the aim of creating richer sensory experiences. By the 1970s, with more international news and social reportage available, the new vogue was focusing on the *vox populi*, to invite ordinary citizens to give opinions. Radio phone-in programmes (in which the hosts engage in conversations with listeners or answer their questions)

2. RTV switched to free-to-air broadcasting in 1973, and Commercial Television was also a free-to-air channel that was founded in 1975.

started gaining popularity. Music programmes also included audience engagement segments. Both the government-owned RTHK and the privately owned Commercial Radio Hong Kong introduced more current affairs programmes in the style of talk shows and news magazine shows. The move was, on the one hand, a way of counteracting the competition from television, as well as a way of answering society's demands for more information and opinion-sharing.

Hong Kong Cinema: the Road to Sensationalism

In this period of great social change, Hong Kong cinema did not seek to be a medium for communication or dissipating social tension. Instead, it sought to continually ramp up sensationalist excitement and offer catharsis for those frustrated with real life over the decade. In other words, there was an emphasis of sensibility (feelings, emotions) over sense (ideas, rationality). While a great diversity emerged in genres such as action, horror and erotica, the creative energy invested in genre-crossing was not translated in the intellectual side of things; themes and ideas were often muddled, while plots were rife with hyperbole and contradiction. *Wenyi* cinema and social realism cinema gave way to *wuxia* and farcical comedies. There was an effort to pack more jokes into comedies, and later to even integrate comedy into action. All those were part of the same strategy to differentiate films from television—the latter was free entertainment for families while the former costs money and therefore had to offer maximum entertainment value and sensationalism. At the same time, however, filmmakers saw that the popularity of television lied in its relatability and ability to closely follow the latest social developments. The medium effectively became a pioneer of pop culture trends. As a result, the film industry often borrowed from television, thus forming an interesting relationship of mutual competition and influence.

I would like to first briefly discuss the state of the Hong Kong film industry before and after the emergence of television broadcasting. Since Cantonese was the most commonly spoken language among the local population, Cantonese films resonated much more with the lower-middle classes than their Mandarin counterparts. They were also far more in touch with social issues and concerns of the day. But due to strong competition from Mandarin film studios such as Shaw Brothers, Motion Picture and General Investment Co. Ltd. (MP & GI), as well as leftist corporations Great Wall and Fenghuang, Cantonese cinema was in a steady decline. Mandarin films had stellar production values, producing better dramatic, musical and action sequences. Coupled with strong distribution networks and marketing, it was natural that they outstripped their Cantonese competitions. In the mid-1960s, the main trends in Mandarin cinema were female-led musicals, followed by *wenyi* romances and comedies. Shaw Brothers dominated over MP & GI and the leftist studios. The company scored huge hits in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia with their period *huangmei diao* musicals. When the *huangmei diao* craze died out, Shaws began promoting their 'new *wuxia* films'

and heralded ‘a new era of technicolour *wuxia*’. The company’s promotional materials promised to open audiences’ eyes to a kind of *wuxia* they had never seen before by using new filmmakers to break away from the old traditions and make way for the new. This marketing strategy was planned and executed by Chang Cheh. After a two-year trial, his strategy finally proved successful when *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) became a hit at the box office. This opened the floodgates for a new wave of *wuxia* and action films. Much blood was spilled and much violence put onscreen by way of these tales of ‘good vs evil’. Hong Kong cinema would never be quite the same again.

New *Wuxia* and Kung Fu Fever: Society’s Reactions and Influences

In his film reviews, Chang Cheh had been a constant critic of ‘soft’, tragic melodramas in contemporary female-led films, especially the coaxing, decadent tunes of *huangmei diao*. He advocated the masculine spirit and what he perceived to be ‘masculine’ qualities of brotherhood, strength, bravery and persistence, all qualities that were at the heart of ‘new *wuxia* films’. However, the political and social climate of the day stopped Chang from imbuing these sentiments in modern-day dramas (he tried his hand at contemporary stories of youthful rebellion and passion, but with little success). The fictional period settings and characters of *wuxia* films allowed him more creative freedom to challenge set boundaries and norms.

One-Armed Swordsman was a box office miracle, breaking the HK\$1 million threshold in July 1967, even when the riots were at their most violent. Chang’s follow-up, *The Assassin* (1967), a tale of youthful revolt against authoritarianism, also performed well at the box office—a great start to a series of very well-received *yanggang* (chivalric masculinity), violent, and action-filled films. Their success can largely be attributed to how their tragic anti-authoritarianism appealed to the frustrated and emotional post-1967 public, especially among the oppressed working-class youths of the day.

Shortly after came Bruce Lee’s kung fu films. They performed phenomenally at the box office because of Lee’s stunning physical skills and their resonance with the social climate of the day. Lee was born in the US, raised in Hong Kong, and spent his childhood playing and brawling with the working class—as reflected in his youthful and rebellious image on screen. His later experiences in the US embodied a touching story of an overseas Chinese in search of identity and recognition: after completing his studies in the US, Lee struggled in Hollywood due to systemic oppression and racist prejudice. After returning to Hong Kong, he made *The Big Boss* (1971), the story about the abuse suffered by Chinese workers in Thailand and the man who steps forward to fight for their rights. This paralleled with the demands of the social and workers’ movements of the day. In the following year, Lee played Chen Jeh in *Fist of Fury* (1972), in which he challenges foreign tyranny by taking down arrogant Japanese invaders using Chinese



In *The Way of the Dragon* (1972), Bruce Lee defeated the symbolic white overlord with genuine martial arts skills, which coincided with the global 'anti-imperialist, anti-colonial' thinking at the time.

kung fu. Lee's shattering of the 'Sick Man of East Asia' stereotype forced upon the Chinese by the Japanese was a fist-pumping moment for audiences and appealed to contemporary anti-Japanese sentiments that stemmed from the Diaoyu Islands dispute at the time. In *The Way of the Dragon* (1972), directed by Lee himself, his character also used his kung fu prowess to defeat Caucasian fighters and malevolent foreign powers. These ideas coincided with the rise of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial thoughts in many parts of the world. Lee spearheaded kung fu films into an era of unprecedented popularity and international recognition as the words 'kung fu' became recognisable all over the world. Bruce Lee was revered as an international superstar and national hero. The rise of *wuxia* and kung fu films in the 1970s echoed the social atmosphere of post-1967 Hong Kong. Their popularity also reaffirmed wider trends as advocated in the third world, namely ideas to do with anti-Western and colonial influence, anti-economic hegemony, as well as demands for independence and freedom worldwide. Born out of a hotbed of social changes, the kung fu boom brought about many innovations and opportunities for Hong Kong cinema. It also served as an example of how Hong Kongers used the medium of film to construct an identity for themselves amidst social change and development.

In the latter half of the 1970s, Cantonese theme songs for local TV dramas challenged the dominant position held by Western and Mandarin pop tunes. The immediacy and realism of television news and live broadcasts helped raise the population's interest in local and international affairs, often spurring them into social action. The emergence of rights activism in 1970s Hong Kong was in large part thanks to the development of television journalism and reportage. The escalation of the Vietnam War and the sight of civilians being murdered en masse caused strong reactions worldwide and sparked protests all over the globe, including Hong Kong. The 1974 Po Sang Bank robbery stand-off, which lasted a staggering 18 hours, was captured live on television. The thrill of watching a live hostage situation unfold surpassed watching a serial drama. It raised awareness and concerns about crime and the effectiveness of the police. The first live broadcast of the Miss Hong Kong pageant by TVB in 1973 can also be cited as an example as it transformed the show into a major annual event. All these different factors demonstrated how television advocated a sense of belonging among Hong Kongers and encouraged them to pay more attention to the relationship between individual and society. Just as Bruce Lee's international success brought pride to his home city, television contributed to the forging and solidifying of a Chinese identity for Hong Kongers.

Cinema-Television Competition and Interaction: the Rise of Comedy

Television soon jumped onto the *wuxia* bandwagon, with Commercial Television's *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (1976) being the earliest example of a *wuxia* serial drama. In the same year, TVB released *The Legend of the Book and Sword* to answer the challenge, ushering in one of the most popular eras for *wuxia* serial dramas. This was also the time when *wuxia* and kung fu cinema entered a period of fatigue. They were getting repetitive and losing their touch with contemporary society. With the shrinkage of the *wuxia* cinema market, a push was sorely needed to reinvigorate the genre. The push, as it turned out, came from television.

In the 1970s, television entered into people's homes with colourful, lively, and jovial variety programmes that quickly won the hearts and viewership of families. *Enjoy Yourself Tonight* (1967) and *The Hui Brothers Show* (1971) are prime examples of such shows. The latter satirised the ills of contemporary Hong Kong society using short skits, with Sam Hui's Cantopop songs interspersed in between. Hui's music began to gain popularity while the show's popularity inspired a series of satirical comedies such as *73* (1973). After finding fame, Sam's brother Michael was recruited by Shaw Brothers director Li Han-hsiang to make the transition to the silver screen. Together, they made *The Warlord* (1972) and *The Happiest Moment* (1973), both great box office successes. Soon after, the brothers set up their own company and collaborated with Golden Harvest to direct and star in *Games Gamblers Play* (1974), which became the highest-grossing film that year. The film was

born out of the *The Hui Brothers Show* in a number of ways: the same creative team behind the show, including the Hui brothers and Lau Tin-chi, masterminded the film; it was very rooted in the skit-style of their television work, connected by a story about a couple of nobodies hustling to make it big by lying, begging, borrowing and stealing.

From 1972 to 1974, Hong Kong's stock market saw huge gains and subsequently a disastrous crash. This benefited speculating tycoons, but it crushed the dreams of many ordinary citizens. Meanwhile, the bribery scandal of then-police chief Peter Fitzroy Godber exposed the societal chaos caused by widespread police corruption. *Games Gamblers Play* delivered comedy with a strong sense of anti-authoritarianism and anti-elitism, serving as a cathartic release of aggression and resentment towards the ruling classes of the day, namely the government, the police, the Royal Jockey Club and triad bosses. The film's amazing gross (over HK\$6.25 million) is in no small part indebted to this sharp, irreverent satire. In fact, Chor Yuen's *The House of 72 Tenants* (1973, originally a stage play by the TVB-sponsored troupe, Hong Kong Movie TV Theatrical Society, which had broken local theatre box office records) also had a cast of predominantly TV actors and was also the box office champion that year (with over HK\$5.62 million). Like *Games Gamblers Play*, *The House of 72 Tenants* also spoke to the frustrations of the oppressed working class, condemning the rich while satirising the incompetence and corruption of Hong Kong's disciplined services (including the police and fire departments). However, the Chor Yuen film was a period piece set in Guangzhou, and its satire and critique were couched in allusions unlike the delightful directness of *Games Gamblers Play*. Nevertheless, satirical comedy became a rival genre that developed in parallel to the *wuxia* action craze. The two genres would later combine into action comedy, injecting new life into the tired action genre. This is an example of how Hong Kong television directly influenced cinematic trends, as film took ideas and resources from television to repurpose and make anew.

Police Corruption and the ICAC: New On-Screen Depictions of Cops and Robbers

Free-to-air television was a form of free family entertainment, thus it was more strictly controlled by the authorities than films. While television was monitored for objectionable content such as sex, violence and anti-social tendencies, films eagerly pursued more sensational excitement as a way to counter its small-screen competition. This is why 1970s Hong Kong cinema continuously sought out new ways to excite its audiences with intense action, sentimentality, comedy and eroticism. The gradual relaxation of film censorship encouraged this trend. 1970s Hong Kong was rife with social ills, crime, and police corruption. In an effort to reform the police force, Governor MacLehose established the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in 1974. One of its earliest high-profile targets was then-police chief Peter Fitzroy Godber, whom quickly fled the city. Before this, violent crimes could be portrayed but never in detail, while internal

police procedures and the police's relationship with the triads were also off-limits. Cinema and television were quick to respond to these reforms: Kuei Chih-hung detailed triad internal workings and inter-gang conflicts with *The Teahouse* (1974) and *Big Brother Cheng* (1975); Ng See-yuen raced to be the first to adapt the Godber story with the smash hit *Anti-Corruption* (1975); in 1976, TVB made the anthology series *CID* with help from the police department. Filmed in a cinematic style, the series portrayed crimes and police procedural work, albeit in a relatively conservative way, and earned acclaim for it. That same year, Johnny Mak made *Ten Sensational Cases* for RTV, a sensationalised version of real-life crimes with heightened violence. The show received a warning from the authorities, but it was nevertheless allowed to air and ended up drawing strong ratings. Then police superintendent Philip Chan wrote and starred in *Jumping Ash* (1976), based on his own experiences. In the following year, he starred in RTV's popular police procedural dramas *The Big Hero* and *The Big Hero II*. The network later made *Big Sister*, a gritty tale of corruption between triad gangs and police forces, while TVB made a sequel to *CID* and a slew of other crime and police procedural dramas. The ICAC also produced cinematic television dramas that portrayed various social problems and promoted its anti-corruption message. At one point, these dramas were banned by the authorities due to their realistic depiction of corruption within the police force and their relationship with hardened criminals. However, the show was eventually allowed to air, opening the floodgates to countless films dealing with triad life, prostitution and gambling rings, drug abuse, and other crime-related topics.

Brain Drain From Television to Film: Energy, Creativity and Realism

With the success of TVB's *The Fatal Irony* (1974), serial drama became the most important creative format in television. It led to shows that were highly popular from 1976 to 77, including *Hotel*, *A House is Not a Home*, and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. These serial dramas mostly focused on modern life in Hong Kong and the changes in society, family, and romantic relationships. In many ways these shows inherited the themes and narratives of 1950s and 1960s Cantonese melodrama, but the long-form format allowed more detail and subtlety imbued into their stories. For example, *Hotel* and *A House is Not a Home* explored political games and power plays between people in a capitalist society, the intersection and conflict between family and business, as well as the rise of female roles in society with gravitas and emotions. Similarly, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* gave a powerful and lively portrayal of the social problems and emotional drama related to the integration of Mainland immigrants into Hong Kong society. It struck a chord with viewers, who tuned in with bated breath every night. Popularity of serial dramas in turn forced cinema to offer further sensory excitement by packing in even more action and laughs in a bid to draw audiences. But the problem was that filmmakers became obsessed with bringing innovation into their fight sequences



Ann Hui's *The Secret* (1979) is one of the representative works of Hong Kong New Wave.

rather than enriching their characters and plot narratives, making it difficult to lure audiences back into the cinema. This was mainly caused by a stale pool of talent in the industry.

On the other hand, there was certainly no lack of talent on *Ng Toi Shan* (literally 'Five-Station Hill', the Chinese nickname for Broadcast Drive, home to three TV and two radio stations), many of whom would later transition to the big screen. It was inevitable that the film industry would bring in new blood from television. Newly established indie companies such as Bang Bang Film Production and Pearl City were far more aggressive than heavy-hitters Golden Harvest and Shaw Brothers in recruiting and trying out new talents. In 1976, Bang Bang appointed Leung Po-chih (from television backgrounds) and Philip Chan to work with established star Josephine Siao, who had just returned from her studies in the US. The result was *Jumping Ash*, a gritty film about the drug trade. The film ranked third at the box office that year—a testament to the creative power of new talents. From 1977 to 78, Yim Ho, Dennis Yu and Ronny Yu formed their own company to make *The Extras* (1978). Other indie companies also achieved moderate success, including Alex Cheung and Teddy Robin's *Cops and Robbers* (1979), Tsui Hark and Ng See-yuen's *The Butterfly Murders* (1979), as well as Ann Hui and Joyce Chan's *The Secret* (1979). This signaled the rise of a new crop of talent in the local film industry. Meanwhile, rigorous competition between the three TV stations led to the closing of Commercial Television, sending many small-screen talents to the film world. This left long-standing effects on both the Hong Kong film industry and local television ecosystem.

Television talents were adept at using cinematic language to explore contemporary social themes and to create gritty, exciting realism. They brought with them high production values, inventiveness and flexibility, as well as an eye for realism—and injected new life into Hong Kong cinema through both creative and technical innovation. Meanwhile, TVB and RTV staged a major face-off in 1980 following the end of Commercial Television. RTV was forced to restructure and rebrand into Asia Television. Both stations subsequently entered a period of relative calm to recover. They also moved from a creative-driven model to a more administratively-minded model; all processes were standardised, with much tighter controls exerted over budgets and production schedules. This led to an emphasis on marketing effect over creative quality. Shows from both stations became formulaic products that lacked the personality and flair of their predecessors.

Television-Film Synergy; Shaw Brothers-Golden Harvest Rivalry

Although the swift development of local broadcast television brought pressure on Hong Kong cinema to change and innovate, the situation was different from that in the US. The major film companies in Hong Kong were not the ones threatened by the change; it was the smaller independent film companies. In fact, most independent Mandarin-film companies were already bought out or forced out of competition by Shaw Brothers and MP & GI in the 1960s. By the mid-1960s, Shaws had achieved a monopoly over the Mandarin film market, squeezing out even MP & GI and leftist studios Great Wall and Fenghuang. Shaws then turned its focus to competing with Cantonese films, strategically seizing market share and attracting film talent from competing film studios. This led to the massive downsizing of the Cantonese film market. In 1972, Cantonese film studios were forced to stop production. Sir Run Run Shaw, the savvy head of Shaw Brothers, naturally saw the potential power of television, so he invested in TVB in its early days in preparation for the developments to come. In the mid-1970s, Shaw Brothers and TVB co-founded a talent training programme, recruiting and cultivating industry professionals in front of and behind the camera for both film and television. Shaw Brothers' films also took inspiration and made use of resources from its television counterparts.

However, an internal crisis emerged within Shaw Brothers during this period. In 1970, a number of Shaws executives, including Raymond Chow, Leonard Ho and Leung Fung, left the studio with a group of management and production staff to form Golden Harvest. The company would become Shaw Brothers' greatest rival, returning Hong Kong cinema from a monopoly to a stand-off between two companies. The competitive relationship between Shaw Brothers and Golden Harvest, as well as the one between television and film, defined the rest of the decade. However, whereas Shaw Brothers and Golden Harvest shared an antagonistic rivalry, competition between television and film created a synergy that brought only positive results. Television did not take audiences away from cinemas. In fact, box office revenue was on the rise throughout the 1970s.

Challenge of the Masters (1976) is one of the *wuxia* classics directed by Lau Kar-leung in the 1970s.



comedies offered an alternative to the action-flooded market. The studio excelled at identifying talent and trusting in their filmmakers' abilities to execute their visions within modest budgets. Without the financial burdens of a big studio, Golden Harvest also allowed their creators more time and space on developing rapport as a team. Even though their technical capabilities weren't up to par yet, their creative forays often paid off and established new cinematic trends, with Bruce Lee's action films and Michael Hui's madcap comedies being prime examples. After Lee's death, the market was swamped with subpar kung fu films. However, Golden Harvest's Huang Feng attempted to innovate by infusing Korean Hapkido and Taekwondo moves into his action films. John Woo took inspiration from the Hui brothers' madcap comedy style and made a series of action comedies for Golden Harvest, incorporating lighthearted gags into action sequences. At the same time, Lau Kar-leung, Sammo Hung, Lau Kar-wing, Jackie Chan, Ng See-yuen, and Yuen Woo-ping all put their own spin on the action comedy. This combination of comedy and martial arts proved to be a potent formula that resuscitated the dying kung fu genre. Soon Golden Harvest recruited would-be superstar Jackie Chan to collaborate with Sammo Hung. The films grew increasingly large in scale over time, turning Chan into a superstar. Meanwhile, Chang Cheh continued to make kung fu films at Shaw Brothers after Bruce Lee's death, focusing on legends of Shaolin and Lingnan martial arts. Those films reached the peak of their popularity in 1975. Not long after, Chang Cheh's martial arts choreographer Lau Kar-leung tried his hand at directing as well and made many 'Southern-style' kung fu and Shaolin martial arts classics. Chor Yuen also found a niche with his uniquely fantastical and atmospheric adaptations of Gu Long novels. The creative rivalry between the two major studios heated up again as newly formed leftist



Mud Child (1976) depicts how the government fails to provide disaster relief after a deadly typhoon hits Hong Kong. Meanwhile residents are left to fend for themselves.

film company Chung Yuen also threw its hat in the ring by promoting Mainland Chinese newcomer Jet Li with their ‘authentic’ Shaolin martial arts films. However, it was already 1982 when that happened.

As an aside, it’s also worth mentioning that even though leftist studios Great Wall and Feng Huang suffered great losses during the Cultural Revolution and the 1967 riots, they managed to make several films with very piercing critiques of contemporary Hong Kong society. These included Hu Xiao-fung’s *The Hut on Hilltop* (1970), a sensitive and rational portrayal of the difficult, dire lives of those living in squatter huts and a hard-hitting criticism of the government’s housing policies. There was also Chan Ching-po and Chu Fung’s *Mud Child* (1976), a superb piece of realist cinema that told the emotional story of civilians who must help each other when the government failed to offer substantial aid in the wake of a devastating typhoon. After the Cultural Revolution ended, the two studios began hiring new filmmakers from local television stations in an effort to revive their dying businesses.

This quick overview of how the main film genres of the era evolved is intended to show how the Shaw Brothers-Golden Harvest rivalry drove creative trends, market growth, and technical improvement in Hong Kong cinema. In reality, local films frequently took the top five positions at the box office in the late 1970s, defeating foreign imports. Ticket sales rose from HK\$1 to 2 million to HK\$8 to 9 million, while production quality and filmmaking techniques also saw marked progress. This was in part due to bigger budgets and because action films required better cinematography, editing and mise-en-scène in order to achieve their intended effect. After 1979, many talented screenwriters, directors, cinematographers and editors applied their knowledge from Western films and their experiences in television to films, thereby greatly raising the professional



Patrick Lung Kong's *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (1971) denotes the Hong Kong 1967 Riots. A large part of the film had to be edited before it was given the permission for release.

standards of local films. In particular, advancements in areas such as character design, location shooting, synchronous audio recording, and music production accelerated the modernisation of Hong Kong cinema.

Ripples Outside the Big Wave: Influences Not to be Ignored

While big heaving waves no doubt make their mark, it's also important to not ignore the minor ripples. Much has already been written about the 1979 New Wave movement, but many 'ripples' have also brought surprising and long-lasting influence to Hong Kong cinema. In 1968 and 1969, Tong Shu-shuen made independent art house film *The Arch*. It garnered positive reviews both internationally and among local critics, even though it wasn't officially released in Hong Kong until 1970. Although its appeal was limited to a niche audience, its success as an art house picture was nonetheless encouraging. Tong later made *China Behind* (completed in 1974 and released in 1987), the story of Chinese intellectuals who escape the Cultural Revolution by fleeing to Hong Kong and ultimately failing to acclimatise to the capitalist society. Although banned in most Chinese communities at the time, it is a fine, deeply humanist and patriotic film. Tong's subsequent film *Sup Sap Bup Dup* (1975) deals with more commonplace themes but is by no means vulgar or pedestrian. It's a lively portrait of the Hong Kong working class filmed in a very experimental style. Patrick Lung Kong's *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (1970) is an oblique critique of the 1967 riots, and much of its bold discussions of political and social issues had to be censored before the film was released to the public. Later, Lung



King Hu's *wuxia* films constitute their own universe, underscoring the transcendence of inner life and its implications. *A Touch of Zen* (1971) is one of the examples.

made *Hiroshima 28* (1974), a tale about the after-effects of the atomic bomb. Lung's decision to express sympathy for the Japanese people rather than to condemn Japan's militarism was heavily criticised, but the film's world view and its anti-nuclear, pro-pacifist message were unique in Hong Kong cinema. Lung's *The Call Girls* (1973), which dealt with prostitution, and *Nina* (1976), a portrait of the female psyche, also stirred controversy upon release. Tong and Lung's storytelling perspectives and film techniques stood out in the 1970s. Their creative visions were closely linked to society at the time and gave rise to the new wave that was to come at the end of the decade.

Last but not least, one must not forget King Hu's significant contributions to *wuxia* cinema. His *wuxia* films were in a class of their own. He didn't follow trends or chased box office glory. Instead, he concerned himself with delving deeper into the meanings and themes of his films while perfecting his technique. *A Touch of Zen* (1971), *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973), *The Valiant Ones* (1975) and *Raining in the Mountain* (1979) received tepid



Chor Yuen's *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (1972) put erotic sense and violence appropriately to use, creating a new kind of film ideologies.

Still from the motion picture *Intimate Confessions of A Chinese Courtesan*. ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

responses when they were first released, but their critical reputation grew with the passage of time. Hu's films would come to inspire successors such as Tsui Hark, Ann Hui, Patrick Tam, Ng See-yuen, Ang Lee, and Wong Kar-wai, as well as long-time collaborators Sylvia Chang, Hsu Feng, Cheng Pei-pei, Wang Xinglei, Sammo Hung, Stephen Tung Wai, Ng Ming-choi, and James Leung. King Hu is truly a master of *wuxia* cinema.

Sex and Violence Abound: Influenced by Society or a Bad Influence on Society?

Another feature of 1970s Hong Kong cinema was the prominence of sexual content. Regardless of the genre, films had to include scenes of sexual flirtation and nudity. The introduction of steamier elements in Hong Kong films started in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Cantonese cinema was in a slump and investments were in sharp decline. However, low-budget comedies with a sexual and satirical edge had a market. Ten such films were released in 1970 alone, turning Tina Ti into a pin-up superstar. Some of the better films included *Lucky Seven* (1970) and *Lucky Seven Strike Again* (1970), both scripted and directed by Yeung Kuen. The sexual elements in both films were rather tame with very little nudity. Instead, they focused on satirising human nature's greed and lust as well as the strangeness of a sex- and money-crazed society. While crude, the films nonetheless hit some truthful notes about contemporary Hong Kong. However, this trend only lasted for a year, as Cantonese films were driven out of production by 1971, though Mandarin cinema picked up the baton in the subsequent years. Even major studios Shaw Brothers and Golden Harvest invested in erotic films whose value

was only defined by the inclusion of nudity and sex. Most of them were unsophisticated and exploitative, but *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (1972) proved to be an exception. Directed by Chor Yuen and written by Chiu Kang-chien, the film achieved the rare feat of using sex and violence to convey its messages. On the other hand, Li Han-hsiang's *fengyue* films (softcore sex films in period settings) were well-made but lacked depth; *The Warlord* (1972), for example, became talk of the town and a success at the box office for featuring a shot of guest star Tina Ti's nude behind. *Legends of Lust* (1972), made in the same year, also achieved commercial success, thereby officially launching a 'fengyue boom'. Li did put some effort in crafting scenes with romance and flirtations, often finding elegance in the bawdy. However, those films were ultimately overshadowed by cheap gimmicks. Other directors who dabbled in the genre included master photographer Ho Fan, whose softcore sex films were experiments in aesthetics and cinematic technique that found little success. Actor Lui Kay, meanwhile, formed his own company in 1973 to produce a series of low-budget erotic films for Shaws. The films had paper-thin plots, low production values and only aimed to appease the mainstream audience's desire for sensory excitement.

Under a system of police corruption, the sex industry flourished as the government relaxed its censorship standards in the 1970s. There was an influx of Hong Kong films about triad-controlled sex, drug and gambling trades, as well as violent, lurid tales of young girls being forced into prostitution—Cheung Sum's works being an example. Erotic cinema later began giving equal emphasis to exposing societal woes and bared flesh, or the concept of 'hard fists and soft pillows'. Over-saturation and a lack of innovation drove the market into decline once again. Hong Kong yet had to introduce a motion picture ratings system at the time, so sex films were vilified as evil influences that even surpassed violence and gore. Society's licentiousness and greed, along with its rising crime rates, were often seen as resulting from these pornographic films. Hypersexuality and violence in film can indeed leave negative influence on young people, but the rise of sexual debauchery and violence in post-1967 Hong Kong was merely a symptom of a wider, deeper condition. Hong Kong society was diseased to its core, and its cinema should not have been blamed for the public's disrespect for morality and for law and order. However, it would nonetheless be fair to say that Hong Kong films chose to exploit the moral chaos in society instead of explaining or resolving it.

Conclusion

It is said that the 1970s, or the post-1967 era, was a 'fiery' period in Hong Kong's history. The riots were brought to an end, but social fractures were deeper than ever, and the constant escalation of conflicts resulted in extreme public dissatisfaction. The government's attempts at reform were often resisted by the people, as many thorny issues could simply not be resolved in a short period of time. People's livelihoods and the economy did gradually improve, and the public mood eventually alleviated. During

this time of great change, Hong Kong cinema didn't seek to drive social progress. Instead, it sought to aggravate the inner desires and frustrations in people's minds. This was a sharp contrast to the didactic agenda in 1950s and 1960s cinema, which believed in films' power to dissipate feelings of discontent and disappointment. While post-1967 television and radio stations mainly served to maintain the government's political status quo, they also facilitated communication, conveyed public opinions, and built social unity. The film industry seemed to have disavowed itself of such responsibilities, opting for pure, unadulterated entertainment and sensory excitement. [Translated by Rachel Ng]

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Creating a Uniquely Hong Kong 1970s

Sek Kei

Hong Kong's economy took off rapidly in the 1970s, with the city being named one of 'Asia's Four Little Dragons' alongside Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore. Among them, Hong Kong stood out in particular because of its economic miracle. Its residents developed a strong sense of identity during that era, enabling them to leave behind feelings of being drifters, refugees, or second-rate Chinese citizens under British colonial rule. They began to embrace the 'Hong Konger' identity instead.

The British Hong Kong government notably changed its aloof approach to policymaking after the 1967 leftist riots, which were inspired by the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in the Mainland. It stopped turning a blind eye to the hardships of the people, instead working to improve the treatment and welfare of workers. It also established the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in 1974 to severely punish corrupted officials. Those who lived in Hong Kong under a liberal legal system gained the opportunity to work hard and break free from poverty. The so-called 'Hong Kong Spirit'—symbolised by the Lion Rock—began taking form during that period.

The British Hong Kong government also actively promoted cultural activities in the 1970s. The *Below the Lion Rock* series produced by the Television Division of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) began in 1972 and had a far-reaching impact on the local population. The Hong Kong Arts Festival and Hong Kong International Film Festival, founded by the Urban Council in 1973 and 1977 respectively, were the first of their kind and remain prominent events on the city's calendar to this very day.

The Hong Kong film industry, on the other hand, has always been operated by

privately owned businesses independent of the government and left to its own devices. The government was only responsible for censorship and did not make its own films, nor did it subsidise the production of certain local features until the Hong Kong Film Development Fund, founded after the 1997 handover. Operating as a free market, Hong Kong's film industry was much more open than its state-controlled Chinese counterpart (in fact, there were very few films produced in the Mainland during the Cultural Revolution, while the Taiwan film industry also faced many restrictions at the time). Moreover, the Hong Kong government's censorship authority gradually relaxed its standards starting in the 1970s. Politically sensitive content was still censored, but restrictions on sexual content, violence, and crime became increasingly lax. Consequently, bloodshed, debauchery, nudity, gambling, fraud, and gangsters were frequently featured in Hong Kong cinema. It was not uncommon to see crime and depravity on the silver screen.

More importantly, Hong Kong cinema was undergoing a significant and unprecedented transformation at the time. Chinese-language features made in various places (including old Shanghainese films, pre-Cultural Revolution Mainland Chinese films, and Taiwanese films during Chiang Kai-shek's rule) were liberated from the shackles of conservative morals and traditional ethics, with some even being considered 'rebellious' and 'subversive'.

It can be said that Hong Kong cinema was going through its own 'Cultural Revolution' in that era. Unlike Mainland China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) which was politicised, anti-establishment, anti-traditional, and opposed to almost anything foreign, the 'Hong Kong Cultural Revolution' was apolitical and limited to pop culture. It was mainly initiated by the film industry of its own accord to cater to the tastes of hot-blooded youngsters. Traditional precepts and teachings no longer applied; greed and lust no longer had to be avoided; it was perfectly natural to indulge in gambling, fighting, and mischievous 'wickedness'. As long as there was a market, filmmakers could do whatever they wanted, no matter how outrageous or taboo it may be.

Admittedly, numerous vulgar and low quality Hong Kong films were made in the 1970s for profit-making. However, 'bad films' that advocate immorality faced the scrutiny of the market. Audiences were free to make their own choices and the market would adjust accordingly. Among all Chinese communities, only Hong Kong could enjoy that freedom at the time. In fact, it was not all just about abusing freedom and setting a bad example; there were also some very notable positive results—Hong Kong cinema gave birth to Bruce Lee's martial arts films, which took the world by storm and made kung fu famous all over the world. It also created comedies with a unique Hong Kong flavour, motion pictures based on true bizarre crimes, heist films, and others. Regardless of those films' qualities, they contributed in lending a distinct 'Hong Kong style' to local films. Since then, 'Hong Kong style' has left its mark in Taiwan and the Mainland. The Hong Kong approach to making action films has also made its mark abroad, including Hollywood.

Hong Kong cinema is a fitting representative of the 'Hong Kong Cultural Revolution'



Based on Wing Chun, Bruce Lee's kung fu incorporated boxing skills from various countries, melding into a kind of play of his own, and became Hong Kong legend. Pictured here is from *The Game of Death* (1978).

in that it exemplified the people's fighting spirit, diligence, diversity, and autonomy. As one of many global 'Cultural Revolutions', it also echoed the anti-establishment and anti-authoritarian movements which erupted in various parts of the world in the 1960s and 70s.

Transformation 1: Unifying Hong Kong Films Through Cantonese Dialogue

Ultimately, Hong Kong cinema is a part of Chinese cinema, and therefore closely linked to traditional Chinese culture as well as its modern, evolved form. One of the earliest silent films made in Hong Kong, *Chuang Tzu Tests His Wife* (1914), was drawn from an ancient Chinese folk tale. Back when Old Shanghai was the hub of the Chinese film industry, Hong Kong filmmakers often travelled north to work and exchange ideas with fellow professionals. Conversely, during the Sino-Japanese War, Chinese Civil War, and later establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, many renowned Shanghainese filmmakers and other talents from the Mainland journeyed south to Hong Kong. These individuals made great contributions to both the film industry and business sector in Hong Kong.

In the years before and after 1949, Hong Kong cinema was politically torn like the Chinese people residing in Hong Kong. The divide between the Communist and Kuomintang supporters facilitated the co-existence of Mandarin cinema, which had

migrated southward, alongside its Cantonese counterpart in Hong Kong. The former had more abundant talents and funds, enabling it to excel over the latter with contemporary films that were more middle-class and chic, as well as period features that were more lavish and made on a larger scale.

In the 1960s, Mandarin-language films produced in Hong Kong evolved from period musicals to 'new school' martial arts films, finally overthrowing Cantonese features, which mainly targeted grassroots audiences. Cantonese cinema tried to turn the tide by appealing to young women working at factories and schoolgirls with teen idols such as Connie Chan Po-chu and Josephine Siao, but it could not withstand the combined onslaught of Mandarin-language films and the newly established Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB). In fact, following the 'death' of the old Cantonese cinema in the late 1960s, many film stars turned to television acting while a few outstanding directors, such as Chor Yuen and Patrick Lung Kong, forayed into Mandarin-language films.

However, the use of Mandarin dialogue inevitably created a language barrier as the majority of Hong Kong residents spoke Cantonese. These films could never be truly 'localised'.

Hong Kong cinema then underwent a major transformation in the 1970s. Cantonese-language films made a comeback and even reclaimed victory over Mandarin cinema. Shaw Brothers' *The House of 72 Tenants* (1973), directed by Chor Yuen, marked the turning point. Utilising vivid and mischievous Cantonese dialogue, the film broke box office records by astonishing margins. The comedies by the Hui brothers soon followed. Featuring the people, settings, and dialect of Hong Kong, these works resonated with the young generation. They grew increasingly popular, giving rise to the uniqueness of Hong Kong cinema.

One should also note that while Bruce Lee began his career as a child actor in Cantonese-language features, *The Big Boss* (1971), his first kung fu flick since returning from the US, was actually produced in Mandarin because Cantonese cinema was out of favour at the time. The case was similar for Michael Hui, who originally rose to fame through television and took up his first leading role with Li Han-hsiang's Mandarin-language film *The Warlord* (1972). It was not until shortly after the box office miracle of *The House of 72 Tenants* that Hong Kong films almost completely reverted back to Cantonese dialogue (Mandarin-dubbed versions were also produced for overseas markets, primarily Taiwan). However, unlike their predecessors, these new Cantonese films all adopted the large-scale and efficient production methods of Mandarin-language films, ending the segregation of Mandarin and Cantonese cinemas.

Chinese films made in Hong Kong were unified through Cantonese—an imprint of the 'Hong Kong Cultural Revolution'. This development established a popular culture predicated on Cantonese-based media. The popularisation of free television also contributed greatly to the revival of the Cantonese dialect in Hong Kong as Cantonese programming made their way into millions of households. Television dramas and music

shows even facilitated the rise in popularity of ‘Cantopop’, or Cantonese pop music. All these things strengthened Hong Kong’s sense of identity and self-confidence.

In addition, television had another indirect and significant impact on Hong Kong cinema at the time: It replaced the role of films as the preferred form of mass entertainment, especially for women and children. Films had to offer what the small screen couldn’t offer in order to attract viewers. Taking advantage of the freedom and openness that other Chinese-speaking regions lacked, the Hong Kong film industry catered to the adult male demographic with films that featured violence, sexual content, and gambling. Because of this, Hong Kong-made *wenyi* cinema targeting at female filmgoers became scarce in the 1970s (though the genre blossomed in Taiwan). Male action actors and comedians were the most popular stars of the era.

Another point worth noting is that the baby boomers that were born after WWII were coming of age at the time. Hong Kong was full of youthful vitality, but the living condition was so poor that many young men were reluctant to go home after work. Moreover, the city also saw an influx of single, young men smuggling into the city from the Mainland. They, too, became fans of locally made testosterone-fuelled martial arts films, mischievous comedies, as well as pornographic and crime features.

During that era, Hong Kong films flourished in the local market and triumphed over Western films at the box office. Midnight screenings also started becoming commonplace, catering perfectly to the ‘delinquents’ who enjoyed the nightlife.

Transformation 2: The Shedding of Morals and Clothes

The old made way for the new in this period of Hong Kong cinema. Veterans of both Mandarin- and Cantonese-language films stepped down one after another, and there was a particular abundance of new, young, and tough male actors. However, the primary figures who facilitated the revolutionary transformation of Hong Kong films were directors from the old studios.

Li Han-hsiang, who had already earned a respectable reputation in the Mandarin-language film circle long ago, was one such key figure. The then middle-aged director was most adept at making Shaw Brothers’ period motion pictures featuring female stars in the spotlight, including *The Enchanting Shadow* (1960) starring Betty Loh Ti, as well as historical films *Yang Kwei-fei (The Magnificent Concubine)* (1962) and *Empress Wu Tse-tien* (1963), both starring Li Lihua. His two most popular works were *huangmei diao* films: *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (1959), starring Linda Lin Dai, and *The Love Eterne* (1963), co-starring Ivy Ling Po and Loh Ti. These films led to considerable financial support from Taiwan, convincing Li to move there to further his career. He contributed greatly to the rise of Taiwan’s Mandarin films (including period features, contemporary romance and realist *wenyi* cinema), but his company failed to do well in business.

Upon returning to Hong Kong, Li unexpectedly ‘went astray’ and made *The Legends*

of *Cheating* (1971), a vulgar Mandarin-language ensemble comedy. Its successful release in 1971 paved the way for the relaxing of moral standards in Hong Kong cinema, creating a so-called 'immorality wave'. He then returned to Shaw Brothers and directed *The Warlord*, *Facets of Love* (1973), *Sinful Confession* (1974), and a series of 'erotic medleys' that rivalled the popularity of martial arts features. More importantly, they were the predecessors of the boundary-pushing blue films and Wong Jing gambling films that would come later.

With male-oriented martial arts and erotic-crime films rising in popularity, innocent romance targeted at female audiences fell out of favour. Actresses had to play gold diggers and prostitutes, with some going even as far as doing on-screen nudity. A renowned Cantonese-language film director in the latter periods of Cantonese cinema, Patrick Lung Kong made *The Call Girls* (1973), while Chor Yuen directed *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (1972) to revive his reputation after his foray into Mandarin-language film production. The latter is a period drama featuring sex, lesbianism, mystery and even beautifully choreographed fights between swordswomen.

Ironically, Lui Kay, an actor who used to play the role of the male romantic lead in Cantonese-language romance films, became a director in the 1970s and made 'vulgar' films such as *Sexy Girls of Denmark* (1973), *Girls for Sale* (1976), and *Starlets for Sale* (1977). Renowned photographer, Ho Fan, also went on to direct a number of aesthetic erotic films such as *Adventure in Denmark* (1973), *Innocent Lust* (1977), and *The Notorious Frame-up* (1978).

Hong Kong cinema thus broke free from the shackles of conservative morals and turned to a path filled with vices like trickery, gambling and eroticism. This phenomenon was undoubtedly triggered by the relatively progressive attitude of European, American, and Japanese cinemas. Li's 'erotic medleys' were similar to the vulgar Italian comedies which were often shown in Hong Kong at the time. These anthology films, each featuring several stories, were given a local spin by incorporating prostitution, gambling, drinking, and cheating practices, as well as quirky behaviours in uniquely Chinese style. He also borrowed from classic novels, adapting the infamous erotic tome, *Plum in the Golden Vase*, into *Golden Lotus* (1974). A section of *Moods of Love* (1977), meanwhile, drew on *Crescent Moon*, a tragic short story about a virtuous girl being forced into prostitution that was written by Chinese novelist Lao She.

While Li churned out countless vulgar works about unbridled desire, he was at the same time mocking social conditions through comedies, telling stories about traditional Chinese forms of work and recreation, making films about Buddhism and the supernatural, as well as drawing on romantic tales of the literati. After achieving success at the box office, Li 'returned to the righteous path' by going back to period films and his love for history (though he also continued to direct features of questionable taste). His *The Empress Dowager* (1975) and *The Last Tempest* (1976) both drew critical acclaim and featured a life-size replica of the Forbidden Palace that was so authentic that it even shocked Beijing officials. It was no wonder that the central government later invited Li to

Poster from the motion picture *Starlets for Sale* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.



Lui Kay, who played frequently as an affectionate lead in Cantonese films, took the director's role in the 1970s, and started shooting erotic films such as *Starlets for Sale* (1977).

return to the Mainland and provided him with generous support to make historical epics such as *The Burning of the Imperial Palace* (1983) and *Reign Behind a Curtain* (1983) in the 1980s.

Transformation 3: Kung Fu Superstars and Guangdong Heroes

In the 1970s, Hong Kong cinema was undoubtedly best known internationally for its martial arts films, especially the ones featuring kung fu superstar Bruce Lee.

The first two films that Lee worked on after returning to Hong Kong from the US—*The Big Boss* and *Fist of Fury* (1972)—were directed by Mandarin-language cinema veteran, Lo Wei. While Lee's own talent and charisma were the most crucial factors to his rise to stardom, one cannot ignore the role Lo played in the success of these films. After Lee's sudden passing, it was Lo who promoted Jackie Chan as Lee's successor, proving

that the director had an eye for talent.

Well-received all over the world, Lee's martial arts films became models for a new brand of filmmaking that fused the East and West. While his fighting style was based on Wing Chun, it was not purely Chinese martial arts. Lee incorporated combat techniques from other countries as well as his own. This, together with his unique talent as an actor, special effects, and the actor's personal experiences in the US, made Lee truly one-of-a-kind on the silver screen and turned him into a Hong Kong legend. As many have said, Hong Kong's uniqueness lies in the fact that it is neither fully Chinese nor Western; it can be open-minded and conservative at the same time. And it takes the best from the East and West and mix everything together.

However, Lee might not have returned to Hong Kong to develop his career had the likes of King Hu and Chang Cheh not set off the frenzy of revolutionary *wuxia* features in the mid-1960s. Chang's portrayal of youthful masculine violence facilitated the male domination of Hong Kong cinema in the 1970s. Chang was best known for his period *wuxia* films, but he also made Republican-era and contemporary works featuring hand-to-hand combat (as well as other weapons on many occasions), including *Vengeance!* (1970), *Duel of Fists* (1971), and *Boxer from Shantung* (1972). He also went on to direct a series of films about Guangdong martial arts heroes of the Qing Dynasty, such as *Heroes Two* (1974) and *Shaolin Martial Arts* (1974). These latter films played a crucial role in reviving Southern Shaolin traditions.

As a matter of fact, old Cantonese cinema had already seen many films about legendary martial artists from Lingnan, such as Fong Sai-yuk and Hung Hei-koon. Works based on Wong Fei-hung were especially prolific and popular, and are regarded as the forefathers of Hong Kong kung fu films. Nevertheless, they were gradually forgotten as the times changed and ultimately dethroned by 'new school' Mandarin-language *wuxia* features. It was not until the early 1970s, with Bruce Lee's rise to superstardom and Cantonese dialogue regaining prominence, that these martial arts films became prevalent again. The legends of Guangdong heroes were popular once again as they evoked the collective memories of the predominantly Cantonese-speaking population of Hong Kong.

Lau Kar-leung, whom Chang often collaborated with as the martial arts choreographer for his films, happened to be a successor of Southern Shaolin kung fu. He made tremendous contributions to this aspect of Hong Kong cinema.

After Lau became a director, he made a name for himself as a martial arts filmmaker with works such as *The Spiritual Boxer* (1975), *Challenge of the Masters* (1976), and *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978). Sammo Hung, who was trained as a martial artist under the northern school of Peking opera since childhood, also became a director. His directorial debut was kung fu comedy *The Iron-Fisted Monk* (1977), also based on Southern Shaolin characters from old Cantonese legends.

The phenomenon of stuntmen becoming directors and actors was an unprecedented occurrence in Hong Kong cinema during that era, and one rarely seen in the rest of the



Still from the motion picture *Shaolin Martial Arts* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Chang Cheh made a series of Guangdong kung fu hero films set under the Qing dynasty in the 1970s, such as *Shaolin Martial Arts* (1974). They played a crucial role in reviving 'Southern Shaolin' martial arts traditions.

world (although it also happens in Hollywood now). Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung, who became kung fu film stars after Bruce Lee, were both trained in martial arts in Yu Zhanyuan's Hong Kong-China Opera Institute as members of the 'Seven Little Fortunes'. In *Drunken Master* (1978), Chan's breakthrough film to stardom, he played a young Wong Fei-hung who is taught martial arts through unconventional means by Simon Yuen Siu-tin's Beggar So. This was, in fact, built on the success of Chang's *Shaolin Martial Arts*, in which Yuen trained the character played by Alexander Fu Sheng. It should also be noted that *Drunken Master* director Yuen Woo-ping is the son of Yuen, a veteran northern school martial artist. The former also started out as a stuntman and worked his way up to become a martial arts choreographer and director.

Of course, period *wuxia* films didn't completely disappear during that period. Chor Yuen adapted Gu Long's novels into a series of films. Works such as *Killer Clans* (1976) and *The Proud Twins* (1979) were so influential that they set off a Gu Long craze in both cinema and television. At the same time, the number of contemporary action films featuring gunfights and explosions also grew. Guangdong kung fu heroes the likes of Fong Sai-yuk and Wong Fei-hung were still very important in Hong Kong cinema even after the 1970s until filmmakers in the 21st century found a new Guangdong folk hero: Wing Chun master Ip Man.

The Legends of Cheating (1971), directed by Li Han-hsiang, unveiled the trend of gambling-fraud cinema. He later made a number of films of the same genre, including *Love Swindlers* (1976).



Still from the motion picture *Love Swindler* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Transformation 4: Real Localisation—Comedy, Mystery and Politics

The freedoms that Hong Kong enjoyed resulted in the diversity of its local cinema, but many of those films produced were not necessarily set in Hong Kong or about contemporary Hong Kongers. For instance, *The House of 72 Tenants*, which revived the use of Cantonese dialogue, was originally a Shanghainese stage comedy from the Republic era. It was turned into a hugely popular Cantonese film in 1963 by a studio in Guangzhou, and then it was remade by Chor Yuen a decade later in Hong Kong. In the footsteps of its predecessor, Chor opted to portray a time when there was no segregation among Cantonese people living in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macau.

Meanwhile, Bruce Lee's *The Big Boss* and *Fist of Fury* were set in Nanyang and the Japanese concession of Republic-era Shanghai, respectively. Stories about Southern Shaolin heroes such as Fong Sai-yuk and Wong Fei-hung mainly took place in the Qing Dynasty or Republic-era Guangdong, while the settings of period *wuxia* films were even further removed from Hong Kong. Li Han-hsiang's erotic and heist films were mostly set in old China and had a distinct northern flavour to them. It was not until *Sinful Confession* and *Forbidden Tales of Two Cities* (1975) that the setting switched to 1970s Hong Kong.

The real localisation of Hong Kong cinema came with the Hui brothers' contemporary comedies. After rising to fame through television, Michael Hui went into film acting. He made his leading man debut in *The Warlord*, a Mandarin-language feature set in Republic-era China. Golden Harvest then invited him to write and direct his own works, with the first being *Games Gamblers Play* (1974). Hui also co-starred in the film with his



Still from the motion picture *The Delinquent* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Chang Cheh's modern and masculine Hong Kong action film—*The Delinquent* (1973).



Kidnap (Cheng Kang, 1974) is based on the sensational 'Three Wolves Case'.

younger brother, pop singer Sam Hui. More were produced following its enthusiastic reception, each injected with more characteristics of a modern and urbanised Hong Kong than the last. Their comedies broke Hong Kong box office records, and the Sam Hui Cantonese songs that were featured in the films remain popular to this very day. It's also worth mentioning that some of the plot devices used in *Games Gamblers Play* were modelled after American film *The Sting* (1973), and that the film was shot with the assistance of John Woo, who was a new director at Golden Harvest at the time.

Of course, there were many old Cantonese- and Mandarin-language films made in Hong Kong that were set in the city and told the stories of its people. Some of them were very realistic, but didn't carry a strong sense of the 'Hong Kong identity'. Most were about the immigrant mentality, often emphasising the characters as being Mainland Chinese as opposed to Hong Kongers. In the ending of *The Kid* (1950), which Bruce Lee made during his child actor phase, his character and his family actually left British-ruled Hong Kong and returned to their hometown in the Mainland at the end of the film. However, the idea that 'Hong Kong is home' eventually became commonplace by the 1970s.

Perfectly blending humour and action in their films, the Hui brothers helped propel comedies set in 'new' Hong Kong into the mainstream, and their action-comedy personas resonated with many Hong Kong people. Consequently, humour became one of Hong Kong cinema's unique characteristics. Even martial arts films began emphasising humour with films that starred the likes of Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan. This craze for laughter lasted for decades, with Stephen Chow becoming the king of comedy in the 1990s.

Chang Cheh also tried to modernise and infuse Hong Kong characteristics into his



Tsui Hark completed his first film *The Butterfly Murders* (1979) with the support of Ng See-yuen.

action films. *Dead End* (1969), *The Delinquent* (co-directed with Kuei Chih-hung, 1973), and *The Generation Gap* (1973), for example, reflected the rebelliousness of the new generation. There were also films that offered realistic depictions of Hong Kong's sex industry, featuring taxi dancers, prostitutes, bargirls, and even foreign soft-core adult film actresses (such as *Virgins of the Seven Seas* [1974]).

Works based on real-life crimes gave rise to another important new genre: the true-crime exposé. *Kidnap* (1974) by Cheng Kang is likely the pioneer of this genre. Inspired by the notorious 'Three Wolves Case', the film depicted the successive kidnappings of a wealthy businessman and his son. A rarity in Hong Kong cinema at the time, the film detailed the criminals' actions and the ensuing police investigation, reflecting the reality of society in the process. Since then, the true-crime exposé became a mainstream genre, with television also following suit. The genre also facilitated the rise of cop films and triad films. The number of locally produced comedies has declined significantly, but Hong Kong cinema continues to excel in true-crime exposés, cop films and triad films to this very day.

Following *Kidnap*, Ng See-yuen's *Anti-Corruption* (1975) became another important film centred on sensational crime stories. Instead of re-enacting a past crime, the film was based on the prosecution of British Hong Kong police officer, Peter Fitzroy Godber, by the newly formed ICAC at the time. The case shocked Hong Kong and cemented the status of the ICAC. The film initially ran afoul of the censorship body, but Ng's efforts

eventually got the film approved for release.

Ng followed up with *Million Dollars Snatch* (1976), also based on a real-life crime. The realistic heist film was a pioneering masterpiece of its genre in Hong Kong cinema. In the same year, Josephine Siao and Leong Po-chih co-directed *Jumping Ash* (1976). Co-written by Philip Chan, who was a police superintendent at the time, the film breathed new life into the genre with a sense of modernity.

Ng is a daring genius of Hong Kong cinema. *Drunken Master*, which he produced, propelled Jackie Chan and director Yuen Woo-ping to superstardom. He also spared no expense in supporting Tsui Hark on his first film, *The Butterfly Murders* (1979). Meanwhile, *Anti-Corruption* and *Million Dollars Snatch*, which he directed, contributed to the relaxing of the British Hong Kong government's censorship of current affair films.

While censorship became increasingly relaxed in the 1970s, there were still qualms surrounding many topics, especially politics. Patrick Lung Kong's *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (1970), inspired by Albert Camus's novel *The Plague*, depicted how government officials and civilians united to combat a virus outbreak in Hong Kong. However, when it was rumoured that the plague in the film is a metaphor for the 1967 leftist riots, its release was prohibited by authorities. It was only when the film was re-edited into incoherent fragments and renamed to *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (from its original title of *The Plague*) that it could be screened in cinemas, but it nonetheless fared poorly at the box office. A better—albeit still incomplete—version that was reproduced many years later ultimately proved that it was actually a film of high calibre.

Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow was not only one of the very few Hong Kong films that projected politics; it was also significant in that it was possibly the first film that embraced the Hong Kong identity and gave viewers a true sense of belonging. Later, Lung directed *Hiroshima 28* (1974). A commemoration of the Hiroshima atomic bombing, the film conveyed anti-war and anti-nuclear messages and depicted the conflicts between China and Japan. The film didn't run into any problems in censorship, but it sparked a political controversy, with some 'patriots' accusing the film of taking the wrong stance by being pro-Japanese.

There was also Tong Shu-shuen, who returned to Hong Kong from the US and made *The Arch* (1970), a black-and-white period feminist film with strong artistic qualities. She followed it with the bold *China Behind* (completed in 1974 and released in 1987), about a group of Mainland Chinese youngsters smuggling to Hong Kong. The first film that illustrated the dark side of China's Cultural Revolution (scenes set in the Mainland were shot in Taiwan), it was initially banned in Hong Kong. However, the ban was lifted many years later, and the film has since been recognised as an important realist political film.

Undoubtedly, the freedom of Hong Kong cinema was still limited in many respects during that era. Fortunately, the film industry was full of vitality. Creativity continued to flourish in commercial cinema, leading to daring explorations on both the action and drama fronts, with some even touching taboo territory.

Five Shaolin Masters (1974) was, to a certain extent, a predecessor to the post-modern gangster hero film genre.



Still from the motion picture *Five Shaolin Masters* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Conclusion

The ‘Hong Kong Cultural Revolution’ liberated popular culture and brought forward new ideas. However, it wasn’t about being anti-tradition, but rather moving away from conservatism and narrow-mindedness. Strengthening the Hong Kong identity did not diminish our Chinese heritage. The two complemented each other rather than created contradictions. Hong Kong cinema has always incorporated elements from the outside world, including the Mainland and countries on both sides of the Pacific Ocean, and melded them to cater to the modern Chinese people.

The fact that Hong Kong-style martial arts films enabled Chinese martial arts to take the world by storm is a case in point. The fighting styles featured in those films were not purely Chinese, yet Chinese in essence. At the time, the industry recruited people from martial arts schools, as well as those who had been trained in operatic martial arts and acrobatics, to be stuntmen and martial arts choreographers. Many of those individuals went on to become actors and directors in their own right.

Aside from influence from Europe, the US and Japan, films featuring cheating and sexual content also drew from classic Chinese novels such as *Plum in the Golden Vase*, *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, as well as other folk tales. Chinese tradition is not only limited to Confucianism and Taoism; there are also the Hundred Schools of Thought and many other unorthodox philosophies. The liberalisation of Hong Kong has in fact preserved many traditional customs that have been deeply engrained in society. This is why Hong Kong films were welcomed by Chinese people around the globe—except for of course, the Mainland. When China finally opened up after the Cultural Revolution, pirated versions of Hong Kong films became extremely popular across the country.

There’s a special significance in Chang Cheh’s use of stories about past martial arts



The Challenger (1979),
a kung fu film directed
by Eric Tsang.

heroes from Guangdong, including *Five Shaolin Masters* (1974) (about the ‘mythology’ surrounding the founding of the Society of the Heaven and the Earth). To a certain extent, these works paved the way for the success of gangster films that would come later. These films even featured triad rituals that were banned in the past.

Films based on sensational crimes marked a further step in localisation, but they, too, can be considered as extensions of existing traditions. The plots of numerous classical Chinese novels and operas also revolved around sensational crimes. In particular, *Yan Ruisheng* (1921)¹, which was cited as China’s first full-length feature by *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, was based on a shocking real-life murder which took place in Shanghai in 1920. Completed in Shanghai and released in 1921, the film was a huge hit and can be considered a pioneering work in the genre.

Nevertheless, Hong Kong films made in the 1970s did indeed have a very distinct local flavour. Hong Kong cinema was considered the most active hub for the production of Chinese-language films in the world. It benefited from its heritage and made innovations that enabled its films to break into the international market. Furthermore, in addition to being ‘unified’ through the use of Cantonese dialogue, Hong Kong films also became free of elements that hinted at the division between leftists and rightists. This was because the activities of leftist circles in Hong Kong cinema almost came to a complete halt due to the Chinese Cultural Revolution. It was not until the passing of Mao Zedong in 1976 that they gradually resumed production. Although the leftists had lost their influence and were no longer as exuberant as they were pre-Cultural Revolution, they did produce works that aligned with the more serious Hong Kong films made at the time. These circles supported the innovative creations of Hong Kong New Wave directors Allen Fong and Ann Hui, as well as Johnnie To. They also collaborated with Mainland Chinese studios, introducing the Hong Kong filmmaking approach (especially for martial

1. See Cheng, Jihua et.al. (eds), *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, Vol.1, Beijing: China Film Press, 2012, 2nd ed, P 43 (in Chinese).

arts films) to the Chinese film industry.

By 1979, the Hong Kong New Wave had emerged. Ann Hui's thriller *The Secret* was in some ways a true-crime exposé. Meanwhile, Alex Cheung's *Cops and Robbers*, Ronny Yu and Philip Chan's *The Servants*, and Peter Yung's *The System* were all cops-and-robbers films. Tsui Hark served up a Gu Long-style period epic with *The Butterfly Murders*, while Eric Tsang made kung fu film *The Challenger*. These young directors all grew up in Hong Kong. Some had studied abroad, and the majority had honed their skills through working in television. Although they were roughly the same age, they all hailed from different backgrounds. However, it's also worth noting that those in their generation that became active in the film industry earlier, including Michael Hui, John Woo, Sammo Hung, Yuen Woo-ping, Jackie Chan, and Karl Maka, were also forces to be reckoned with.

That period of transformation and revolution began with Chang Cheh, Li Han-hsiang, Lo Wei, and Chor Yuen leading the way by nurturing the next generation. Later on, a young generation of aspiring filmmakers banded together as 'brothers'. These 'brothers' had very different personal and academic backgrounds, but they fought hand-in-hand, competing and working with each other.

On the other hand, the spirit and characteristics of Hong Kong, which began taking shape in the 1970s and flourished in the 1980s, undoubtedly gave rise to the city's self-centredness and even arrogance. When Hong Kong was faced with an imminent change in leadership in the 1990s, the local film industry was struck with an identity crisis brought on by the ticking clock. The contradictions between Hong Kong's sectionalist mentality and its status as a part of the Greater China region gave rise to a rather complicated situation.

Perhaps it was all about politics after all. The 'Hong Kong Cultural Revolution' can be said to have been influenced by China's Cultural Revolution to a certain degree, but it actually had the opposite effect—everything that the Chinese Cultural Revolution opposed and criticised flourished in Hong Kong. After the 1967 leftist riots, Hong Kong cinema transformed and prospered tremendously. When Hong Kong returned to China in 1997, the local film industry lost its direction and could almost be described as being schizophrenic. With more entertainment choices emerging in the new age and tastes becoming more westernised, the reign of Hong Kong films over the local market was eventually overthrown by Western films. The boom became a downturn as local films fell out of favour with local audiences. The predicament prompted Hong Kong film industry professionals to turn to the Mainland film industry to sustain their careers.

As a matter of fact, Hong Kong filmmakers who have travelled north to participate in co-productions have contributed greatly to the market-oriented transformation of the Chinese film industry over the past 20 years. But how can one retain the unique characteristics of Hong Kong while adapting to the ever-growing Chinese market? This is still a matter of constant debate. [Translated by Johnny Ko]

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From Detective to 'Ah Sir': The Birth of Hong Kong Cop Films in the 1970s

Po Fung

On 9 February 1971, *Super Boxer*, the first Cantonese release of the year, came to its last day of screening. Another two years and eight months would pass before another Cantonese feature hit cinemas. This is a well-known period in Hong Kong cinema history when Cantonese films disappeared. In retrospect, this temporary demise of Cantonese cinema signified not only the disappearance of a filmic term, but the end of a filmmaking tradition. Cantonese films re-emerged in 1973, but the spirit that informs these works was worlds apart from their predecessors from the 1950s and 60s. Some of the major differences include the decline of old genres, such as the romantic family *wenyi* cinema, as well as the rise of new genres. One of those new genres, the cop film, is the centre of discussion in this essay.

The Detective in Cantonese Cinema

The detective hero has been a constant presence in Cantonese films. Actor Tso Tat-wah, for one, made a name for himself with his detective persona. Eight months before the release of *Super Boxer* saw the release of *Secret Agent No. 1* (1970), starring and directed by Tso himself. Its crime scene is, however, ill-conceived. The investigation procedure is written without the most basic understanding of how the police works, and the law enforcer lacks anything resembling a personality. This was not an isolated case but a common defect in Cantonese detective films. Worse still, these films often failed to propel the plot from the detective's point of view. Either a female knight-errant—in the vein of the Wong Ang series—shows up to save the day, or an amateur associated with the detective joins the investigation and ends up bumping into the culprit by sheer coincidence. The genre is generally crude and childish.



Directed by Wong Fung, *Super Boxer* (1971) was the last publicly released Cantonese film before the disappearance of the genre in the early 1970s.

Juxtaposing these Cantonese detective flicks with any local cop film from the 1980s and 90s—such as Danny Lee’s *Law with Two Phases* (1984), Jackie Chan’s *Police Story* (1985), or Sun Chung’s *City War* (1988)—even the least attentive viewer would notice the obvious differences in terms of dramatic formula, character design and aesthetic judgement. The detective film, as it turned out, didn’t blossom into a distinct genre; it was the 1970s crime films and TV dramas that provided the template for the cop film to evolve into a major genre in Hong Kong cinema. This essay sets out to trace how this film genre came into being, with special focus on a pioneering work of the genre: *Jumping Ash* (1976).

The Hong Kong Cop Film in the Making

A new genre, at its formative stage, is often ambiguous as it melds with other things before gradually taking a clearer, steadier form. The cop film is no exception. Its early days came during a boom in true-crime exposés. This cinematic trend dated back to a slew of shocking events in the 1970s. In June 1973, the then-colonial government charged Peter Fitzroy Godber, Chief Superintendent of the Police Force, with bribery and corruption. In August of the same year, British superintendent Ernest Hunt was also brought to justice. In February 1974, the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) was founded. And that was followed shortly by the arrest of drug kingpin Ng Sik-



Anti-Corruption (1975) by Ng See-yuen launched the Hong Kong true crime exposé film genre.

ho, better known as Crippled Ho, in November. These sensational tales of crime became cash cow for the tabloids. Weekly magazine *The Covered-Ups*, for example, saw its sales skyrocketed with its reports on the drug trade in Hong Kong. Similar publications also burst upon the scene.¹

With so much money-making potential, true-crime exposés naturally became the latest fad in film as well. *Anti-Corruption* (1975) directed by Ng See-yuen was a trailblazer in this regard. Influenced by Costa-Gavras' *Z* (1969), according to Ng,² the film is the story of how one man—clearly modelled after Ernest Hunt—can go from an average police officer to becoming a man consumed by greed. Despite issues with the censorship authorities, it was ultimately cleared for release; its sensational topic and strong sense of realism—helped by the use of real locations—made it the second-highest grosser of the year, scoring HK\$2.5 million at the local box office.

To capitalise on *Anti-Corruption's* success, Rediffusion Television (RTV) aired an anthology series titled *Ten Sensational Cases* (1975) that same year. Ng also returned to the genre the following year with *Million Dollars Snatch* (1976), a realistic portrayal of the \$HK7 million heist involving a Hang Seng Bank armoured car in 1975. That film was also a hit, earning over HK\$1.5 million. In that very same month, *Jumping Ash* also entered the fray.

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1. Po Fung, 'The Origins of Hong Kong Gangster Films', in Po Fung (ed), *Always in the Dark: A Study of Hong Kong Gangster Films*, Hong Kong Film Archive, 2014, pp 22–37.
 2. See Donna Chu & Po Fung (interviewers), Po Fung (collator): 'Ng See-yuen: The Key is to Comprehend the Ways of Survival in Independent Cinema', pp 162–173 in this volume.

Popularity of True-crime Exposés Before *Jumping Ash*

A small plot detail in *Anti-Corruption* actually reveals a correlation between *Jumping Ash* and other true-crime exposés. In the opening of *Anti-Corruption*, a rookie patrol cop (played by Hung Tak-shing) hears for the first time from his veteran partner the term ‘jumping ash’, which is explained as a reference to dope selling. A year later, this slang would become the title of a film. This might have been mere coincidence, but the publicity material for *Jumping Ash* emphasised that the film laid bare the inner workings of the local drug trade. An example of the film’s promotional material: ‘When asked why she made her directorial debut with a film about an international drug ring instead of a *wenyi* film, Josephine Siao said that firstly, films pulled from the headlines appeal to audiences worldwide; secondly, Hong Kong’s drug problem has long been a matter of great concern to her.’³

Jumping Ash’s link to the fad of true-crime films was clear to film critics of the day. Kuk Lung, for instance, remarked in *Wen Wei Po*: ‘Since the arrest of Crippled Ho, films about drug kingpins have come out one after the other. At first, filmgoers were eager to know more about what they saw on the news, so those films were eye-openers that fared quite well at the box office. However, only so much can be done about the same subject. Films that came later have tried every means to stand out, but they all ended up looking alike. *Jumping Ash*, in its opening shot, takes audiences to the streets of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. A plot soon emerges: An assassin is sent by a Dutch gang to snuff out Tak the Pimp in Hong Kong. The complex plot seems to be an attempt to offer something new...’⁴

Known for his eccentric views, critic Sam So conveyed the view of fellow critic Chow Tsz in *Close Up Magazine*: ‘According to Chow Tsz, among recent releases in Hong Kong, the “based-on-true-story” films have proven to be box-office hits. Local production *Million Dollars Snatch* and foreign productions *Hunter Will Get You* (1976) and *Shadow in an Empty Room* (aka *Blazing Magnum*, 1976), are just a few examples. It’s now clear that Hong Kong filmgoers have moved on from films with nude women and fight-till-you-drop martial arts flicks. Instead, realistic action dramas with exciting gunfights have become the new favourite. There is no more blind faith in big-name actors. A film can be a hit as long as the topic is fresh, the story is good, and the audience can understand and relate to it. *Jumping Ash* is a film that’s along those lines...I am bold enough to say that more drug trade and heist films will come long after *Jumping Ash*.’⁵ The above examples show that critics had already noticed that *Jumping Ash* was part of a new trend.

That said, *Jumping Ash* is a film, not a documentary. It’s based on fiction rather than

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3. ‘Josephine Siao Explains Why She Chose an Anti-drug Theme for Her Directorial Debut’, in *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, 22 August 1976 (in Chinese).
 4. Kuk Lung, ‘*Jumping Ash*’, *Wen Wei Po*, 1 September, 1976 (in Chinese).
 5. Sam So, ‘Weed Through the Old and Bring Forth the New’, in *Close Up Magazine*, No 20, 9 September 1976 (in Chinese).

an actual event. In the story, Inspector Leung (played by Callan Leung) is trying to hunt down Tak the Pimp (Lam Wei-kee), the boss of a drug syndicate. Tak tries to bribe Leung and harasses his family, but the righteous lawman remains undeterred. When Leung gets ahold of evidence against Tak, an assassin (Michael Chan Wai-man) injures Leung's girlfriend (Josephine Siao) badly before snatching the evidence. In a pique of rage, Leung roughs Tak up and is suspended from duty by his trouble-phobic boss (Lee Chi-chung). Relentless, Leung gets Tak's rival (Chen Sing) to lure Tak out and brings the culprit to justice in the ensuing showdown.

The Influence of American Cop Films on *Jumping Ash*

The narrative of *Jumping Ash* bears obvious traces of its counterparts in American cinema. In the early 1970s, Cantonese-dubbed foreign dramas in television network Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) were immensely popular, and police drama was one of the key genres. Popular examples included *Ironside* (1967–75), *The F.B.I.* (1965–74), *The Streets of San Francisco* (1972–77) from the US, and *The Young Inspector* (1971–72) from Japan. These shows provided ample chances for Hongkongers to familiarise themselves with the creative formula of the cop story.

In April 1976, four months before the theatrical release of *Jumping Ash*, TVB produced local cop series, *CID*. Hong Kong audiences were already familiar with the cop genre by then. This is why film critics not only noted that *Jumping Ash* was part of the true-crime exposé boom; they also asserted that it was modelled after the popular cop drama genre from the West. *Wah Kiu Yat Po* columnist Yu Lap remarked: 'The police officer played by Callan Leung is the first of his kind in Chinese films and TV dramas, but that archetype is a common presence in the West.'⁶ In the review already quoted above, Kuk Lung added: 'Inspector Leung is very much like the cop in the Japanese TV series *The Young Inspector...*' Much has been written about *Jumping Ash*'s resemblance to its Western counterparts, but Kuk Lung's assertion is actually incorrect. Although Inspector Leung's sister in the film did note that her brother looks like a 'young inspector', that was only a common expression at the time. Years later, Josephine Siao admitted: '*Jumping Ash* has nothing to do with the Hong Kong New Wave. It's only a Hong Kong remake of *The French Connection* (1971).'⁷

Other critics also highlighted the connections between the two films, such as Kiu Ling in *Ming Pao*: '*Jumping Ash* is fresh in terms of subject matter. Its depiction of the battle between the police and drug dealers is reminiscent of *The French Connection*,

6. Yu Lap, 'Putting a Good Gloss on the Police and So On', *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, 8 September 1976 (in Chinese).

7. Po Fung (editor-in-chief), *The 25th Hong Kong Film Awards Presentation Ceremony Brochure*, Hong Kong Film Awards Association Limited, 2006, p 102 (in Chinese).

though it is even more substantial and more local.⁸ In another essay, he added: ‘In my opinion, this film takes after the cop films by Hollywood powerhouse Don Siegel in terms of ideological substance.’⁹ Another critic, Shu Kei, also wrote: ‘Callan Leung, the hero of *Jumping Ash*, is an upright inspector. His styling and characterisation immediately bring to mind the “Dirty Harry” (in *Dirty Harry*, 1971) and Jimmy “Popeye” Doyle (in *The French Connection*).’¹⁰

In addition to *The French Connection*, the two critics also referenced *Dirty Harry*, another major American cop film. A closer examination reveals that although *Dirty Harry* didn’t affect *Jumping Ash* as much as *The French Connection*, they do share some commonalities. These well-justified opinions, which touched upon the overall development of Hong Kong’s cop films, deserve further discussions.

In the late 1960s and early 70s, three seminal titles brought great change to the development of American cop films. They are, namely, *Bullitt* (1968; directed by Peter Yates, starring Steve McQueen), *The French Connection* (directed by William Friedkin, starring Gene Hackman), and *Dirty Harry* (directed by Don Siegel, starring Clint Eastwood).¹¹ With these films came a new kind of screen hero—the plainclothes police officer who takes the law into his own hands.

Previously, the fearless inspector in cop films is backed up by a large police force against his only enemy—the law breaker. But the maverick inspector here has an even worse enemy—a controlling boss who imposes needless constraints on the hero. Under the pretext of safeguarding the police’s public image, these bosses often ‘throw the rule book’ on the hero and impede the investigation. The inspector’s peers, therefore, may become a hurdle instead of a supporting force.

In real life, the police are law enforcers. To them, discipline and obedience to their superiors are paramount. And yet in cop films, the biggest obstacle against combating crime is often the laws that protect suspects’ rights. Lawyers are mostly portrayed in a bad light, be it the greedy defence attorneys hired by the criminals, or power-hungry prosecutors who only care about their own career prospects. The prosecutor played by Robert Vaughn in *Bullitt*, for example, puts his political self-interest above all else and pressures Steve McQueen’s supervisor to thwart his subordinate’s investigation. In *Dirty Harry*, Clint Eastwood captures the culprit, only to get a dressing-down from the prosecutor for infringing on the suspect’s rights, thus rendering all the evidence in hand null and void. Eastwood, in an act of resistance, denounces such laws as wrong. These stories usually build up to a scene in which the boss stops the hero’s investigation, but

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8. Kiu Ling, ‘*Jumping Ash*: A Surefire Box-office Hit’, in *Ming Pao Daily News*, 21 August 1976 (in Chinese).
 9. Kiu Ling, ‘*Jumping Ash*: A Realist Gem Definitely Worth Viewing’, in *Ming Pao Daily News*, 26 August 1976 (in Chinese).
 10. Shu Kei, ‘*Jumping Ash*’, in *Close Up Magazine*, No 20, 9 September 1976 (in Chinese).
 11. For more on the special significance of these three titles in American police films, see Thomas M Leitch, *Crime Films*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, chapter 10, ‘*Bullitt* and the Police Film’, pp 215–240.

they are then followed by the hero's rebellion against the higher-ups. Defiance becomes the last resort for the hero to hunt down the criminals, despite passing the point of no return. Eastwood's vigilante cop tosses his inspector badge away in the end of *Dirty Harry*, but he is seen wearing it again as if nothing had happened in the sequel.

To accentuate the divide between the lawman and the outlaw, personal vendettas are usually added to their battle. In *Bullitt*, Steve McQueen is intent on finding the mastermind in order to avenge his injured peers. In *The French Connection II* (1975, directed by John Frankenheimer), Gene Hackman is held captive by the drug lord and forcibly shot up with drugs, turning him into an addict. Their conflict runs so deep that it can only be resolved by death. In *Dirty Harry*, Clint Eastwood becomes a bitter rival of the serial killer whose murders were aimed to provoke the police. Catching criminals is the police's job, but cop films often see the maverick cop's coworkers or loved ones get harmed, making the hunt personal.

Harbouring a distrust of the law, the maverick inspector often chooses to seek justice on his own and will kill the perpetrators instead of bringing them to trial. These stories always come with the thrills and spills of action scenes because gruesome combat is necessary to justify the hero's killing of the culprit in self-defence. The three titles mentioned above all feature exciting action scenes. Both *Bullitt* and *The French Connection* feature car-chase scenes while *Dirty Harry* has plenty of gunfights and a dangerous stunt that sees Harry jump from a bridge onto the top of a bus in pursuit. These groundbreakers are markedly different from the American and Japanese cop dramas popular at the time. For one, TV dramas have to dish out one episode after another, so the hero can't possibly do anything irredeemable. While those shows have the obligatory gunfights and action scenes, the main plot eventually ends with the culprits' arrest rather than their death. The maverick inspector, on the contrary, usually dispatches the culprit with his own hands.

The Vigilante Hero Inspired by American Police Dramas

The creators of *Jumping Ash* might not have done a detailed dissection of *The French Connection* during production, but the two films certainly share similarities in plot structures. Gene Hackman shows up at a seedy bar and drags his mole into a room for interrogation. After getting the intelligence he needs, Hackman hits the man in the face to help him cover his identity. Likewise, in *Jumping Ash*, Callan Leung questions a blind informant on the street and punches him in the end so that his informer won't give himself away.

'Leung Sir' (Inspector Leung) played by Callan Leung is essentially modelled after the maverick cop discussed above. Like his counterparts, the law enforcer is tenacious and fearless. He even has a slacker boss who only wants to get to retirement without any trouble from Leung. Tak the Pimp also has a cunning lawyer by his side. When

Tak's attempts to bribe Inspector Leung fail, he harasses Leung's family and sends his underling to beat up his girlfriend so that he can seize the evidence gathered against him. These acts justify Leung's battle against evil. The climax comes when the boss suspends Leung and asks him to hand over his badge. No longer armed with the authority of the lawman, Leung soldiers on and takes on the criminal singlehandedly. After a series of chases and brawls, Leung finally captures Tak and even spares his life. However, the assassin played by Michael Chan Wai-man, the embodiment of Tak's evil, is killed by Leung in the end. *Jumping Ash* followed the dramatic formula of the maverick inspector, which went on to become the spine of Hong Kong cop films from the 1980s and 90s.

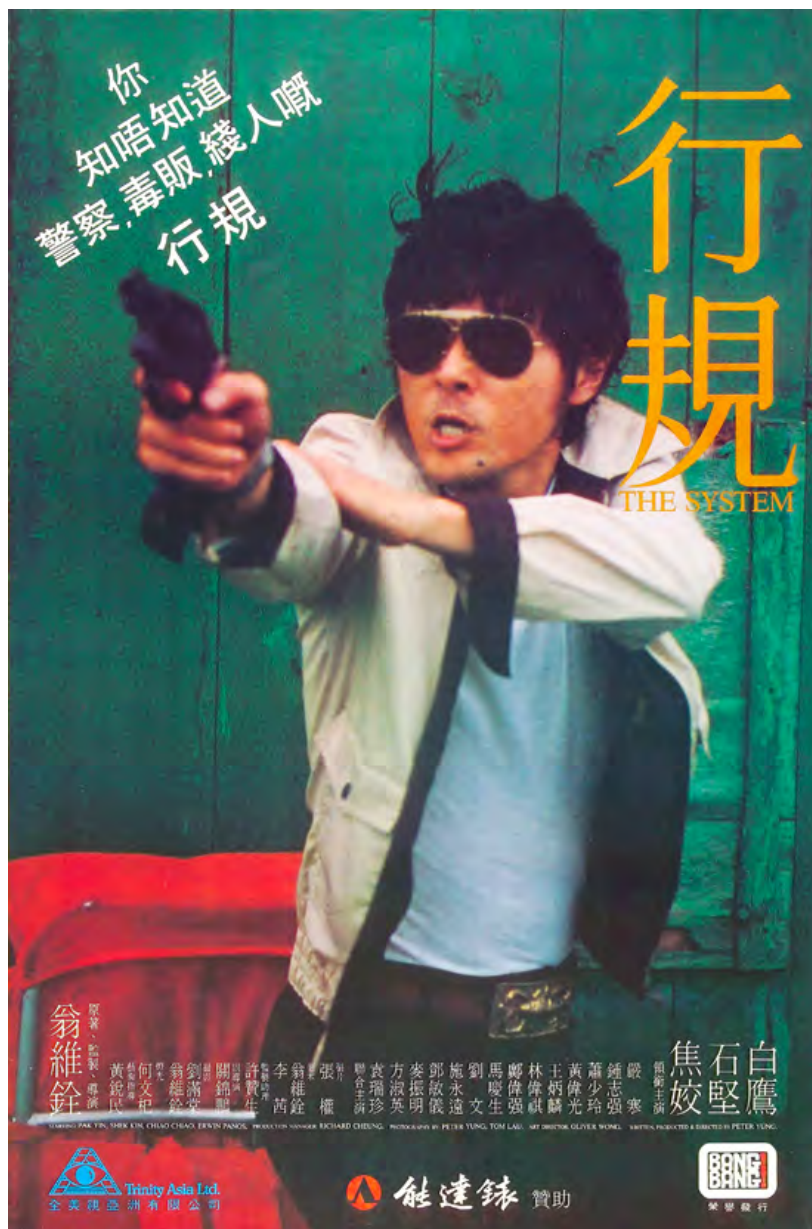
A comparison between *Jumping Ash* and *Million Dollars Snatch*, which was released slightly earlier, would reveal their differences as cop films. *Million Dollars Snatch* also features a police officer, Detective Lee (played by Chang Kung), in a lead role. He and mob boss Chan (Eddie Lam) stand in stark contrast to each other. The film features a long chase scene that leads to Chan's arrest, but there is very little drama in the Lee character. Aside from his occasional bursts of anger in front of his subordinates, Lee has little in terms of discernable character traits. It is ultimately Chan and his gang who serve to propel the plot. All *Million Dollars Snatch* has is the crime itself. It doesn't have a dramatic formula that would blossom into a distinct genre. The film actually doesn't even depict Detective Lee entirely as a hero. After his triumph over evil, Lee is arrested by ICAC in what appears to be a satirical twist devised by the filmmakers to say something about social reality. An inspector on the take, after all, can't possibly be a heroic figure. It is not until *Jumping Ash* that a full-fledged narrative formula for the cop film surfaced. From this point of view, *Jumping Ash* can justifiably be called the first cop film in Hong Kong cinema.

Also of particular attention is a plot detail that appears in both *Jumping Ash* and *Million Dollars Snatch*: The police officer in the latter is addressed as 'Detective Lee', whereas the hero in the former is addressed as 'Leung Sir'. The first instance of addressing a police officer as 'Ah Sir' was probably in TVB's *CID*, which was aired earlier in the same year. In the first episode, the male protagonist played by Tony Wong Yuen-sun is referred to as 'Lee Sir'. Addressing an officer as 'Taam Cheung' (or detective) goes back a long way in Cantonese cinema, but 'Ah Sir' is actually how police officers are addressed in real life. This new way of addressing police officers in the cop film mirrors a change in Cantonese filmmaking—from a period where little attention was paid to details to a new phase where films have to reflect real life. From Detective to 'Ah Sir', *Jumping Ash* not only made the cop film a genre in its own right, it also made realism a new requirement for the genre.

The Cop Film Enters a Phase of Contemplation and Exploration

Jumping Ash didn't bring about a new trend; only a handful of cop films were made in Hong Kong in 1977 and 1978. Nonetheless, it is closely related to the cop films that

The System (1979), directed by Peter Yung and starring Bai Ying.



Chan's contribution to the genre goes back to before *Jumping Ash*; he offered story ideas for TVB's *CID*.¹² Spurred on by *Jumping Ash*'s success, Chan left the police force and joined the film's production company, Bang Bang Film Production. In 1977, he conceived for RTV *The Big Hero*, whose name was taken from the *Jumping Ash* theme song that would double as the series' theme song as well. Callan Leung played one of the two male leads, 'Poon Sir', while the other lead was played by Wong Chung, who

12. Cheung Tin (collator), 'Jumping Ash's Writer Philip Chan is a Serving Police Officer', in *Close Up Magazine*, No 19, 26 August 1976 (in Chinese).

starred in Chang Cheh and Tsai Yang-ming's Shaw Brothers production *Police Force* (1973). Chan served the show in multiple capacities: Planning producer, co-screenwriter, and a supporting actor in the role of 'Pang Sir' (which became a more significant role in the latter half of the series). Shot entirely on film and chiefly directed by Johnny Mak, *The Big Hero* was a gritty take on the criminal underworld. It was a milestone in the Hong Kong cop genre, winning widespread attention upon its commercial release. Wong Chung, Philip Chan and Chan Chik-wai, who played another police officer, established themselves firmly as staples of the Hong Kong cop genre.

In 1979, the Hong Kong cop film saw major breakthroughs. *The Servants*, *Cops and Robbers* and *The System* were released in the second half of the year to both commercial and critical acclaim. Among them, Bang Bang's *The Servants*, co-directed by Philip Chan and Ronny Yu, was intended as a thematic sequel to *Jumping Ash*. *The Servants* again features Lam Wei-kee as the villain. While in prison, Lam plots revenge against 'Chow Sir' (Paul Chu), the officer who sent him to prison. To a large extent, Chu's character is the equivalent of Callan Leung from *Jumping Ash*, though he's working alongside Philip Chan's 'Pang Sir' (the same character as the one in *The Big Hero*) this time around. A corrupt officer who oscillates between both sides of the law, Pang pairs up with Chow against the two hitmen sent by Lam—one of them played by Michael Chan Wai-man from *Jumping Ash*. Pang's role is an interesting and eye-catching one. In my opinion, it's Chan's landmark performance.

The Servants and *Jumping Ash* are also different in terms of cinematography. The latter has a rudimentary touch typical of documentary filmmaking, whereas the former comes across as refined and calculated. Narrative-wise, *The Servants* is not exactly an eye-opener; its strength lies in the script's funny tidbits, helped by Chan's experiences in the police force. The film earned over HK\$4 million at the box office, becoming the second highest grosser that year.

Chan followed this up with a cameo as Superintendent Pang in Alex Cheung's *Cops and Robbers* (1979). Even though he didn't act in *Jumping Ash*, it did transform Chan into a famous screen cop along with Callan Leung and Wong Chung. Chan also wrote Johnny Mak's renowned crime thriller, *Long Arm of the Law* (1984), again showing his thorough understanding of the police. In retrospect, Chan's efforts of fusing his actual experience as a policeman into the Hong Kong cop film during its formative years were crucial in its overall development.

Conclusion

The cast and crew of *Jumping Ash* not only became a major part of the Hong Kong cop film genre, the film also imported the vigilante maverick police officer archetype into Hong Kong cinema. When action dramas were all the rage in the 1980s, Danny Lee, Jackie Chan, Chow Yun-fat and Yuen Biao all played the vigilante maverick cop. *Jumping*

Ash also provided the narrative structure for ensuing cop films. Its significance in Hong Kong cinema is there for all to see. [Translated by Elbe Lau]

Po Fung was formerly Research Officer of the Hong Kong Film Archive. He is the author of *An Analysis of Martial Arts Film and Its Context* (2010, in Chinese).

Finding Cecile: The Legend of Tong Shu-shuen

Shu Kei

Last October, the Department of Filmmaking of the Taipei National University of the Arts teamed up with the National Central University's Film Studies Centre and organised the Third International Conference on the Film Histories of Taiwan and Asia. I was invited to deliver a presentation on the topic of 'The Exchange between Taiwan and Hong Kong Cinemas between 1950s and 1970s'. I had chosen Tong Shu-shuen and her oeuvre as the subject of study, while suggesting also the screening of Tong's debut work, *The Arch* (1970), during the conference. One of the programmers confessed to me that the name of Tong Shu-shuen did not register with him. Later he enquired the Taiwan Film Institute and was told that a 35mm copy of *The Arch* was in its collection. The print, however, was found to be in such dilapidated condition that rendered it unsuitable for screening.

The Significance of Tong Shu-shuen

The name Tong Shu-shuen is seldom heard in Hong Kong today. *The Arch* was last publicly shown in February 2015 at the Hong Kong Film Archive's '100 Must-See Hong Kong Movies' programme. Also included in the list was her second film, *China Behind* (completed in 1974 and released in 1987), which was shown in May 2012. The latter was also featured in another programme 'Revisiting the New Wave', with a screening in April 2017. Prior to these, *Sup Sap Bup Dup* (1975) was shown in November 2010 as one of the titled features of the Hong Kong Film Archive's 'Restored Treasures' series. Even with all attracting full houses, these screenings only reached a meagre audience. The three films, together with Tong's last work, *The Hong Kong Tycoon* (1979), had never gotten digital releases, though *China* was released on LD in the 1980s. *Sup* and *Tycoon* were shown on the two free-to-air television channels, both a one-off show dating some 40 years ago. While a copy of *Arch*, *China* and *Sup* have been preserved in



Poster for the 2013 event, *A Forgotten Legend: Hong Kong's Pioneer Filmmaker Tong Shu-shuen*

Poster Designer: Kathy Wong Cheuk-wing

(Picture provided by Cantonese Cinema Study Association)

35mm at the Hong Kong Film Archive, there is no surviving copy of *Tycoon*, save the VHS tape recording from Asia Television (ATV) in 1986. Resurrected from oblivion, this VHS version was shown at the Broadway Cinematheque on 11 August 2013 during the fourth instalment of the Cantonese Cinema Study Association's thematic series, 'A Forgotten Legend: Hong Kong's Pioneer Filmmaker Tong Shu-shuen'. The seminar room was filled to the brim, attended by an 80-strong audience (including the film's lead actor, Michael Lai), far exceeding its capacity of 30. Thanks to the boost from social media platforms, the small-scale retrospective series was effective in conjuring up remnants of memories, with regards to the long-forgotten director among a small circle of film lovers.

The rare breed of films and remarkable achievements put the name of Tong Shu-shuen in the history books of Hong Kong cinema. But here are two more contributing factors: Tong was among the handful of women directors working in Hong Kong cinema between its infancy and its heyday (1930-1980); in addition to her filmmaking endeavours, she founded Hong Kong's first serious film magazine, *Close Up Magazine*. In circulation between 1975 and 1978, the magazine had left a profound and lasting mark on Hong Kong film culture. A trailblazing auteur, she advocated for the exploration and development of local film culture, an unprecedented move in the history of Hong Kong cinema. I will expand on these points in the discussion below.



The Arch (1970)

***The Arch*: An Audacious and Groundbreaking Experiment**

Tong Shu-shuen was born in 1941. Her grandfather, Tang Jiyao (1883-1927), was a renowned political and military figure in Yunnan Province during the Nationalist regime. Tong grew up in Hong Kong and moved to Taiwan during her teenage years. She later took her film studies at the University of Southern California in the US. After graduation, she returned to Hong Kong and launched the pre-production of her debut film, *The Arch*. She met Patrick Lung Kong through a mutual friend, and with his help, she rented an abandoned studio at Cathay Studios to shoot the film.¹

After 30 days of filming in Hong Kong,² she took her crew to Taiwan for location shooting. With its editing and post-production work completed, the film was shown at the San Francisco International Film Festival and was further chosen for screening during the 'Directors' Fortnight' at the Cannes International Film Festival in 1968 to critical acclaim.³

Organised by Studio One, *The Arch* premiered at Hong Kong City Hall on 20 September 1969, blowing the minds of young intellectuals and film critics alike. In less than a week's time, *The Chinese Student Weekly*, a magazine which was most influential among the younger generation, ran an article 'Weekly Feature: Tong Shu-shuen • The Arch • A Special' (26 September, issue 897), devoting three whole pages to the

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1. See an interview in *CineAction* by Alice Shih, 'The Journey of Cecile Shu Shuen Tang, Hong Kong Independent Filmmaker: In Her Own Words', No 94, 2014, pp 69-72.
 2. See 'Female Director Cecile Tong Shu-shuen', *Screen Stories*, July 1967 (in Chinese).
 3. See 'Selected French Film Reviews on *The Arch*', Selected and Translated by Malta, *The Chinese Student Weekly*, No 897, 26 September 1969; 'Famous Critics' Recommendations', No 950, 2 October 1970 and 'Western Film Reviews on *The Arch*', No 951, 9 October 1970 (in Chinese).

coverage and reviews of the film, together with an interview of the actress, Hilda Chou Hsuan. Since then, and until 5 February 1971 (issue 968), *The Chinese Student Weekly* had run some 60 articles either directly or indirectly touching upon topics related to the film within a span of 18 months (71 issues). Over in Taiwan, the film was given a special award for Best Creativity, Best Leading Actress, Best Cinematography and Best Art Direction at the 9th Golden Horse Awards in 1971. However, things didn't run smoothly for the commercial distribution of *The Arch*. The film was delayed to a 1970 release date in October—only to be given a three-day slot at four cinemas (Queen's Theatre, State Theatre, Rex Theatre, and Mandarin Theatre) that primarily shown Western films. It was further the hard-earned result of repeated negotiations from Mok Yuen-hei, the sole film distributor who dedicated in promoting art films, with the cinema operators. Tong also had to hand-tint the original black-and-white film on a new colour stock.⁴ As expected, the film did not fare well at the box office and had made only scant appearances at film festivals or retrospectives in the decades to come. A few years ago, the Hong Kong Film Archive proposed to Tong the idea of restoring the film digitally. However, Tong expressed her wishes in redoing the music,⁵ which were found to be at odds with the principles of film restoration. The project is thus pending further discussions.

And in Taiwan, the film had never gotten theatrical release until this day.

The significance of *The Arch* can be attributed to four aspects:

1. The film, a period feature, was made by Tong as a female independent producer and director charged with procuring funds. It was probably a first in Chinese film history.
2. The film boasted a top-notch cast and crew hailing from Hong Kong (actors: Hilda Chou Hsuan and Roy Chiao, music: Lui Tsun-yuen, set: Bao Tinming); Taiwan (location photography: Chi Ho-che); the American-Chinese actress, Lisa Lu; India (on-set photography: Subrata Mitra);⁶ and the US (editing: Les Blank, sound mixing: Del Harris). Such an international ensemble of personnel was never seen before in Chinese cinema.
3. In her feminine take on *The Arch*, a humorous folktale that was reworked by Lin Yutang and included in his collection of short stories, Tong made use of black-and-white photography to evoke the aesthetics of Chinese painting. While on the

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4. See note 1. At one point Tong discussed how she achieved this effect: 'Then I invented a tint-filter and hand-tinted the film on colour stock when it was shown commercially in Hong Kong, as no theatre would book black and white films anymore in the 70s. The filter could turn some colours so the print exhibited like old Chinese painting. The outcome looked very nice, it was like an old scroll, you know... sort of sepia, some of those light greens. Too bad no more of these copies survived.' I have my doubt as to whether Tong did 'invent' the tint-filer since film tinting was already popular in the silent film period.
 5. See note 1. The original line reads: 'Looking back, if I were to do it again, I would use less music, part of it is too repetitious... too much music. That's why I keep asking the Hong Kong Film Archive to let me play with the existing print. I would like to redo the music.'
 6. Subrata Mitra (1930-2001), one of India's leading cinematographers, was most famous for his long-time collaboration with Satyajit Ray, the great Bengali director.

other hand, she employed a great deal of visual language (freeze-frames, jump-cuts, repeated cutting and dissolves) in kinship with the traditions of contemporary Western cinema (particularly those of the French New Wave) to depict the characters' (mainly female characters') state of mind (sexual emotional states in particular). For music, a mixed fingering of the Chinese *pipa* and *guqin* fabricated moods of bewilderment and anxiety, and together with the minimalist sets and measured pace of body movements and dialogues created powering moments of contrast and tension. Such a bold and unconventional feat had never been attempted, nor replicated, since.

4. 1970 was the year that marked the dwindling of Cantonese cinema (with an annual output of just 35), the emerging dominance of Shaw Brothers in Mandarin cinema and a raging trend of 'new-style *wuxia*' films, with the industry increasingly gravitated towards commercial fare. Daring to go against the flow, Tong modelled *The Arch* on the stylistic and technical distinction of European art cinema in the 1960s. In another pioneering move of Chinese cinema, the film was first shown at overseas film festivals and in cinemas of Europe and the US, before hitting the screens in Hong Kong.

It is a pity that the achievements of Tong or *The Arch* had never amounted to a major force in transforming the scene of Hong Kong cinema. Such transformative power wasn't unleashed until the late 1970s, by a crop of Hong Kong New Wave filmmakers. Interestingly, it remains true that Tong was the first who took up the cudgels for the 'movement' (more on this point later). Therefore, Tong is, and befittingly so, widely credited as the pioneer of the Hong Kong New Wave.

China Behind: Endowed with Prophetic Foresight

In 1974, Tong went on and directed her second work, *China Behind*, which was more daring and profound in terms of subject matter and vision, comparing to *The Arch*. Set against the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), it tells the story of several intellectuals fleeing from Guangzhou to Hong Kong. It needs to be noted that, through the film's conception to completion, the revolution was still raging. In the West, a clique of 'progressive' intellectuals further went into extremes in venerating Mao Zedong's ideology (known as Maoism) and the revolution, as the ultimate realisation of anti-capitalism. *China Behind*, however, alludes to the revolution as a suppression of human nature, the pursuit of freedom and desire for love, a frenzy political manoeuvring and class struggle set off by 'family origin'. Invested with a prophetic foresight, the film was thus recognised as the fountainhead of the political film genre in Chinese cinema (six to seven years prior to the release of *The Coldest Winter in Peking* [1980, Taiwan], *If I Were for Real* [1981, Taiwan] and etc).

The film couldn't be shot in the Mainland, and Hong Kong didn't have similar venues for location shooting. Hence, majority of the scenes (particularly those of the Red Guard rallies, revolts and denounce of the public) were filmed in Taiwan.

Tong Shu-shuen's *China Behind* (completed in 1974 and released in 1987) was set during the Cultural Revolution



The production format of the film was also nothing like that of most Chinese films at the time. According to Tong, she met a group of youngsters and film students in Taiwan while shooting on location for *The Arch*, and they had formed the backbone of the *China Behind* crew. The crew comprised of Fred Tan, Yau Lop-poon and Cheuk Pak-tong, who were later active in the film, cultural industry and academia of Taiwan and Hong Kong; a documentary cinematographer was also hired (Note: referring to Chang Chao-tang). Everyday 'We had to wait for another professional film crew to finish with their shoot, and then we sent somebody over to borrow their camera... We didn't have adapters; somebody had to hold the lens with his hand, and we bought film scraps... Everyone in the cast was an amateur, except the girl, who had some acting experience on television at that time... The university location at the beginning of the film was just a high school campus. We had to beg the students to come and play the Red Guards... they had never even heard the revolutionary song. They had never seen Mao's picture...' ⁷ Tong summed up the entire filming experience as 'very underground; very low budget, very experimental and unprofessional'. This kind of shooting was dubbed as the 'guerrilla' style in the West, a popular form of independent filmmaking in the US in the early 1970s. As for Chinese/Hong Kong cinema, similar titles only came in some 20 years later, succeeded by Fruit Chan's *Made in Hong Kong* (1997)—a testament of Tong's pioneering spirit in filmmaking.

Had *China Behind* aimed to be a mere exposé or critique on the atrocity of the Cultural Revolution, the film would have been just another anti-Communist film during

7. See note 1, pp 70-71.

the Cold War. Tong's astute observations and piercing insights as an artist were on full display in the final 10-minute sequence: out of the five fugitives, only three were able to reach Hong Kong, while becoming respectively a busboy in the stock exchange, a catholic convert and an unemployed housewife. Within this highly condensed, simple yet profound coda, save the monologue delivered by the converted believer Jing Haodong, Tong put to use the strong contrast of sheer sounds and visuals, outlining the excruciating plight of the three survivors whose personal freedom was stripped away, and ideals buried in another regime. This montage of contrasting sounds and visuals consisted of an American flag hanging outside the Hilton Hotel, in contrast with the banner on the roof of the Bank of China building, proclaiming 'Long Live Chairman Mao' (in simplified Chinese characters); a cacophony of shouts in both Cantonese and English, the frantic ringing of telephones and noises inside the stock exchange; sounds from the bustling traffic; the ostentatious Cantonese opera singing (with the accompaniment of the gong and drum), in contrast to the gospel music like Hallelujah; radio broadcast of horse-racing results in beauty parlours in contrast with Song Lan's hysterical laughs, and against seemingly topsy-turvy sensations created by the electronic soundtrack. All incorporated in a single scenario to create a unique effect, Tong's utmost purpose was to unmask the brutality of politics (or the system/environment) in abolishing humanity.

Like *The Arch*, *China Behind* was scheduled for theatrical releases in Europe before its opening in Hong Kong cinemas. Ironically though, the film received a lukewarm reception as it failed in pandering to Western recognition of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution. Worse still, the film was banned in Hong Kong by the Film Censorship Authority on the grounds that 'it might damage the good relations with other territories (Note: China) and contribute to possible breaches of peace'. Only two private screenings were allowed at Studio One (attended by members only). Mentions of the film in the media were few and far between penned by friends of the director.⁸ A screening organised by the Film Culture Centre of Hong Kong during its thematic programme was also cancelled without stating a reason, just before it was due to held on 8 October 1980.⁹ It was until 1984, when all programmers at the 8th Hong Kong International Film Festival joined hands in lobbying with the Film Censorship Authority, that permission for a one-off screening at the 'A Study of Hong Kong Cinema in the Seventies' programme was granted.¹⁰ Later in an article published by the *Asian Wall Street Journal* on 17 March 1987, it was revealed that the practices of film censorship in place at the time (referring to the Film Censorship Regulations stipulated in 1953), had never been incorporated into the laws of Hong Kong by the Legislative Council, and were intended as internal

8. One of them was Greenstreet Kan, writer and horse-racing pundit. See 'A Banned Film', in the column 'Cloud, Purple, Cat', *Ming Pao Daily News*, 2 May 1975 (in Chinese).

9. See Yee Tung, 'A Brief Discussion of Tong Shu-shuen's Films', *Thumbs Up Weekly*, No 122, 1 October 1980 (in Chinese).

10. The writer was the programmer of the World Cinema section of the 8th Hong Kong International Film Festival. Another film that suffered the same fate at the hands of the Film Censorship Authority was Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975).

guidelines only. In other words, reviews made by the Film Censorship Authority in the past were all null and void. This revelation sparked outrage within the film industry and the government was pressured to set up a special task force, inviting the then newly established Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry Association (MPIA) (Note: founded on 16 July 1986), and representatives from the film industry (Note: the writer served as one of the representatives) to work together in drafting the Film Censorship Ordinance Bill. In addition to the stipulation of the 'three-tier' rating system,¹¹ censorship criteria of political nature, such as 'damag(ing) good relations with other territories and contribut(ing) to possible breaches of peace' found in the original guidelines (see above), would be abolished in the bill. With the ordinance coming into effect the following year, in 1988, films previously shelved for political reasons re-entered the public domain. Jumping the gun of the ordinance, *China Behind* was released publicly on 29 May 1987. However, in a coincidence of ill timing, Deng Xiaoping had begun a new era by setting in train the 'open door' policy. The Cultural Revolution had become a part of history that the Chinese government, people as well as the international community were eager to dismiss. The film may have been finally 'unearthed and premiered' in Hong Kong, but it didn't make a splash and wasn't given its due recognition, deeming Tong a martyr of her time.

Sup Sap Bup Dup: Observing the Society from the 'Margins'

With the support from retired Mandarin film star, Jeanette Lin Tsui, Tong took the directorial reins of *Sup Sap Bup Dup* (1975).

The film was touted as Tong's first 'commercial film', placing playful and erotic elements at the hub of its marketing wheel.¹² Tentatively entitled 'Nothing Too Strange', the film was completed in lightning speed¹³ and released under a new title, 'Sup Sap Bup Dup'. It was originally a term for mahjong, referring to a winning hand made up of 13 mismatched tiles. The film was also structured in a form of 'anthology', which was popular in both China and the West (termed as 'omnibus film' or 'portmanteau film' in the West), and was divided into 13 narrative segments, similar to sketches or comics.¹⁴

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11. Films were classified into Category I: suitable for all ages; Category II: admit audiences of all ages, but related advertising materials of the film must indicate 'not suitable for children'; Category III: for persons aged 18 and above only.
 12. Published in August 1975, No 208 of *The Milky Way Pictorial* ran an article on *Sup Sap Bup Dup* with a subheading of 'A Commercial Film Shot by Tong Shu-shuen'. Writer An Pei of the 'Celebrities' Life' column in *Wah Kiu Yat Po* also wrote an article with the heading 'Tong Shu-shuen Also Knows How to Play the Gimmick' (in Chinese).
 13. See 'Montage in Praise of *Sup Sap Bup Dup*; Tina Ti's Special Interview with Shu-shuen', *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, 22 September 1975 (in Chinese).
 14. The big-screen version was whittled down to 11 segments for theatrical release after the midnight premiere, possibly necessitated by the negative audience reactions to the two edited-out sequences. As far as I can determine by the surviving film stills, one sequence features four Westerners playing mahjong in the middle of the road in the heavy traffic; details of the other segment are unknown.



Sup Sap Bup Dup (1975) was Tong Shu-shuen's observation of the Hong Kong society at the time. Pictured here is a scene—'Fated Match of a Bachelor', between Leung Sing-por and Helena Law Lan.

Devoted fans of *The Arch* (and *China Behind*) saw *Sup Sap Bup Dup* as a complete surrender of Tong to commercial interests (if not a betrayal). Critics then and in the years that followed were unanimous in their criticism, dismissing the film as 'kitsch',¹⁵ one of the reasons being that Tong 'lacked understanding of the middle and lower-class lives, and was thus doomed to fail'.¹⁶ In Lau Shing-hon's view, 'the biggest problem lies in its overly fragmented plot; with humour of the screenwriter and director incapable to pander to the taste of the local audience; the comic timing also feels off',¹⁷ it was a work that 'failed critically and commercially'.¹⁸ Sek Kei offered a more even-handed review, arguing that, 'as a director who has always catered to intellectuals, she changes to reach the mass audience... it could also be seen as another sort of experimental film... with an equal share of hits and misses';¹⁹ yet his conclusion still ended on a negative note: 'The Achilles' heel of the film is that it has lost the meticulous and "give-it-all" attitude embodied in the early works of Tong. She has yielded to the restrictions of filmmaking, banking on strikes of genius just like other Hong Kong directors... with slipshod

15. See 'Annual Review and Films of 1975', *Thumbs Up Weekly*, No 12, 8 January 1976 (in Chinese).

16. Ibid.

17. See Lau Shing-hon, 'The Problems with Tong Shu-shuen', *Da Da Monthly*, No 22, 1 August 1976 (in Chinese).

18. See Lau Shing-hon, 'Shu Shuen: The Lone-Rider in Hong Kong Cinema in the 1970s', *A Study of Hong Kong Cinema in the Seventies*, the 8th Hong Kong International Film Festival retrospective catalogue, Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1984, p 106.

19. See '*Sup Sap Bup Dup*—The Cards are Fine; the Matches are No Good', *Ming Pao Evening News*, 22 September 1975 (in Chinese).

storytelling in places.²⁰ The film was further a massive box office bomb when it hit the cinemas: its midnight premiere almost caused a riot (15 years earlier than Wong Kar-wai's equally notorious work, *Days of Being Wild* [1990]).²¹ Despite the sexually explicit wordings on its advertisement ('man strips off in his rough-hewn way; woman embodies the bombshell with finesse'; 'rich woman spends days and nights at the mahjong table; buys herself a naked man as stake'), it failed to turn the box office around. Shortly after the release of the film, producer Jeanette Lin Tsui shut down her self-named Jeanette Productions and left Hong Kong.

Is *Sup Sap Bup Dup* really a 'slipshod' piece as Sek Kei described it? True enough, it lacks the minutely crafted and graceful aura of *The Arch*; its subject matter and thematic emphasis also pale in comparison with *China Behind*'s piercing insights and controversial stance. Still, I would argue that Tong had largely retained qualities prerequisite for an auteur—not only was she not 'kitsch', or 'going-with-the-flow', she remained steadfastly true to herself. While the film displayed a higher level of expertise than that of *China Behind* in each of its production department, according to the commercial standards at the time, it should still be considered as a low-budget film. Also made at a remarkable 'chop-chop' speed, doesn't it qualify as another product of guerrilla filmmaking à la *China Behind*? Told through the critical gaze of a modernist, *The Arch* is Tong's response to the oppression of females under Chinese traditions. In *China Behind*, Tong examined, with the eye of an outsider, the fate of lives stripped of autonomy under different regimes/systems, delivering less a pungent stab than an objective, rational poke at the issue. If we take a closer look at *Sup*, Tong is in fact presenting, from the perspective as a 'hybrid' Hongkonger and as 'someone from the margins', a cross-sectional study and view on Hong Kong society at the time. Tong found Hong Kong to be a strange yet astounding metropolis that brought together cultures of the East and West, traditional and modern, where 'nothing is too strange'. The film was made with a full-of-curiosity, affable mind set, and with nostalgia, from Tong. If there is one feature that distinguishes it from her previous works, it is that Tong was more free-handed and liberated (rather than 'slipshod') with the format of *Sup*: the film is at the same time comic and tragic, serious and light, real and false, erotic and romantic, fantastical and realistic, horrifying and farcical; with a babel of words in both Chinese and English (and Italian), in the tongue of Cantonese and Mandarin; and a medley of Cantonese-style rap as well as pop songs. The 13 segments weave together narrative and annotative reflections, alternately frivolous and solemn

20. See 'Attitudes Adopted in Filming *Sup Sap Bup Dup*', *Ming Pao Evening News*, 25 September 1975 (in Chinese).

21. I had the opportunity back then to hear first-hand from Tong the events unfolding the night of the film's premiere at Royal Theatre in Mong Kok: Seated at the balcony at the weekend night premiere, Tong and Lin noticed how the audience became increasingly agitated halfway through the film. Soon there emerged shouts from downstairs, demanding to know who the director was. The answer was supplied instantly, 'The director's upstairs!' A chorus of condemnation and insults followed, with someone yelling, 'Let me give her a good beating after the show!' Tong and Lin were so seized with fear that they wouldn't dare go downstairs and leave the premises until well after the crowd dispersed.

where ‘nothing is too strange’, if not ‘all-encompassing’.

The most distinctive stroke of the narrative appears just before the end: a down-and-out young man (played by Adam Cheng) enters a pitch dark place and is startled to death by the sudden appearance of a mysterious diviner (the fortune-teller). Followed immediately by the non-diegetic voice of a woman, shouting ‘Cut!’, the place starts to lit-up. A film set where the characters are cast to play their roles is revealed—and that everything has been a bad dream of reality. This moment of dissociation casts the audience back into the real world outside the silver screen, forcing them to reflect on, comparing their difference as well as authenticity. Designed for contemplation, this ending stakes a claim for Tong as an avant-garde storyteller.

Despite a tidal wave of criticism hurling at the film, there are four scenes that can be counted as its saving grace: (1) the southern scholar (played by Wu Jiaxiang) who numbs his nostalgic pangs at the mahjong table, but takes his own life when his mahjong friends migrate abroad one by one; (2) the operatic excerpt, ‘Fated Match of a Bachelor (Remade)’, featuring Leung Sing-por and Helena Law Lan as two rivalling con artists whose paths collide as they gatecrash weddings and during mahjong scams; (3) a mahjong contest attended by wealthy players which comes complete with stimulated radio commentaries of football matches; (4) the finale of the destitute young man mentioned above (played by Adam Cheng), receives a lucky charm from a mysterious diviner, and has been on a winning streak during gamble. Among them, the second sequence merits special attention: Tong employed two veterans of Cantonese cinema, Leung Sing-por—a renowned comedian whose every move was imbued with theatrics and guaranteed to impress (Tong had Leung opened with a solo scene, depicting him getting ready in a small room for his ventures—a precursor to the final scene of Tony Leung Chiu-wai in Wong Kar-wai’s *Days of Being Wild*, who was similarly captured in a cramped apartment, preparing for a night out). Younger audience nowadays recognise Helena Law Lan and has great rapport with the veteran thanks to her chilling screen-stealing turn in *July 13th* (1996). As fate would have it, Law had been stuck in doing supporting roles in the years before 1975. In casting Law as the lead, Tong showed a shrewd eye for the veteran and to a greater extent, her love for Cantonese cinema, as well as the local culture that it represents. It came as little surprise that Tong had reiterated in her many interviews, for both local and overseas media, her fondness for Cantonese cinema, especially the odd-couple farces featuring Sun Ma Si-Tsang and Tang Kei-chen, in which their character archetypes now reincarnated in the mismatched pairing of Leung and Law.

The Hong Kong Tycoon: Laden with Subtle Irony and Lament

In 1977, Tong directed her last Hong Kong film, *The Hong Kong Tycoon* (1979).

The film was produced by Wong King (the pseudonym of Wang Jingxi).²² By Tong’s own account, it was neither her idea nor screenplay. She would be given relevant pages of the script on the day of shooting and that she would need to revise them on the spot.

The Hong Kong Tycoon (1979) depicts the trials and tribulations of a nobody's ascent into the upper echelon, with Michael Lai starring as the protagonist Ajin.



The jury was still out on the final theatrical cut and the director hadn't seen the finished film herself.²³ The film was shelved for two whole years before it was hastily released in 'left-wing cinemas' to dismal reviews and lukewarm box-office.

I had written two articles for 'Movie Talks' of *The New Evening Post* (also known to be a left-wing newspaper) at the time of its theatrical release. Below is an excerpt:

Tong Shu-shuen's *The Hong Kong Tycoon* ... greeted and left the screen in haste. The film didn't make a splash in the box-office, and not even with the critics... Is *Tycoon* really a complete fiasco that doesn't warrant a mention?

No, it isn't—absolutely not. The film strikes me as a highly unique piece in Hong Kong cinema, just like Tong's previous three films. Even though it can hardly be counted as an overall success, one cannot rule out its merit in demonstrating a distinctive sense that permeates every frame. On the contrary, one must give due recognition to *The Hong Kong Tycoon* for its incidental elegance and melancholy.

Most critics dismissed the film for its lack of drama. However, I would argue that this equable verve that characterises the narrative was a deliberate choice by the director... With *Tycoon*, Tong had a legendary or probably thrilling story to tell, but she chose to spin a rags-to-riches tale of a nobody, Ajin (played by Michael Lai), into one that is short on hyperbole, creating a sense of muted resignation... the dramatic shift from comedy to tragedy is an inevitable development of the narrative and structure. (The film) does not focus on the extravagant, debauched lifestyle of the social climber,

22. The co-screenwriters were credited as Wong King and Ci Ci, the former the pseudonym of Wang Jingxi and the latter of Tong (from her English name, Cecile).

23. See note 1, p 72.

but maintains its quiet integrity to allude to the futility of his ill-gotten wealth. This finesse of subtle irony and lament is a rare gem in recent Hong Kong cinema. ('Subtle Irony and Lament: My Take on *The Hong Kong Tycoon*'²⁴)

There are yet more features that set *Tycoon* apart from average local production... Much of its length is devoted to building up a melancholic vibe exquisitely, quietly observing the characters' expressions, reactions or finest details of movements. These episodes have functions much like the punctuation marks in an article—be they the semicolon, dash or exclamation mark... serving to propel the narratives as well as to furnish occasions for graceful pauses... Its portrayal of Linda's (played by Ada Lui) meteoric rise from a secretary to a development manager is a case in point. Tong trains her lens on Linda, and in one long shot, charts her moves in the spacious office from shuffling a few documents and mementos around the desk, before sitting herself in a high-back chair and getting up to look out the window, with her lovely face silhouetted by the glaring rays of the sun. In another scene, Linda is found alone in a huge mansion making a string of phone calls, a gesture that implies she has cut herself off from her childhood friends. The camera then hovers above her as she slowly ascends a spiral staircase, revealing the embedded significance through the camera movement. It echoes with the final scene where Michael Lai's character is glued to his phone, diligently ringing up three women and their three empty flats. The scene ends with him standing on the balcony against the sun, overlooking the skyline of a prosperous Hong Kong—tranquil yet desolate. Tong's knack for ending a film on a melancholic note should come as no surprise to her fans—the lament about seeking and losing, and its few variations can be found in *The Arch*, *China Behind* and even *Sup*. ('Seeking and Losing: My Second Take on *The Hong Kong Tycoon*'²⁵)

The significance of *Tycoon* was further expounded at the screening organised by the Cantonese Cinema Study Association (as mentioned above), where a panel of speakers including Timmy Chan and Yau Ching shared their insights on the film.²⁶ I won't go to the lengths of repeating them here.

Founding *Close Up Magazine* to Promote Film Culture

One night in 1975 (I forgot the exact date, though it was likely to be of the months after October and the release of *Sup*), Tong invited a group of film critics for *The Chinese*

24. See Shu Kei, 'Subtle Irony and Lament: My Take on *The Hong Kong Tycoon*', *The New Evening Post*, 13 July 1979 (in Chinese).

25. See Shu Kei, 'Seeking and Losing: My Second Take on *The Hong Kong Tycoon*', *The New Evening Post*, 14 July 1979 (in Chinese).

26. The presentation of Timmy Chan and Yau Ching can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wscrkcNFWo> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8m17jmVFkc> (in Cantonese). It is noteworthy that Yau Ching's *Filming Margins: Tang Shu Shuen, A Forgotten Hong Kong Woman Director* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004) is the first and only publication devoted to the studies of the director and her work.

Student Weekly and some regular film reviewers for newspapers, to a meeting at her place in Minden Row, Tsim Sha Tsui. As an 'up-and-coming writer' for *Weekly's* film column, I too got an invite. That night Tong announced her wishes to the attendees: she was going to publish a specialist, independent and serious film magazine (I remember her emphasis on the word 'serious'). Its content would include coverage on new releases, interviews with film personalities, film reviews and even introduction to film theories, aspiring to achieve the goals of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, a French film magazine founded in 1951 by film theorist and critic André Bazin, not only to promote local film culture but also as an influence to be reckoned with in the film industry. She urged the attendees to lend their support. If my memory serves me well, the group's response was rather surprisingly less enthusiastic than might be expected.

The cover of *Close Up's* launch issue featured French actor Alain Delon, with a subheading of 'A Handbook for Film Audience' (it was later retitled 'Film Biweekly'). Priced at HK\$1 (raised to HK\$1.5 from issue 15 onwards), it was published fortnightly on Thursdays. The magazine had undergone two periods of hiatus: the first was a month-long break after issue 20, from 9 September to 7 October 1976; the second was also a one-month hiatus after issue 28 (from 3 February to 4 March 1977) that coincided with the Chinese New Year holiday. The magazine folded on 29 September 1978 with issue 66 and with Gigi Wong on its cover, after being in circulation for two years and ten months.

Close Up's editorial office was located in none other than Tong's 500-square-foot living room (her bedroom was strictly off-limits to the staff!). Lee Mer and Wu Ping served as its earliest editors, and they were succeeded by Cheung Kam-moon; then I was hired to take the helm. The magazine was chronically short-staffed. For the entirety of my tenure (from around the latter half of 1976 to mid-1977), I had only the help of one assistant editor (with the later addition of a part-time assistant) to get the job done: from commissioning and editing articles, proofreading copies, typesetting, arranging copies to go to print and distribution.

Close Up's editorial directions, policies, contents and the many changes during its run are subjects worthy of in-depth study and illustration, one that would deserve an article of their own. I only summarise here several features that define its significance:

1. Although *Close Up* didn't quite match the bar set by *Cahiers du Cinéma* (not by a long shot, to be frank), it undoubtedly filled the void in film journalism and criticism left by the then-defunct *The Chinese Student Weekly* (and its 'Film Salon' section), satisfying the craving of a batch of film lovers (and even cinephiles) nurtured by *The Chinese Student Weekly*. It wouldn't be unfitting to recognise the magazine as having been very affirmative towards film criticisms, while elevating the cultural status of Hong Kong cinema.
2. Newspaper, radio, *xiqu* and film were the most popular forms of mass entertainment/media in Hong Kong, after the WWII and until the late 1960s (television only entered the scene when Television Broadcasts Limited [TVB] commenced broadcasting in

1967). Among them, film was gaining increasing importance (as evidenced by its massive output) due to its all-embracing nature (whether the breadth of its nature/content, or the scope of its audience). Perhaps it was due to the lack of resources and technical limitations that local film productions, Cantonese films in particular, were never examined in a serious light or given their due recognition, often being dismissed as lowbrow entertainment to please or only for the mass audience. From the mid-1960s onwards, under the impact and influence of a brand new trend of philosophical thought and art forms that was sweeping the world, these ‘all rags, no riches’ Cantonese films were to varying degrees spurned by the Baby Boomer generation, and even treated with disdain. Take the example of the ‘Film Salon’ section of *The Chinese Student Weekly*. Most of its contents, be it news or criticisms, was dedicated to foreign films (primarily from the US and Europe, followed by Japan), while the occasional mentions of local works were invariably tainted by bias. This had also been the prevalent stance until the early stages of *Close Up*, with the coverage of foreign films taking the centre stage. However, the tables were about to be turned. Issue 29, the relaunch edition (4 March 1977) following the magazine’s second hiatus, published a ‘From the Editor’ column, ‘Blowing one’s own trumpet’: ‘It has become obvious that since issue 21, *Close Up* has shown an inclination that gears towards our local films, while allocating less space to foreign cinemas and even consciously leaving them out. *Close Up* is the one and only film magazine for Hong Kong film audience. In order to raise the bar for Hong Kong cinema, we believe that we should recognise, instead of rebuffing, the achievements of our films and film workers... We should not turn into a magazine for a niche “City Hall film audience”...’ The same issue also published a 1976 annual film review and honoured the best of Hong Kong films that year with its *Close Up* film awards; in issue 30, the magazine hosted a Chinese film forum and announced its annual best television shows list. This shift in editorial direction was in line with the ‘changes’ seen in *Sup* and *Tycoon*, in which Tong demonstrated an awareness of belonging to Hong Kong and made it her issue of concern, while taking roots in Hong Kong—a sensibility akin to ‘indigenouness’ in today’s language.

3. Such changes, to a large extent, were because of a crop of up-and-coming screenwriters and directors from television a year earlier, as well as their string of drama series, including *Superstar Specials* (1975), *Social Worker* (1976), *Seven Women* (1976), *Mary Quant 77* (1977), *Young People* (1977), *The Underdogs* (1977) and *Below the Lion Rock* (Note: a long-term drama series, started airing in 1972). Mostly film graduates from the US and UK, these newcomers joined the ranks of TVB and the Television Division of Radio Television Hong Kong, shooting on a standalone 16mm film camera that required almost the same operation and technique as filmmaking. Catering to the family audience, these dramas drew on real-life content largely inspired by news stories, in which they were not shy of controversies in their plotlines, perspectives and approaches. Stemmed from Shaw Brothers’ studio films and other mass-produced TV series/comedies, their creative approaches were not

only intriguing, but unveiled a new direction. *Close Up*, through Tong's advocacy and perseverance, took the lead in dubbing this cohort 'Hong Kong New Wave'. As early as in issue 20, the magazine ran a special feature, entitled 'New Wave Sweeps Across the Broadcast Drive', giving an introduction of these New Wave screenwriters and directors, as well as reviews of their television works. Reviews of their latest films and articles of their happenings appeared in almost every edition since then. One issue even published the script of a work banned for its politically sensitive theme (*ICAC: Investigation*, written by Yim Ho and directed by Ann Hui) in an act of solidarity. A year later, issue 63 (18 August 1978) ran an article, 'Hong Kong New Wave Cinema: Revolutionists who Challenge Traditions' (with congratulatory messages on both the front and back covers), to act in concert with the start of the shooting of *The Extras* (1978), Yim Ho's debut feature, thereby cementing the momentous term's place in Hong Kong cinema history.

Coda

Whether Hong Kong New Wave Cinema is a bona fide revolution warrants further discussion. But Tong beat a quiet retreat just when she had set in motion her single-handed efforts to push for change. If I remember correctly, she had never made her departure official. Knowing too well that she is not one in keeping a high-profile (nor accepting failure easily), I didn't attempt to gauge her feelings when she bowed out all those years ago: was it of despondence, or of disappointment? Or was it a sacrifice made in a life-and-limb situation? The one thing certain is that, during the many times we met again, Tong had kept her usual graceful dignity, poised and elegant, tempered with her own brand of wry humour. I do not think the free-spirited filmmaker would have any regrets about her endeavours. On the contrary, I believe, much to our regret, not only did we fail to recognise her courage and celebrate her achievements in fairness and equity, we watched with folded arms as her four remarkable and stunning masterpieces slowly eroded and disappeared in the river of time. If this article is able to offer a set of clues for Tong and her cinematic oeuvre, in prompting future studies and preservation work, then I have done my job.

28 January 2018

[Translated by Agnes Lam]

Editor's note: Unauthorised content quoted from its original source has been removed from this article with writer's consent.

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ORAL HISTORY



Sammo Hung:

Making Kung Fu Comedies to Showcase My Strengths

Interviewers: Cheung Chi-sing (30 May 1999);
Po Fung (25 March 2013)

Collated by Nicky Lam and May Ng



The upsurge of kung fu films began in Hong Kong during the 1970s; a phenomenon that created a boom in the local film industry. It further established the foundation for Hong Kong films to break out of Asia and into the world. One of the most illustrious film icons of the times, the ‘Big brother of big brothers in film’, Sammo Hung is equally accomplished as an actor, director and producer. Hung is a pivotal figure in pioneering the kung fu comedy genre. Nicknamed ‘Sam Mo’ as a child, he trained in Peking opera with master Yu Zhanyuan and entered the film world as a child star. Hung quickly rose to the challenges of filmmaking and made an enduring bond with its craft. In this interview, Hung recalled the process of honing his skills and his entry into the industry, as well as the various struggles faced as a young martial artist. He talked about becoming an martial arts choreographer and his evolution into a bona fide filmmaker with his studious and dauntless character, and through years of collaborations with different directors while learning the tricks of the trade along the way. Hung further spoke of his journey in becoming a film director and directing the box-office sellouts, *The Iron-Fisted Monk* (1977) and *Warriors Two* (1978), as well as the making of *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* (1980), a great hit that unveiled a new path for Hong Kong kung fu cinema in the 1970s and 1980s.

An Opera Troupe Kid Getting Into the Film Industry

I was born in 1952 in Hong Kong. Originally from Ningbo, my family seemed to have always connected with films somehow. My maternal grandfather was a production

designer; he worked with plaster and clay figures, and made sets and décors for the 'Eighteen Arhats' and the 'Four Heavenly Kings' in *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (1959). My paternal grandfather (Note: Hung Chung-ho) was a formidable producer in his day who had his own film studio (Note: Huanan Film Studio) on Grampian Road at the time. My paternal grandmother (Note: Chin Tsi-ang) was a famous actress. As a kid, I was often on the streets starting fights and getting into trouble. My grandparents took me to meet Master Yu (Note: Yu Zhanyuan) when I was nine years old. I had no idea what Peking opera was, but the children there were doing somersaults and I found it interesting. The following week, I begged my grandparents relentlessly until they finally sent me to train with the opera troupe. I signed a seven-year contract with them.

My voice was never amazing, but I trained for almost everything in school, including character studies such as *qingyi* (virtuous female), *xiaosheng* (civil male) and *jing* (painted-face male). I could probably be called an all-rounder for Peking opera. All students of the troupe lived together like in a boarding school. However, our education was much less conventional. There was not a lot of book learning, but for the things that mattered, such as the Confucian ideas of 'heaven and earth', 'king and country' and 'family and teachers'; we were well-taught. All of us were well-mannered and exceedingly respectful to our elders. There were around 60 apprentices, but not everyone had what it took to meet the demands of Peking opera. The few who did were versatile and well-rounded, capable of playing the entire repertoire of characters. In the beginning, we did not have as many people and thus performing was taxing. If someone was suddenly sick, I would step in as the alternative. I remembered my first performance was at the city hall; and we could only manage one show. And I still remember the first time we performed under the name of 'Seven Little Fortunes' was at the Princess Theatre. It was not until later when the troupe grew larger that we could perform at the Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park.

I began to act in films like *Education of Love* (1961), *The Crisis* (1964) and others, when I was 12 or 13 years old. I recalled shooting *The Princess and the Magnificent Seven* (1962) with Patricia Lam Fung and a large group of kids; I was already a child star by that time. Later, I starred in a number of Cantonese films directed by Chan Lit-bun, Wu Pang, Tu Guangqi, Robert Chung and more. Then there were the various Mandarin films that I made around the same period of time with directors such as Ho Meng-hua, Lo Wei and the master Griffin Yueh Feng. As a kid, I did not understand why filmmaking appealed to me.

I started working as a martial artist in films when I was 14 years old. At that time, I was still training with my master, but I was allowed to take leave for film shoots. The compensation was HK\$60 a day. When I returned to school, I would hand HK\$55 to my master and kept HK\$5 myself. Every time I finished a job, I would return elated, feeling special. Once I was home, I would tell my younger troupe mates of what I had done on shoots, the moves I had made, and then I would design some movements for them. When I turned 15 or 16, I left the troupe to officially join the industry. Starting from that time, I would pass on every detail of what I did on set, what was shot and how I died

in the film to my peers; I felt like I was becoming a director, an instructor, with a sense of enthusiasm and excitement. As I made more films, I became engrossed in all aspects of filmmaking. Whether it was martial arts or operating a camera dolly, I was always up for the challenge. Whenever the foreman asked me to do something, I proved myself to be multi-talented. I would pay close attention to how my partners had done it, and slowly I had become the assistant martial arts choreographer, the martial arts choreographer and finally the director.

Life of a Martial Artist

I graduated as a martial artist at the age of 16. At the time, my master's son-in-law, Han Yingjie, was our mentor. To be honest, we were already pretty good, but we lacked experience. Most action sequences involved bouncing or jumping, with standard fighting movements, 'ta' (controlled falling onto your back) and 'ji' (spitting) fake blood. The more technical moves involved jump-flipping down from some height, leaping on a trampoline and wire-flying. Usually there would be a stack of cardboard boxes to break our falls, but sometimes there would be nothing at all, even though the moves were dangerous.

Being a martial artist requires endurance; it is arduous and involves pushing your limits. I had no experience so I progressed by observing my teachers and colleagues, learning from them and accepting their criticisms. If you are dedicated and willing to work around the clock, you will see the results sooner. However, if you are unwilling and introverted, this might prove difficult. As a choreographer, you have to communicate well with others and be somewhat outgoing. You have to be capable of explaining principles of the movements well. This is a stark contrast to being an actor, in which you are only required to be present and fully immersed when the camera is rolling, and you do not need to speak up in other times.

In those days, there were miles between the director and us in the hierarchy of things. I can afford to be fierce now, but not back then. We had to be deferential. I was always an obedient child; the general rule was that whenever the boss asked, 'Who's up?' We would all volunteer to be the first, and no one would ever say no. We prevailed in whatever was asked of us. Things didn't change so much when I became the choreographer myself. If someone had issues with the sequences I designed, I would step in and do it myself. For example, there was a stunt that required being thrown down a flight of iron stairs by two men and with closed-eyes, which even the stunt double would not dare to do it, I did it myself and gave it all I had. There was no other choice. An empty pocket is a poor man's courage. The things you do to make ends meet are the real motivators.

I was in Taiwan filming *The Fast Sword* (1971) and I remembered that Huang Feng was the director. There were two stunt doubles on set; and we had overdone our jump from a trampoline and crashed into an enormous piece of granite. I knew a crash would

happen, so I tried with all my strength to steel up my entire body, but I kept my head up to avoid hitting it on the granite. Despite this, I slammed straight into the rock with such force that I blacked out. When I finally removed my wig, the director said that the stunt was scrapped and called it a day. However, the first shot we did the next day was the same action and I repeated it without question.

I also recalled shooting *The Life for Sale* (1973) in Korea, where I had to jump from a height of 60 feet, with only a pile of six carton boxes and a piece of foam to break the fall. The boxes were very small and I would have to land perfectly on them. I was the martial arts choreographer, but to my disbelief, I was told that there were no carton boxes on set that day. Not shooting meant losing a huge amount, so we decided to give it a go. Truth be told, it was a pretty dangerous stunt, but luckily, we made it.

There were other mishaps along the way and the worst of them was an incident when the wire, in a wire-flying scene, snapped mid-flight. There was a pop, and everything came crashing down. It was something beyond control, but I escaped unscathed fortunately. Life was hard for martial artists and stunt doubles. Everyone suffered from internal injuries at some point, but would not be given time for convalescence because it would cost a lot more money. I also worried about our stunt doubles' safety. There were, of course, many incredibly skilled stunt masters who could control in executing any given actions, such that they would suffer only superficial injuries without any safety problem. However, there was an equal amount of action extras who had the guts but not the skills. No matter who was injured, I always felt responsible.

Hong Kong action films are world-renowned, and that they leave audience feeling incredulous, wondering how the actions would be possible. This is what we are most proud of. It makes all pain and suffering seemingly worthy in the end. I'm not sure if that is always true, but it gives us a great sense of achievement. These martial artists and stunt masters have helped elevate Hong Kong cinema to a significant place.

Action Choreography Must Be Compelling

Not long after being a martial artist, I became the assistant martial arts choreographer.

All things go in the 'designing phase' because it is when imagination reigns. However, the film's narrative, characters and settings still had to be grounded in reality. Even though there are various fictional elements in films, its logic and portrayals must be authentic. Of whether its impact is sufficient is something else altogether. For instance, with the 'Falcon Claw', it is important that its every single move has to be compelling, regardless of whether the rendering of the 'claw' can be fully felt or not.

Even though the martial arts choreographer took charge of the action scenes, he could only take care of what happened on set at the end of the day. During post-production, I could discuss and ruminate over ideas with the director at length, but the process was not an easy one. We might have spent years training for Peking opera, but

in reality, our understanding of its cultural and historical significance was superficial. Everything that I learned—of how to become a director or how to work with actors—came from observing and absorbing others' knowledge, in the hopes to invigorate my own way of thinking and give new inspirations. I had also practiced various styles of kung fu as well as boxing from the different schools and systems, to know more about martial arts and enrich my approach to choreography.

Learning from Collaborations With Different Directors

I worked with a number of directors, including Lo Wei, Ho Meng-hua, Griffin Yueh Feng and Cheng Kang from Shaw Brothers. At the time, Cheng alternated between Tong Kai or Han Yingjie as his martial arts choreographer. I was shooting on many productions with Lo Wei because he often worked with Han. From the very beginning, Lo had already let Han decide on how the scene would be shot. I filmed mostly in studios with Lo, and abroad with Huang Feng, mostly in Korea. The same happened with Chung Chang-hwa.

Different directors had different ways of seeing things, as well as styles of direction. For instance, King Hu always treated us like his best friends' children. We had watched him work since we were kids, and followed him on his productions when we became martial artists (Note: Hung worked on director King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* [1971], *The Fate of Lee Khan* [1973] and *The Valiant Ones* [1975]). He would have a complete concept before speaking with us. During those days, our sense of cinematography, mise-en-scène and image creation were worlds apart from Hu. He would always have everything set ahead of time. Even so, he enjoyed talking with us and sometimes we would talk for the whole night. He was very much interested in mentoring the next generation. He would share his insights with us and occasionally design his own choreography. Ultimately, action choreography for films is not entirely the same as that for theatre and opera performances. Sometimes, the movements we designed for him would be of different feeling, but there was no comparison. Hu was undoubtedly a great director, highly cultivated in all aspects of art and culture. We were humbled to be next to him.

Bruce Lee was different (Note: Hung collaborated with Lee on *Enter the Dragon* [1973] and *The Game of Death* [1978]). Interacting with Lee was an entirely different experience. His philosophy was in fact experience gleaned from the stage and fighting arenas. He knew exactly what movements could be used to control someone and when to play offence. He was closer to the real world and grounded his ideas in actualities. Lee drew inspirations from the early years of the Republic of China in *The Big Boss* (1971), followed by *The Way of the Dragon* (1972) and *Fist of Fury* (1972). These films exerted a great influence on us because of their 'authenticity'. They were real fights incorporated with martial arts practices that we had seen during training. This was what the audience liked and what the average Joe wanted. So, when it came to making films, we tried our utmost to recreate this visceral realism, of how a face got jolted when someone was being punched in the face. This was the approach we had for doing things.



With the stage name Chu Yuen-lung, Sammo Hung served as the martial arts choreographer for *The Valiant Ones* (1975), directed by King Hu. He also starred as the *wokou* leader Hakatatsu.

I worked as a martial arts choreographer under Huang Feng when I first started out, and it was a collaboration that last for many years to follow. At that time, a lot of big stars bullied me as I was young. I was also afraid to speak up for myself, so I just resigned. Later, Huang would tell me loudly on set, 'Tell me if anyone disrespects you, I will resign together with you.' He wasn't speaking to me; he was speaking to everyone else.

Receiving the Directorial Baton and Filming *The Iron-Fisted Monk*

I had worked as martial arts choreographer under Huang Feng and Chung Chang-hwa for quite a while and made a number of films with Golden Harvest when the idea of becoming a film director took form. I asked Huang whether I had any chance of being a director, and he said yes. After that, Huang accompanied me to Golden Harvest for a meeting with Raymond Chow. He told Chow that this kid that he brought along wanted to be a director and wondered if there was any opportunity. Chow said okay and told me to try writing a screenplay. I approached Huang to outline the story that would become *The Iron-Fisted Monk* (1977), and the boss ultimately approved it. Since it needed to be in Cantonese, I enlisted Szeto On to help me in writing the first draft. After he was done, the boss also green lit the project. Huang really spoke out for me at that time; he even



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The first film that Sammo Hung wrote, directed and starred in, *The Iron-Fisted Monk* (1977), showed his abilities to the full extent.

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made a cameo appearance as a Shaolin monk in the film. He was truly a great mentor to me.

When I started making this film, I was afraid that I was an unknown name; that's why I chose Chen Sing as the titular monk Sam Tek while I played the Hawker. This directorial debut of mine was also a kung fu comedy, because I felt that my strength was never in choreographing serious action flicks. I am good at 'making people laugh' (witty), it could be somewhat exaggerated, but realistic and realisable. Another thing was that I made it in Cantonese. Back then some people would ask me, 'Aren't you worried about this?' I said it should be fine because I felt that my characters were 'cuter' talking in Cantonese, and audience would feel closer to them. I would use a lot of lighthearted dialogue, for example, if two characters met up and were making small talks, one of them might say, 'Hey, how are things?' The other would reply, 'It's alright, you know, nothing to write home about.' I really liked this kind of lighthearted banter.

While shooting *The Iron-Fisted Monk*, I conceived the film with specific characters in mind to showcase what I was good at. Things were a little chaotic, but I never froze up in fear. No matter what I was filming, dramatic scenes or something else, I gave everything I had, with no excuses in stopping myself or that I could not make myself to full use, and without succumbing to pressure. Of course, I was a lot more ambitious when it came to the action sequences. I tried bringing in more dynamism and ingenuity to these elements. Of course, looking back years later, I do think some of the sequences were quite stiff. But it was ok, it was my first film after all.

During filming, Mr Leonard Ho watched the rushes with me; his only comment was

‘we don’t need so many “NG” takes’. I filmed all these characters’ close ups with so many takes that watching them bored Ho. This experience taught me that never let your boss watch the uncut rushes. It would be better to go through a pre-selection process and make a rough cut first. For example, if you had ten takes, cut down to two or three. Mr Ho would never say if a shot was good or bad. Instead, he would ask you, ‘Why is it like this here?’ or ‘How about that there?’ He would always tell me if he had some good pointers. I was pretty worried when I finished the film because everyone would say to me, ‘No way. This film is terrible.’ But after the premiere, those rejections became, ‘I told you that you would succeed.’ It was hard to imagine how people’s words could change so fast.

I already knew Mr Raymond Chow before I had become a film director, but he was more of an acquaintance. Back when I was in Australia with Jimmy Wang Yu, filming for *The Man from Hong Kong* (1975), Chow said to me, ‘Hey Sammo, you have what it takes.’ I replied, ‘Yes, but that depends on whether you will give me a chance.’ But at that time I didn’t have the guts to walk straight into an office and discuss possibilities with Mr Chow. Of course, following the success of my film, my legs found sufficient strength to carry me through those doors.

Learning Wing Chun for *Warriors Two*

The reason I made *Warriors Two* (1978) was because of my mentor, Lau Kar-leung. When I was directing my first film, he gave me plenty of encouragement. He reminded me that as a director, if I ever felt that the framing was wrong after shooting a scene, I could reset immediately to shoot again without worrying about what others had to say. Lau gave me the confidence and reassurance needed to make my own decisions. At the time, most kung fu films, such as *Five Shaolin Masters* (1974) starring Alexander Fu Sheng, featured Cantonese martial arts—Hung Fist. In comparison, the movements for Wing Chun were smaller and more refined, thus lesser known by people. I never trained in Wing Chun before, but I had heard of its principles and found them very ‘stimulating’. There were things in Wing Chun’s philosophy that resonated with me. For example, the idea of ‘if there’s no bridge, then make yourself one’ was an entertaining one, in which I believed the audience would also find intriguing. So I started conceptualising the story of this context, with research, study and training in Wing Chun. As a martial arts choreographer, I couldn’t imagine having a Wing Chun master on set ‘designing’ the action for me. With no understanding of cinematic styles and techniques, the designed choreography would lack that cinematic feeling. That was why I had to learn Wing Chun myself, though I was already interested in studying it to begin with. I had a friend back then who helped me a lot with this. He was a great martial artist in the Wing Chun style and became the consultant for my choreography. With my newfound knowledge and training, designing the action scenes became easier for me.

I had Leung Ka-yan as Mr Jan and Casanova Wong, a Korean actor, to play Cashier



Although at the time most kung fu films featured the Hung Fist, Sammo Hung had specifically studied about Wing Chun to film the box-office hit, *Warriors Two* (1978).

Wah in this film. I drew inspiration from Wing Chun again one or two productions after this (Note: referring to *The Prodigal Son* [1981]), because I felt that there was more to it. To be honest, what hadn't the audience seen before? The only thing that matters is to make a film that is entertaining.

Establishing a Company

During that time, me and my friends, Karl Maka and Lau Kar-wing were casually saying that we should form a company of our own. I said, 'Why not? I'm in.' And that was how we founded Ga Bo Films. The three of us agreed to take turns in making films; Maka would make one (Note: *Dirty Tiger, Crazy Frog* [1978]), followed by Lau (Note: *Odd Couple* [1979]), and then me. The other two finished shooting their films, but I didn't because I didn't have the time. I could be an actor or a martial arts choreographer, but directing a film would have taken more time and effort than what I could afford, and I was still making films for Golden Harvest. It didn't really matter, though. Whenever someone had an idea, we would hold a meeting to talk things over, and we would go into production once everything was agreed upon. Regardless of whether the film succeeded or not, as long as I had the chance to take part in the production, and that the others were willing to have me, I would be elated.

(From left) Karl Maka, Sammo Hung and Lau Kar-wing went with the trend of kung fu comedies, and collaborated in shooting *Odd Couple* (1979).



When we founded Bo Ho Films, I felt that there were too many directors without support of a production company. If I was capable of producing and overseeing the production of more films, I would not hold back in providing opportunities for other directors. With Bo Ho Films, I could direct films, and director Wu Ma also assisted me. Meanwhile, Yuen Biao and Lam Ching-ying helped me with all other aspects of work so that our talents could work on the tasks at hand. And we had worked like this for over a decade.

Against All Odds: *Encounter of the Spooky Kind*

Every time I make a film, I would want to include something new, something that audience would find interesting. Later I thought of shooting a story about Maoshan sorcery—that was how *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* (1980) came to be. The film relied mainly on audience's fascination of legends about ghosts and the supernatural. These stories were particularly popular in Southeast Asia and in Hong Kong; everyone loved them. During those days I mostly talked with Leonard Ho about these things, so I made a suggestion of filming *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* to him. He agreed, and I went ahead.

At that time, a lot of people tried to persuade me that this was a bad idea, that nobody would watch a film like this, and that no one would like it. But I disagreed; I felt

that there was definitely a market for it. I had a clear idea of what kind of film I wanted to make, and even though there was all this naysaying, I said, ‘Trust me, it’d be fine.’ There were also a lot of criticisms on newspapers of my decision. I never understood why these critics would badmouth the film when I was still in the middle of production, and that the film hadn’t even been released.

I ignored these negative comments—I’d already made films about Wing Chun, what hadn’t I tried before? Maoshan? Alright, let’s do it! So I made *Encounter of the Spooky Kind*, a film about spiritual possession. With this concept, I got in touch with a friend, Yeh Feng, who knew a lot about Maoshan rituals from the Southeast Asia. He gave me a lot of pointers and told me a lot of stories. On the other hand, I also wove many Peking opera elements into the film, to make it more interesting. I heard so many strange and bizarre tales of the supernatural at the time, and gained quite a good understanding of this culture, so I felt confident in shooting the film. I organised all kinds of materials and started conceiving of how I would develop a certain character, and of how the plot would pan out. Many of the props used in the film were also my inventions. During that time, I needed to figure out how to film characters descending from the sky, or a body that would suddenly hollow out—I also didn’t know how I managed to come up with these ideas, yet the result was terrific. No one knew how we pulled those off, because not a lot of Hong Kong audience was aware of CGI effects.

The screenwriter of *Encounter* also played a key role in its success. We kept making suggestions and asked him to revise the script, and he’d show it to us after finishing the draft. It was actually pretty tough for him, but fortunately he had an excellent grasp of what we wanted to achieve, otherwise he would end up writing something different. The screenwriter for *Encounter* is Wong Ying (Note: co-written with Sammo Hung), but he had passed away. Lucky for us, *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* turned out to be a great hit.

Formation of the ‘Hung’s Clan’

Now I thought about it, I did not adopt the name ‘Hung’s clan’; it was given by other people. The first generation of the team included Yuen Biao, Lam Ching-ying and Bee Chan, who had been working with me since I was a martial arts choreographer. We started out from performing Peking and Cantonese operas, and we lived together. When I finally became a director, it seemed natural that they stayed on with me. That was how we became this band of brothers called the ‘Hung’s clan’; and then there was the second and the third generation. In fact, I would spend some time training the members of the group, in hopes that they would not only be a martial artist, but beyond that. How long could one really last as a martial artist or stunt double? I always wish that they would be proficient in any given role and get established in the film industry on a long-term aspect, after becoming a member of the team. For instance, if someone realised that he was interested in cinematography, he would be given opportunities to pursue a

In the late 1980s, Sammo Hung invited Lau Kar-leung to make a cameo appearance in *Pedicab Driver* (1989). The fighting scene between the two was in particular noteworthy.



career as a cinematographer. I wanted everyone to have a chance in developing his own talent and strengths.

An Action Star Must Also Act With Feelings

Having made so many films, I never felt like I achieved something spectacular. This was perhaps due to my upbringing in the opera troupe and my own character. After spending all these years shooting so many films, I believed the most important thing was the experience and memory that stayed with me from each production. Looking back on my films, there were a few personal favourites, such as *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* (which Hung starred and directed in), *The Prodigal Son* (which Hung starred and directed in), *Eastern Condors* (which Hung starred and directed in 1987), also *The Dead and the Deadly* (directed by Wu Ma, produced and starred by Sammo Hung, 1982) and *Pedicab Driver* (which Hung starred and directed in 1989).

I also liked *Heart of the Dragon* (which Hung starred and directed in 1985), in which I played the mentally disabled brother of Jackie (Note: Jackie Chan). Almost every day, the boss would discuss with me of whether my character could trip to the ground before becoming an impressive fighter. I replied, 'Yes, but how?' I ultimately had a fight in the film, but only in a ferocious and brutal one in the ending. I really liked this film, and Jackie performed well, too. It proves that action stars are not only capable of physical performance, they act with feelings' which is the key to all great performances. [Translated by Hayli Chwang]

Lau Kar-wing:

On an Era of Real Kung Fu and the Martial Arts Wisdom of Lau Kar-leung

**Interviewers: Cheung Chi-sing (26 March 1999);
Po Fung (16 August 2017)**

Collated by Po Fung



Interviewing director Lau Kar-wing was a very unique experience. Most interview subjects use language to convey their thoughts, but when director Lau was talking about kung fu, he would need hand gestures to express his ideas. It was a case of a single movement saying a thousand words. As an interviewer, it was of course a joy to watch, yet a hard task when the interview had to be put on paper. Nevertheless, it was a valuable experience of listening to director Lau sharing his years of experience in action choreography with his brother, Lau Kar-leung. The idea of ‘imbalanced fight’ mentioned in the interview was as well a unique principle of the Lau clan’s choreography that had never been revealed before. He further explained on the key features of each of the 18 martial arts styles. We believe that this interview would be a crucial document of Hong Kong martial arts cinema.

Learning Martial Arts at a Young Age

I was originally from the Xinhui District of Guangdong and was born in Shaoguan in 1943. It was during the Sino-Japanese War that my parents had to flee with me and my siblings in tow. My father, Lau Cham, was a disciple of Lam Sai-wing and trained in Hung Fist. My mother came from a family of Chinese Opera performers, with my maternal grandfather, uncle and cousin all capable of doing the somersault tricks that Sammo Hung was trained in. They were in the ‘Five Tiger Soldiers’ roles of Chinese Opera. That’s why my older brother Lau Kar-leung and I picked up those on-stage moves and adopted them in films.

Lau Kar-leung had participated in numerous film productions featuring the legendary Wong Fei-hung since the 1950s. Pictured here is a crew photo during the shoot. (From back row right) his father Lau Cham, director Wu Pang, Kwan Tak-hing; (from middle row right) his elder brother Lau Kar-leung, Sek Kin, Charlie Chan; (sitting in centre front) Lau Kar-wing.



I couldn't remember exactly of when we came to Hong Kong. I think I was around eight years old. At the time, China should have been already liberated. My older brother started learning martial arts from our father at six, when we were still in the Mainland. I didn't begin until I was ten, at my father's martial arts school in Hong Kong. At first, he didn't want to teach me because I was taking away his time from teaching students. So I started by peeking from the stairway during his lessons. The first thing I learned was the Taming the Tiger Fist, an introductory move for Hung Fist. My father and brother didn't know I was practicing secretly until I'd mastered the move. My father told me that it was Lau Kwai-hong, a comedy actor, who brought him into the industry, before he started acting in the Wong Fei-hung films (Note: referring to the Wong Fei-hung film series in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, starring Kwan Tak-hing). I started going to the film sets when I was 11 or 12 years old. When my father went to the studio to shoot, I would follow him there with a vegetable basket and a folding stool, with water and food in the basket. When they needed people for the lion dance scene, I would be positioned at the lion's tail or playing drums on the side. I hadn't officially started shooting, but I was already able to make 15 dollars a day for work.

Learning from Foreign Productions

I only joined the industry when I was around 16 years old. My brother and Tong Kai, whom I looked up to as a big brother, brought me in as a stuntman. At that time, I would work at most two days in a month because I was only a stand-in for my brother or Tong, when they couldn't make it to work. I remembered that it was until the late 1960s that I got more filming opportunities.

The first film that Kar-leung and Tong Kai worked on as martial arts choreographers

was *South Dragon, North Phoenix* (1963), starring Nam Hung and Lam Kar-sing. I started working for them from that film onwards. Truth be told, Hong Kong filmmakers wouldn't have known how to film action scenes if it wasn't for the Americans. When I was working on Chang Cheh's production *The Magnificent Trio* (1966), an American title called *The Sand Pebbles* (1966), came to shoot in Hong Kong. Directed by Robert Wise and starring Steve McQueen, the action choreographer of the film was Loren Janes. We learned a lot from him and gave contemporary Hong Kong action films a total makeover. In those 'Teddy Boys' films we used to make, we would put our hands on our stomachs and bounce away when the heroine threw a punch at us—the reaction wouldn't match the action at all. But the way we choreographed changed after filming that foreign piece. There were about 20 martial arts stuntmen in Hong Kong at the time and they were brought to the YMCA for a three-week training course with Janes. He taught us how to react to a gunshot, jump on a trampoline and how to fall from a high place. The most valuable lesson of all was how to give reaction of being hit—without actually being hit. For example, if the camera was over there, you could react when the fist reached right in front of your face. Since it's in a double position, the fake hit would be blocked and would already look good on screen. We knew nothing about this, but we had adopted these teachings quickly.

Breaking a high fall with cardboard boxes was also something we learned from the Americans. If I remembered correctly, I was the first who pull off a stunt like that in Hong Kong films. We were making *The Black Musketeer 'F'* (1966) in the Kwokar Film Studio, which starred Tong Kai's wife Suet Nei, and I was Suet's stunt double. There was a scene in which her character was pulled down from the second floor, with her legs caught by a flying cable. I was young and I would try anything. We started shooting after laying out cardboard boxes on the floor and covering them with a cloth. I didn't even know how to fall so I dived straight down. I saw the others did the same thing in *The Sand Pebbles* and it seemed fine; thus I did the same.

From Shaw Brothers to the Globe

I was already with Shaw Brothers when I worked on *The Sand Pebbles*. There were a lot of group scenes, instead of one-on-one fights. Jimmy Wang Yu would stand in the middle while 50, 60 stuntmen took him on. People were getting injured left and right, but they would bandaged up and continued to fight. Action scenes back then emphasised heroism. I was a huge fan of the group action scenes that Tong Kai choreographed, probably because he had to do those 'dangzi' fights during his opera days, in which stuntmen would cross the stage while the general character in centre stage swung a giant spear around. Those scenes looked great.

The first film I worked as an assistant martial arts choreographer was a film directed by Chang Cheh, starring Jimmy Wang Yu, Cheng Pei-pei, Lo Lieh and Wu Ma. It was shot in Japan in 1966—the same year that I got married. We filmed both *The Golden*

Five Fingers of Death (aka *King Boxer*, 1972) was Lau Kar-wing's breakout film as a martial arts choreographer.



Still from the motion picture *King Boxer* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Swallow (1968) and *The Flying Dagger* (1969) in Japan and that's when I began working as Tong Kai's assistant. I also had to thank Chang for giving me my first job as a proper martial arts choreographer. Shaws had a Korean director named Chung Chang-hwa, and Chang recommended me to work on Chung's *Heads for Sale* (1970). (Note: Lau Kar-wing was listed as the martial arts choreographer for *The Elusive Golden Butterfly* [1966]. *Heads for Sale* did not include a credit for martial arts choreographer. In that same year, Chung directed *Valley of the Fangs* [1970] and Lau was officially credited as the martial arts choreographer.)

After that film, I worked on *Five Fingers of Death* (aka *King Boxer*, 1972). That's when I began to get famous. Shaw Brothers' films had never done this well in the US. Somehow it broke out of Chinatown and was screened in the more mainstream cinemas. An American producer saw it and loved the action scenes, and he collaborated with Shaws. Shaws then sent me to Spain to work on a production with an Italian director, starring Lee Van Cleef (Note: refer to *El kárate, el Colt y el impostor* [1974]). From then on, people began to know my name. I actually did another foreign film (Note: *Karateçiler Istanbul'da* [1974]), but I'd never seen the final version. I went to Turkey to work on that project, a co-production between a Hong Kong and a Turkish company. People in the Middle East then loved Hong Kong action films so they knew who I was.

Filming in Hong Kong and Taiwan

Hong Kong cinema was in a slump in 1971 and 1972. There was not much shooting work in Hong Kong, after I came back from Europe. Kar-leung then asked me to go to Taiwan with him. Chang Cheh's company, Chang's Film Co., had just moved its base to Taiwan. That was a real turning point for my career. I spent three years in Taiwan. I was a hard worker and I liked doing films back-to-back. The directors there became more

and more fond of me because I was hands-on in every production. I wouldn't send out assistants to do my job for me. Hong Kong action work was much better than that of Taiwan at the time because they hadn't had a grasp of filming action yet.

I only did one or two films for Chang's Film Co. The opening sequence of *Heroes Two* (1974) came with a seven-minute short called *The Three Styles of Hung Fist*, which shows Chan Koon-tai doing the Hung Fist's Taming the Tiger Fist above a 'gung' Chinese character. Chan did all the close-ups himself, but I stepped in for the wide shots that only show his back or side. Chan was trained with Tai Shing Pek Kwar Moon (monkey and axe hammer style), not Hung Fist, and only true Hung Fist practitioners can do the entire sequence without stepping out of that Chinese character.

That kind of opening sequence was very popular at the time. When Chang's Film produced *Shaolin Martial Arts* (1974), Kar-leung suggested to Chang Cheh that he should film a similar opening sequence of me doing a demonstration with a glaive. So I did a demonstration of the 'Cai Yang Glaive', which my father taught me. 'Cai Yang Glaive' refers to the glaive that Guan Yu uses. I'd put the glaive behind me, then brush it forward, across, lift it up along with my leg, and finally wrap my arm around it like riding a horse. My father said that the moves had to be done particularly good because they were the 'applause moments'. After I finished the demonstration on set, everyone told me that I did the tradition proud.

From On-Stage Performance to Taking up the Director's Role

My first leading role was for a film shot in Hong Kong. It was the directorial debut of Chen Hung-lieh, *The Inheritor of Kung Fu* (1974), but it wasn't successful. The second one was shot in Taiwan and was considered a success. It was Karl Maka's *The Good, the Bad and the Loser* (1976). I was the leading actor alongside Roy Chiao. I really had to thank my friend Guy Lai Ying-chau for this one. We already knew each other before he went into the film industry. When he founded a company with Richard Ng Yiu-hon and Karl Maka, he offered me a leading role and I said yes without hesitation. It was a period production and had to be shot in Taiwan as Hong Kong didn't have the proper locations for it.

I returned to Hong Kong for a week-long break in 1976, when Lui Ming gave me an opportunity to direct my first film, *He Has Nothing But Kung Fu* (1977). The film made HK\$1.1 million, which was considered a success at the time. I decided to stay in Hong Kong to advance my career after that.

Later, Kar-leung and I formed Lau Brothers Film Co. We made films such as *Dirty Kung Fu* (1978) and *Fists and Guts* (1979). Kar-leung helped out a lot, but since he was still tied to his contract with another company, my name was credited for most of our films. Kar-leung and I made a great team in terms of action choreography. Even when I was his assistant in the early days, we worked really well together. Once he put out his

Lau Kar-wing took the leading role in *The Good, the Bad and the Loser* (1976), directed by Karl Maka.



arm, I'd know exactly how to block his moves. All I asked him would be how many moves he would put out before I fight back. If he said five, I knew that I would block his moves for five times, before hitting back with one. We worked so well together, firstly because we were brothers and we knew how to communicate with each other; and secondly, we were trained in the same style at home.

Sammo Hung, Karl Maka and I also founded a company called Gar Bo Films. Our first production was *Dirty Tiger, Crazy Frog* (1978). Hung and I starred and choreographed the action, while Maka directed it. The script was written by Raymond Wong and it was the beginning of what would later become Cinema City. I also directed the company's second film, *Odd Couple* (1979). After that, we had to disband because Golden Harvest wouldn't dismiss Sammo Hung. Speaking of Hung, he's an amazing guy. He's smart and willing to learn. He's a bit chubby, but light in fights because his foundation is good. He was trained in northern martial arts for stage, but after we worked together, he turned that into a more effective fighting style, rather than a performance style.

Real Kung Fu in the 1970s

Kar-leung and I were trained in routines. We were trained for an extensive period of time and we had to teach disciples. So we're all about horse stances and statures. Comparing to other choreographers, our action is formal and solid.

Real martial arts became more important in the 1970s kung fu films. Later on, the film titles would even tell you what style the protagonists were fighting in. There were Hung Fist, Wing Chun, Praying Mantis, Tai Shing Pek Kwar Moon and all kinds of schools. Even though we're skilled martial artists, we still had to imitate or asked for others' help. Kar-leung and I excelled in the styles that our father knew, including Choy Li Fut, Praying Mantis and Hung Fist, so we already knew more than the other martial artists. As a martial arts choreographer, knowing more styles means more variations in moves, and that naturally means smoother choreography.

Admiring the Knowledge and Ingenuity of My Brother

Let me talk a bit of my brother Kar-leung here. I have five siblings. Kar-leung was the third eldest. He began learning kung fu at six, and he'd already started using weapons at ten. Our father used to introduce him to other masters, so he naturally picked up a lot from them. By the time he was 13 or 14, all of Guangzhou knew that Lau Cham's son was proficient in the 18 martial arts styles.

My brother wasn't particularly smart, but he was a brilliant martial artist. His advantage was that he wasn't very tall, thus he was fast. He could also do a very solid horse stance, unlike a tall person whose horse stance would look large and unstable. Since he's short, Kar-leung naturally had short arms. If you have long arms, it takes time to swing them around; having short arms means that he can swing and then pull back in right away. That was his biggest advantage. He also knew a lot of martial arts styles and so there were variations in his very smooth moves. I really admired him.

Kar-leung's first film as director was *The Spiritual Boxer* (1975). Although he'd never learned about spiritual boxing, he knew how many styles were there and that no one had ever filmed them before. He put them in the film and the audience liked it. His second directorial piece was *Challenge of the Masters* (1976). There was a scene that we were fighting in the woods. He was using a spear and I was with a sabre. People only knew me as a stuntman before, but they started to recognise me after this film, as we had used over 30 moves in that sequence. It was also a difficult sequence to shoot because both of us were fighting and that there was no one behind the camera to watch our moves. However, the cinematographer of this film, Arthur Wong, was amazing. He memorised nearly all of our moves, so he knew exactly how to follow us with the camera. Maybe it was because he often worked with Kar-leung, we would always turn to him to see if we did the moves alright. In the film I did a set of moves called the 'Plum Sabre' that was invented by our martial arts school. But it wouldn't look good if I followed the entire routine in the film as it would look stiff on camera.

As the routine I did with a sabre in the opening sequence of *Odd Couple*, I learned it from a tutorial book that I bought from the Mainland. I didn't adopt the entire set of moves, but added a few moves of my own. The book would tell you to swing the sabre



Still from the motion picture *The 36th Chamber Of Shaolin* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Lau Kar-leung designed quite a lot of training scenes in *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978), which proved to be crowd-pleasers.



Group photo with Lau Kar-leung (centre) and Gordon Liu Chia-hui (right)

from point A to point B, but it doesn't teach you how to get there. Since we know martial arts, we generally understand how it would work. And even if we don't, we could change it so that it would in a certain way. Martial arts in film require flair, yet it should still be lethal if you use it for combat. Flair simply means an extra turn or squat here and there. It's still effective without those turns, but having them makes it look much better on the screen. You can't just stick to routine moves.

The 36th Chamber of Shaolin (1978) was a turning point for Kar-leung. That film had a lot of scenes about training that audience loved. Do our forefathers really train like that? Of course not. But when the audience sees it, they would believe that this is how fighters ought to be trained. If I want to pick up a heavy object with a long pole, I could lift it easily from the middle. But if you shift that object to the end of the pole, wouldn't it be more challenging? However with time, you could train yourself to have the power to rise to that challenge. People loved that film, so Kar-leung expanded on its popular aspects in his subsequent films. Say if you throw a punch, why would I block you like this (Lau uses his arms to demonstrate)? It turned out that he wanted to speed things up. Once I block you, your arms can then reach out like this. This was Kar-leung was good at. His every move and stance on screen was made clear for the audience, and that's why they loved his style of choreography.

We knew two styles of Praying Mantis, which were respectively taught to us by our father and Sek Kin. John (David) Chiang and I had this fight scene in *Shaolin Mantis* (1978) that showed us breaking over 40 moves in one shot. I was holding a tobacco rod and was shifting it between my hands during the fight. My brother and I designed

this sequence. It wouldn't have looked that good if I didn't know the style. I had plenty of moves, so I could do all kinds of things with the rod. I used the tobacco rod again in another two films, *Dirty Kung Fu* and *Knockabout* (1979). In addition to the Praying Mantis, my brother also knew how to do the Monkey Fist. After moving to Hong Kong at eight, my father would take use to greet others during Chinese New Year. One of them was Geng Dehai from Tai Shing Pek Kwar Moon, and that's how my brother learned the Monkey Fist. He did an amazing demonstration of it in *Mad Monkey Kung Fu* (1979).

Each school has its own variation of the 'Bridge Hand' move. Everyone knew that Hung Fist used it liberally, just like how Wing Chun did. When a Wing Chun fighter lays his arms out, it would be a 'Bridge Hand' move; when you swing your arms up in Choy Li Fut, it would be a 'Bridge Hand' move, too. However, Hung Fist's 'Bridge Hand' moves are the most famous and best for close-contact fights. The alleyway fight between Gordon Liu Chia-hui and Johnny Wong Lung-wei in *Martial Club* (1981) was spectacular, because the tight quarter was the best place to display the 'Bridge Hand' moves. My brother was clever in that he knew how to make good use of the environment for his choreography.

The Uniqueness of the 18 Weapons

No matter how much flair is put into a kung fu routine, every move has logic behind it. Take *Legendary Weapons of China* (1982) as an example. If my brother and I hadn't known so much about weapons and moves, it would've been hard to put together the fights. Why can't a pole or a spear beat a rattan shield sabre? Because spears and poles are straight in design. When you attack with a spear or a pole, I can block it with the shield and slice you with the sabre. Why a three-sectional staff can beat double daggers? Because the staff is 'soft' and the daggers are short. The staff can also be shortened when we get up close to block the daggers. We have to put these into context whenever we choreograph a fight. A certain weapon can defeat another. Why can a glaive beat a spear? Because the glaive is heavier. One good thing about my brother's choreography is that he doesn't like 'imbalanced fight' (a clear margin between the strong and the weak); like how obvious that a tanto and a glaive aren't going to have a real fight. We would never make that mistake because it's unreasonable to have a weaker weapon to defeat a much stronger one.

We have rules for how every weapon is used. Within the 18 martial arts styles, your left arm must be put forward when you swing and thrust a spear. Conversely, your right arm must be in the front when you use a pole. In fact, your right arm must be in the front whenever you use a heavy weapon; so obviously that applies to a glaive, or even a hoe, a trident or a *ji* (a Chinese halberd).

Other choreographers have their own expertise, but their expertise doesn't necessarily match how my brother sees it. He knows a lot of martial arts styles and



Still from the motion picture *Legendary Weapons Of China* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

The alleyway battle designed by Lau Kar-leung in *Legendary Weapons of China* (1982) was highly original, which created powerful and dynamic interactions between combatants in a restricted environment.

things about weapons, and how to use those weapons effectively. He always says that he would never stab with a sabre—it should be used to slice. The most lethal part of a sword is its sharpest, thinnest point; so it should be used to stab or poke. As for its thick bottom part, it should be used for blocking. A spear, needless to say, is used to take advantage of the distance between you and the opponent, because of its length. When Kar-leung uses it, you'd usually see him turn his hand and shake its pole. The red tassel in the front is also important because it is a great distraction. Besides, spear is fast. You can push it up to your opponent's eyes, shake it and lift your back hand, then use it to stab the lower body of your opponent. Its lightness is also an advantage. Imagine a spear versus a glaive. If you try to swing down a glaive, I would block it with an upward action. We would never brush it aside, because the glaive would be far too heavy to be brushed aside with a spear. We would either prop the glaive up or duck. There's always logic behind every move we designed.

The advantage of a long pole is its length. No matter which direction you're from, I could point it and keep you at bay. A long pole is not for brushing moves aside. It is used to 'circle, point, slice, bounce, pressure and poke'. For example, when I say 'circle' and 'point', it means that when your weapon makes an attack, my pole would encircle it and lock it in a circular motion, and you won't be able to get away unless you let go of your weapon. If I 'slice', I would push you away in one move and attack right away. If I bounce



Photo with his elder brother
Lau Kar-leung (left)

you away, I could swing my hands down and come back up at you quicker than you can respond. Further with the length of the long pole, you wouldn't be able to get close to me at all. That's why I say my brother knows how to make use of the environment. If the fight is set in a small or dense place, the long pole would be useless.

Hung Fist has a big rake as weapon, which is rarely used by other choreographers. It's too impractical and you wouldn't be able to create a lot of moves with it, unless you make a fake one. If a choreographer is not familiar with it, it would be hard to design sequences with it. The one way to use it in fights is to put your right arm forward and swing it the same way as you would with a rake, a glaive, an axe, a hoe or a *ji*. But the big rake comes with an extra move: when you attack with your weapon, I can use its three prongs to trap your weapon, and then pull back to twist your weapon away. Since it's so heavy, it can smash a lot of things when being swung. If you have a large and buff actor, you would have to give him something substantial like a big rake.

After the 1980s

I became a freelancer in the 1980s, and I worked on films by Shaw Brothers, Golden Harvest and Cinema City. When I collaborated with Cinema City, my friends Karl Maka and Eric Tsang treated me well. My first film with them was a contemporary feature, *Till Death Do We Scare* (1982), which used foreign special effect makeup. From that film, I

realised the advantages of collective creation. The group would give me suggestions and I would incorporate them, before designing the shot sequence and shooting them on set. I didn't have to worry about the special effects because we had a special effect artist from the US. I just need to make a request—like how the giant would transform—then he would show it to me, and proceeded once I agreed. The second film I directed for Cinema City was *Play Catch* (1983), which featured a stand-off between Alan Tam and a panther. Tam had such a great working attitude. While the cinematographer needed his own cage for protection, and with me directing the actors outside the cage, Tam was inside the cage with the panther and another animal trainer. I couldn't believe that Tam was willing to do the scene. I had a really tough time making this film. We borrowed the circus and only had three days to shoot the ending. Filming animals was really hard and we ended up shooting for an extra day.

Later I joined Golden Harvest and directed two films for Sammo Hung's Bo Ho Films—*Those Merry Souls* (1985) and *Scared Stiff* (1987). I called in a lot of favours from old friends like Chow Yun-fat and Anita Mui for the cast. After that I worked with other companies like Movie Impact. *The Dragon Family* (1988) was one of the two films I directed for them, and I was also one of its producers. It had a star-studded cast, including Andy Lau, Ko Chun-hsiung and Michael Miu, and did quite well at the box office. Then I directed *City Cops* (1989), with Cynthia Rothrock as the lead; *Skinny Tiger & Fatty Dragon* (1990), starring Karl Maka and Sammo Hung. I was also the martial arts choreographer for several films, including Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* (1991) and Ringo Lam's *Full Contact* (1992). The market wasn't doing well, thus I felt a bit tired and decided to stop. [Translated by Kevin Ma]

Editor's note: Lau Kar-leung was interviewed by the Hong Kong Film Archive on 1 February 1997. Content of the interview is available in 'Interview with Lau Kar-leung—We Always Had Kung Fu', featured in *A Tribute to Action Choreographers*, edited by Li Cheuk-to and published by the Hong Kong International Film Festival Society in 2006.

Ti Lung:

A *Wuxia* Film Must Uphold the *Wuxia* Spirit

Interviewer: Cheung Chi-sing (26 March 1999)

Collated by Nicky Lam



In 1968, Golden Horse Award-winning actor Ti Lung was accepted into the acting course of Shaw Brothers. He had his first starring in the following year with *Return of the One-Armed Swordsman* and became a young star to watch. He was cast in a series of films by Chang Cheh, playing characters in different genres and historical periods. Loved by the audience, he quickly shot to stardom. Ti would then work with a number of directors; most notably in Chor Yuen's *wuxia* films, until he left Shaw Brothers in the mid-1980s. Ti is a versatile actor who could play a wide range of characters, from an emperor to pirate Cheung Po-tsai. However, having an upright image meant that he was most often typecast as a valiant warrior. To audiences, Ti Lung is the eternal swordsman of the silver screen. This interview by Hong Kong Film Archive, conducted in the late 1990s, centres on Ti Lung's experience in the 1970s, and lays bare his passion for Hong Kong cinema, especially for the *wuxia* genre. His sense of honour and his respect for his teachers are also apparent in the principles influencing his choice of roles and accounts of working with veterans. Ti Lung is a righteous and virtuous swordsman shines through and through.

Entering the Industry With Shaw Brothers' Training Course

I was born in 1946, in Xinhui, Guangdong Province. I was fond of action and *wuxia* films, and I admired the *wuxia* spirit profusely. I was a thin and feeble young man, so I took Wing Chun lessons at night after work. Later, I fell in love with cinema and managed to get into Shaw Brothers' actor training course. The course had 60 students from varying

backgrounds. The training lasted six months, during which instructors taught us about characters and how to express ourselves. Over the years, the course had taken different forms but it was essentially a comprehensive course. We were taught the rules of the set we had to abide by, such as punctuality and never leaving early. Most importantly, we were told to never toss our prop weapons, no matter how upset we were because they were our bread and butter. For example, we were doing a pan-shot with 20-plus fight moves. One of my opponents kept screwing up, but I could do no more than telling him, 'Please practise a little harder.' I couldn't toss my sword in rage.

My first film was the period swordplay drama *Return of the One-Armed Swordsman* (1969) (Note: he used the name 'Tam Wing' in the film). Jimmy Wang Yu was the lead actor. I only played a minor character who was killed by Essie Lin Chia shortly after the opening. After this film, director Chang Cheh cast me in more prominent roles.

Shaw Brothers was home to many big-name directors at the time—all from northern China. Under Director Chang, we made films like *The Heroic Ones* (1970), *King Eagle* (1971), *Shaolin Temple* (1976)—there are too many titles to remember. Slowly I learned how to wield weapons like the sword, spear, two-edged sword, halberd, three-section staff, red-tasseled spear, crescent blade, and double sword. But before all of that, we had to learn horse-riding. The studio had a stable with many horses. We would take turns, in order of seniority, to apply for the horse-riding permit. Then at six o'clock every morning, we would tell our masters we were going horse-riding in the hills behind the studio. In addition to horse-riding, we also learned how to drive. Those early days were wonderful.

Actors used to have a strong sense of honour and shame. When a director instructed me to fight, I gave it my all. When I dislocated limbs and joints, I would go right back to the set, as I was expected to, after getting a poultice. We put our all into learning everything—punch, tumble, shoulder roll, trampoline.

The Contributors of Hong Kong *Wuxia* Films

John (David) Chiang and I were rookies during the making of *Dead End* (1969). The film had a lot of action and fighting. I played an 'angry youth'—equivalent to that of today's gangster—in jail who was beaten up. I couldn't even do the appropriate reactions to getting beat up at the time. Fortunately, the masters were keen and friendly in giving me instructions on how to avoid injuries, and that's how I was inducted into the world of cinematic deception.

John Chiang is a good friend and competitor from whom I learned a lot. He came from a family of actors and filmmakers. His passion for films and his contributions to the industry are self-evident. Compared to quick-witted John, I was clumsy. That's why I took lessons in a whole bunch of things, like Mandarin, horse-riding, trampoline, the Praying Mantis style of martial arts, Taekwondo, and Karate. I also read a lot to enrich my knowledge. After *Dead End*, I got more offers and got to act in more period films.



While still a relatively newcomer, Ti Lung had a taste of ‘passing a counterfeit as real’ in *Dead End* (1969).

When my contract was up, it was renewed for three years, and then another three. That repeated a few times. I went on to make a large number of Qing dynasty films.

I practised Wing Chun, which is essentially hand-to-hand combat with few moves. I agree with Brother Kar-wing that Wing Chun does not have the range and diversity of stances and moves that Hung Fist has (Note: Ti Lung and Lau Kar-wing were interviewed on the same day). Hung Fist is a stylistic trove—Taming the Tiger Fist, Tiger and Crane Fist, Ten-Animal Fist, just to name a few. Even a tiny sample of that is enough to visually excite the audience.

Whenever Master Tong Kai and Master Lau Kar-leung were choreographing, we young ones would watch in complete silence from the side. Directors were respected. They had their own chairs, next to which were the assistant director’s chair, and next, the martial arts choreographer’s. The hierarchy was clear and seniority was respected. When the directors spoke, we listened with full attention. We wouldn’t get distracted. We gave serious thought to why we could not perform the Drunken Fist, the Spirit Channeling Fist or whatever it was they designed as beautifully as they could. When they choreographed a scene, they had to bring something new to the table that surpassed what had been done before. But having made so many films, it’s easy to run out of ideas. It’s understandable that they would have to put old wine in new bottles at times. The masters were tough as well. The two of them had so many things to take care of on the set and to organise. When it rained, the whole studio would be in practically freezing temperatures. These martial artists were such highly valued professionals because they were resilient. They had the stamina and they were excellent at doing what they were told.

Duel of Fists (1971) introduced Thai boxing to the audience. As director Chang Cheh said, it was ‘the real deal’. The combat was intense and every punch left an impact. At the time, great martial arts experts like Master Chen Sing and Master Chan Koon-tai joined the industry. I must reiterate that a martial arts choreographer executes his duties

Directed by Chang Cheh, *Duel of Fists* (1971) introduced Thai boxing in a spectacular demeanour, with the support from a number of martial artists.



Still from the motion pictures *Duel Of Fists* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

through learning and observation. He is familiar with an actor's strengths and knows how that actor could best portray the character. He would try to draw it out and allow it to manifest. In this regard, the contributions of directors Tong Kai and Lau Kar-leung were indispensable. Their films garnered handsome revenue for the Hong Kong film industry, the choreographers and the crew. These two men—as well as directors Chang Cheh and Chor Yuen, of course—and the teams working behind the scenes were of pivotal importance to Hong Kong cinema. I also have to thank Yuen Cheung-yan and Yuen Wah of the Yuen's clan for expanding my horizons. The films wouldn't have been the same without those flips on the trampoline and the grace of the wirework stunts.

Dangers Lurked at the Set of *The Pirate*

We always took care not to inflict injury when shooting action scenes, but injury was inevitable. I was careless and inexperienced, and I constantly found myself being stitched up. Some years later we started doing films with gun fights and big-scale battles. During the shooting of military (Note: director Chang Cheh's *7-Man Army* [1976]) and navy films (Note: *The Naval Commandos* [1977]) in Taiwan, we were exposed to explosions as well as gun- and cannon-fire. Being inches away from death and having crisis hover over us, we realised that filmmakers should be guided by principles that would allow us to satisfy both ourselves and the audience within the limits of safety.

In this area we are admittedly behind the West. When they do action shoots, the leading actor has several doubles. They have realistic-looking props and first-rate post-production skills. Their explosion scenes are relatively harm-free, with a safety index reaching 65% or 70%. A local veteran told me that when he was on *The Sand Pebbles* (1966, the film was partly shot in Hong Kong), he had to be thrown into the water in one scene. The man underestimated the force of the impact and threw up blood-streaked vomit.



The Pirate (1973) comprised of a number of explosion and thrilling action scenes, with alarmingly dangerous situations during filming.

For instance, there was one battle scene in *The Pirate* (1973) that took place in international waters. We had to hurl self-made explosives into the water. The enemy's ship would fire and we would detonate the explosives to simulate cannon fire from the enemy. What we hadn't foreseen was that the current would quickly sweep the explosives to the bottom of our ship. If we had pressed the button, we would all be dead, because there were tons of similar explosives in our cabin. In another scene, I had to grab the sail and suavely swing myself over to another vessel. The wind was much stronger than I expected, so I was rolled up by the sail and thrown overboard. I was lucky enough to have landed on the side of the deck. If I had fallen on one of those thick steel cables, I would have suffered serious injuries. This was how we were learning on the job.

If I had opinions about the action instructions given on the set—like such and such a move would flow more smoothly if I did something else—I would tell the choreographer. In *The Pirate*, there was a shot of me half-submerged, head underwater and legs in the air, chop-sticking a person on the ship and flinging him into the water with my legs. I wasn't physically able to do this, so the master had to go underwater to hold my waist up. He gestured 'Camera!' to the crew. The camera started rolling, and he propped me up by the waist so I could extend my legs skywards and make it look good. If he hadn't helped me, my soaked pants would have weighed down on my legs. There was no way I could effortlessly stretch out my legs, grip someone and hurl him into the water.

Versatile Actor Who Worked With Many Directors

I mainly played young swordsmen during my early days at Shaw Brothers, though I did play the villain in *The Blood Brothers* (1973). I played General Qi Jiguang in *Ninja in the Deadly Trap* (1981); had shaved my head for a turn as a Shaolin monk, and played soldiers in the army and the navy. I think that's pretty comprehensive.

Most of my roles were heroic. I was always the one roughing people up, rarely the other way around. For *The Blood Brothers*, director Chang Cheh showed me the



Still from the motion picture *The Empress Dowager*. ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Director Li Han-hsiang would ask actors for a table-read of the script, where he would give instructions of their gestures. Pictured here is *The Empress Dowager* (1975) with the lead actress, Xiao Yao.

screenplay and asked me to pick a role. He said there was a villain named Ma Xinyi and wanted to know if I was confident enough to take it. I said I was willing to try if he would give me pointers as we went along. I ended up winning an award for that role (Note: Special Award for Outstanding Performance at the 11th Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan in 1973). I played Sung Tse-ho in *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), who was a half-hero, half-villain type of gangster. I think that villains are simply unfortunate souls who are sacrificed in the narrative. They can also be very human.

As actors, we also had to keep venturing into new territory. For example, director Li Han-hsiang believed that I could play an emperor, which meant that I didn't need to fight. That gave me fresh hope. I have to thank Director Li because the experience taught me so much. My other projects with him included *The Empress Dowager* (1975) and *The Last Tempest* (1976), all with a strong narrative about the Qing imperial harem. Then there was *Tiger Killer* (1982). Before filming, the director would have us do a read-through so we would wipe all traces of our previous characters from our unconscious and become absorbed into the new one. If you play an emperor, what would be your attitude and demeanour when you see the empress or a concubine? An emperor must be dignified, yet he could also be a tragic character, irresolute and powerless. That was how Director Li helped us get immersed in our roles.

Shaw Brothers had many great actors, like Ku Wen-chung, Ku Feng, Ching Miao and



Still from the motion picture *The Magic Blade* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Ti Lung had starred in a number of Gu Long films directed by Chor Yuen. *The Magic Blade* (1976) is the first one of them.

Fang Mian. They were all happy to show us the ropes if we asked them politely. I was on a plane with Ku Feng once. I wanted to learn how to laugh, so I turned to him, ‘Brother Ku, could you teach me how to laugh? I find it very difficult.’ He started from the basics, like how they would do it in Cantonese opera. ‘Ha’ and ‘Heh, heh’ are done by ‘laughing out’ your breath. Allow the laugh to flow with your breath, and it will look spontaneous. He was spot on. There was much to gain by seeking their advice.

Director Chor Yuen’s speciality was Gu Long-style romantic swordplay. I remembered what he said to me when we worked together (Note: Ti Lung starred in many Chor Yuen films that were based on Gu Long’s novels, including *The Magic Blade* [1976] and *Clans of Intrigue* [1977])—‘You don’t have to fight with all your might. Don’t waste your energy. Cinematography and editing will achieve what the audience desires.’ That was a valuable lesson for me. Actors are bound to exhaust our bag of tricks one day. But sets, roles and characters can always be refreshed.

Productive Years at Shaw Brothers

The studio had a good system that protected actors. We were exempted from certain stunts—they were the job of the doubles. We were paid HK\$500 a film, as the leading actor! We earned HK\$500 per film on top of a basic stipend of HK\$500 per month, and

every contract lasted three years. That's some investment! If I achieved nothing in three years, how could I face my family? How could I face my youth? Blood and sweat made us. We started with HK\$500 a month in our first year, then HK\$600 in the second year, then HK\$700 in the third year, and so on. That went on for over a decade. There were adjustments in the later years, of course, as I received pay raises and bonuses. The studio treated me pretty well, so I achieved a comfortable and peaceful life. I must thank the audience and the studio for that.

I enjoyed the extended-family lifestyle of the film industry. But remaining at Shaw Brothers was not a matter of loyalty. After all, film is business, and there are no eternal friendships or grudges in that. You judge for yourself what you can do, and what others can do that you can't. When I watched Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan in action, I realised that I didn't have their skills. They could handle hardcore beatings and torture, and in doing so, they succeeded in creating true-to-life heroes. In *Drunken Master* (1978), Jackie Chan was hung upside down and dropped onto a hard surface. Unlike us, these guys were trained martial artists and fought their way up. As a result, we chose a different path that had more to do with plot development and characterisation. It's a different genre altogether.

Winning the Golden Horse Award With *A Better Tomorrow*

After I left Shaw Brothers in the 1980s, I made a few films for Cinema City thanks to Dean Shek. I had just returned from Taiwan, and I said I was good with any roles as long as the script is good. Even though the screenplay of *A Better Tomorrow* was a 'remake' (Note: the film took its subject matter from a 1967 Patrick Lung Kong-helmed production of the same title in Chinese), the depiction of brotherly love and the code of brotherhood in this version was brilliant. I felt that it would make a wonderful film. In hindsight, John Woo, Chow Yun-fat, Leslie Cheung, myself, Emily Chu and other actors were at a low point in our careers. When I was directing (Note: Ti directed *Young Lovers on Flying Wheels* [1974] and *The Young Rebel* [1975]), Woo was just a script supervisor and assistant director. But I didn't care which one of us entered the industry first. I was happy to be a part of it. At meetings, we were full of ideas and spoke our minds.

I was involved in two projects concurrently at the time—*The Legend of Wisely* (1987) and *A Better Tomorrow*. The former was the first to begin filming but finished later due to the cast's schedule conflicts. I am very fond of the Sung Tse-ho character in *A Better Tomorrow*; it was a new challenge for me. The film was a huge box-office success. Everyone was happy. Cinema City reaped a huge profit; Hong Kong cinema had found itself a new genre of films about comradery among people, brothers and even those in the criminal world. It bagged me Best Leading Actor at the 23th Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan in 1986. After this, I made *True Colours* (1986), *A Killer's Blues* (1990), and some other titles for Cinema City.

Bad Practices and Changes in Filmmaking

Having experienced several dynasties of the Shaw Brothers empire, I am quite well-versed in the rules and phenomena of the industry. The boom we enjoyed was due to demands from external markets like Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, the US and Canada. Shaws also had a comprehensive talent training programme and a rigorous overseas promotion system. These were the reasons for their overwhelming success. These Hong Kong martial arts films would later replace Japanese samurai films, greatly benefitting Shaw Brothers and Hong Kong.

Shaw Brothers had a very thorough system that set out, in black and white, when one could leave work. You had to stick by the rules, so over-time was not allowed. After Shaws, I encountered directors who were impulsive, who would revise the screenplay on the spot, taking this out and adding that in. I suppose this is what they call 'flexibility'. I was in a street scene where I had to chase an escaped convict with a dump-truck charging in my direction and screeching to a stop inches from me. I asked the driver before the shoot if he thought things would be fine. He said he wasn't a stunt driver and had never been in a film; he was hired to drive that truck at the last minute. He also said the brake pads were thin: 'Brother Lung, just go with the flow!' he said. It was a night shoot on Nathan Road. This kind of arrangement left the actor feeling very exposed. But you were at the mercy of the director's whim. You could only be extra careful and hope for the best!

Another time, we were shooting in a bus depot. A bus was lying on top of me and I was supposed to look helpless. I had gel slathered all over my body to resemble diesel. It was harsh. But the scene didn't make it to the final cut because it didn't look 'real' enough. Actors get the short end of the stick in such cases. There should be more gentlemanly empathy between directors and actors. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Many conflicts happened due to reckless directors demanding the impossible with no regard for the actors' health and safety. A director might try to persuade you to do an explosion shot of a drinking glass—I'm talking about real glass!—by saying, 'Don't worry. No one is that unlucky.' What if I got blinded by the debris? Are you going to take care of me for the rest of my life?

I have seen people killed by explosives on set. I have seen misfortune struck. I do not want to see it happen to newcomers. Stunt wires snap and cars can skid out of control. You miscalculate a jump and end up disabled for life. Young directors should try to set straight the many uncivilised practices plaguing Hong Kong cinema.

After the 1970s and 80s, the scene was revolutionised by new filmmakers returning to Hong Kong from overseas, like directors Karl Maka and Peter Chan. They introduced new concepts as well as technical and artistic know-how. The appeal of films was dominated by fast-paced editing and dynamic movement, while actors' tangible presence is sidelined. Realism was no longer valued as much as it was during Master Lau Kar-leung's time, when dozens of moves are packed into a single tracking shot—some high,

On-set photo of Ti Lung shooting period films



some low, each clearly defined. Editing is the wizard now. If you want to shoot an actor dropping on a tabletop, you cover the table with rubber. The corners are fake, and the crash mats made to resemble metal. The actors are fully protected by stunt pads, some reinforced by metal. The times have changed, and audiences' tastes have evolved. In the past, action choreography required viewers to be 'discriminating', to be able to distinguish Hung Fist from Wing Chun and Thai boxing. But in an era when the tap of a finger can trigger an explosion, viewers are after visual impact rather than realism. They don't need to know if the actors can really deliver their punches. They're happy as long as it's sumptuous and it dazzles.

A Wuxia Film Must Uphold the Wuxia Spirit

I am water. Put me into any vessel and I will take on its shape. Verve in a screenplay inspires me. I am willing to do role that viewers find entertaining, as long as it's not seriously degenerate or corrupting. But I am adamant about rejecting roles that are degenerate, against moral conscience, or harmful to China's national dignity. Some examples are Western films that require actors to play Chinese characters with queues, or films featuring behaviours that corrupt young minds.

I want to emphasise that a *wuxia* film must uphold the *wuxia* spirit—one must not kill the innocent, and one must honour one's teachers and their teachings. This is why I always enjoy watching the Wong Fei-hung series. Although I was never a true Shaolin apprentice, Shaolin martial arts brought so much joy to my life. Why should I defile it? We were nurtured by martial arts films. [Translated by Piera Chen]

Chan Koon-tai:

Shaw Brothers Wanted to Make Me a Rival on par With Bruce Lee

**Interviewers: Donna Chu and Wong Ain-ling
(31 October 2002)**

Collated by Wong Ha-pak



Chan Koon-tai, a top player and national champion of martial arts, is a great action star with bona fide skills. He was not only one of director Chang Cheh's favourite collaborators, but a box office sellout name of the 1970s action cinema. In this interview, Chan talked about entering the industry and into Shaw Brothers, as well as his collaborations with Chang, Cheng Kang, Kuei Chih-hung and a number of martial arts choreographers.

Taking up the director's role not long after his successful acting career, he recalled himself directing and starring in *The Iron Monkey* (1977), as well as the establishment of his own company. Chan further sought to innovate the ways that martial arts sequences were presented onscreen. Over his many years in the film industry, he played a full spectrum of historical heroes, revolutionaries in the late Qing dynasty, to even modern triad bosses. He insisted that they were all 'good guys', who were not afraid to fight for truth and justice. He also argued that his martial arts skills were only used to punish the wicked rather than to mindlessly promote a violent agenda.

From Martial Arts Champion to Action Star

I worked briefly at the Hong Kong Fire Services Department, but I quit my job due to the 1967 riots. Some friends from the film industry said, 'Since you're so interested in athletics, you should take a stab at making films!' That's why I entered the industry and became a stuntman under martial arts choreographer Tong Kai. He knew that my martial



Still from the motion picture *The Boxer From Shantung*. ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Director Chang Cheh, with a keen eye, casted Chan Koon-tai as the lead for *Boxer from Shantung* (1972).

arts skills were not bad, so he gave me a number of opportunities and asked me to choreograph actions for films. I ended up becoming his assistant.

I started practising martial arts at the age of seven under my master and his master (Note: referring to Tai Shing Pek Kwar Moon [monkey and axe hammer style]). They began to train me formally when I was 15 or 16. After winning the lightweight title at the First Southeast Asia Kung Fu Tournament in 1969 (Note: Chan Koon-tai was the lightweight champion at the First Southeast Asia Kung Fu Tournament, held on 17 May 1969 in Singapore), Shaw Brothers approached me and offered me a contract. Later, I auditioned for Chang Cheh's film, *Boxer from Shantung* (1972) and he immediately offered me the lead role of Ma Yongzhen.

By that time, I was already very familiar with Shaws' work environment because I'd worked as a stuntman under Tong on one of Chang Cheh's productions, *Vengeance!* (1970). Chang had known me for quite some time by then. However, I found that working as an actor was very different than that of a stuntman, particularly because I was shooting a Mandarin film and I didn't know how to speak the language. Before *Boxer from Shantung*, I'd played 'Nine Tattooed Dragons' Shi Jin in *The Water Margin* (1972). In one scene, I had to jump down from the second floor and then say my lines. But my delivery was so bad that the whole cast and crew couldn't stop laughing for two hours. Many of the most popular and respected actors starred in the film, such as Lily Ho, Li Ching and Ku Feng. I started calling Ku 'Master' and asked him to teach me Mandarin. That's when I started learning the language properly. Even though the studio dubbed the

dialogue in post-production, we still had to speak Mandarin on set to make sure that the shape of our lips synced with the audio. It would have been very embarrassing to speak Mandarin with a thick Cantonese accent! Every Shaw Brothers' actor was assigned a voice talent to dub over their lines, and all my films were dubbed by Chang Pei-shan.

I didn't feel that nervous of playing the lead for the first time. I just felt that I had to give my best because that I was given such a great opportunity. A film shoot usually lasts for 60 working days, but *Boxer From Shantung* had to be completed within a month. We filmed non-stop around the clock—Pao Hsueh-li directed during the day while Chang took over in the evenings. During the shoot, I accidentally hit Ku in the jaw. It was during rehearsal, and it wasn't because I'd made a mistake with my choreography. The shoot was near its end, and the month-long mad dash to complete the film before the Chinese New Year was starting to take its toll on my body. I was so exhausted that I started to see multiple Ku Fengs in front of me! This was the first and only time in my film career that I had ever hurt a co-star.

I met a lot of people after entering the film industry, including fellow stuntmen and choreographers Yuen Bun, Yuen Woo-ping, and Yuen Cheung-yan. I also came across Jackie Chan, who was much younger than us. Back then, action film veterans were divided into two camps: Jackie Chan was with Han Yingjie and Simon Chui Yee-ngau, while our group was led by Tong Kai and Lau Kar-leung. Although people on the two sides knew each other well, we rarely spent time together.

In the past, Shaw Brothers made tons of *wuxia* and action films; and the directors would work with their preferred teams of crew and staff. It was natural that this led to the formation of different factions. Chang Cheh liked working with Tong Kai and Lau Kar-leung, so they became off-limits to other directors. After signing my contract with Shaws, I became one of Chang's regulars, and other directors couldn't cast me in their films. The only exceptions were when Chang passed on the scripts he had to other filmmakers such as Sun Chung, Pao Hsueh-li and Kuei Chih-hung. That's when they were allowed to hire me.

Chang Cheh: the Commander-in-Chief for Action Films

As a director, Chang never imposed any restrictions on how his actors should play their roles. He gave us free reign. When we received our scripts, he would want us to read it and digest our characters. Most of our films back then were written by Ni Kuang. He basically tailored his characters for us, so most of our shoots went well. Chang often started shooting very late at night possibly because of his script-writing work, and he would even take naps on set. But you should never assume that he had fallen asleep, because he was always aware of whether a shot was fine or not. There was a time when Wu Ma and John Woo were assistant directors, and Chang was in a good mood, animatedly giving instructions on lighting and cinematography. He had a good working

relationship with his Japanese cinematographer (Note: Miyaki Yukio, also known as Gong Muduo). Chang would nap during the lighting set-up and the assistant directors would take over. Afterwards, they would ask him if a shot was all right, and he would say, 'Do another one.' He was able to do that without giving any explanation—he just wanted us to do it again. Sometimes he would say, 'That's fine!' and we would switch to the next shot.

Chang would hand the fight scenes over to the martial arts choreographers, but he would always be in charge of where the cameras should be placed and how the shots would be framed. The way and style of how *wuxia* and action films were made then is different from that of today. When designing fight scenes, martial arts choreographers would first communicate with the director to understand the motivations of the characters in the film and what the result of the scene is. The directors didn't care about what happens during the fight. In fact, Ni would only write in his script of which characters are injured at the end of the fight or what happens to them. There was no other detail about the fight itself. This was the way fight sequences were made back then.

I never really participated in action choreography because I believed in sticking to my position as an actor. Actors are not directors and they don't know the big picture. The director would get distracted if I offered too many opinions. I might discuss the movements created by the choreographers, telling them it would be more natural if I do a movement in a certain way or how a movement could be done more elegantly. Sometimes my suggestions were accepted, and sometimes we would just stick to the original vision.

Chang Cheh's Forte: Creating Idol Heroes

Since I was one of the action stars with genuine martial arts training back then, it can be said that Shaw Brothers wanted to set me up as a rival to Bruce Lee. As a result, Chang consciously tried to create something different with me comparing to his other action films. Every one of my characters in his films left a pretty positive impression on audiences. Of course, there was Ma Yongzhen from *Boxer from Shantung*. There was also *Man of Iron* (1972) and *The Blood Brothers* (1973). *The Blood Brothers* also had Ti Lung and John (David) Chiang, but my character stood out well among the three of us. It's also worth noting that Chang would usually arrange Ms Ching Li to play the female lead in my films, so many friends in the industry used to say that we were a 'screen couple'.

Chang was very adept in creating idol heroes in his films. All the newcomers he cast became very famous, reaching almost idol-esque level of fame and popularity. I guess this is partly due to his excellent chemistry with Ni. For example, if he wanted to film Chan Koon-tai, he and Ni would make a script based on my looks and my personality. Whenever he prepares to write a script, we would have dinner and chat casually. Soon after, Ni would have a new screenplay completed. The script, after all, is the most important element of a film.

In Chang's films, my main role was an actor. He had a strong sense of personality



Chan Koon-tai grew a moustache particularly for his character in *The Teahouse* (1974), which has since become his trademark. The above is a still from *Big Brother Cheng* (1975), a sequel of *The Teahouse*.

and shooting style. I was only an actor, but I slowly grew to love this industry while observing how he filmed.

Cheng Kang: A Director Who Didn't Like to Sleep

Chang Cheh later left Shaw Brothers for Taiwan, but I didn't go with him. I'd worked with Cheng Kang before, and he became the first director I worked with after I left Chang. The film was called *King Gambler* (Note: released on 24 November 1976). I also worked as an assistant director and producer during that film's eight-month shoot. I learned a lot and shared a great relationship with Cheng. I had the opportunity to follow the entire production process very closely, including editing. This experience helped a lot with my later involvement in producing and directing. I discussed the script with Cheng every evening during the shoot. We often chatted until early hours in the morning, leaving us no time for sleep. He would revise and rewrite the script himself after our chats. Cheng's scripts often went through multiple drafts. In fact, the whole floor would be littered with his abandoned drafts. However, he would usually end up using his original version.

Before *King Gambler*, I'd worked with Cheng as a martial arts choreographer for some of the fight scenes in *The Fourteen Amazons* (1972). After becoming an actor, I'd

only done *King Gambler* with him, so I've only done two films with him in total. I was also in *Invincible Enforcer* (1979), but that was only a cameo.

Nevertheless, we saw each other quite frequently because Cheng lived next door to me at the Shaw Brothers staff quarters. He was a very emotional person. During the production of *King Gambler*, he wanted to save money for a particular scene by constructing a screen that would block off part of the space. It was a way to avoid hiring so many extras for the shot. He spoke to Mona Fong about the screen, but it didn't work out. He burst into tears afterwards, and we had to halt the shoot. As a producer, I had to find out what was going on. I ended up getting involved in the argument, and I even witnessed Cheng slamming his hand on Ms Fong's desk in anger.

Cheng cried whenever he felt sad or frustrated. He was also an insomniac. There was a royal jelly product, and he took a pack of that stuff every day to keep himself awake. This was why he was emotionally unstable. Whenever he got emotional, we had to stop shooting and go home. That's why some of his films took three years to make.

Kuei Chih-hung: Realism at All Costs

I worked with Kuei Chih-hung on several films, including *The Teahouse* (1974), *Big Brother Cheng* (1975), and *Killer Constable* (1980). He was an eccentric director, but he was also a good director who took his work very seriously. When we were making *Big Brother Cheng*, there was a shot where he wanted me to lie in a drainage canal in the Kwun Tong industrial district. He wanted to capture the passing of a ferry in the background behind me, and he was patient enough to wait two hours for that shot.

I didn't experience certain things personally, but there have been stories of Kuei keeping the cameras rolling even when the actors got injured. He would insist on continuing, and said, 'Ah, the realism, the realism!' That's the kind of director he was, and some have called him cruel for it. He disliked pretension and loved authenticity. For example, the drainage canal I mentioned just now was where the waste water from the factories passed through. It was so filthy that the smell stayed with me for three days. So that's also why Kuei liked working with me—I was the kind who never complained.

I was an actor of many firsts in Hong Kong cinema. In Kuei's *Big Brother Cheng* and *The Teahouse*, I became the first ever Hong Kong actor to play a triad member because it had been a taboo subject in Mandarin cinema. Then I took part in *King Gambler*, when the theme of gambling was another brand-new subject matter at the time. When I played the titular character of *Big Brother Cheng*, I was still young and didn't quite look like a powerful gangster boss. I had to think of a new image for myself and started keeping a moustache—a decision that was approved by Kuei. I was personally very happy with it as I thought it gave me character, so I kept it even after filming wrapped.

When filming *Killer Constable*, my right hand pinky got chopped off by a fellow actor who was in a fight scene with me. We were using real weapons bought from the Chinese

Goods Centre. My opponent in the scene forgot that he was meant to hit my body with the blade. Instead he tried to strike me on the head, and out of instinct I tried to block the blow with my right hand. Since it was a real metal blade, my pinky got chopped off. I was lucky, though; I could have easily lost all my fingers on my hand!

The Two-Year Litigation With Shaw Brothers

I was working like a machine when I was at Shaw Brothers. I worked on three sets a day and only had four to five hours of sleep each night. Directors in charge of the films I starred in generally gave me special permission to arrive late, though I never abused my privilege. Still, I struggled to get up in the mornings and would always arrive at my morning shoots two hours late because I never had an early night in.

During my early years at Shaw Brothers, Chang Cheh would personally discuss my contract with me. He'd say, 'Here's a contract, will you sign it?' I trusted him completely. My first contract was for three years. For this contract, I was paid HK\$1,500 per month. That was hardly enough for my daily expenses. Chang Cheh treated us like his sons; when he saw that we were unhappy, he would call us rascals and gave us HK\$1,000. He often gave us pocket money like that.

Half way through the shoot for *Boxer from Shantung*, Chang Cheh came to me with another contract. 'Why don't you sign on for another three years?' he asked. I signed it, and that was that. Mr Shaw (Note: Sir Run Run Shaw) was also very nice to me; he would give me a nice bonus of HK\$80,000 to HK\$100,000 when a film of mine was released.

Even though I was employed by Shaws, I also had an independent film production company called Tai Shen Film Company (Note: formed around 1973, the company's first production was *The Crazy Instructor* [1974]). Shaw Brothers was fully aware of my involvement in Tai Shen and did nothing to stop me. This was because I was only an investor and did not participate in any work that would be in breach of my contract. *The Simple-Minded Fellow* (1976) starring James Yi was one of the films that my company produced.

I wanted to build my own career as a director and producer at the time, so I made *The Iron Monkey*. I negotiated a deal with a film company and also took their deposit, which meant I couldn't back out anymore. Mr Shaw once offered to help me repay the money so I would go back to work for him. I refused and was determined to finish the film in order to honour my promise. I did finish the film, but it was banned by Mr Shaw. (Note: *The Iron Monkey* was filmed in 1976 with Chan as the writer, director and lead actor. Shaw Brothers applied for a ban on the film in Hong Kong through the courts. The film was originally distributed by Golden Harvest, but it was released for only one day on 18 November 1977, before the ban was enforced. The ban lasted until 11 January 1979).

With the two contracts with Shaws, I was obligated to make 24 films over the course



The Simple Minded Fellow (1976), produced by Chan Koon-tai's Tai Shen Film Company, was a low-budget film but with decent production values.

of six years. But in fact, I'd already made over 50 films during the first three years. That's why I had a long court battle with Shaw Brothers, over whether I'd already fulfilled the duties outlined in my contracts. After the lawsuit, I signed another ten-film contract with them. That was when we switched to an English-language contract. (Note: The lawsuit began in the summer of 1976, and was finally settled in September 1978, after which Chan went back working for Shaws.)

I stayed in Taiwan for a few years after 1976. I couldn't come back to Hong Kong because of the lawsuit against Shaw Brothers. If I returned, they would have applied for an injunction to stop me from leaving the city, which meant that I'd have to stop making films, and further lost my livelihood as a result. When I was in Taiwan, I had to rent out the entire Central Motion Pictures studio for my films. This way we could have privacy and I wouldn't be caught making films. This was a tough time for me because I had to

act and direct at the same time. My partner then was Pai Hsueh-li, who directed two of my films. I also had to raise money and collect copyright fees so we could afford our production budget. Nevertheless, it was a valuable experience because I learned how to be organised.

I don't blame anybody for what had happened with the lawsuit; loyalty was important to me. I believe in my character, and I would never betray anyone for the sake of money. I felt like I did the right thing. Later I went back working for Shaw Brothers. We had a good working relationship, but it became one that of a buyer and a vendor—you pay me, and I give you what you want; there was none of the enthusiasm that existed in the past.

New Action Styles in *The Iron Monkey*

I didn't make much money with *The Iron Monkey*, but it was nonetheless a breakthrough in terms of my filmmaking career. Many kung fu films back then simply included action for the sake of action. With *The Iron Monkey*, I thought of the idea of associating the characters' movements with that of animals. Both 'snake' and 'tiger and crane' are martial arts styles, but how exactly did martial artists learn from the movements of these animals? In the opening sequence, I filmed a fight between a monkey and an eagle. Then, I designed the human characters' fighting style and movements based on how the monkey and the eagle moved. I wanted to try a new way of showing audiences what martial arts styles like 'Eagle's Claw' and 'Monkey Fist' were truly like.

Many in the industry told me I was insane. At a time when an average production cost around HK\$1 million, I spent HK\$1.5 million, with HK\$500,000 of that budget devoted to filming these sequences. The opening sequence alone took ten days of filming, which was considered a great extravagance back then.

Why the title *The Iron Monkey*? One of my ancestors was a training instructor of the Palace Guards during the Qing dynasty. He was imprisoned for some crime that he'd committed. Since he was a great martial artist, no one could guard him effectively, so the prison used four monkeys to guard him instead. That was how he learned the Monkey Fist. *The Iron Monkey* is based on the stories that were passed on to me about him.

Set Foot in Independent Production

The company I ran was an independent film studio. I was trained and raised in the Shaw Brothers system, so I demanded a certain level of standard in my films. I invested over HK\$400,000 in a low-budget caper like *The Simple-Minded Fellow* because I was concerned with the quality of my productions.

By the 1980s, only a few of the major film studios could afford a steady stream of output. The other smaller, independent studios let their actors demand whatever salaries they wanted, so the qualities of the films suffered while they struggled to balance the

books. During my time, actors would consider how much investment there was in the market, as well as what percentage of a film budget would go to the cast before demanding a certain salary. But things changed in the 1980s. One actor would demand HK\$3 million, and another would want HK\$7 million. The problem is that a film may not even make HK\$7 million across all markets. How on earth can anyone afford to make it? Coupled with the proliferation of piracy in the later years, this problem proved fatal for the local film industry.

My company was one of the larger, more well-established ones among the independent studios. We made four films in 1990 alone, including *Sleazy Dizzy*, starring Stephen Chow, as well as *Blood Stained Tradewind*, *Forsaken Cop*, and *Return to Action*. The first two of these titles were directed by Chor Yuen. We collaborated with J & J Film Company in Taiwan, who had their own cinema chain. This meant that our films could be released in Taiwan under a proper cinema chain. My company basically took all the production work, and I was personally involved in every detail. I built my company and career using my own resources and experience.

Unfortunately, all those films were pirated into VHS tapes before they were even released in cinemas. The blame probably lies with the photofinishing lab or the test-screening process. We hadn't even made a single copy of the finished product, and VHS tapes were already available overseas. I sued the involved parties in Thailand and even took the case to Taiwan and Korea, but the locals managed to produce legitimate sales contracts. The problem is that contracts can be faked. Copyright laws back then were not as robust and complete, so the matter was left unresolved. I decided to leave the industry because of this issue and began working in other fields.

Good at Playing Heroic Idols Battling the Evil

Even though my years at Shaw Brothers were tough, it was still a very enjoyable time in my career. Every film I made had a steady audience base. I didn't think too much about other things back then, and it was only at a later stage when I started thinking that I deserved to have other things. That's when I started making decisions that would earn me more money.

I love martial arts. I had made a lot of martial arts films in my day. I often played heroes, including historical figures like Hung Hei-koon and characters like Wong Fei-hung. These men fought for justice and protected the weak. I never felt that any of my films had a negative influence; unlike some of the later 'Young and Dangerous' films about triad culture. To be honest, I believe that film and television, as mass mediums, have enormous influence on society. Even though my character of *Big Brother Cheng* is a triad member, the film only highlights the good in him, and only focuss on how he battles against forces of evil. [Translated by Rachel Ng]

Michael Hui:

I Dream to Share My Worldview Through Films

Interviewers: Cheung Chi-sing (23 June 2004);
Po Fung, Cecilia Wong, Lau Yam and
Winnie Fu (24 January 2013)

Collated by Hui Pui-lam



‘Life is like chess; every game is filled with legends and stories.’ This line from Sam Hui’s classic pop tune, ‘Life is Like A Game of Chess’, seems to reflect his brother Michael’s showbiz career. Rising to stardom in the 1970s, Michael Hui broke multiple box office records in Hong Kong with his unique ‘Hui-style’ comedies. In 1974, he wrote and directed *Games Gamblers Play*, which he co-starred with his brother Sam. Grossing over HK\$6 million, the film was the box office champion that year. Subsequent Hui Brothers productions *The Private Eyes* (1976) and *The Contract* (1978) were not only top box office hits of their respective years, but *The Private Eyes* was also the highest-grossing film of the decade.¹ It’s no exaggeration to say that Michael Hui is an iconic star of 1970s Hong Kong cinema.

Hailed as the ‘Poker-faced Comedian’, Hui excels at juicing comedies from daily lives of the working class. He has earned the laughs and applause of the mainstream by tackling subjects such as gambling, hustling, and dreams of getting rich, reflecting the society and the times that his audiences lived in. Hui often plays Scrooge-like bosses—frugal, harsh, egotistical, greedy for quick wins and instant gratification. His

1. According to *Box Office Records of 1969-1989 Film Releases*, *Games Gamblers Play*, *The Private Eyes*, and *The Contract* were respectively Hong Kong box-office champions among both local and foreign releases of 1974, 1976, and 1978. *The Last Message* came second place in 1975. *Games Gamblers Play* made HK\$6,251,633.90, which broke the record for the best-grossing film in Hong Kong. This was later trumped by *The Private Eyes*, with HK\$8,531,699.70, which was also the highest-grossing film in 1970s Hong Kong. See *Box Office Records of 1969-1989 Film Releases*, Hong Kong: Film Biweekly Publishing House, 1990, pp 74, 87, 100 and 126 (in Chinese).

Hui's family photo. (Back row from left) Michael Hui's grandmother, his father and mother; the four brothers in order are Michael, Stanley, Ricky, Sam, and their little sister Judy being carried by their mother.



characters constantly tries to take advantages of others, only to end up in a worse situation than before. Not only is this a form of working class humour, but it's also a reflection of the rapidly urbanising and industrialising Hong Kong society at the time. In this interview, Hui said that each and every one of his works was an experiment of sorts. Let us follow him down memory lane and revisit these 'experiments' from the 1970s, now remembered as undisputed classics of Hong Kong cinema.

A Connoisseur of Western Pop Culture

I was born in Guangzhou on 3 September 1942, but my family hailed from Panyu. I had very vague memories of my dad carrying me on his back to Panyu when I was five to pay respects at our ancestors' graves. I grew up in Guangzhou and went to a primary school there. Our living conditions were poor back then. My father was a teacher who enjoyed playing violin and performing Cantonese opera. He didn't make a lot of money. He was a military doctor during the Sino-Japanese War, so he also took on a few medical cases during his spare time. Our family moved to Hong Kong in around 1950, when I was nine years old. That was the time when everyone was coming to Hong Kong more or less as refugees. We were not well-off. We settled in Diamond Hill in Kowloon and ended up staying there for over a decade. I finished my primary studies at the Chi Lin Nunnery in Diamond Hill because tuition was free. My father was working at a hotel when I graduated from the school. His boss said, 'Your son won't do well studying Chinese in a nunnery. You have to know English in Hong Kong.' So he arranged for me to enter La Salle College, a famous secondary school. I only had to see the headmaster and didn't need to take any exam. I was quite lucky that I had the connections. La Salle's teaching medium is English, so my English may be better than my Chinese. As people may remember, Hong Kong society back then held English in high esteem; it was really the bedrock of the city's culture.

I began poring over British and American TV shows and films during my secondary school years. I also formed a band with my friends, covering Elvis Presley and Beatles songs. During my spare time, I watched a lot of Woody Allen, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton films, becoming familiar with Western pop culture in the process. On the other hand, I wasn't very knowledgeable of Chinese culture, though I knew a bit about Cantonese opera because my parents were fans. When we lived in Diamond Hill, my parents would often leave our front door open and sang Cantonese opera tunes on the sandy yard outside with their friends. Sam (Note: Sam Hui) and I spent most of our childhood watching our parents singing Cantonese opera and performing its gestures. Our family wasn't doing well financially when I graduated from secondary school. Coupled with the fact that I was the eldest of many siblings who needed taking care of, I wasn't in position to go into university. So, I attended The Sir Robert Black College of Education for a year and found a teaching job immediately afterwards. A teacher was quite well-paid back then, but I decided to go to university in the end. My father was not earning much and I had to go to university at the same time as my younger brother. Fortunately, my mother said she would support my decision if I could support the family and afford my school fees at the same time. After I got into The Chinese University of Hong Kong, I took on several part-time teaching jobs in the evenings to keep up. It was a tough and hectic time for me.

Hosting Quiz Shows on TV

By the third and fourth year at university, I couldn't spend as much time on my tutoring and teaching jobs due to exams. As destiny would have it, a new TV station, Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB), had just been launched in Hong Kong.² My pop star younger brother had a music programme there, and he told me that the station was hiring hosts. It was a part-time job that was well-paid. He encouraged me to try it out, and I went for an interview immediately without knowing exactly how well it would pay. The bosses were impressed with my eloquence and the fact that I was studying in a university, so they asked me to host a weekly quiz show, *Interschool Quiz Contest*.³ Teachers with a qualification from a normal college back then earned about HK\$675 per month, but this weekly gig paid me a monthly salary of HK\$1,500. It was double that of a teacher's salary and more than enough for my livelihood. Later, the bosses from the TV station asked me to join *Enjoy Yourself Tonight* (EYT) (Note: A long-running variety programme that began in 1967) when they learnt that I could speak English. I did interviews with foreigners and intellectuals there, and it gave me an extra source of income.

When I joined the variety programme team, I was fascinated by the quirky little skits that were being performed. But I had never really thought of having a proper showbiz

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2. Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) officially started broadcasting in 1967.
 3. This programme had various names, including *Interschool Quiz Contest*, *Citizen Interschool Cup Contest*, and *Citizen Interschool Quiz Contest*.

Michael Hui (right) is good with talking and Sam Hui (left) can sing. The two Hui brothers worked together in harmony.



career. Ever since I was a child, my father was always keen to stress, ‘You have to study hard. No matter what you do in the future, don’t be an actor.’ He thought that actors were the lowest in the social hierarchy. We should study hard to become presidents or businessmen rather than entertainers. I remember that Leung Sing-por (Uncle Por) told me, ‘Michael, you’re so handsome and well-mannered. You have to keep your image as an intellectual. Don’t go down the path I took—you’re not fit to be a clown or comedian.’ I guess he would have never dreamt that Michael Hui not only did go down that path, but that I also learnt a lot from him. I admired Uncle Po; he was one of the teachers who inspired me the most with his way of acting and movements in performances. They left a profound influence on me.

The Birth of *The Hui Brothers Show*

I had planned to leave the TV station and slowly move into the world of business. I joined a huge advertising firm after my university graduation.

I was in charge of client relations at the firm. However, I realised after a year that I wasn’t interested in the field at all, and I became confused about my future. In the middle of my confusion and frustration, the head of the TVB production team, Selina Chow, saw my jokes for EYT and asked Sam and I to do a Chinese New Year special. That was how I lucked into *The Hui Brothers Show* (1971). The show started only as a one-off special for the holidays. Sam was a great singer, and it was the very first time that audience had seen someone deliver gags and jokes with a machine gun-like speed. The programme was well-received and attracted sponsors. That’s how it turned into a weekly show.



Michael Hui's breakout film, *The Warlord* (1972) showcased his talents and was crowned the second best-selling production of the year.

Still from the motion picture *The Warlord* ©Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

The Warlord: From President to Director

I had only planned on doing the show as a temporary gig, but something big happened. One of the most respected directors of the day, Mr Li Han-hsiang, was about to film *The Warlord* (1972). He had cast Taiwan's Ching Miao for the titular role of the warlord Marshal Pang Ta-fu,⁴ but Ching lost his passport and couldn't make it to the shoot. Who could they cast in such a short period of time? Li approached me. There was an opening skit in *The Hui Brothers Show* where I'd play seven roles on my own, including Chaplin, Hitler and Zhong Kui. It turned out that Li was a regular viewer of the programme. He told me, 'I saw you playing Zhong Kui, and that roughness is more or less the feeling I'm looking for. I can imagine you looking very commanding bald-headed with thicker eyebrows.' I was only in my 20s back then, and the marshal was a character in his 50s. Why would Li cast such a young actor for the role? He said that he found my acting style refreshingly new, and that it was different from the traditional stuff. I initially refused the

4. In the Li Han-hsiang-penned memoir *Yin Hai Qianqiu*, he writes that Michael Hui was his first and only choice for the role. He recommended Hui highly to Sir Run Run Shaw, despite protests from many executives at Shaw Brothers. Shaw suggested other actors such as Ching Miao and Fan Mei-sheng, all of whom were rejected by Li. The only other actor in running was Ng Cho-fan, but salary negotiations broke down before a contract could be signed. It was only until after *The Warlord* had started shooting for a couple of days before Shaw agreed to let Hui play the titular role. For details, see Li Han-hsiang, 'Can't Find The Warlord', 'My Sudden Interest in Michael Hui', and 'Run Run Shaw's Serenity in an Emergency' in *Yin Hai Qianqiu (A Thousand Years in the Cinematic World)*, Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1997, pp 219-227 (in Chinese).

role because I felt that I was a ‘handsome’ lead. There was no way I would shave my head. Li said, ‘No worries, men should have character! Don’t think too much about it. You can have a bald head for a bit, then your hair will grow back in a couple of months.’ Even Sir Run Run Shaw came to persuade me to take the role, so I finally said yes. *The Warlord* turned out to be a great success. I think it was Shaw Brothers’ biggest box office hit at the time.⁵ So I’d inadvertently become a film star—a popular one. Fate can be unpredictable sometimes.

When making *The Warlord*, Li was the only one on set who spoke Mandarin; the rest of the crew spoke Cantonese. My Mandarin was terrible. Even though we weren’t doing sync sound on set, I was still worried that my performance wouldn’t be convincing if I had to speak Mandarin. So I asked Li if I could speak in Cantonese. He said it didn’t matter, that I could even speak English if I wanted to as everything would be dubbed during post-production. There was a lot of profanity in the dialogue that I didn’t know how to say, so I did most of the lines in English, such as ‘son of the...’. It made everyone laugh at first, and Li would just say, ‘OK, OK.’ It turned out that he had found a very capable talent who knew a lot of profanity in Shandong dialect to dub over my dialogue. Whenever I said ‘son of the...’, the voice actor would say something that matched the shape of my mouth perfectly. That’s why I was able to act freely.

Li liked to coach actors, often approaching them and telling them what to do exactly. But he never did this with me. He would just say, ‘Marshal, come stand over here, say this bit of dialogue, bang the table with your hand and curse. Give it a try.’ I would say my piece and say ‘son of the...’. Li smirked. When I asked him how I did, he’d just say, ‘Yes, that’s it.’ He felt that the dialogue could be done with the dubbing and that he would rather capture my performance at its most spirited and uninhibited phase. If he’d criticised me a few more times, I wouldn’t have delivered such a lively performance. Since Li gave me the freedom, I had managed to create a warlord who was entirely different from my usual way of acting. I never played that kind of character or acted in that style since then.

My dream was to make some sort of contribution to the world, to share with others my thoughts of the world we lived in. This was why I wanted to be a president, but I hadn’t thought of any other way to accomplish it. As I observed Mr Li on the set, I slowly realised that film held the same kind of power. I got on well with him, and he taught me about film editing. ‘You didn’t know why I filmed in that certain way yesterday, right? What I wanted to say was, that era was like a game of *pai gow* between two players. If I lose, then this city is yours. Let’s stop fighting—I’m sick of fighting! That’s the kind of ridiculous world I want to portray: a warlord can lose the city of Guangzhou to you in a game of *pai gow*. He can even let you have Nanjing just like that.’ To me, *The Hui Brothers Show* was just a collage of bits and pieces. It was pretty interesting, but I

5. *The Warlord* made HK\$3,464,724.80 at the box office, and was the second best-selling film of 1972. The champion that year was Bruce Lee’s *Fist of Fury*, produced by Golden Harvest (HK\$4,431,423.50). See note 1, p 48.

didn't see it as a lifelong career. Working with Mr Li on *The Warlord* changed my way of thinking. If I conceptualised and wrote a screenplay, then that could be a reflection of my world. I could voice my opinions and thoughts through characters. The medium of film could travel to every corner of the earth, and its influence is immeasurable. I like being creative; sharing my ideas with the world was exactly what I wanted to do. I didn't have any naïve notion of being an actor. After wrapping of *The Warlord*, I told my wife that film would probably be my lifelong career. I then made three more films for Shaw Brothers (Note: *The Happiest Moment* [1973], *Sinful Confession* [1974], and *Scandal* [1974]). I became familiar with how films were made.

At that time, Sam wasn't getting any work despite being signed to Golden Harvest. So I said to him, 'How about I write and direct, and let's star in a film together?' He agreed, and we got support from Golden Harvest. That's how we made our first film, *Games Gamblers Play* (1974). In many ways, the film was still an extension of *The Hui Brothers Show*, but it was immensely successful and broke Golden Harvest's box office records.

From TV to the Silver Screen

Games Gamblers Play was the first film I wrote, directed and starred in. Box office was important, of course, so the gambling theme was a calculated decision. I studied sociology, a subject that very much reliant on data and statistics. I saw that eight out of my ten friends either played mahjong or went to Macau regularly to gamble. During that time, Hong Kong's social hierarchy was pyramid-shaped, with working class, the vast majority of population, at the bottom. Gambling clearly would appeal to the biggest group of audience, so I made gambling the background of the film and put together many jokes and plot points that are connected with that theme. *Games Gamblers Play* showed all the vices and dirty tricks that gamblers used. I thought this would relate to the grassroots. After all, I was part of the grassroots, so what I created must have been 'grassroots' too.

The concept *Games Gamblers Play* was rather easy because the two male leads were already fixed. There is only so much you can do with two male characters—mostly friendship or a mentor-student relationship. So I created two gamblers who start out trying to swindle each other. They're pursued by people out for their blood and eventually become great friends. Looking back, I actually had never studied filmmaking. I tried to move from 'piecemeal' jokes to a film with a coherent narrative. Despite my ignorance, I managed to put together a film that was quite funny and watchable. I started out blindly putting something together and stumbled onto success. It felt great as long as everyone found it funny and entertaining. But later on, my ambitions for scripts became far less than simple when film became a proper career for me.



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Michael Hui attempted to explore more profound subject matters with *The Last Message* (1975).

My First Experiment: *The Last Message*

I was a thinker who tried to convey things that interested me, things with a bit of depth. At the same time, I knew what the market wanted. So I did some calculations and looked for ways to deliver deeper messages in shallow ways. By the time I was about to start *The Last Message* (1975), I was riding on a wave of success from *The Hui Brothers Show* and *Games Gamblers Play*. I was feeling ambitious and wanted to express things that I wanted to say. One day, a senior member of my family passed away. While a number of relatives stood around the body weeping, I saw that his finger was twitching slightly. He might still be fully conscious at that point. What if he had something really important to say? What could he be thinking at that moment? I kept thinking, could I make a film about someone whose brain was still active after he's dead? The film's quality is another story, but the box office numbers indicated how audiences felt. *Games Gamblers Play* made over HK\$6 million at the box office, but *The Last Message* made only around HK\$4



In The Private Eyes (1976), Michael Hui wielded the sausage nunchaku like a professional; it was a result from training for three months.

million. That's a drop of HK\$2 million.⁶ If it wasn't for the high level of anticipation from the wait, the film might have made even less than HK\$4 million. After *The Last Message*, I didn't dare to step too far from the mainstream, so I made *The Private Eyes* (1976). When its box office reached HK\$8 million, I forgot my lesson and wanted to experiment again.

I saw a lot of laughable things in society. I wondered how certain people could behave a certain way and how horrendous their personalities could be. I put together all those negative traits and acted them out through my characters. I had always given Sam the positive attributes because he excelled at playing the kindhearted guy. It also made the division of labour easier. I acted out things and characters that I despised, like the mean-spirited boss in *The Private Eyes*. Those characters were based on how my father was bullied in the past or my own experiences.

6. *The Last Message* grossed a total of HK\$4,553,662.90. Although this was lower than the box-office returns of *Games Gamblers Play*, it was nonetheless the best-selling local film of 1975, and was in second place overall behind the foreign film *The Towering Inferno*. See note 1.

***The Private Eyes*: The Comedic Potential of Action Scenes**

The Private Eyes was also an experiment; I tried to think in a visual way, to reduce the number of dialogue in hopes that the film could be more palatable to audiences overseas. *The Private Eyes* was a successful first step. The film had a lot of help from Sammo Hung and John Woo, who were experts at designing action scenes and editing action montages. Sammo did the action choreography and John, as producer, was adept at filming action scenes. Before filming, I could only imagine myself throwing a wok that would come back and hit me like a Frisbee. I thought this would be hilarious, but how should I film it or edit it? That's when I relied on Sammo and John.

Another example was the scene in which I threw a string of sausages like a whip. Sammo taught me how to whip it. In his choreography, the action stops when I can't reach the sausages and realise that it'd been split in half. He would then cut to another shot to show the sausages being split in half. There was also a fight sequence in the supermarket that I designed. I wanted Sam to enter and quickly take down his opponents with two or three moves. But how should I film it? Sammo designed the action and instructed Sam on how to throw punches. Meanwhile, John thought of using close-ups to pan upwards, following Sam's fists. We'd add a shot of the words 'bang bang bang!' on screen with sound effects, then we would show Sam's opponents flying backwards. There would be no physical contact between the actors at all. That was considered innovative at the time. If I hadn't been there, they would've spent forever shooting a fight scene, and we'd all be in trouble. I needed the shots to be extremely fast to give a feeling of extraordinary speed. But if I was directing it by myself, we also wouldn't have been able to get such beautiful shots. The three of us needed each other. It was a great stroke of luck that we had such a talented team from Golden Harvest on *The Private Eyes*. Having experts help me execute my vision and complete the film was a wonderful experience. Without their help, *The Private Eyes* would definitely be a lesser work.

When *The Private Eyes* was first released, it was revolutionary. Although Bruce Lee had given a new vision to kung fu films, the traditional kung fu genre had reached a state of fatigue. Suddenly, people saw that Michael Hui could actually be this funny doing kung fu, and *The Private Eyes* became a success. Where have people seen such funny kung fu action scenes? Who would whip around a string of sausages like that? Don't underestimate that whipping move—I spent three months practising before I could do it with some small measure of success. My action expert friends saw this and realised that kung fu films could go in that direction. It inspired Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan to make action comedies. This is how fate works sometimes; I think I'm quite lucky.

Midnight Turnabout: 'Chicken Aerobics' Escapes the Cut

I'm a person who believes that the script should come first. Without a good script, not even God can save the film. Whether a scene is funny or not depends mostly on timing—

it's too much if it's a few seconds too long, and it's too fast if it's a few seconds too short. That's why storyboards are really important. My storyboards are actually there for my own reference. For example, if I know that I'm doing 14 shots for a scene, the frames on the paper tell me what I need exactly. I'd tell my assistant director, 'I'm doing 14 shots. Let's do them in this sequence today: 1, 7, 5, 9.' The storyboards were very simple and not as detailed as the ones in Hollywood. A lot of people were tickled by the 'chicken aerobics' scene in *The Private Eyes*, in which I misunderstood what was on TV and started performing aerobic exercises on a dead chicken. That scene was 10 minutes in length. We took *The Private Eyes* to a test screening after we'd wrapped. It was attended by six or seven executives, including Raymond Chow, Leonard Ho, and Andre Morgan. I was very nervous. They walked out with smiles on their faces after watching the film. Raymond Chow asked me to go into his room and said to me, 'Michael, I think your film was ok. It's quite fast-paced and funny, so I don't really have anything in particular to suggest. If you don't mind, however, there's that scene where you performed aerobics to a chicken. Everyone knows you've misunderstood the instructions from the TV. I don't think you really need to lie on the floor with the chicken for ten minutes. To have the camera focused on you for ten minutes? That's way too long. Maybe two minutes is enough.' I thought that ten minutes was necessary, but these seven talented people from the industry felt that two minutes was enough. Fortunately, there was the midnight showing. I said, 'Let's not shorten the scene just yet. We'll have time to do it after the first midnight showing.' After the midnight showing, we went for a late-night snack. That's when Raymond Chow said that those ten minutes were the funniest in the entire film; he said that Mrs Chow almost fell on the ground laughing and that I definitely shouldn't cut it. Comedy really is a difficult thing to grasp—it can't too long or too short. It needs to be just right. That's the challenge. That's why a storyboard really helps in figuring out how to edit a scene.

A number of directors mistakenly think that they don't need to spend time designing gags or comedy as long as they have talented comedians that will naturally be funny. But comedy is never easy. It took me a long time to come up with the sausage gag, and that three minutes of screen time required three months of preparation. How could one simply come onto the set and act without preparation? My habit was to think a gag through, making sure that it would be funny in every way, and wait until everything was ready before rolling the camera. I can't create new things on the set because it's not a funny environment at all—it's hot, tiring and everyone's in a rush to finish shooting. How can you create something that's funny and lighthearted?

The Contract: An Experiment in Minimum Dialogue

It can be said that *Games Gamblers Play*, *The Private Eyes* and *Security Unlimited* (1981) were films that consciously pandered to audience's tastes. I consciously gave them what they wanted and enjoyed. On the other hand, *The Last Message* and *The Contract* were

The three Hui brothers were in Japan promoting the film series *Mr Boo!* in 1979. From left: Sam, Ricky and Michael Hui.



more experimental in nature. *The Last Message* was an attempt at something new, and it could either be great or be a failure. It failed in the end, of course. With *The Private Eyes*, I had completed an experiment in making a film with fewer dialogue. I knew then that I had to reduce dialogue and add more action to appeal to foreign markets. *The Private Eyes* had a lot of action scenes, including the sausage whipping, but it still wasn't enough. So I decided to go all out in my next film, *The Contract*.

The Contract was an experiment in reducing the amount of dialogue in a film as much as possible. It tells the story of a character who wants to steal his contract from his boss. That gave the possibility for numerous comedic chase sequences with minimum dialogue. The film was sort of an oddball with a somewhat strange plot. The experiment wasn't very successful, but it didn't mean that the concept of reducing dialogue in favour of visual gags was a bad one. *The Contract* suffered from a weak plot, with too many chases but not enough emotional content. So I moved on to *Security Unlimited*, which was in essence a continuation of *The Private Eyes*. By the way, I should mention that *The Contract*⁷ and *The Last Message* were both hits at the Taiwanese box office. The former did especially well because of its chase sequences. It made around HK\$8 million in Hong Kong, but that's not considered a great number.

The Hui Brothers Parting Ways After *Security Unlimited*

My films were also well-received in Japan and Taiwan, if I'd continued with my 'visuals over dialogue' approach, I could have made a dozen more films that would have no problem succeeding overseas. But my way of thinking began to change, and that led to

7. *The Contract* made HK\$7,823,019.50 at the local box office, and was the best-selling film of the year 1979. See note 1.

the professional separation between my two brothers and I (Note: the three Hui brothers who starred in films were Michael, Ricky and Sam). I wasn't a prolific filmmaker because I didn't want to keep shooting the same thing; I found it boring. After *Security Unlimited*, I started feeling bored. All my films were modern comedies in which us three brothers got together to tell some jokes as more or less the same characters. We couldn't disband, and it was hard to change things up. So one day I told my two younger brothers, 'I want to take a risk. Let's part ways for a while and do what we like. Sam's handsome, so he has plenty of options. He doesn't need to follow me around, playing the fool.' Cinema City had just been formed and wanted to hire Sam to headline their productions. So he collaborated with them, and that's another story.

Casting Golden Harvest Colleagues

I often cast my colleagues from the Golden Harvest office in my films because we were so close from working together all the time. When I created a character and felt that a certain person was suitable for the role, then he or she must be right for it. Otherwise I'd have to tell my producer, Louis Sit, to find someone to play the arrogant supervisor who always pretended to be a bigwig. Louis would then have to run around trying to scout for actors and arrange auditions. I didn't want to bother with all of this, so I just cast our Golden Harvest colleagues. For example, in *The Private Eyes*, the soft drink factory manager who fired Sam was played by the marketing manager of Golden Harvest. Most of us in this industry have some sort of interest in performing. You might be performing onstage while he was scribbling away in an office, but both of you are actually performers at heart. At the after-party for the film, people would point and laugh at each other. The atmosphere was great, and it felt like we were truly a team.

Playing the Bullied, Not the Bully

Film is my life. I can create my own world from scratch. There is no greater sense of satisfaction than knowing that an audience got my message, had a good time and felt touched by my work. I actually like writing more than acting, but you'll never accomplish your dream if you keep writing screenplays for someone else to direct. So I had to direct as well. But Michael Hui's scripts would always be only written for Michael Hui; he'd become tired of that. I often played the domineering character who bullied Ricky in films, but no one had ever seen me getting bullied. This is really unfair, because I do enjoy playing the weaker, bullied roles. But for some reasons, everyone feels that it's more natural that I play the bully, or else it wouldn't be as fun to watch. In Li Han-hsiang's *The Happiest Moment*, I played Xiao Liu, the coward who kept getting bullied. My character would become so terrified that he curled up into a ball on the floor after getting slapped by the boss's wife. I really like this kind of roles, but Xiao Liu was my only chance to play it. When I was in TVB, Leung Sing-por and I had worked together in many skits. He

played the boss and I played the nervous, jumpy assistant. We had a lot of fun doing those hilarious skits. I was funnier playing the bullied one rather than the bully in those situations.

Film: A Lifelong Passion

It's difficult to demand that a script has to be well-written, funny and touching all at once. Everyone knows that. I have devoted my whole life making sure that I can achieve all of the above. *The Private Eyes* was passable; it made people laugh, it wasn't boring, it had a fast pace, and it was interesting—that was enough. A filmmaker needs to truly love film. Making a living is important, of course. But at the end of the day, he needs to love film and be genuinely interested in figuring out how to make a good film. [Translated by Rachel Ng]

Editor's note: Michael Hui's account of his experience with the Golden Harvest can be found in 'Michael Hui: No Contracts Were Signed But It Felt Like a Permanent Contract', edited by Po Fung and Lau Yam, *Golden Harvest: Leading Change in Changing Times*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2013, pp 170-177 (in Chinese).

Ng See-yuen:

The Key is to Comprehend the Ways of Survival in Independent Cinema

Interviewers: Donna Chu (12 March 1997);
Po Fung (21 November 2017)

Collated by Po Fung



The 1970s saw Shaw Brothers' rise to the top. Its vast, sophisticated studio system had paved the way for a number of stars and directors to success, but at the same time it also cultivated a group of revolutionaries who sought to overthrow the existing system that they were unhappy with. Indeed, the only legitimate competition that Shaw Brothers had, were former employees of the studio itself, a famous example being Raymond Chow of Golden Harvest. Another well-known example is Ng See-yuen, who is the subject of this interview. Ng could be said to be one of the most representative producers of independent cinema in 1970s Hong Kong. He made his name with *The Bloody Fists* in 1972, which featured many of the most prominent kung fu actors of the day and grossed over HK\$1.7 million at the box office. Throughout the rest of the decade, he continued to release innovative films that were both critical and commercial successes, including *Anti-Corruption* (1975), *The Secret Rivals* (1976), *Drunken Master* (1978), and *The Butterfly Murders* (1979). Every one of these titles was a testament to his creative drive, and their box office numbers were comparable, even superior, to many big-studio productions. In the interview, Ng was keen to point out how he had realised the flaws of the studio system while working at Shaw Brothers, and how he found success by reversing their ways of working. Hong Kong cinema of the 1970s had benefited much from such a group of inspiring, determined innovators, who managed to break new ground despite a lack of resource.

Early Years as Assistant Director for *The Chinese Boxer*

I was born in Shanghai in 1944, with my family from Zhuhai of Guangdong Province. I attended secondary school in Shanghai, and came to Hong Kong in 1961 to continue my studies at New Method College for a few years. Later I wanted to study film, so I joined the screenwriting and directing class at the Southern Drama Group, which was organised and sponsored by Shaw Brothers. My studies lasted for around one year, including internship.

After graduating, I joined Shaw Brothers officially to work as an intern script supervisor, mostly under director Lo Chen. Soon I became an assistant director for an external project, helping Chiao Chuang, who was originally an actor. He had left Shaw Brothers for an independent studio, and was producing *The Heroic Sword* (1969), directed and starred by Chiao himself. I was responsible for writing the script (Note: Chiao Chuang received the writing credit for this film) and took on the role of assistant director. Yet there were no more jobs after that one film. I later saw Director Lo, who said, 'Come back and help me.' So I returned to Shaws as an assistant director, and during this time I had assisted Jimmy Wang Yu on his film *The Chinese Boxer* (1970). Wang was at the height of his popularity back then, and Shaws was very accommodating to his demands. He was older than me by a year and was also from Shanghai, and as I could speak Shanghainese, we got along very well. Wang wanted to make an action film because he was experienced and well-versed with fight scenes. He borrowed me from Lo Chen and another Taiwanese assistant director Yang Ching-chen to help him. We did have a script to start with, but Wang kept revising it during the shoot with the two of us. Most of the script changes were to do with the dialogue. *The Chinese Boxer* was filmed in South Korea—I remember it was winter because of how cold it was. As part of a small crew, I had to double-time as both the assistant director and the script supervisor. Since the film was made during the peak of Wang's career, we fully committed to realise his visions and he was particularly strict with audio dubbing. Back then dubbing was not like how things are now, with soundtracks for everything. We had to dub over action scenes by actually punching and hitting objects. Wang was concerned with the sound effects, and we did many rounds of testing on different materials to find out which produced the best sounds. For example, we discovered that hitting a ten-pack cigarette package could produce a realistic and more substantial sound for punches and kicks. But if it was a hit on the stomach, then it had to be done with a drum. These sound effects helped us differentiated blows on various parts of the body, whether it was the arm or the head. The Iron Palm technique in *The Chinese Boxer* originated from our impressions when reading *wuxia* novels. Most people from Hong Kong were aware of these mythical kung fu stances, but had never seen them before. So we took a large wok, added some sand, with artificial smoke, and the result was exciting. We didn't think too much about it, but the audience loved it.



On the set of *The Mad Killer* (1971). From left: director Ng See-yuen, Susanna Auyeung Pui-san, boss Wong To and Gao Yuan.

Injecting New Ideas in *The Mad Killer*

The first film I directed was *The Mad Killer* (1971), produced by Star Motion Picture. At that time Shaw Brothers didn't like to promote their internal staff and preferred to hire directors from Japan or Taiwan, or experienced filmmakers outside the company. It was very difficult to be a director at Shaws back then; an assistant director could have worked there for more than half of his life, used up all his creativity and imagination, before getting the slightest chance of promotion. This way, it was quite impossible to make a good film. I was very lucky to have met Mr Wong To from Star at the age of 26. He was an independent producer who first approached my mentor Lo Chen about shooting a film. But Lo had a contract with Shaws and couldn't take the job. He then recommended me to Wong, and I agreed to join him at Star. My name wasn't well-known back then, and it would be difficult to sell my film overseas. Therefore the director credit for *The Mad Killer* was shared by Lo Chen and me, even though I was responsible for all directorial activities on set. The action choreography was done by Yuen Woo-ping, which was also his first time working as a choreographer on films, while assisted by his brother Yuen Cheung-yan. The cinematographer was Hua Shan, also a newcomer to the business.

I had a couple of friends at Shaw Brothers whom I got along well, like Chiu Kang-chien; they were also dissatisfied with the studio system at Shaws, in which every role, apart from the director's, was put in a very passive place. The lighting technicians didn't know what to do until they got on set; the cinematographers simply did what the directors told them to do without understanding what the film was about as a whole, not to mention any notion of style. I wanted to break free of such bad practices, so we did a lot of preparation work for *The Mad Killer*. I talked about scene set-ups with Hua Shan, designed shots and frames beforehand if possible. While in the past action sequences were designed on-set, the Yuen brothers and I took the time in choreographing several

action scenes with extra importance beforehand. We brainstormed a lot of ideas in the hopes of bringing something new to audience. I handed a copy of the script to every crew member, and when the lighting technician took the script from my hands he was very confused. I said everyone should have a look because I would like to create a new way of filming. In the end the shoot went very well.

I wanted audience to see and experience something new from my film, and since the original script was quite conventional, I added four 'death killers'. I told Hua Shan my idea, in which the four killers would ride on galloping horses and clad in shining helmets. Like Omar Sharif's entrance in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), we would see their vague silhouettes, but with no clear shot of their faces, in order to heighten their sense of mystery and death-like power. We hired some stuntmen who were competent riders to play these killers. However, before the film was released, Mr Wong To previewed the film and required all these scenes to be cut because they weren't in the script. It could be said that *The Mad Killer* was not a box office hit. I remembered that it made over HK\$200,000 (Note: the film's box office was HK\$270,000), which meant that the film either lost money or barely broke even.

It had hit me badly that the film didn't do well, and also because I had signed a contract with two or three more films with Mr Wong. Since this one didn't do well, he decided to halt the production of the second one. I had nothing to do all day long. Even though I had lots of stories in mind, I had no chance of shooting them. I was waiting for the company to let me make my next film. After *The Mad Killer*, I was free for almost a year, until I got my next job, *The Bloody Fists* (1972).

Shot to Fame With *The Bloody Fists*

The Bloody Fists was financed by Empire Cinema Centre Ltd, a company owned by a Filipino businessman named Jimmy L Pascual. However, he said he could only provide half of the funding, and asked if we could fund the other half. We said that we didn't have the money, so we took our own salary as investment. Back in those days, a few thousand dollars was already a big sum of money, as our salary was only two to three hundred dollars per month. On average each of us would have to shell out seven or eight thousand dollars. In the end, five or six people, including myself, Yuen Woo-ping, editor Kwok Ting-hung, cinematographer William Chang, assistant director Chen Wah, and a dubbing artist Michael Fung shouldered half the shares of the film. I had the script ready a long time ago, just that my old company didn't want to film it.

Filmmaking in those days relied heavily on the studio system. Without a studio set, directors would not be capable of making a film. You would need a set for a café, a set for a family living room... even though the studio sets were not very well-made, that they would creak and shake when you walked on them with heavy steps, directors still relied on them. Thus the industry was tied inextricably to the studio system. I was determined



The kung fu film directed by Ng See-yuen, *The Bloody Fists* (1972), sold more than HK\$1.7 million at the box office and established Ng as a force to be reckoned with. Director Ng See-yuen (centre) is pictured here with Chan Koon-tai (left) in the midst of discussion for the shoot.

to shoot entire *The Bloody Fists* on location, not because I wanted to, but because I couldn't afford to use studio sets. I couldn't rent any of the Shaw's studios, and it would have been very expensive to construct new sets. I didn't need any glamorous palaces for my film, so it was totally possible to film on locations instead. I therefore had the thought of making the film at village houses in the New Territories. It was also around this time that 'atomic lamps' were launched, replacing those massive, traditional lamps, which were used as lighting on set. This was a key development in the history of Hong Kong independent cinema. After amplification, these lamps would become very bright, and we called them the 'atomic lamps'. Furthermore, for our camera equipment, we had started replacing the old, bulky Mitchell cameras with a smaller ARRI model, even though the ARRI 1 camera motors were too noisy for live sound-recording. Back then the consensus was that the lighting for on-location shoots would not be good as it required a lot of lamps. However, with the 'atomic lamps' and the lightweight cameras, we were in a position to do so, and I was therefore all the more confident in filming *The Bloody Fists* on locations. Another thing was that the term 'da zaai' (meaning kung fu star) started with the making of our film. During this time, Chen Sing often played villains in Shaw's film and had made quite an impression with his personality. He was also at the same time a karate expert, with calluses all over his hands due to hard practices. Since the main character of my film was an outlaw, I felt that I didn't need a handsome lead for the role, and Chen Sing would fit the bill perfectly. I also thought that a 'da zaai' film needed to be filled with 'da zaai' actors, so I hired Chan Koon-tai, who was a disciple of Tai Shing Pek Kwar Moon (monkey and axe hammer style), to play the villain. Furthermore, I got Pak Sha-lik, an instructor of Thai boxing; plus Liu Dachuan, who was in the news headlines for challenging Bruce Lee to a duel; and finally, Larry Fang, another 'da zaai'. The cast really was an assembly of some of the greatest fighters in the industry, which would be an irresistible draw for audience who like action films.

There was also a little controversy with *The Bloody Fists* that had to do with Chan Koon-tai, who played the bad guy. He disappeared after filming the ending sequence. I shot the last scene on a beach in Cheung Sha, Lantau Island over the course of ten to twenty days, and it was a tough shoot. Afterwards Chan disappeared all of a sudden, because he was signed to director Chang Cheh's *Boxer from Shantung* (1972), and Chang was about to make him a big star. Cinematographer William Chang and I spent a whole night at Shaws, pleading Chang, asking him to discharge Chan for our shoot. We said all the nice words we could have said, but Chang was adamant in his refusal, and wouldn't let us continue shooting with Chan. The production was suspended for a long time and we almost had to dismiss the crew. One day, I suddenly had a thought, as I remembered how I used to wear facemasks in Shanghai during winter because of the cold. Since Chan was playing a long-haired Japanese ronin, if I had made the character wearing a mask, then we could get a stunt double to film the rest of his scenes. That would be it! So we immediately started shooting again.

After *The Bloody Fists* was done, it made quite a splash at the box office. Back in those days, it was very impressive for a film to score over a million at the box office; after all Chang Cheh's crowning achievement was that he was a 'million-dollar' director. But this film of mine managed to make HK\$1.7 million! We were overjoyed, the cast and crew who were involved in the production were so happy that we could cry. And in many ways, it had been the turning point of my career.

The Documentary-Styled *Anti-Corruption*

After *The Bloody Fists*, I made *The Good and the Bad* (1972), my second film for Empire. After that I went on and became a director for The Eternal Film. During this time, I had made and invested in two films for Eternal, one of which was *Anti-Corruption*, a work that was very important to me. Back then I watched a lot of foreign films, including *Z* (1969), which was filmed in a news programme-like, documentary style that had never been attempted in Hong Kong cinema. With the newly established Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in 1974, I had an idea that I should make a film like this. Since it could potentially damage the reputation and esteem of the British colonial government, bosses at Eternal were worried that *Anti-Corruption* could get banned. So I offered to split the cost fifty-fifty; that way our losses would be fifty-fifty as well. This kind of film was extremely low-budget, and I decided not to use any famous film stars, since the presence of a well-known face would ruin the documentary-like realism I wanted to achieve. I went to several prominent British companies and asked their senior managers to play the British characters in the film, because I felt like only they would have that upper-class comportment and gravitas I was looking for. I put in a lot of effort to the film—I had shot documentary footages of Peter Fitzroy Godber's trial at the High Court. I also remembered that I included Crippled Ho (Ng Sik-ho) in my film. We used a lot of handheld cameras with our shoot because unsteady shots were an important feature



Shot in a documentary style, *Anti-Corruption* (1975) merged fiction with reality, and was a precursor to other Hong Kong films in this canon. Pictured here is the crowded entrance of Gala Theatre upon release.

of documentaries. Second, we tried to film secretly, with pedestrians inside the shots without them knowing; unlike in Shaw's productions, it was easy to tell that people onscreen were hired as extras. Third, we didn't use any professional actors, and instead we hired amateurs for a better sense of persuasion. I knew that including professional actors would ruin the entire set-up of the film.

Anti-Corruption did indeed get into problems with censorship. It was actually before the time of the Film Censorship Ordinance,¹ so there wasn't a law that could ban the film from getting released. The officials thus delayed the process as much as they could, and even issued threats in hopes of getting me to back out. But it was impossible that I would back out, as I had invested all my limited funds and savings into the film. I had long debates with the officials in charge and eventually got them to yield. I remembered very clearly how Gala Theatre, which only released foreign films, decided to show *Anti-Corruption*. Therefore, a lot of people were squeezing into the theatre and that even the box-office window was broken, and they had to call the police. When the police cars came, I took a photo of the crowded scene at the theatre's front door to commemorate the moment.

Finding Fame and Establishing My Own Company

During the time when I was making films for Eternal, I established my own company, Seasonal Film Corporation, in 1973. It was not a difficult feat for me at all. Since my name was already well-known for selling productions overseas, it was very easy for me to get capital for Seasonal Film. All I had to do was to settle the distribution rights in

1. The three-tier film classification system that Hong Kong citizens are familiar with, comes from the Film Censorship Ordinance launched on 10 November 1988.

one or two overseas markets, get the deposits, and I would have enough money to start shooting.

The overseas markets back then referred mostly to Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, etc. My independent production, *The Secret Rivals*, was sold to Taiwan and did very well there. It was a low-budget film and was shot in South Korea in collaboration with a Korean company. In those days Korea was very much like the Mainland now, in the sense that there would be a quota for imported films, but more leeway with collaborated features. So I worked on that film with them, firstly by sending a story outline and proposing a cast with Wang Dao, John Liu Chung-liang, and a Korean actress. The collaboration model was almost the same as the Hong Kong-Mainland productions nowadays, but we were much ahead of time. It cut down on production cost and garnered the support from local government. Thus I had made a tidy profit from *The Secret Rivals*. Adding to the fact that such films were also Hong Kong productions, I didn't have to worry about their appeal to the Hong Kong market, making me realised that independent cinema actually had its own ways of surviving and making money.

The Smash Hit: *Drunken Master*

Drunken Master could be said to be my other turning point of career. In those days, people were making *wuxia* films or gory action flicks because such genre of films would have steady sales in some of the less developed foreign markets. I had been frequently attending film festivals very early on in my career. While most people attended them in the hopes of winning awards, I was there to watch the films and observe the latest trends of the film business.

When I was at an overseas film festival, someone once told to me, 'These Chinese films of yours are too violent—so much blood and gore, with guts spilling out everywhere! These films won't be allowed to release in northern Europe.' This had got my wheels turning—could we make our films less violent? What if we retained the action and kung fu, but in a form of a comedy? Once Yuen Woo-ping and I saw a Jackie Chan film, and while he had given an outstanding performance, the film did badly in the box office. I asked Yuen, 'Who is this?' 'That's Jackie Chan!' 'I think his physical skills are pretty good!' 'Oh yes.' Yuen and Chan knew each other well because they used to be disciples under the same school. Therefore I said, 'Hey, if we have a chance, let's get Jackie in a film?' But after saying this we didn't follow up, until when I was considering incorporating comedy into films.

Norman Law, who was one of my assistant directors at the time, thought of the Chinese film title *Shexing Diaoshou* for *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (1978). In fact there was really a martial arts school under the same name on Castle Peak Road. As we all know, *shexing* means 'snake's stance', while *diaoshou* means 'eagle's claw', and together they would have formed *shexing diaoshou*. I thought it would be a pretty good



Snake in the Eagle's Shadow (1978) made Jackie Chan a star, and paved the way for him in the Japanese market.

stunt for films, so we worked together on a script and added some comedic elements in. The main character was a young man, so I immediately thought of Jackie Chan for the role. Yuen Woo-ping took me several rounds of persuasion before agreeing to be director of the film. Upon its release, *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* was an instant hit, both locally and overseas.

During this time, Lo Wei's film company wasn't doing very well, and Jackie Chan was in a contract with him, so I borrowed Chan from Lo for shootings. Our company consisted mostly of young people like Chan himself, so we had a great time working together. We also had a different working style, in which we emphasised collective creativity—after the script was drafted, everyone would come over to my place and discuss how the next scene should be played and filmed. Chan participated in this process too, and we added in a lot of gags and action ideas to the script after brainstorming. When we arrived at the set, we already knew what we had to do. Chan told me that he would join us if we gave him HK\$10,000 a month. I replied that I could afford to pay him HK\$10,000, but I wouldn't do it because he was Director Lo Wei's actor, and his contract wasn't over yet—it would be wrong of me to headhunt him. After the wrap-up of *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*, we made *Drunken Master*, also by borrowing Jackie Chan from Lo.

Speaking of *Drunken Master*, there was quite a story behind the film. *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* was a smash hit in Taiwan, so the distributors invited us over to have a look at the box office numbers, and brought us to Beitou for drinks. While everyone else was drunk and playing drinking games, I said to Yuen Woo-ping, 'They look like they are doing drunken boxing; let's make a film called *Drunken Master*.' We decided to put a lot of comedic elements into the film, and Jackie Chan also worked very hard on the piece. He would participate in our daily discussions of the script, lying on the floor while listening to us. Occasionally he would jump up and offer a few ideas, and then lie

back down. In the past he had single eyelids, but I asked him to undergo procedures to get double eyelids during the shoot of *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*. It had completely changed his looks. He had also injured his nose; nowadays we call him 'big-nosed', but he wasn't born that way; he had simply fallen on his face and the bones in his nose had been knocked askew. Chan put in a lot of effort, especially in the final sequence where he had to act drunk, for every take he would hold his breath until his face turned red. I went through a lot of books during the shoot, taking a leaf from here and there about drunken boxing. I had also found a drunken boxing master from the Mainland to perform for us. We made some changes to his movements, and incorporated elements of the real drunken boxing kung fu into our film.

Drunken Master caused a major stir when it was released. Not only was it a massive hit in Hong Kong, it sold out in almost every possible market in Southeast Asia. It was played in a theatre in Seoul for ten months, and a column in the Korean newspaper even begged the question, how could they make such a great film? I took the film and some photographs of Jackie Chan to Japan, but no one would take it. Later a manager from Toei Company Ltd. in Hong Kong had a look and felt that it was pretty good, and his counterparts in Japan also liked the film. I immediately flew over to negotiate a contract with them, and so both *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master* were released in Japan, thus laying the foundation of Jackie Chan's popularity in Japanese cinema.

An Eye for Talent – Tsui Hark

I usually produced films on my own, and collaborated with Golden Harvest in regards to local distribution; we had shared a good working relationship. The only interlude was Golden Princess, which was a cinema chain that had just been established, with big ambitions. They hadn't opened a production division yet, but they had the thought of it, so their boss, Gordon Fung Ping-chung came to discuss matters with me. Therefore, I gave the distribution rights of Tsui Hark's first film, *The Butterfly Murders* (1979), to Golden Princess. But since it didn't do well, I went back to Golden Harvest with my subsequent productions.

The Butterfly Murders was actually one of my most ambitious works. I had only watched one episode of Tsui's TV drama series, *Gold Dagger Romance* (1978), before deciding that he was an unusual talent, so I asked him to come work for me. The *Butterfly Murders* was filmed entirely in Taiwan; back then my films tended to do very well there and so it was easy for me to get funding from local investors. Tsui was a big spender, but I still gave him free rein. I remembered an investor complaining that the money was being spent far too quickly, and I wouldn't forget what he had said, 'You gotta wait for the banknotes to dry after they come out of the printer!' I told him that I would settle the final bill, and that he had nothing to worry about. *The Butterfly Murders* was a big-budget production; we created the seven-level pagoda level by level. We used the studio sets at Central Motion Pictures, and made changes to their pre-set exteriors.



Group photo of the cast and crew from *The Butterfly Murders* (1979). From left: Wong Shu-tong, Hsia Kuang-li, Tino Wong, Chen Chi-chi, director Tsui Hark, Michelle Yim, producer Ng See-yuen, Tsui Siu-ling, Lau Siu-ming and planning producer Hung Kuen-hoi.

One of Tsui's greatest assets was his prodigious talent in utilising the mise-en-scène.

I spent and lost a lot of money on *The Butterfly Murders*. The butterflies alone costed a fortune, as we would capture them from the Butterfly Valley, with a cost of NT\$1 each. Later with the change in weather, the cost of each had risen to NT\$5. Eventually we'd caught everything we could, but we hadn't finished the film—what should we do? We cut out some paper butterflies, and when the wind blew, they looked just the same as the real ones. We used real butterflies only when we had to film close-ups. When the film was first released, the box-office numbers for its midnight showing was bad, and the audience was not satisfied; it was something that upset me till this day. I'd told Tsui, 'I respect everything that you do, but can you please listen to me for once? Can you give Lau Siu-ming a final fight at the ending sequence?' Tsui wouldn't listen and refused to film that scene. If I insisted, the film would have definitely been a commercial success. I looked at the audience in the cinema, and saw that their reactions were underwhelming; it was miles apart from my previous action and kung fu flicks. That's when I knew that *The Butterfly Murders* would be a flop. I sat alone absent-mindedly in the lobby of Hong Kong Hotel until the film ended and the audiences flocked out from the theatre. It was late at night, and a fellow approached me—it was James Wong. He cursed and said, 'F***, it was great, this director's wonderful!' Wong knew about cinema, and he saw the merits of the film and the potential in Tsui. He didn't know Tsui back then, so I introduced them to each other. Later all the music in Tsui's films would have been done by Wong, including the song 'A Man Should Stand Strong' and the beautiful tunes in *Green Snake* (1993). Tsui and Raymond Lee had later made the very big hit *Dragon Inn* (1992) in the Mainland for me. I was as well the executive producer for the three sequels directed by Tsui, from Golden Harvest's *Once Upon A Time in China* series.

Beyond Hong Kong; Producing Films in the US

By the 1980s, Hong Kong action films were on the decline and a lot of films had failed to make a profit. Therefore, I went to the US to make English-language productions. The reason was that I wanted to film some so-called 'low-budget' films in the US with our action film techniques. One of my earlier successes was *No Retreat No Surrender* (1986), which had a budget of US\$1.2 million, with Corey Yuen Kwai as the director. Of course, as the producer, I had to multi-task and wear a lot of hats. During casting, there were two final candidates for the villain role in the film, and eventually I picked Jean-Claude Van Damme, a Belgian actor. Apart from his action chops, I also liked his accent, since most baddies back then were played by Russians; we couldn't cast someone with pure American accent. Van Damme shot to fame with this film of mine. *No Retreat No Surrender* was played in some of the mainstream cinema chains in the US, and during its release there was a day in which its box-office numbers was ranked number one. But most importantly, it got extremely high ratings when it was broadcasted on Home Box Office (HBO). Moreover, the film had done well in many overseas markets. I continued to make a number of English-language films that had found worldwide commercial success, such as *No Retreat, No Surrender 3: Blood Brothers* (1990) and *The King of the Kickboxers* (1990).

Later I went to the Mainland to develop and produce films. In recent years, I've put my focus on opening cinema chains in the Mainland, because I've realised that the development of the film industry would be empty words, without improving the quality of cinema facilities. So I concentrated on providing better service at our theatres, and I've opened over 40 cinemas. Now my chain, UME Cineplex, has become a top cinema brand in the country. If Hong Kong filmmakers would like to have a share of the Mainland's market, they would have to create opportunities for mutual benefits. [Translated by Rachel Ng]

Joseph Kuo Nan-hung: Mutual Benefits From Exchange Between Hong Kong and Taiwan

**Interviewers: Po Fung and May Ng (19 March 2015);
May Ng (4 September 2017)**

Collated by Simpson Choi



Joseph Kuo Nan-hung became acquainted with filmmaking when he was young. He began writing screenplays for Taiwanese dialect films at the age of 19 and made his directorial debut in his early 20s. He gained the recognition of director Li Han-hsiang and transitioned into making Mandarin films. Kuo then moved onto *wuxia* films and had an illustrious and varied career. Particularly memorable was his revelation on what had inspired him to start shooting in colours back in those days: his experience of watching colour films produced by the Shaw Brothers and Motion Picture & General Investment Co. Ltd. (MP & GI). He decided to leave the black-and-white Taiwanese dialect films after that. At one point, Hong Kong cinema was like a window in Asia, opening up a kaleidoscopic world of infinite imagination and aroused dreams in people's hearts.

During the 1960s and 70s, Kuo joined the eager ranks of Taiwanese filmmakers who established production companies in Hong Kong due to its favourable tax laws. Through the interview, Kuo not only enlightened us on the conveniences in Hong Kong at the time for filmmakers, he also gave details of his experience dealing with various international distributors, as well as the selling of film rights in that era. Amongst them, he was most proud of the release of *The 18 Bronzemen* (1976) in cinemas across Japan. Kuo's personal accounts served as precious testimony to a page in film history that was nearly forgotten—the interactions between the film industries of Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1970s.

Starting His Career With Taiwanese Dialect Films

My real name is Kuo Qing-chi. I entered the film industry as a scriptwriter when I was 19 years old. I wanted a professional pseudonym, so my third elder sister took me to a teacher. He gave me the name Kuo Nan-hung. However, I didn't wish to be called Kuo Nan-hung all the time. When I was 21 years old, I adopted another pseudonym, Jiang Bingham. My grandfather originally named me Kuo Hong-ting, but my father disliked it, so it was changed to Kuo Qing-chi. I changed it back to Kuo Hong-ting when I went to Hong Kong. My birthday was also changed back to the 5 June 1935, different from the one in Taiwan. I was born in the countryside during the Japanese occupation. My father had failed to register my birth immediately, and he would've been fined for the tardiness. So he changed it to the day he made the declaration: 20 July.

I left for Taipei at 19 years old to study screenwriting and film directing. I sold my first script just after I turned 20 years old. It was bought by The Asian Film Company, the largest Taiwanese dialect film production company at the time. The person in charge was Ting Pai-shien, and the film was *Death in West Bay* (1959, Taiwan). In fact, I had already established the Hongya Film Company Ltd in Taiwan back in 1957. However, I had to join the army at the end of that year, so I stopped the company for two years. It was not until 1960, after finishing my active service, that I reactivated the company for my first self-funded title. Hongya went on to produce 19 films on its own and 4 films for other companies. In other words, it made a total of 23 Taiwanese dialect films. However, I lost my drive in making black-and-white Taiwanese dialect films seven, eight years later because of the influx of colour films in Taiwan. These films were produced by Shaw Brothers and MP & GI from Hong Kong. I felt envious after watching these films, and I no longer wanted to make films for the small screen. I stopped filmmaking at that time and studied at Shih Hsin School of Journalism (later Shih Hsin University) for a year. I was fortunate enough to be scouted by director Li Han-hsiang and joined Grand Motion Picture Company as a filmmaker. I signed a three-year contract with him, and I made my first colour Mandarin film, *When Dreams Come True* (1969), in 1966.

Under the Mentorship of Li Han-hsiang; Working for Grand Motion Pictures

At the time, there were very few cinematographers in Taiwan who had the experience in shooting colour films. While filming *When Dreams Come True*, I approached Li and asked, 'Director, there's this cinematographer that I brought over from Taiwanese dialect film industry. I've collaborated with him a dozen times. Would it be alright if I let him shoot this colour film?' Li replied, 'If you think he is capable, then he is.' Li gave his executive directors a lot of power. Of course, he didn't always agree on everything. When the first cut came out, he would have plenty of feedback, of where things needed to be expended or edited. Still, it was good as I could learn a lot from him.

During that time, Li also brought a number of specialists and technicians to Taiwan, greatly broadening my horizons. Most period films were usually shot on locations. When Li shot *Seven Fairies*¹ (1964), he built sets such as little bridge over a stream in the studio and added a backdrop brought over from Hong Kong. It would be hard to recognise that it was filmed in a studio. This was director Li's creation, and it became a practice that would soon be adopted by other Taiwanese filmmakers. I had always respected and admired director Li. Later, I realised that he was more of an artist than a businessman. When shooting a period drama, his attention to details was absolute; every single prop must conform perfectly to his vision. During the filming of *When Dreams Come True*, we fashioned the set of Butterfly Wu's home after a luxurious salon in 1930s Shanghai. I said to Li, 'Director, we've spent NT\$50,000 on this incredibly beautiful set. Why don't we save it for the next film, Chiung Yao's *Love Is More Intoxicating Than Wine* (1967)? I can reuse it as Kuei Ya-lei's home.' His response was, 'That's not a good idea.' Within two weeks, the set was dismantled. He would rather tear a whole set down than let an old set be reused. NT\$50,000 was more than my directorial pay at the time and considered a huge sum 40 years ago. Nevertheless, I'm grateful to director Li for giving this home-grown director a chance. I learned so much from him.

A Taste of Success With My First Wuxia Film: *The Swordsman of All Swordsmen*

Grand Motion Pictures' *When Dreams Come True* and *Love Is More Intoxicating Than Wine* were both distributed by Union Film Company Ltd. So when the Grand Motion Pictures disbanded, Union Film approached me to work for them. When I was shooting *The Lost Romance* (1971, Taiwan), my mind was fixated on *Come Drink with Me* (1966) so much that I had requested a print from Shaw Brothers so I could see it again. By then I had already written a third of the script for *The Swordsman of All Swordsmen* (1968, Taiwan). I had never read any of the *wuxia* novels by Jin Yong, Gu Long or Szuma Chung-yuan before writing it. In addition to *Come Drink with Me*, which left me with the strongest impression, I also watched Hsu Tseng-hung's *wuxia* films as well as *One-armed Swordsman* (1967). However, 90% of my time went to watching Japanese swordplay films, and I wrote *The Swordsman of All Swordsmen* with their spirit in mind. Films from the *Legend of Musashi* series² were particularly influential on *The Swordsman of All Swordsmen*. I had never imagined that Union Film would agree to take the project right away, and that the film would go on to make over one million dollars.

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1. Li Han-hsiang's *Seven Fairies* was released in Taiwan in 1963.
 2. Japanese directors, Inagaki Hiroshi and Uchida Tomu had respectively filmed titles from the *Samurai, Legend of Musashi* series in the 1950s and 60s.

Established a Production Company in Hong Kong in the Late 1960s

Why did I end up in Hong Kong? It was because of making *The Swordsman of All Swordsmen* for Union Film. I was in Hong Kong to promote the film and realised that even though Hong Kong's film industry lacked governmental grants (subsidies), all filming equipment and materials were tax-free. Then I discovered that Hong Kong companies filming in Taiwan enjoyed tax breaks and that film stocks were much cheaper in Hong Kong. There were heavy taxes levied on imported filming equipment and materials in Taiwan. Knowing this advantage, I bought two flats in Kowloon and applied for residency in 1969. Afterwards I founded another production house in Hong Kong—Hong Hwa International Films (H.K.) Ltd.³

Hong Hwa was completely a Hong Kong company. It was founded almost 50 years ago, and there should be around 50, 60 films under its name. At that time, I decided to stay in Hong Kong to establish myself there.

Taiwan Implemented Tax Breaks for Filmmakers

Taiwan gave tax breaks to Hong Kong production companies filming in Taiwan. It was a clear attempt to attract Hong Kong companies to not only shoot in Taiwan, but create work opportunities for local film crews. This measure became pivotal for Taiwanese production companies as the film industry was transitioning from black-and-white to colour films. However, the negatives, film stocks, audio tracks and subtitled films all needed to be imported from Hong Kong or the US, with the government charging import duties of about 25 to 30% on all film materials. Local filmmaking organisations and drama associations, including myself, founded the Republic of China Film Producer Association (now called the Taiwan Film Producer Association) to reflect our displeasures to the government. These materials were so cheap in Hong Kong, yet the import duties to Taiwan were unreasonably high. The Free General Association from Hong Kong (Hong Kong and Kowloon Cinema & Theatrical Enterprise Free General Association Limited) also lent us a helping hand. In response, the government issued a decree that allowed Hong Kong companies to bring their own film stocks when they shoot in Taiwan. They had to pay a 20 to 30 % levy (as deposit) at the taxation office, but it would be refunded when the film was completed and exported back to Hong Kong. This initiative from the treasury department was made possible with everyone's efforts. It also led to over a hundred Taiwanese production firms establishing companies in Hong Kong. They were mostly shell companies that had no real operations in Hong Kong. Once they received the business licences, they bought film stocks to be imported back to Taiwan. Many of those companies also edited, dubbed and subtitled their films in Taiwan. If a film didn't

3. Hong Hwa Company was renamed as Hong Hwa International Films (H.K.) Ltd. on the 24 July 1984.

have too many prints, it would be printed locally as well. Otherwise, all negatives would be exported to Hong Kong for processing before being imported back to Taiwan.

Efficient Film Distribution in Hong Kong Than in Taiwan

Another reason I stayed in Hong Kong was because of its technology and expertise in filmmaking that had surpassed Taiwan. Its system was more comprehensive and its people were more efficient.

What impressed me the most happened around 30, 40 years ago; I had stationed in Hong Kong for a long time and would only return to Taiwan for film shoots. It was so convenient to go in and out of Hong Kong. During that time, travelling with a Taiwanese passport was very troublesome; you could only have one set destination at a time. Once you said that you were going to, say, Thailand, then that's the only place you could go. With martial law in place in Taiwan at the time, each traveller needed a special exit permit that had both an exit and entry visa. Once you had the permit, you could book a plane ticket with your passport. The travel agent had to report your trip to the immigration department 72 hours before departure. The report was for the Taiwan Garrison Command, which needed to know who was leaving on every single flight. A passport would be useless without the exit permit. I arrived in Hong Kong in 1968, and I successfully applied for a green-coloured Hong Kong identification card the following year. That document allowed me to travel freely. I was so touched that I could go anywhere in the world as long as there's a flight available. It would've been so much more troublesome in Taiwan.

In additions, there were no mandatory inspections for film stock imported from Hong Kong, whereas everything needed to be inspected for a Taiwan production. Releasing a film in Taiwan at the time meant undergoing a rigorous inspection process. It would be checked once for local release, and then checked again for export to ensure that there would be no corrupted content. The audio and subtitled prints all needed to be checked. Sometimes, the inspections and custom procedures could take up to a month, despite me having already set up a release date in Singapore. It was pretty nerve-wrecking! Two-thirds of my films were reliant on foreign market, so my films after *The Swordsman of All Swordsmen* were mostly sent to Hong Kong for editing, scoring and processing before being re-imported back to Taiwan. During that time, I collaborated the most with Chou Fu-liang and Frankie Chan on music scoring. The former had assisted me in both Taiwan and Hong Kong, while the latter helped me in Hong Kong.

Collaboration With Shaw Brothers

In 1968, *The Swordsman of All Swordsmen* broke box office records in Hong Kong, earning HK\$1.16 million. Two months later, the general manager of Shaw Brothers,

In 1969, Joseph Kuo Nan-hung signed a two-film director contract with Shaw Brothers. Pictured on the left is Raymond Chow, Shaws' production manager at the time.



Laurence Ling, arranged a meeting with me. He said, 'Director Kuo, your film, *The Swordsman of All Swordsmen* is truly remarkable, our boss has also seen it and would like to hire you as a filmmaker for Shaw Brothers.' However, I wanted to show my gratitude for Union Film at the time, so I explained to Ling that I would only consider going to Hong Kong after filming *The Ten Masters* for Union. It turned out that the historical research for *The Ten Masters* took a lot longer than expected. Then I worked with Tongjie (Tong Yuejuan) on two other films, *The Son of Swordsman* (1969) and *Superior Darter* (1969). All this resulted in a delay of around ten months.

I felt a bit sorry and prepared myself to sign with Shaw Brothers. That's when Raymond Chow came to me. He was an extremely considerate and thoughtful person. I kept telling him that I was a little scared of Hong Kong because it was such a big place. Being the only child, my parents also didn't want me to go abroad. He smiled and said, 'Joseph, don't be afraid. If you are scared of signing a long-term contract, then why don't you just sign up for first-look deal first?' I suggested we signed for two films, but I stipulated in using my screenplays. At the time, they gave a fixed production budget for me to shoot in Taiwan because they all knew that I was a writer-director. Once I signed on, I went to see Sir Run Run Shaw for approval. Shaw said, 'I also distributed your *The Swordsman of All Swordsmen*. What other screenplays do you have?' I said I had one called *Mission Impossible* (1971) and asked him to have a look. When the production wrapped, Chow had already left the Shaw Brothers.

Later on, Sir Run Run Shaw asked me what I had in mind next. I responded that I had another script, *The Mighty One* (1972). I didn't spend much time networking in the film industry because I spent my free time writing scripts. I signed a two-film deal with Shaw Brothers; *Mission Impossible* was shot at its studio, but *The Mighty One* wasn't. Mr Shaw kindly said, 'Joseph, we'll give you the hottest star for *The Mighty One*.' And who was that? 'Ivy Ling Po'. I said no honestly because director Cheng Kang was filming *The Fourteen Amazons* (1972) with Ling. He was a meticulous person and his films could take up to two years to complete. But Mr Shaw insisted, 'Hey, let's compromise and make this work.' However, once we started our two-month shoot, Ling was only available to me for a week. I had to pay rent for the three sets I constructed at the Central Motion



With Ivy Ling Po as the lead for
The Mighty One (1972)

Pictures. The shoot went over budget by about NT\$700,000 to NT\$800,000 in the end. Once I finished filming, I sent all the negatives to Shaws for editing, scoring, etc. The extra cost was never recovered and I had resigned to that. Despite everything, I was grateful to Shaws because my rate increased by several times after I signed with them. For that, the two films I made at Shaw Brothers left me fond memories.

The Overnight Sensation of *The 18 Bronzemen*

I followed *The Mighty One* with *The Ghost's Sword* (also known as the sequel to *Sorrowful to a Ghost* [1971]). Of the 230 films produced in Taiwan annually at the time, more than a hundred of those were slipshod *wuxia* films. Due to this oversaturation of *wuxia* films in the overseas market, I stopped for about a year. After that, I reconnected with producer Li Shin and the old crew for a new film. They all thought I wanted to shoot a modern love story, but I told them it would be a *wuxia* film. The screenplay for *The 18 Bronzemen* (1976)⁴ was written ten years prior, back when I lacked the skills and resources to do special effects and sets for this genre. I had no idea where to begin at the time; the budget was high and I didn't have the confidence to shoot it. The cost of an average *wuxia* film during that era was about NT\$4 to 5 million, but I had spent over NT\$10 million of my own money for this production. I had never expected the film to break box office records and become an overnight sensation.⁵

The 18 Bronzemen also made Carter Wong a superstar, even more popular than fellow cast members David Lin and Roc Tien Peng. People began to fight over having

4. *The 18 Bronzemen* was released in Taiwan in 1975.



Photo during the shoot of *The 18 Bronzemen* (1976)

Wong in their films. He only signed a first-look contract with me, which meant that he would be free to take on other roles as long as I didn't have a film for him. Wong ended up starring in a dozen of films over the course of three years. Things got so intense that he would be threatened by mobsters with knives and guns to act in films. In the end, I advised him to leave for the US, and he did soon after.

My idea at the time was that *wuxia* films had to be distributed internationally. That's why around 60% of the *The 18 Bronzemen* earnings came from overseas sales. Besides countries that screened the pirated version, the film was released in France, Italy, Spain and Germany.

I still remembered that the buyer of the film from West Germany was a 32-year-old young man. He came to see me carrying a French newspaper with an article on *The 18 Bronzemen*. He said, 'My uncle owns cinemas that he rents out. If I buy this film, he will have the best cinemas to screen your film. It will be shown in a dozen or more cinemas across the country.' At last, I sold the film to him for US\$60,000. Half a month later, he said he wanted to dub the film in German, so I sent him the soundtracks and special effect rolls. Seven to eight months later, he asked me if I had any more Shaolin films. I probed him on how the film had performed, and he replied, 'To be honest, I made US\$600,000.' That was how lucrative the film industry could be.

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5. The Hong Kong box-office record for *The 18 Bronzemen* was HK\$1,744,324.90. It was listed with the 10th highest box-office sales in 1976, among other Chinese and Western films released in Hong Kong of the same year. See *Box Office Records of 1969-1989 Film Releases*, Hong Kong: Film Biweekly Publishing House, 1990, p 100 (in Chinese).



The 18 Bronzemen (1976) was extremely popular, and was screened internationally in Japan, France, Italy, Spain and Germany, etc.

The 18 Bronzemen Swayed Over Japan

Around 1981, Hong Hwa received a call from an English speaker. When asked where he was calling from, he answered from Japan. It turned out that he was Mr Nakajima, the international director for Japan's Toho Co. Ltd. He explained, 'I'm from Toho in Japan, and we have asked Herald Films (Nippon Herald Films, Inc.) to get in touch with you. Herald Films would like to accompany the international director to Hong Kong and view a print of a Shaolin film from your company.' Naturally, I said yes, and they came two days later. After watching the film, I offered them the Japanese distribution rights for US\$1 million.⁶ They replied, 'Why is it so expensive? The films we import from the US don't even cost that much.' After that they wanted to renegotiate on the price and terms. So I made another proposal—for Toho to release my film at 100 cinemas simultaneously. They responded, 'Oh, that would be impossible. We mainly screen American films by Paramount and Columbia Pictures...' There would be no further negotiations then. Why did I insist on this? *The 18 Bronzemen* had already made a lot of money, so it didn't really matter to me. Half a month went by and they called again, 'If we release the film in 100 cinemas, do you have any other condition?' I told them I would need a minimum guarantee. 'A guarantee of how much?' US\$300,000. 'A minimum guarantee of US\$300,000!' I also stipulated another condition—that they would pay for the cost of making over a hundred prints for the release. After all, printing cost was high, and the printing quality in Japan was superior to that of Hong Kong. This issue stretched the negotiation for another two weeks. Finally, they said, 'Ok, we will make the prints, but Director Kuo, do you know that in order to screen a film in Toho cinemas across the country, the marketing cost alone would be US\$1 million. We have billboards, TV ads...' So I lowered my minimum guarantee from US\$300,000 to US\$200,000. That's how I fought to get my film in 100 cinemas.

Later on, I even inserted a few extra scenes to the film. Since Toho, Japan's biggest film company, was showing *The 18 Bronzemen* across the country, I wanted to make the most out of it. Scenes with children were always a hit with Japanese audience, so I

6. According to others it was US\$500,000. See Zheng Deqing (chief editor), *The World Directed by Joseph Kuo*, Kaohsiung: Kaohsiung Film Archive, 2004, p 73 (in Chinese).

Yuen Woo-ping was hired as the martial arts choreographer for *Born Invincible* (1978).



wanted to add scenes of the three protagonists arriving at the Shaolin Temple as kids, as well as their grueling training. Herald Films agreed: ‘Good, we will give you another three weeks, but Director Kuo, our company will not be reimbursing you for the costs of the extra scenes.’ I agreed because I was the one who wanted these changes. In the end, I spent NT\$2.7 million on a ten-day shoot. I inserted the scenes into the original negative and created a new international version of the film. Herald arranged the film to be shown at Toho’s flagship cinema, the Hibiya Theatre, along with releases across the country. It caused quite a stir at the time.⁷

Later I traced back to why Toho would ask Herald Films to inquire about *The 18 Bronzemen*. It was because of an article in a celebrated Japanese monthly magazine called *Bungeishunjū*, which had introduced a great Taiwanese *jidaigeki* named *The 18 Bronzemen* (Note: swordplay films are called *jidaigeki* in Japan). After reading the article, Toho approached Herald to find out more, and it turned out the author of the piece was none other than Kyū Eikan. Kyū was a Japan-based writer from Taiwan, who had won a Naoki Prize in Japan with his novel. During Chinese New Year, he watched *The 18 Bronzemen* with his family at the Great China Cinema in Taipei and wrote the article after returning to Japan. It was only after making enquires with the Japanese that I knew that it was Mr Kyū Eikan who had written that article.

Hiring Yuen Woo-ping as the Martial Arts Choreographer for *Born Invincible*

Sometimes later, three of my films, including *The 18 Bronzemen*, *The Temple Ablaze* (1977) and *Born Invincible* (1978), were distributed by Golden Harvest in Hong Kong. The

7. *The 18 Bronzemen* was released nationally in Japan in 1983. See Huang Ren (ed), *Joseph Kuo: The Godfather of Taiwan Film*, Taipei: Showwe Information Co. Ltd., 2012, p 59 (in Chinese). With regards to the negotiation between Kuo and Herald Films on the Japanese release of *The 18 Bronzemen*, see note 6.

others were sold directly by me to other companies. During that time, foreign distributors approached my company to negotiate the rights, and I sold them separately. Golden Harvest had approached me to be my distributor for Hong Kong. So whenever I had a film that I believed would be a box office hit, my first call would be to Raymond Chow because he's great with distribution. In fact, my relationship with Golden Harvest was a fateful one; I had a chance to own shares in the company, but I let it past because I was conservative and erred on the side of caution. I was afraid to do anything too risky.

When I was filming *Born Invincible*, Yuen Woo-ping wasn't my first choice as the martial arts choreographer. At first, I asked my company manager in Hong Kong to find a choreographer named Sa Gor (Chan Siu-pang), who was referred to me by Michael Chan Wai-man. However, the manager signed on a different candidate. Later I came across *The Secret Rivals, Part 2* (1977), the film where 'Big-Eyed' Yuen Woo-ping (Note: 'Big-Eyed' was an industry nickname given to Yuen) first worked as a martial arts choreographer, and I decided to hire him. I then asked director Ng See-yuen to arrange a meeting with Yuen Woo-ping, Corey Yuen Kwai and the others on the fourth floor of the Fortuna Hotel on Nathan Road to talk about the deal. I told Yuen that in a couple of weeks, I would start shooting a new film called *Inborn Qigong* in Taiwan (the film wasn't named *Born Invincible* yet; Yuen suggested that name later). I asked him how many more people he would bring along to Taiwan. He replied that it would be Corey Yuen, his brothers Yuen Shun-i, Yuen Cheung-yan and some others. I agreed and rented several suites in the New May Flower Hotel for them. In the end, Yuen arrived in Taipei with his assistant Corey Yuen and nine other martial artists and stunt doubles.

Here was another example of a 'missed treasure', of how I had let an incredible prospect passed by. After the first five, six days of pre-production in Taipei, Yuen approached me and said, 'Director Kuo, I've read your screenplay. Why don't we consider a change of direction?' What kind of change? 'There are too many films with knives and swords lately; I have a script here, would you like to have a look first?' I said yes. What he showed me was the screenplay of *Beggar So*. I finished it within one night; it was set during the late Qing dynasty, with barehanded combat and beggars. It was quite playful. My mind was not as agile as Yuen; I hadn't caught on yet to its potential, but Yuen did. The next day after lunch, I went to the hotel and spoke with 'Big-Eyed'. I explained that I would shoot his *Beggar So* next, as everything was already set for this film. I had already signed with Nancy Yen and Mark Lung Koon-mo as leads, and with Jack Lung Sai-ga as the male supporting lead. He agreed. Instead of making *Beggar So*, I pushed on with *Born Invincible*. Two months later, I got a call from Ng See-yuen, 'Director Kuo, how long will you still need "Big-Eyed" for?' I replied that we would wrap up in a week. 'Oh, so it's almost done, then.' He continued, "'Big-Eyed" came back last month and he has a script that I would like to shoot. Can you please let him come back earlier for pre-production?' I thought about how we had been there for each other, so I told him that it should be fine since it's only the ending that needed to be shot. It would be fine as long as Corey Yuen was there. So I let 'Big-Eyed' go back early.

Half a year later, I bumped into 'Big-Eyed', Corey Yuen and the others at the entrance of Yue Hwa Chinese Emporium. It was two or three o'clock in the afternoon, and they had just finished lunch. They asked, 'Director, do you want to watch *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (1978) this afternoon?' 'What is *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*?' 'It's the new film by director Ng See-yuen. There will be a test screening at the Mandarin Laboratory (film-processing company).' Really? I would like to see it. What time would it be? 'In an hour.' So I rushed over to Mandarin to watch the film. Afterwards, I realised that it's an adaptation of the *Beggar So* screenplay.⁸ That film was going to spark another cinematic revolution, similar to the way *Dragon Inn* (1968)⁹ and *The Big Boss* (1971) did. I couldn't sleep for the following three nights.

Exchange Between Hong Kong and Taiwan Benefit the Film Industry

Back in those days, collaborations between Hong Kong and Taiwan were really about complementing each other's deficiencies. The tax breaks lasted for decades. Countless Hong Kong production companies, including Golden Harvest and Shaw Brothers, shot their films in Taiwan. Even Lo Wei, who was in Golden Harvest at the time, also filmed in Taiwan. As Hong Kong lacked locations for period and *wuxia* films, and it was not possible to film in the Mainland at the time, people like Wong Cheuk-hon, Tong Yuejuan and many more companies went to Taiwan to shoot. They made good use of Taiwan's landscapes—its mountainous wilderness, open seas and more. Furthermore, Taiwan already had four film studios, including Tongyi, Central Motion Pictures at Wufeng District and others. They were all small studios, but the companies could also use the Central Motion Picture Corporation studio, which had street sets. In Hong Kong, only Shaw Brothers had a studio like that. That's why independent filmmakers went to shoot in Taiwan. That was the reason for the exchange: to complement each other's deficiencies. On the other hand, Taiwan also took advantage of Hong Kong's superiority in dubbing, sound recording and film processing technologies. For example, for *Seven Fairies*, director Li Han-hsiang brought a few dozens of technicians from Hong Kong to Taiwan and jumpstarted local colour film productions. There was also the free flow of talents; Shaw Brothers signed on a lot of Taiwanese directors and actors, including my two directing protégés, Chang Peng-yi and Tsai Yang-ming. Actresses from Taiwan such as Shih Sze, Wang Ping, Lily Ho, Ching Li and Brigitte Lin also ended up in Shaw Brothers' films. This exchange of talents, locations and techniques resulted in mutual benefits for both parties. [Translated by Hayli Chwang]

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8. The plot of 'Beggar So' had no real connections with the scenario of *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*. However, it was clearly related to *Drunken Master* (1978) at a much deeper level. Despite this, the character Pai Chang-tien played by Simon Yuen Siu-tin did resemble a beggar in terms of appearance. Was *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* an adaptation of the script 'Beggar So' that Kuo had read? It would be difficult to ascertain today.
 9. *Dragon Inn* was released in Taiwan in 1967.

Bai Ying:

Hong Kong and Taiwanese Productions in Korea Played a Role in Nurturing Korean Talents

**Interviewers: Cecilia Wong, May Ng and Kwok Ching-ling
(25 February 2015);
May Ng (30 November 2017)**

Collated by Cindy Shin and May Ng



Born in Beijing and raised in Taiwan, Bai Ying signed with Union Film Company after successfully auditioning at an open call in 1966, launching a distinguished acting career closely entwined with the *wuxia* genre. His piercing gaze caught the attention of director King Hu, who later cast him in multiple productions and served as his mentor. Bai Ying made his acting debut in *Dragon Inn* (1967) and received critical acclaim for his role as the villain, the white-haired eunuch. He followed up his debut with star turns in Hu's *A Touch of Zen* (1971), *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973) and *The Valiant Ones* (1975), playing chivalrous swordsmen. His ability to play both villains and heroes with equal aplomb established his reputation as an iconic *wuxia* actor in both Hong Kong and Taiwan throughout the 1970s.

The following article is a distillation of two interviews with Bai Ying conducted by Hong Kong Film Archive, chronicling his experiences of working with the legendary King Hu, as well as his acting career in the 1970s in both Hong Kong and Taiwan. Bai also talked about his time filming in Korea and his time spent teaching martial arts stunts at the film school founded by renowned Korean director Shin Sang-ok. Although his stint there was brief, Bai's contribution served as a testament to the cultural and professional exchange between filmmaking talents in Hong Kong, Taiwan and their peers in the rest of Asia.

Bai Ying's makeup portrait
for *Dragon Inn* (1968)



Debut on the Silver Screen With *Dragon Inn*

My birth name was Bai Ying. I was born in Beijing in 1941. I moved to Taiwan with my mother and other relatives when I was eight years old. In 1966, Union Film Company held an open call to recruit new talent. I signed up and auditioned. The head of the jury was director King Hu. Union Film accepted me and signed me to a six-year contract, effective from 1966 to 1972.

I immediately adopted the stage name 'White Eagle' (also pronounced as 'Bai Ying' but written differently in Chinese). At the same open call, Union Film signed up a total of seven actresses and six actors. The actresses included Polly Shang-kuan, Han Hsiang-chin, Yang Mong-hua, Nancy Yen, Hsu Feng and Zhao Yingying. There was also Chang Shu-mei, who ended up never appearing on screen. The actors included Shih Chun, me, Wan Chung-shan, Roc Tien Peng, Qi Wei and Wen Tian.

After being accepted by Union Film, we attended classes every day at their production offices on Hangzhou South Road. The instructor, Kao Ming, taught us about the rules on set and shared his work experiences. Apart from attending classes, we were also required to do manual labour for the production. The men made props, including the palanquin that I sat in for films and prop swords. The women assisted with the wardrobe because there was an overwhelming number of costumes required, including those for the heroes, the villains and the *fanzi* (secret service foot soldiers). All of them were made from scratch.

At the time, Director Hu rarely spoke to us. Whenever we encountered him, we greeted him by calling him 'Master.' He would merely grunt in response and then walk

away. Our only real conversation happened during the first audition. After appraising your physical appearance and personality, he knew immediately if you were cut out for acting.

It was a month or so before the film crew embarked on the location shoots. One morning, Wu Hsu-ching—Fang Yuan’s disciple who was sent over from the Shaw Brothers—did my makeup and even gave me a white wig cap. The wardrobe lady helped me with the costume fitting for the ornate embroidered robes. Director Hu took a look at me then told me to take a picture. That was my costume reference photograph. After studying all the production stills on the very next day, the director decided that I should play Eunuch Cao (Note: Eunuch Cao Shaoqin).

Location Filming Along Central Cross-Island Highway

The *Dragon Inn* production began outdoors. Our first stop was Houli District in Taichung City. There was a dry riverbed in the vicinity filled with stones and not a drop of water. The mountain next to it was called Huoyan Mountain. Our lodgings were located in the nearby Wufeng District. Each morning, we climbed Huoyan Mountain to help level the ground at the location. Once we were done, set builders from Taichung arrived and built the façade of the Dragon Inn. The exterior scenes of the inn were shot there. Construction took over two months to complete. During that period, we helped move things and clear the site. The girls delivered our meals at noontime.

The area around the site was in disarray. There were huge boulders everywhere and garbage that floated downstream ages ago. We went there to clear out the refuse and garbage every day. After that, we moved the big stones to the side so that the dry riverbed resembled a road. It was the road that Shih Chun’s character takes to reach Dragon Inn. Once the exterior of the inn was completed, we filmed for a fortnight, non-stop. Even the scene with the flaming arrows was shot there. After we completed shooting in Huoyan Mountain, we set off for the Central Cross-Island Highway.

Our production’s first stop along the Central Cross-Island Highway was Lishan. That was followed by Dayuling, the highest elevation along the Central Cross-Island Highway at an altitude of over 2,000 metres above sea level. Passing Dayuling, the Central Cross-Island Highway ends near Tianxiang, a flatland. At the time, the Central Cross-Island Highway was simply a dirt road and had not yet been paved. It was quite rustic and lined with a few utility poles.

We spent a relatively short time in Lishan because the area had already been somewhat modernised. However, Fushoushan Farm could still pass for a period setting, and we shot a few scenes there. Dayuling was quite barren. Because of the high altitude, very few people lived there except aboriginal tribes. We stayed in Dayuling for over two months and shot many scenes there, mostly for the climactic showdown.

After that, we went to Tianxiang to film transition scenes, including the scene where Miao Tien’s character, Pi Shaotang, and his men scout the path ahead for my character

in hopes of evade Shih Chun and his people. There was a river there with many large overhanging rocks. The scene where Roy Chiao encounters Miao Tien was also shot there. There were many tunnels and caves in Tianxiang. Once you step inside, all you could see was marble. It was very beautiful. Director Hu liked it very much. There were 50 to 60 people in our crew and we reserved a number of small hotels for living nearby.

Dragon Inn Main Set Shooting at Danan Studio

After completing the location shoot, we returned to Taipei. We worked at Danan Studio every day, preparing for the shoot on the main set. Danan Studio was in Taoyuan, situated near Taipei, and it was owned by Union Film. The interior of Dragon Inn was a two-story structure. For this production, Union Film purchased a slew of lights and borrowed every available light available in the Taipei film industry. After the interior was completed, we worked on the set every day. I was assigned the task of mounting overhead lights. From construction to set dressing to mounting lights, the entire set preparation took two to three months to complete.

During the shoot, I would be on the lighting bridge assisting the lighting crew when I wasn't required for any scenes. The other novice actors worked for the props department, sound crew or other teams. Director Hu told us clearly from the beginning, 'you 13 recruits are actors and will always be actors; there is no star system at Union Film.'

Bits and Bobs Working on the Set of *Dragon Inn*

The shot list was only available when we arrived on set; once we saw the list, we would know what was to be filmed that day. Director Hu drew his own shot list. He divided each page into two sections; the upper section was further divided into four rectangles, which he used to make the storyboard of the shots. The drawings clearly outlined the action and the sizes of each shot; everything was represented down to the exact detail. Martial arts choreographer Han Yingjie knew exactly how to choreograph the fight scenes as soon as he saw the shot list. Even the scale of each shot was indicated in the drawings. If the shot was a close-up, the director drew a big head, and we the actors would remind the makeup artist to clean up our faces.

We simply did whatever Director Hu instructed us to do. Afterwards, we'd understand the intent and learn from it. During the filming of *Dragon Inn*, I only had one 'NG' and it was at the Fushoushan Farm in Lishan. In the scene, my entourage was taking a break when the First Officer reports to me. I grow enraged and did this (pointing at someone with the index and middle fingers pressed together), which was a gesture from Peking opera. Hu hated such stylised gestures. He had one rule: Peking opera gestures were not allowed on his set. He said that cinema should be free from such restrictions and conventions.

The fight scenes were, of course, choreographed according to Director Hu's specifications. He would first inform Han Yingjie of his design. After digesting the information, Han instructed us on what to do and we rehearsed the movements. Director Hu would observe, then he would proceed with a master shot once we had the movements down. After that, he went in for other angles for several key points in the fight sequence. When you watch his *wuxia* films, you want to move along with the action on screen because he was highly sensitive to the details. The audience's point of view alternated between closing in to the action and kept far away in order to generate greater excitement and anticipation. The editing was the key to the success of Hu's *wuxia* films.

Later at the end, Wan Tsung-shan and Wen Tian's characters betrayed me. My opponents in the film were played by Shih Chun, Hsueh Han and Polly Shang-kuan and they fought against me as well. My cohorts against Shih Chun and his people included Miao Tien—the First Officer, Han Yingjie—the Second Officer, and some *fanzi*. Those *fanzi* did not do much stunt fighting and most of them are for transitions. The stunts in *Dragon Inn* were quite basic, though King Hu's designs were quite abstract. About midway through the production of *A Touch of Zen*, professional stuntmen were brought into the fold. It was then the director decided to adopt another approach for the design and choreography of the fight sequences.

Han Yingjie had previously worked in Hong Kong before following King Hu and Yang Shih-ching (Note: the film's producer) to Taiwan. When he was in Hong Kong, he'd worked with the Yuen's clan, whose members included Yuen Lung (alias Sammo Hung), Yuen Biao and Yuen Lau (alias Jackie Chan). Han was an elder in the Yuen's clan, so the members all had to address him Uncle-Master accordingly. Han had also previously worked in the circus. Juggling, trapeze, acrobatic... he could do them all.

Han took two people with him to Taiwan, but it wasn't long before they left Han to fend for himself in Taiwan and returned to Hong Kong. When *Dragon Inn* was in production, the use of stuntmen wasn't a common practice in Taiwan. Professional stuntmen were quite rare there at the time. Productions would often resort to hiring Peking opera *wusheng* (male warriors), who were trained to do acrobatics for fight scenes. Polly Shang-kuan and Shih Chun had designated stunt doubles—Shang-kuan's stunt-double was a Peking opera *wudan* (female warriors).

The wirework team was from Taiwan. They were very professional. If they were careless, lives could be endangered. Someone could fall and be badly injured. During the climactic battle, the shot of me flying through the air to attack Shih Chun was achieved through wirework. Sometimes, I would be required to use a trampoline to get airborne for the camera. After I bounced off the trampoline, I somersaulted through the air with the help of wires. A shot of me turning around after landing, ready to charge at Shih Chun, was inserted later. Director Hu put at least four shots together for that single action alone.

Han Yingjie taught me basic trampoline skills while we were shooting *Dragon Inn* in

Dayuling. I had never used a trampoline before. After watching me fall a few times, he said to me, 'Always keep your legs straight as your feet hit the surface of the trampoline.' I kept his words in mind and straightened my legs before hitting the trampoline, but I bounced too high up and lost control. He had placed a safety mat next to the trampoline, but I overshot it completely and landed face-first on the ground, leaving me battered and bruised. It took me four or five days of practice to master the technique.

After *Dragon Inn* wrapped, Director Hu arranged for me to work with the editor, Chen Hung-min. It turned out that Director Hu wanted to give me the opportunity to learn about editing. Because of that experience, I understood how shots were put together. It laid the foundation for my future career as an action director.

Making of *A Touch of Zen*

After *Dragon Inn*, we went on to make *A Touch of Zen* (1971).¹

I remember the production of *A Touch of Zen* began on location. The first location was along the Central Cross-Island Highway, the stretch behind Dayuling and just before Tianxiang. As I mentioned before, Director Hu had fallen in love with the scenery there when shooting *Dragon Inn*, but we didn't shoot very much of it at the time. That's why he chose to begin the filming *A Touch of Zen* at that location.

After the climactic battle in the film's first part, there's a scene in which Hsu Feng and an old monk stand before a temple, watching as Shih Chun disappears in the distance. That temple was located in Tianxiang.

We shot in Tianxiang for two months before moving on to Zhushan. We spent over a month there and stayed in a nearby small hotel. Each day we climbed uphill to a bamboo forest where there was a huge swath of bamboo trees. Director Hu chose the bamboo forest for the filming location because the bamboos created a sense of speed. When a person moves past a few trees, he wouldn't appear to be moving very quickly. But if he moved through a thick bamboo forest, it created the illusion of very quick movement. I think the director's main goal was to create a heightened sense of speed for the movements.

Hsu Feng had a stunt double for the wirework stunts and shots involving the trampoline. In the climactic scene, we joined forces to battle the villains. There was a shot in which I catapulted her high into the air before she dived back down to attack. The insert for that shot was filmed at Sun Moon Lake. The production built an eight-foot platform at the pier at the deepest part of the lake. As the sun was setting, the camera captured Hsu Feng's stunt double taking a dive into the water. That shot was placed

1. See Wong, Edmond (ed), *The Chronicle of Taiwan Cinema 1898-2000* (Vol 2, 1965-1984), Taipei: Council for Cultural Affairs, National Film Archive, 2005 (in Chinese). The production of *Dragon Inn* was wrapped on 25 May 1967. *A Touch of Zen* began filming on 14 December of the same year. See respectively p 526 and p 533.



Bai Ying played the righteous General Shi in *A Touch of Zen* (1971), directed by King Hu, and had consecutive fighting scenes with the antagonists.

after the one in which Hsu Feng descended from the trees.

In another setup, they tied one end of a rope to Hsu Feng's waist and attached the other end to the leg of the camera tripod. As she ran, the camera was pulled along with her while maintaining the same distance.

After completing the location shoot in Zhushan, we returned to Taipei to prepare for the street scenes and interior shots at Union Film's Danan Studio. An ancient street set was built in the studio. Both sides of the street were lined with houses and shops. In the film, Shih Chun's shop and residence are located there, across the road from the deserted General's Residence where Hsu Feng's character finds refuge. There was also a defensive wall behind the street. After the construction of the General's Residence was completed, we went to the set each morning to make it appear weather-worn and dilapidated.²

We filmed inside the General's Residence for over two months. The toughest part was shooting at night every day for the ghost haunting scene. Many later films were shot on that the same set, including *Iron Mistress* (1969, Taiwan) and *Black Invitation* (1969, Taiwan), both of which I appeared in.

My role in the film was General Shi Wenqiao. Director Hu, who worked very

2. Ibid. p 568. Construction for the ancient outdoor set in Danan Studio was completed on 23 August 1968. King Hu and his crew moved in immediately afterwards to shoot *A Touch of Zen*.

spontaneously, took quite a relaxed approach in the development for all my characters. Pretending to be blind wasn't difficult for me at all. I devised a few physical mannerisms, which I rehearsed before presenting them to the director. Once he approved, we started filming immediately. My movements were simple, and I pretended to be blind by brandishing a crane. In one scene, a few *fanzi* attacked me and the fight ended after a few moves. That's how the fight was designed by Director Hu.

In terms of acting, Director Hu worked with actors in a specific way; he knew exactly what he wanted from the start. I did what I could, and he would only ask me to go a little further, to dig a little bit deeper. He treated all the actors the same. I think what he tried to do was to inspire us to perform. If your acting skills were mediocre, it was fine as long as you tried your best. With enough practice, you were bound to improve. He didn't communicate much with Shih Chun and Hsu Feng because they would not have responded to such coaching; their expressions were always the same. Director Hu managed to capture their distinct personalities and essence instead.

A Touch of Zen was based on a story from *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, written by Pu Songling, a writer in Qing Dynasty. I remember the film script ended with Shih Chun and Hsu Feng disappearing together. That ending would have corresponded with the supernatural themes of *Strange Tales*. In the film version, the revelation that Hsu Feng isn't a ghost leads to a resolution, though not necessarily a happy one: Her character gives birth to a child but cannot bear the burden of responsibility, so she decides to become a Buddhist nun. Shih Chun's character leaves with the child in the end.

Coming to Hong Kong for Career Growth; Endless Film Contracts

While the first part of *A Touch of Zen* was in production, I also performed in three other Union Film productions, including *Iron Mistress*, *Black Invitation* and *The Grant Passion* (1970, Taiwan). By 1969, principal photography for *A Touch of Zen* was almost complete. Armed with a recommendation letter written by Director Hu, I came to Hong Kong and appeared in Shaw Brothers production *The Eunuch* (1971). After that, I made a few films for Golden Harvest, including Huang Feng's *The Angry River* (1971, the first production of Golden Harvest), Lo Wei's *The Invincible Eight* (1971, the first Golden Harvest production released) and Law Chi's *Thunderbolt* (1973). All of these films were shot in Hong Kong. I also remember acting in Chiao Chuang's *Story of the Thirty-Six Killers* (1971). It was a very well-made film. I would love to see it again if I get that chance.

I've made quite a few films in Korea. During my first stint in Korea, I spent over four months there, working on two films by Golden Harvest's Jialian Company: Huang Feng's *Bandits from Shantung* (1972) and *Lady Whirlwind* (1972). Both films were co-produced by Hong Kong's Golden Harvest and Korea's Shin Films.



Bai Ying's first film for Golden Harvest was *The Angry River* (1971).

The shoot for *Bandits from Shantung* progressed very slowly because the horses in Korea were not adapted to the filming process; they did not take instructions well. In Hong Kong or Taiwan, the team of horses used for filming always included an alpha. When the male protagonist rode the alpha, the other horses would follow. The filming process was quite smooth and flexible. But the horses in Korea were different. The first horse would go one way and the second horse would go another. It was a nightmare.

The crew from Hong Kong consisted of 20 people, including a makeup artist, a set costumer, a prop master, a production coordinator, not to mention the cinematographer and his assistants, all of them were from Hong Kong. There were also a wirework team and a stunt crew from Hong Kong.

Here are some of my observations about filmmaking in Korea. The production system in Korea was very strict. For example, when a crew member arrived on set, he was assigned a specific task and could not deviate without permission. I witnessed first-hand a young camera assistant sneaking a peek at the viewfinder. He literally got his butt kicked by his senior for breaking protocol. They were very meticulous and followed strict rules. We were genuinely impressed. The employees at Shin Films treated us like dignitaries. They had great energy, speed and always achieved good results.

I also witnessed how Shin Films' processing labs operated. After we finished shooting, the exposed film would immediately be sent to the lab, and the rushes would be available on the next day. The labs were both efficient and proficient. After watching

the rushes, we would know what areas needed improvement and what additional shots were required.

Giving Stunt Lessons to Korean Actors

While working in Korea, I got to know Shin Films' owner, director Shin Sang-ok. He and I became good friends. I called him Uncle Shin and treated him like an elder, but he asked me not to do that because he regarded me as a brother. He was in his 40s then, so I thought of him as an elder. Shin was a renowned director in Korea. His wife, Choi Eun-hee, had won the Best Actress Award at the Asian Film Festival. They were both highly acclaimed and respected industry veterans.

He said to me, 'You know, my Shin Sang-ok Film School has many students. Many are quite high-calibre, and some of them are even good enough to be directors. But they don't know anything about film stunts. I'd like you to teach them about stunt work.' I said yes and went to his film school to teach film stunts. I asked our production unit to provide me with a trampoline to teach students basic trampoline skills. I also borrowed a set of wirework equipment from the production team and taught the students how to assemble the wirework, how to suspend someone and how to control their movements in the air. They were given quite an advanced tutorial on the finer points of wirework. I taught there for over a month until principal photography for *Bandits from Shantung* (1972) began. I had no time to spare after that.

Shin Sang-ok was very grateful and treated me very well. Eventually he said, 'Let's collaborate on a film together (Note: *The Reward* [1971]). You play the killer.' I accepted his offer and worked on the film. He also made me commit to designing my own stunts. I said, 'Fine. No problem.'

When we were shooting *Bandits from Shantung* and *Lady Whirlwind* in Korea, we visited an academy every day to learn *hapkido*. The academy master was Ji Han-jae. His disciple, Hwang In-shik, was a teacher there. Golden Harvest did not make the hapkido training a requirement. We were genuinely interested in learning it and ended up doing it for two months. Later, when Golden Harvest decided to make *Hap Ki Do* (1972), Raymond Chow chose us for the film. That's how Ji Han-jae and Hwang In-shik ended up being recruited to work in Hong Kong. *Hap Ki Do* was shot at the Golden Harvest Studio on Hammer Hill Road.

Later on, I visited Korea again to film *Gone with Honor* (1979), a Taiwanese production for Central Motion Picture Corporation directed by Shu Chin-liang. All the outdoor scenes for *The Proud Horses in Flying Sand* (1980) were also filmed in Korea.



Bai Ying collaborated with Li Lihua in *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973).

Reuniting With King Hu in Hong Kong

When I arrived in Hong Kong, I worked on a few more films for Director Hu, including part two of *A Touch of Zen* (Note: production began in the middle of 1971). I didn't spend much time filming at the Shing Mun Reservoir, probably just a fortnight. After we finished shooting the fight scene there, Director Hu wanted to depict Roy Chiao's ascension to heaven in the spirit of *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. The camera was set up to capture Chiao backlit by the sun behind him. The director had to work within a very short window of time in order to achieve the effect. In the film, Chiao eventually rises to his feet, hinting at his ascension to heaven. Hu was a *Zen* enthusiast and wanted to incorporate *Zen* philosophy into his film.

Later, I also worked on Director Hu's *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973) and *The Valiant Ones* (1975). King Hu Film Productions owned *The Valiant Ones* entirely but only half of *The Fate of Lee Khan* because Raymond Chow demanded the other half. He considered *The Fate of Lee Khan* a commercially viable project and wanted half of it. Naturally, he invested half of the production budget. Chow dismissed *The Valiant Ones* as a non-commercial film, so he wanted no part of it.

The Valiant Ones went into production first. We started at the Shing Mun Reservoir area. We filmed many scenes there, including the first time my character helps Roy Chiao fend off the Japanese pirates. The site (a rundown hovel) was located close to the reservoir. Director Hu designed the entire scene and even directed the camera movements. Being Director Hu's cameraman was a challenging job because of the many tracking shots that was demanded. The film's cinematographer was Chris Chen, the second of four Chen Brothers, all of whom were cinematographers. The most famous was the eldest, Chen Jung-shu. *A Touch of Zen* Part Two, *The Valiant Ones* and *The Fate of Lee Khan* were all shot by Chen Jung-shu. He was already an established cinematographer in Hong Kong and had worked with many other directors. When Director Hu heard that the second-born Chen brother was also in Hong Kong, he hired him at once.



Master King Hu (left) was directing on set.



Still from the motion picture *The Eunuch* © Celestial Pictures Ltd. All rights reserved.

Bai Ying arrived in Hong Kong to advance his career as an actor. His first film was Shaw Brothers' *The Eunuch* (1971).

Director Hu was very good at creating a commanding presence for a character. Take *The Valiant Ones*, for example. Hsu Feng is sitting on a rock, sewing by way of introduction for the audience. Japanese pirates then close in, clearly intent on ambushing her. Before they can reach their target, she makes one swift move before returning to her sewing. In the next shot, the pirates have all been incapacitated by her sewing needles. The director essentially created an illusion, fooling the audience with a slight of hand trick. He never filmed the action of the needles. Instead, he just showed all the pirates on the ground, struck by needles.

After the exterior scenes, we filmed the interior scene where my character negotiates with the Japanese pirate leader. We completed the scene very quickly. It took us just a week. We then proceeded to the island shoot. We shot only a small portion of the film there, just the climactic showdown between Sammo Hung and me. Some of the exterior scenes of the Japanese pirate's lair were also shot near the Ninepin Group in Sai Kung.

When we moved the production of *The Valiant Ones* to an outlying island, we began to film *The Fate of Lee Khan* simultaneously. The façade of Ying Chun Ge (the tavern that appears in *The Fate of Lee Khan*) was shot on the island, as was the final showdown. The main set was inside the studio, where we filmed for a month.

Li Lihua was the heart of *The Fate of Lee Khan*. We all looked up to her. Director Hu called her by her nickname, Xiao-mi, but we called her Aunt Mi because she was our elder. Her work ethic was beyond reproach. She was a consummate professional who was also not afraid to voice her opinion. She even chastised Wu Jiaxiang for his lack of professionalism. In short, she was an old-school veteran with great integrity. In terms of the fight scenes, she was able to embody the character of a skilled swordswoman with just a few moves.

Director Hu worked very quickly in those days. I think he spent just over three months shooting the two films concurrently. If you work with other peoples' money, you can't waste time. The production was under heavy scrutiny; Golden Harvest would never allow us to go over schedule.

From Period Films to Contemporary Dramas

Apart from period films, I also appeared in a number of contemporary dramas during the 70s in Hong Kong, including *The Legends of Cheating* (1971) and *Cheat to Cheat* (1973) directed by Li Han-hsiang. In addition, I also worked on a series of action and detective films for Goldig Films directed by Cheung Sum (Note: *The Peeper, the Model, and the Hypnotist* [1972], *The Black Belt* [1973] and *The Little Man, Ah Fook* [1974]). The two owners of Goldig Films (Note: Alex Gouw and Gouw Hiap-hoo) were quite good to me. They often treated me to dinner after I finished shooting. They were Indonesian Chinese of Hokkien descent, so I spoke Hokkien with them. The action director that collaborated with Director Cheung was Chan Siu-pang. He had a group of stuntmen working under him, including notable stunt performers such as Chan Koon-tai and Jason Pai Piao. They would later go on to become successful actors.

In the late 70s, I worked on Peter Yung's *The System* (1979) and Ronny Yu's *The Saviour* (1980). The latter was a solid production with a good director. Yu and Peter Yung were both excellent directors, but they had very different styles and approaches. Peter Yung was more artistic, more cultured. Ronny Yu was very much a gritty realist.

I also worked on *See-bar* (1980) by Dennis Yu, who had previously worked for King Hu Film Productions and was mentored by King Hu. That was where we met and became good friends. He went on to become a director after he left Hu's company.

A Trend of Wuxia Films in the 1970s

The 70s was the golden age of the *wuxia* genre in both Hong Kong and Taiwan's film industries. The overwhelming majority of the films that I made in that period were *wuxia* films. Apart from King Hu productions, I also worked on productions by Shaw Brothers, Golden Harvest and Jialian Company. I also did many Taiwanese films, such as *Judicial Sword* (1975), an adaptation of a King Hu script, and Chang Mei-chun's *Super Dragon* (1977) and *13 Golden Nuns* (1977). I even won a Golden Horse Award for Best Supporting Actor for my performance in *Super Dragon*. I made countless films in that period.

Because of *Dragon Inn*, many directors offered me villainous roles. Because of *A Touch of Zen*, I was also offered roles as the hero. Whether I played the villain or the hero, I always tried my best. I formed many friendships through my many collaborations over the years in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The crew on every production were dedicated professionals. There was always a strong sense of camaraderie.

Dragon Inn caused a sensation upon its release and King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* was awarded Technical Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. These set off the craze for *wuxia* films from Hong Kong and Taiwan around the world. During this time, many Hong Kong and Taiwan film productions filmed overseas to boost production values. It was still

impossible for Hong Kong or Taiwan-based companies to film in the Mainland during the 70s, so the more established companies often sent crews to Korea for location shoots.

As I noted earlier, I've made a few films in Korea and spent over a year there altogether. During my time there, I enjoyed working with the local Korean crews. They worked professionally and seriously and they were eager to learn. It was a learning experience for Korean film crews. As a result, their collaborations with the Taiwan and Hong Kong film industries contributed to the advancement of the Korean film industry by adopting many of the techniques that they learned from us for their own *wuxia* and action films. Needless to say, Hong Kong and Taiwanese *wuxia* productions during this period had a huge impact on the Korea film industry. [Translated by Sandy Ng]

Editor's note: Bai Ying's account of how he joined the film industry, his filming experience in Taiwan and with Shaw Brothers in Hong Kong was published in 'Bai Ying: There's No Bai Ying Without King Hu', Hong Kong Film Archive *Newsletter* Issue 73 (August 2015), pp 7-13; his account of working on Peter Yung's *The System* (1979) was published in Law Kar (curator), Kwok Ching-ling (edited), *Movie Talk Series ①: The Dream of a Lost Traveller: The Films & Photography of Peter Yung*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2015, pp 108-109 (in Chinese).

Hsia Tsu-hui:

Li Han-hsiang, a Good Teacher, a Good Friend

Interviewer: Cheng Chuen-wai (25 September 2017)

Collated by Cheng Chuen-wai



The 1970s saw vibrant exchange between Hong Kong and Taiwan cinema. Many Hong Kong studios and filmmakers went to Taiwan for film productions; a decent number of Taiwanese filmmakers also came to Hong Kong for better development. It was at this point of time that director Hsia Tsu-hui was invited to Hong Kong by director Li Han-hsiang, and went on to become a crucial player in the latter half of Li's career. Hsia Tsu-hui was born in the Mainland and grew up in Taiwan. In the 1960s, he joined Taiwan's China Motion Picture Studio where he made acquaintance with Li Han-hsiang while assisting the shooting of two films helmed by Li, *Storm Over the Yangtse River* (1969) and *The Story of Ti Ying* (1971). In the 1970s, after coming to Hong Kong, Hsia was involved in the majority of Li's works after the latter returned to Shaw Brothers. From imperial epics to soft erotica, Hsia had a hand in almost every one of them, up till the final television drama, *Burning of Efang Palace*. Director Hsia spoke to us about his working and personal relationship with director Li, giving us a glimpse of Li's professional style and the operations of Shaw Brothers.

Childhood Fascination for Films

I was born in Nanjing on 10 November 1933, in the 22nd year of the Republic of China calendar. I only lived in Nanjing for a short while since my father was in the air force and had to move South with the government after the war began. We settled in Chongqing,

Photo taken during the filming of *Iron Will & Tiger's Gall* (1971) in Taiwan, with Hsia Tsu-hui in the centre and cinematographer Wu Guang-chang on the right.



Sichuan. After WWII, we lived in Nanjing for over three years. In late 1948, we followed the government to Taiwan in which I began my studies afresh from the first year of secondary school.

I had loved music since I was a teenager. It was an era when Hollywood films dominated Taiwan's entertainment market. I soon fell in love with films too. I remembered watching the epic *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and being blown away. I was overwhelmed and vowed to join the industry if I ever had the chance.

There were no art academies in Taiwan at the time. Those who wish to study theatre had nowhere to go. During my military training, the Fu Hsing Kang College happened to be recruiting. Since it had a film and theatre department, I decided to ditch the pen for the sword. I became a professional soldier in order to study there. But it took me seven years post-graduation and several allocations before I was sent to China Motion Picture Studio as a scriptwriter and director. The studio concerned itself mainly with the productions of newsreels and documentaries. Feature films were few and far between. But it gave me an opportunity to acquire proper filmmaking and post-production skills.

Making the Acquaintance of Li Han-hsiang

During my time at China Motion Pictures, Taiwan showbiz was seized by news that Director Li Han-hsiang was coming to set up Grand Motion Picture Company. *The Love Eterne* (1963) which he previously helmed had taken Taiwan by storm. I had seen that film three times and was captivated by his directorial techniques. The way he rendered the shots, the scenes and the design of costumes and props were unique. His transformation of traditional *huangmei diao*, moreover, was a massive success that left

me a lasting impression. I was a fan, brimming with respect and admiration for Director Li and *The Love Eterne*. Little did anyone expect that two years later, Li would fall out with Shaws and came to Taiwan with a huge crew to set up Grand Motion Pictures. Its address was 1 Quanzhou Street in Taipei where the old Railway Hotel stood. One day, our team leader asked me to adapt the popular *The Love Eterne* for the stage. I carried out the mission and the 10-day public performance rocked the town. One day, Director Li came to watch our play. The team leader introduced me to him. That was our very first meeting.

Years later, Li's Grand Motion Pictures was plagued by problems. They had taken money from investors in Singapore and Malaysia but fell short of their pledge of five titles a year. They couldn't even make two. The ensuing lawsuits pushed the studio to the brink of closure. I was still working at China Motion Pictures. The head of the studio, Mei Chang-ling, was a great boss. Although he wasn't a filmmaker, he recognised and valued talent. Mei wanted to recruit Director Li to produce films for China Motion Pictures. The idea was welcomed by all the scriptwriters and directors at the studio. Director Li presented us with a spy novel by Zou Lang, which was later made into *Storm Over the Yangtse River*. I was appointed as the assistant director, and thus I have made acquaintance with the great Director Li and went on to become his work partner.

The shooting of *Storm Over the Yangtse River* lasted three or four months. You can imagine my mindset at the time. I was a student in awe of his teacher. I worked extremely hard. Two years later, China Motion Pictures hired him to make *The Story of Ti Ying* (1971). Without a second thought, he specified that he wanted me on board (Note: Hsia Tsu-hui was the music designer and assistant director of the film, which won Best Music [Non-musical] at the 9th Golden Horse Awards). Director Li gave a lot attention to the soundtrack. All his major films had previously been scored by Japanese composer Saito Ichiro. They had a long working relationship and got along well. Both *Storm Over the Yangtse River* and *The Story of Ti Ying* were produced in Japan as per his instructions. I would design the music, then it would be brought to Japan for post-production. I accompanied him to Tokyo for the dubbing of *The Story of Ti Ying*. When we arrived in Tokyo, Ko Chun-hsiung got two of his classmates to serve as our interpreters. After work, we would always go in town for fun. One day, Director Li jokingly asked them to introduce me a Japanese girl. One of his classmates, Mr Huang brought a girl out, who as fate would have it, became my wife. Director Li later returned to Hong Kong directly from Tokyo and never went back to Taiwan.

Military Education Films for China Motion Picture Studio

During my time at China Motion Pictures, I made a lot documentaries and military education films. The latter were of 50 minutes each, with the more important ones lasting 90 minutes. The objective was always to reinforce military education in compliance with government policies. Later I produce two feature films. These could be sold whereas



Photographed during the shooting of Qing period films. 3rd left: Li Han-hsiang; 4th left: Hsia Tsu-hui; the person in red is Li's daughter, Melinda Lee Yen-ping.

military education films were, evidently, made for the military. One of the latter, *Iron Will & Tiger's Gall* (1971), was a war film featuring a beach landing that was shot at the marine corps training beach in southern Taiwan, starring real soldiers. It was like real life. An independent production would be hardly able to achieve the same level of realism. The other one *Blood Splashing Over Rainbow Bridge* (1973) was based on a military novel. Both were proper feature films that were screened in theatres outside the military.

Coming to Hong Kong

Director Li returned to Hong Kong when I was with China Motion Pictures. But he still considered me as a very good friend. He made a number of films in Taiwan, like *The Legends of Cheating* (1971) and *The Admired Girl* (1972) which had required reshooting. The negatives were kept in Taipei, in my custody. I would have people going to Hong Kong and bringing them to him batch by batch. That's why we were in contact during those years. Two years after he returned to Hong Kong, Shaws decided to put the past behind them and hired him afresh (Note: Li Han-hsiang went back to Hong Kong via Japan in 1970. In Hong Kong, he later set up New Grand Films and rejoined Shaw Brothers in 1972). Later he got tired of making erotica, so he filmed two Qing royal court dramas, *The Empress Dowager* (1975) and *The Last Tempest* (1976). We were still in touch. One day he rang to ask if I would be interested in coming to Hong Kong. I said, sure. So my family of three moved to Hong Kong at his invitation (Note: in 1974). I joined his crew right away and during his time at Shaws, I was involved in almost all of his projects. We worked together seamlessly. On the set, he only had to utter a word and I knew what he wanted. I would arrange the scenes in order and have the director go over the shots. After he had given his stamp of approval, shooting would begin. Many titles were made in this fashion.



Hsia Tsu-hui worked with Li Han-hsiang seamlessly.

In around 1978, his health began to show problems with constant chest pain. One day he was suddenly hospitalised. The doctor said three of his four blood vessels were blocked. The only solution was to undergo surgery in the US. He flew there and Lisa Lu referred him to a doctor who eventually cured him. I found out later that before this trip, he had surreptitiously slipped off to the Mainland to visit his old friends in Beijing. He was afraid that he would die without seeing his childhood home. But his contract with Shaw Brothers meant that if he did it openly, his films would not be able to enter the Taiwan market, and it would be a great loss for Shaws. After his recovery in the US, he had established contact with the the Mainland. It was around this time that he got tired of shooting erotica. Subsequently he went to the Mainland to make *The Burning of the Imperial Palace* (1983) and *Reign Behind a Curtain* (1983). My Taiwanese nationality prevented me from following suit and so I returned to Taiwan to make TV dramas.

Working With Li Han-hsiang at Shaw Brothers

The vast majority of Director Li Han-hsiang's works were period films. Contemporary subject-matter wasn't his forte. He couldn't beat the young Hong Kong directors at that. It was not to his taste either. Since Li had read many books of distant dates and had an abounding collection of *chuangqi* novels, films like *The Adventures of Emperor Chien Lung* (1977) and *Emperor Chien Lung and the Beauty* (1980) were stories that he threaded together from literary sketches. Though an efficient writer, his screenplays were sketchy. You had to have a script in hand to get investors, barring special circumstances. When the script was ready, I would copy the whole thing by hand because his writing was illegible. He said King Hu used to do this for him; now it was me. They were incomplete—scenes scattered here and there. I guess the full version only existed in his head. One couldn't assume shooting the first scene on the first day; it could be

the eighth scene or the tenth. But what lay ahead and what had come before? Only he knew. My arrival in Hong Kong coincided with the filming of *The Empress Dowager*, the only one with a full screenplay. Why? Because it was based on a famous play *Empress Dowager Cixi* (Note: with another name *The Untold Stories of the Qing Palace*) by Mr Yang Cunbin from Beijing and we had already mounted an abridged version in Taiwan. You will notice the dialogue in *The Empress Dowager* is refined and literary. Director Li didn't write it—he doesn't like that way of talking. His later films were all drafted in his mind. He would only think about the following day's shooting schedule the night before. He told me that he would wake up at 4am to script. His earlier films *Back Door* (1960) and *The Winter* (1969) were *wenyi* films. Apparently he had the time to write full scripts back then. At Shaws, however, he needed to speed things up for the sake of livelihood. Most of Shaws' directors did not get to film their own scripts but were given screenplays for shooting. He was the exception. Who would dare to hand him a script? He often recounted how he'd use 25 minutes to tell Sir Run Run Shaw a story. When Mr Shaw nodded, he knew he could go ahead. Other directors at Shaws had to put their screenplays on Mona Fong's desk. She had to read them first. She would have criticised your writing and have you making revisions. There was no way he could live with that. All his ideas were improvised. This was his strength, perhaps also his drawback.

Director Li told me back in Taiwan that a director must edit his own films. He had a flatbed editor at home that had cost him over HK\$200,000 at the time. After the shootings in the morning, he would go straight into the dark room and someone would deliver the footage to his home before dinner. He would do the editing at night. He often asked me to go and watch. Later when I was directing films in Taiwan, I would have edited them myself, with the techniques I had learnt from him. At Shaws, he left the music and sound effects alone but took charge of all editing.

Director Li was very strict about set design and he liked to partner with Shaws' set designer Chan King-sam. The two had a tacit understanding, thanks to years of collaboration. He would do a rough pencil sketch of the sets he wanted and the blue print would be drawn up by the next day. Usually it was very close to his idea, even if not exactly. After the set was built, only a couple of minor tweaks were needed on-site, before they were ready. He liked to use real foliage rather than plastic trees and flowers. Shaws was a very organised studio in which it had managed the props meticulously. To be honest, Ms Mona Fong had her strengths. This environment enabled us to value these props and costumes.

He also liked to give instructions of how to act. Actors like Lisa Lu and Tanny Tien Ni moved exactly as he told them. I do not agree entirely with this method. When I directed, I would, barring special requirements, encourage actors to give their own interpretations. I could not tell them to do precisely as what I said because I hadn't gotten to that level. He was different, of course, being superlatively experienced. But whether it was suitable was debatable. For a while in Taiwan, I seemed to have succumbed to his influence.

I taught actors how to act, and they would say, director, you're a great teacher. And I replied, I preferred not doing this; I would like you to give your own interpretation and showed me, and I would let you know if it's appropriate. But that's not Director Li. He was in control of every single detail. He loved performing and was good at choreographing the minor movements on screen. Most of the conspicuous performance-oriented actions in his films from Shaws, were by him.

I co-directed *Hello, Sexy Late Homecomers* (1978) at Shaws with another few of their directors. I also helmed the 'Pond' segment starring Yueh Hua in *Return of the Dead* (1979) (Note: the film credits Hsia Tsu-hui as assistant director and Li Han-hsiang as director). We made those films because Shaws told us to; it wasn't our choice. Till now I have no idea what went on in *Hello, Sexy Late Homecomers*. Frankly speaking, Shaw Brothers was a classic example of commercial institutions where everything was done to please consumers. During its heyday, Shaws was churning out 40 titles a year to meet the huge demand. No other studio could possibly do that. Shaws was thoroughly well managed. Policies and rules were in place, hence were limitations. Director Li had it better than everyone else because no one dared to offend him. Other directors wouldn't always get what they wanted; the authorities would give them something else and they would have to abide.

Shooting Taiwan TV Dramas in the Mainland

After leaving Shaws, I went to Taiwan. Mei Chang-ling, the studio head I knew, was still there, but he was now the general manager of China Television Company Ltd. He asked me to film some serial dramas and episodic TV dramas for China Television (doing what I was good at basically). So I started commuting between Hong Kong and Taiwan. I teamed up with some old Taiwanese friends, with whom I am still in contact with.

Serial drama filming for TV was a three-lens operation. After shooting on-site, the director would hand the reins to the programme director, who would then work on the footage from the three cameras for the final record. I wasn't used to it in the beginning. Those of us from film preferred to work shot by shot; compromise was therefore necessary. I chose an episodic drama managed by Mei, in which one episode was about two hours long, equivalent to a film.

Sometimes later, Chiang Ching-kuo decreed that military veterans could return to their hometowns to visit their family. My buddy Mr Cao Jing-de, who was a well-known drama producer at China Television, recruited me to make *The Legend of White Snake*, a 50-episode TV drama in the Mainland (Note: the series was launched in 1992). I brought a crew from Hong Kong to locations like West Lake in Hangzhou and Jinshan, to shoot. We were Taiwan's first TV crew to film in China. Our presence triggered tremendous excitement in Hangzhou and Suzhou, putting us under the spotlight. The series was later sold to China Central Television (CCTV) in Beijing at a giveaway price of US\$1,000 per episode. Seeing that the crew came from Taiwan, CCTV wavered, and sold the show to

Group photo with Cecilia Ip (centre) and Angie Chiu (right) during the drama shooting of *The Legend of White Snake* (1992)



Beijing Television (BTV). But it turned out to be a mega-hit that riveted the crowds. There was not a single person who hadn't heard of *The Legend of White Snake*. They found us refreshing. They were curious about us because we came from Taiwan. But in fact, the leading actors were all from Hong Kong (Note: Cecilia Ip and Angie Chiu). Their styling was also different from what the Mainland was used to. The tunes sung in the drama weren't traditional *huangmei diao*—the vocality was closer to that of Chinese folk music. The Mainland audience loved the songs and everyone knew how to sing them, until now.

Adapting the *Snuff Bottle*

After leaving Shaws, I had to travel frequently to Taiwan for TV dramas, but I kept in touch with Director Li Han-hsiang. One day, he told me that he had made acquaintance with an overseas Chinese from New York on a flight. That man owned a cinema which had always showed Director Li's works. He was willing to invest in films and the director happened to have a story in hand—Mainland author Deng Youmei's novel *Snuff Bottle*, which had been brought to his attention by Yueh Hua. The story is about a painter of inside-painted snuff bottles during the Qing dynasty. The investor from New York gave his immediate consent. Having secured an investor, Director Li sought me out. Ever quick-witted and now with money in his pockets, he thought, well, we've been in Hong Kong long enough, a trip to Europe is just in time. He concocted this fabulous fantasy with an opening of a collector acquiring a precious inside-painted snuff bottle from Sotheby's in London. The artefact would go on to unveil the story of the Qing dynasty snuff bottle painter. Right away I said, wow, Europe sounds wonderful! So off we went to Europe—Mrs Li and their daughter came too. We were there for almost two weeks. We stayed in Paris for a while and got quite a number of shots, and a few in London. Yueh Hua was of course there too. This was how Li's *The Snuff Bottle* (1988) came into being. Since then, he never had the chance to make this kind of film again.



Hsia Tsu-hui was not only the right-hand man to Li Han-hsiang, the two saw each other as family. Photographed in Korea in the early 1990s. 1st right: Li Han-hsiang, 2nd left: Hsia Tsu-hui.

Making Category III Films for a Living

After this incident, we lost touch for quite some time. Then one day, out of the blue, he had his driver fetch me to his place, saying that an opportunity had come up. An investor had hired him to make four films, all erotica, but he couldn't finish them without my help. He then wrote me a HK\$200,000 cheque. The first of the four was a modern number to be shot in Thailand. He was in Bangkok briefly while I stayed there and finished the film (Note: starring Peter Yang Chun, title uncertain). The other three were with period settings. He wanted to film in Korea because it was too difficult to find soft porn actors in Hong Kong and Korea had more period sets to offer. (Note: the three period films were, *The Golden Lotus 'Love and Desire'* [1991] and *Madame Bamboo* [1991], two productions that credited Liu Kok-hsiung, Lin Fu-ti, and Hsia Tsu-hui as executive directors, Li Han-hsiang as writer and director; and *The Demon Wet Nurse* [1992], directed by Hsia Tsu-hui). We stayed in Korea for half a year. Among the three, I provided the story for *The Demon Wet Nurse*—a mid-length serial published in the supplement of *Oriental Daily News*. I wasn't too sure what happened to the films after those six months.

The truth is, these Category III films were a last resort. We had to eat and had families to be fed. We had to bring home the bacon. Having worked for Li for so many years, I had a complete grasp of his style. He was getting on in years. He could no longer run around for each shot. He had lost his drive and vigour.

Li Han-hsiang's Last Works

We were very close friends. He treated my family as his own. There was no doubt about it. Later I had to travel to Taiwan frequently for filming. After shooting, I would come back, rest a bit, and deal with the scripts for coming projects.

I was working on the screenplay of *Bohidharma* (1996) with Lin Fu-ti of the Directors

Guild of Taiwan in 1996, trying to adapt it for a serial drama. One day I got a call from Director Li asking me to go to Beijing, to help him film the TV drama *Burning of Efang Palace*. The programme was produced by mainland actor Liu Xiaoqing. I kept saying no as I didn't want any involvement, until one day he said, are you not my brother? So I dropped my work on hand and showed up in Beijing four days after the cameras had started rolling. There were two executive directors besides him, and two cameras. The basic provisions were there. He directed the main scenes and the other two took care of the less important ones. I was the supervisor of all things. We had used around 20 videotapes after over 10 days. As we watched them, he asked me how many episodes the footage could amount to post-editing. I replied truthfully, not more than 100 minutes. There had been way too many takes per scene and most of them had gone to waste.

I told him that drama was different from film. The big screen enlarges actors and props; but it's the opposite for TV, hence the props do not have to be flawless. The most important thing is speed. He could not drag his feet for shooting or it would have never finish. In the beginning he was motivated, then after a while, he began to lose steam and left everything to the executive directors. There were many problems with their work. I couldn't just sit back and watch. Director Li was a man with strong characters. He would swallow take in his grievances without breathing a word to anyone. The budget was HK\$9 million, which was barely enough. As time went on, resources dipped and more problems cropped up. The pressure increased. I could tell he was struggling to hang in there. Everyday he would sit in silence, in front of his small desk in his Beijing home. I saw what was happening, so I took the burden for him.

Seeing him passed away right under my very eyes, had filled me with deep sorrow and regret. Heart attack is really fatally dangerous. His choice of location was as well in rural Beijing, which was not easily accessible back then. A combination of unfortunate coincidences had taken away the precious life of one of Hong Kong's most immensely talented and illustrious director. He was only 72! What a waste!¹

The plethora of coincidences and opportunities that brought our lives together, with an inseparable partnership built—I guess that's serendipity at play. Though we are both filmmakers, I had much to learn from him in terms of professional achievement. He will always be a respected teacher and mentor in my heart. I would not have my beautiful family without him. For the rest of my days, I will miss this wonderful veteran, teacher and friend. [Translated by Piera Chen]

1. Li Han-hsiang passed away on 17 December 1996 in Beijing.

Yeung Kuen:

How Many Cantonese Films Had the Guts to Toy With Sex?

Interviewer: Donna Chu (3 July 1998)

Collated by Eric Tsang



Yeung Kuen (1931-2012) was born in Guangzhou to a family of high-ranking officials. However, he lost his privileged life after coming to Hong Kong, and had gone from jobs to jobs. Yeung later enrolled as a part-time student at the China Film Academy out of his passion for films. He entered the film industry after graduation and co-funded his directorial debut *Flying Corpse on a Foggy Night* with his schoolmates. Yet the film was never released theatrically in Hong Kong. Nonetheless, he made his way up from the bottom, starting out as a production assistant and an assistant director to gain experience. Yeung became a prolific director in the late 1960s and made a number of films for Goldig Films throughout the 1970s until he joined Shaw Brothers. He remained active as a filmmaker until the 1990s and later spent his twilight years in the US.

Here is an interview conducted before Yeung moved to the US. He began with his personal background before going into his early days in the film industry, as well as his experience as a director for Goldig Films and Shaw Brothers. Yeung's films covered a wide range of topics, including the supernatural and eroticism. While trying to meet the market demand, he sought for originality and breakthroughs—perhaps the reason why he was able to survive in the film industry for decades.

Writing Film Journals

I was born on 18 December, 1931 in Guangzhou. My family is from Hainan. My real name was Yeung Cheung-kuen, but to make it easier for others to remember, I removed

‘Cheung’ when I started working. My mother gave birth to nine kids, yet for some reason, all her daughters died prematurely and only her three sons survived. I’m the middle child. My father was quite a high-ranking general of Kuomintang. He lived a clean life, free of corruption. My family didn’t experience any financial difficulties, but we were definitely not considered wealthy.

I came to Hong Kong when I was about five or six years old. The Japanese invaded Hong Kong when I was in primary four, so I fled to the Mainland following my father’s unit. When the war ended, we went back to Guangzhou where I attended secondary school. That’s when my love for films began and my uncles would often give me complimentary tickets. I was studying in a boarding school, so I would sneak out with one or two of my friends to watch films.

Back then, cinemas didn’t have the kind of subtitles that you would see now. When a western film came into China, they would have someone who was good in English to do a plot summary and translate it into Chinese. Then someone would write them on a piece of glass. There would be a small screen next to the silver screen, and someone would ‘project’ the narrative on the small screen while the film was playing, like a projector guide. The Chinese who didn’t know English had to rely on those. My directing mentor, Mok Hong-si used to do these translation work. Each cinema would be in charge of their own projections, ‘projecting’ the description according to the story development. For a time, there was even audio guide—a person would sit there and use a microphone to tell the story. But I had never attended those screenings.

After watching a film, I would write a journal and it would be like a film review. I mostly write about Hollywood films of the 1930s and 40s. I would note down the name of the film, the casts and the name of the director, with a simple synopsis. After that, I would be like a god, writing down what was good and what was not, and how I would rewrite them. I admired Sun Yat-sen a lot at the time and wanted to make a biopic of him. I also saved up my allowance from home to buy film tickets and film magazines. We weren’t that good at English back then in the Mainland. We only bought the foreign magazines to see the stars.

I went back to Hainan for university before I finished secondary school. I liked to read novels and other literature when I was young. Thus I majored in Chinese, in hopes to become a scriptwriter. However, half a year later, the Civil War reached Hainan; I couldn’t continue my studies and came to Hong Kong. My father later also came to Hong Kong. He became a Christian, attended the seminary and was working in a shop there as a sales.

I was already 17 years old when I came to Hong Kong. I used to be the son of a government official, but now I was just a civilian; so I had to find a job. My first job was a salesman in a publishing firm. I went door-to-door soliciting readers for commission. I was also once a purchaser inside Hong Kong-Macau cargo ferries, or the person who dispersed pay at construction sites. I was later an auditor at an accounting firm for a few years.

An Honour Student at the China Film Academy

A school called the China Film Academy was founded at that time, located near the intersection of Jordan Road and Mongkok Road. Wang Yuen-lung was the principal, with Tu Guanqi and Doe Ching as vice principals, and Wong Cheuk-hon as head of the school board. I thought the school would be a good stepping stone into the film industry, but its HK\$60 tuition fee was an astronomical number to me. So I took three jobs to earn my tuition. I was crazy about films back then, and naturally I was more hard-working and had a bigger thirst for knowledge than everyone else. Later the school saw my grades and performance, and waived my tuition.

We had two to three hours of class every night. At first, we studied all subjects—Tu Guanqi taught performance, Li Han-hsiang and King Hu with set design, and Doe Ching taught directing. There were also a lot other less famous teachers who taught acting and production. The programme was quite well-rounded. After my first year, we put together a graduation performance. I was mischievous and loved the spotlight, so I took up the leading role and worked as an assistant director during rehearsals.

The school went on for about three, four years. I believed only a dozen people or so from there went into the industry: Ng Shek, Pat Ting Hung, Yok Teng-heung, John Lo Ma, etc.

Crowdfunding Directorial Debut With Classmates

After graduation, a few directors approached me and Tu Guanqi was the first one. I agreed to work as a production assistant and thus quitted my three jobs. The first film I participated in was *Where is My Bride?* (1958), which was also Paul Chang Chung's first film. I only made HK\$400 that year and it wasn't even enough to cover the bus fare. It was tough.

Of course, I kept watching films after I started working. I watched films that failed at the box office to see why they failed. Naturally, I also watched films that did well. We felt frustrated at the time; why would cinemas only screen productions with famous stars? Instead of hiring actors, a few of us from school pooled some money together, rented a studio, wrote a script and filmed my directorial debut *Flying Corpse on a Foggy Night*. We only engaged amateurs on the film, with the exception of Leung Tin. Yet, no one wanted to screen it in Hong Kong. It was only released overseas and we lost money.

The Most Trusted Assistant Director of Tao Yuen Motion Picture

After directing *Flying Corpse on a Foggy Night*, I worked as a production assistant on a few films and as an assistant director at Tao Yuen Motion Picture for three, four years. I would have a monthly salary with a HK\$200 bonus on each film. My contract stipulated



The first film directed by Yeung Kuen, *Flying Corpse on a Foggy Night* (1959) was never released in Hong Kong. Pictured here is Leung Tin with the phone.

that I couldn't do other jobs.

I was a popular assistant director. The company wanted me to work on every film, even demoting the director's original assistant director to make room for me. Once, I went to Macau to film a unit after finishing one in Hong Kong, and then the company flew me back by helicopter to shoot another film. People made fun of me, saying that my schedules clashed to get a helicopter ride. Life was simpler back then and with less stress than in later years.

I was a first-rate assistant director; I worked hard, with good memory, and kept my composure at all times. I comprehended that my job was, instead of creating, to help in realising the director's creativity. Even if I think the director's ideas were terrible, I would do what he said. I would also get into debates, but not when I was on duty. That's why the directors loved me. Some of them even said that only I could do such high-quality work so quickly.

I collaborated with a lot of directors and each of them had their own style. I also worked with Tu Guanqi, who brought me into the industry. Over time, I realised that his theories were from his experience. Tu was also very lucky because his directorial debut, *Spy Number One* (Note: 1946, Central Motion Picture), was already a nationwide sensation. He found fame very early in his career. However, his theories weren't as strong as Mok Hong-si's. Doe Ching was a great director too. I had collaborated with Wu Pang

a dozen of times too, who made more Wong Fei-hung films than anyone. I also worked with Wong Tin-lam and even Chor Yuen, who was younger than me. I was able to work with all directors, but I admired Mok Hong-si the most.

Mok Hong-si, the Director I Respect the Most

Mok was my mentor. He was proficient in both Chinese and English, with good temper and was very cultivated. His only problem was his health issues. I handled a lot of things for him when I worked with him on films like *Lady Bond* (1966). I could've been a director a year or two earlier, but I turned down the offers because Mok wouldn't be able to work if I wasn't by his side. He taught me a lot of things, and he needed an assistant who could really give him a hand. So I kept working as an assistant director instead of becoming a director.

It was a really tough time. Once, I worked for Wu Pang, Wong Tin-lam and Mok Hong-si at the same time—I worked a morning shift, an afternoon shift and a night shift. Each unit was around 10, 11 hours of work, so I had to arrive at some sets late and leave some sets early. By the fourth, fifth day of that schedule, I didn't need to eat anymore; I only drank water and didn't need to sleep. Finally, I went to see a doctor and was diagnosed with hepatitis. I realised that I had worked 18 units in 7 days! Of course I fell sick! In the end, I had to quit all three films and spent a month in bed.

The Lady Information Agent, the First Film Seen in Hong Kong

The Lady Information Agent (1967) was my first film that was actually seen in Hong Kong. The film was first called *Rock Plan*. It's about someone who goes to Japan to buy a few cases of rocks. An investigator is sent to check that person's motive, but the real reason is to find a mole in the organisation. The film itself wasn't bad and had an interesting idea. But it wasn't a financial success because it was released during the 1967 riots. Who would want to see a film at the time?

I didn't write all of my early films, but I had a lot of input in them because I want to make films with my own ideas. A director should direct his or her own scripts to really express their ideas. My scripts are very detailed. The script for *The Lady Information Agent*, for example, had all the shot directions on it. The more preparation we do in pre-production, the more relaxed we are when we shoot.

Goldig Films, a Company With Good Faith

Brothers Alex Gouw and Gouw Hiap-hoo founded Goldig Films. They were Chinese-Indonesians who made their fortune from toupees, but they were also interested in films. They decided to form a production company in Hong Kong and wanted to produce films

to make money. Their intentions were very pure, not like some other investors. That's why I liked them.

Goldig's first few films were too expensive, so they didn't make much money. They got the hang of it later on and created an effective distribution network. They made 60, 70 films and turned a good profit. Later on, they decided to quit as their health worsened and they thought that film-making was too complicated.

I was with Goldig Films for six, seven years. The bosses and I had discussions about ideas for films. For example, I didn't want to make *Learned Bride Thrice Fools Bridegroom* (1976) because I knew that it would be a flop. But overseas distributors said that they haven't seen a Cantonese musical in a long time, so the bosses were adamant about making one. The film itself wasn't bad. I edited the shots based on the rhythm of the music. The problem was that people didn't watch those films anymore!

I had a good relationship with Goldig Films. I didn't make films for other companies, but with my bosses' permission, I would use my salary to fund my own films. *The Devil Strikes* (1977), which my wife (Note: Amy Pang Yuk-ping) produced was financed by Lau Chi-wing and I. I co-financed *The Daring Age* (1981) with Lai Tat. *The Drummer* (1983) was produced through Sincere Film Production, which I founded with Chow Chung, but we went out of business after just one film.

The Originality of *Enjoy Longevity—300 Years*

I made films about a wide range of topics. There were films based on current events, films that came from personal thoughts and feelings, and films that came from crazy thoughts. Along the vein of social realism, I think that *The Country Bumpkin* (1974) was good at exploring the inner lives of everyday people. It was successful and it was well-received. *Lucky Seven* (1970) was also pretty successful. I also did a *wuxia* film, *Within Three Strikes* (1969), that was very well-received. For contemporary realism film, *The Drug Queen* (1976) did pretty well. For erotic films, *Night Girls* (1986) did well. However, what I made wasn't up to me; it was up to the market. If the bosses let me make it or if the film could sell overseas, then I'd make that project. If not, I would put it aside and work on something else.

Enjoy Longevity—300 Years (1975) had an interesting topic. I came up with the idea for the story, and then I hired scriptwriters to write it. It started when I was on the set with Tam Bing-man. I said, 'Bing, what would happen if someone doesn't die?' He said, 'Well, that should be fun.' I thought about it and felt that was the wrong answer. I said, 'It's very painful if a person can't die.' From that idea, I wrote a story about a person that can't die. I first set the end of the story around 1947, 48, and then I went backwards by 300 years, to the Qing Dynasty. I used this timeline as the framework and came up with a story that connected several major events in Chinese history. It was simple.

I took world-famous literature and found the best quotes from them. I tried to find



In the early 1980s, Yeung Kuen was already experimenting with self-made special effects to film *Seeding of a Ghost* (1983).

places to put the ones that applied to the story. I also wrote some of those lines myself. There are some philosophical dialogues in the film. For example, when the protagonist asks the fairy to give him eternal life, the fairy says, ‘Time and money are the two biggest burdens in life, but you can’t help but love it. I can give them to you, but don’t regret it.’ So the fairy really did give him those two things. I wanted to write that having money doesn’t give one bliss or happiness—It’s misery to not be able to die. I calculated that the main character had time to marry 13 wives. He’s really in love with his last wife. When she grew old, she wanted plastic surgery and eventually wanted to die. He felt that he’s had enough of life and wants to die, but he can’t die. It’s a pretty fantastical story.

Joining Shaw Brothers

My bosses were unhappy that I made films for other companies, so I decided to quit. After I left Goldig Films, I worked for other companies. Shaw Brothers, for one, treated me very well. They came to see me two, three times. So I joined Shaw Brothers. My first film for them was *Hell Has No Boundary* (1982), followed by *Seeding of a Ghost* (1983), *Take Care, Your Majesty!* (Note: 1983, with Li Han-hsiang listed as director) and *My Darling Genie* (1984).

When I was young and had made a few films, I'd hope that each film I make would hold some special value, whether it's in terms of shots, editing, performance style or theme. During each stage of my career, I would try to make some kind of breakthrough, though I don't know if I was successful or not. How many Cantonese films had the guts to toy with sex? I used sex as a theme for *Lucky Seven*. For *Seeding of a Ghost*, I used classical special effects techniques, and that film ended up being used as teaching material by someone. That film had a lot of special effects, 60 to 70% of which was done by me. There weren't a lot of darkrooms available back then. There was a long take that was drawn in animation. I spent HK\$800 to buy a dried corpse from India. I installed hinges on it and used the simplest, most classical way to shoot a ghost having sex with a dried corpse.

Because of budget, not many films were shot in sync sound at the time. We let Mandarin-speaking actors speak Mandarin on set. If a Cantonese speaker couldn't speak Mandarin well, then we let them speak in Cantonese. If it's a Mandarin film, then we dubbed the dialogue in Mandarin, or we'd dub the Cantonese if it's a Cantonese film. I didn't have any trouble with communication. If the actor is a non-local, then I'd speak Mandarin to him or her. My Mandarin isn't very good, but it's smooth enough to be understood.

Encounter the Bad Eggs of the Film Industry

Later, I became a producer. Sometimes I would help shoot a few scenes or help younger directors shoot something. I also made television films, though I wouldn't put my name on them sometimes. I've worked with some bad people in the industry. I'd written a script, and not only did I not get paid, I was demanded to pay him taxes. I got angry and stopped writing.

No matter how much passion one has for something, that passion does cool someday. Making films was my dream, but when it became my career, it became a way to support me and my family. Five or six years after I left Shaw Brothers, I realised that I didn't think much of my accomplishments even though I've spent so many years in this industry and worked with so many actors. Sometimes I would look at my wallet and asked why I'd worked so hard for this industry. What could I possibly accomplish by putting more sweat and tears into it? I lost my passion then and realised that passion is for young people. [Translated by Kevin Ma]

Ho Fan:

Traversing Erotica and Art With a Spirit of Experimentation

**Interviewers: Donna Chu and Wong Ain-ling
(18 February 2001)**

Collated by Wong Ha-pak



Often described as an ‘aesthetic director’, Ho Fan (1937–2016) was already a celebrated award-winning photographer at young age before becoming a filmmaker. Passionate about cinema, he began making experimental films in the early 1960s. His feature debut, *Lost* (1970, co-directed with Sun Po-ling), was a non-mainstream production. After entering the commercial film industry, Ho directed *Love and Blood* (1972), *Adventure in Denmark* (1973) and *Girl with Long Hair* (1975), satisfying the appetite for ‘pillow and fist’ (i.e. sex and violence) in the 1970s. With his background as a photographer, Ho was able to capture the beauty of the female form and pioneer the aesthetic erotica genre. Devoted to arts, he received critical acclaim for his arthouse films *The Miserable Girl* (1975) and *Two for the Road* (1980). In this interview, Ho recounted how he started his career as a director from what he collectively referred to as ‘category III films’.¹ Ho resented being labeled as an erotic film director, though he believed that even erotic films could be tasteful and with depth despite the challenges and restrictions imposed by film investors. Throughout his career, Ho Fan was always eager to experiment with new ideas, and his passion for directing remained as strong as ever.

1. In 1988, Hong Kong started implementing the ‘three-tier film classification system’; Category I refers to ‘suitable for all ages’; Category II refers to ‘admit audiences of all ages, but related advertising materials of the film must indicate “not suitable for children”’; Category III refers to ‘for persons aged 18 or above only’.

Titled as a 'Photography Prodigy' in Early Days

My childhood dream was to become a writer. My interest in writing began in secondary school. My Chinese teacher at St. Paul's Co-educational College was a source of inspiration. I was a fan of Ba Jin and loved his novellas *Perdition* and *New Life*. My teacher said that if I continued to improve and develop, I could achieve the same calibre of writing. I was greatly encouraged by his words. I was allowed to complete in-class writing assignments at home. I filled thick notebooks as if I was writing novels. My teacher often gave me high marks, and my classmates nicknamed me 'the wordsmith'.

I majored in literature in university. Unfortunately, I also developed severe migraines. I would get headaches whenever I read or wrote for prolonged periods. So, I deferred my studies for health reasons. I listened to music at home, visited the countryside often and took many photographs. I entered a student photography contest and even won a prize. Then I entered another competition and won first prize. Having my work recognised gave me the confidence to continue. When I was at university, I also studied drama under Yao Ke, but my migraines came back whenever I spent too much time writing scripts. I pursued filmmaking and photography because they were activities that didn't exasperate my migraines. I love photography, but cinema is the 'eighth art' that encompasses all my favourite art forms: photography, literature, painting, drama, music, architecture and sculpture; it's an interdisciplinary art form.

In 1956-57, I received the prestigious Fellowship of The Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain (FRPS). I was in my twenties at the time and developed a reputation as a 'photography prodigy'. Even the British (photographers) said it was unheard of for someone so young to receive such an honour; they couldn't qualify for the fellowship until their seventies or eighties! At the time, I considered photography as a stepping stone to filmmaking. I had my sights set on becoming a film director. My fellow photographers were very supportive of my aspirations, hoping that I would one day conquer the film industry and become a master filmmaker.

From Shaw Brothers Contract Actor to Director

I went to Shaw Brothers and took the qualifying exam for directors. At the time, Sir Run Run Shaw was the president; Raymond Chow was the production chief and head of publicity; and Leung Fung was the chief examiner. Leonard Ho was also working in the publicity department. They questioned my ability to direct actors because I knew virtually nothing about acting. I was young and not bad looking, so they offered to sign me as a contract actor instead so that I could develop some acting skills before directing other actors. It made sense to me. I was given my first acting opportunity in *Wives and Greener Pastures*; I was one of the male leads, but the bosses were unhappy with the director, Richard Poh. They cut the production short and even issued an order to have all the footage burned. *Love Without End* (1961) was my second film as an actor. Chin Han and I were both intern production assistants on *The Swallow Thief* (1961). Shaw Brothers



Ho Fan won the Best Film Award at the Banbury International Film Festival in the UK, with his seminal work—*Gulf* (1966).



A still from *Gulf*

signed the both of us at the same time, nurturing us to become actors.

I was quite wooden, so they cast me in the role of Tang Sanzang. The film adaptation of *The Journey to the West* consisted of our installments: *The Monkey Goes West* (1966), *Princess Iron Fan* (1966), *The Cave of the Silken Web* (1967) and *The Land of Many Perfumes* (1968). I was involved with the series for several years, and it was the kind of film that didn't require much acting. I also performed quite a few supporting roles, but I was a failure as an actor because I had stage fright. I performed better behind the scenes. My place was behind the camera. It felt like where I belonged. Working in front of the camera, on the other hand, put me in a daze.

I had no aspirations to be an actor, but Shaws wanted to extend my acting contract for another three years before they would let me direct. They told me to develop myself further, but I wanted to be a director. During this period, I became acquainted with Law Kar, Kam Ping-hing, Lin Nien-tung, Sek Kei, Ada Loke, Isabel Ni, Hu Ju-ren and Dai Tian. We started making experimental films together and wrote for *The Chinese Student Weekly*. We modelled ourselves after François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol's *Cahiers du Cinéma*, hoping that reviews and critiques would break new ground for the Chinese Cinema and start a Chinese New Wave! At the time, Union Press published three magazines backed by American Funds. *The Chinese Student Weekly* was intended for Chinese students while the other two were made for foreign exchange students. The magazine published my film reviews, translations, literary works, photography and photography reviews. Together with a group of like-minded enthusiasts, we founded the University Life Film Club. We made experimental films together, shooting first on 8mm and Super 8mm film before moving on to 16mm. We were all passionate about cinema and made many films. Our roster included future luminaries such as Law Kar, John Woo, Terry Tong and Alex Cheung.

Feature Film Directorial Debut *Lost* Examines Conflict Between Flesh and Spirit

One of my films, *Gulf* (1966) won an international award (Note: Best Film award at the 1966 Banbury Film Festival in the UK). It was an experimental film. I went on to co-direct a film called *Lost* (1970) with Sun Po-ling; it was my feature film directorial debut.

Sun was a photographer. She thought I had potential after seeing my experimental films and offered to produce my film with her own money. She wanted to collaborate on a film together. She even took the film to film festivals in Cannes and Berlin. That was in 1969 or 1970. The film didn't win any award, but it developed quite a following, described as a 'New Wave Gem'. Sun's dream was to screen locally produced films in prestige cinemas, and she hoped that my film would be released in the same theatrical circuit as foreign films. She was quite ambitious, so of course I approved of her decision! Unfortunately, this dream was short-lived; none of the foreign film circuits was willing to screen the film. It was a 90-minute black and white film shot on 35mm film, and it never received a theatrical release.

Lost depicts the 'eternal conflict between the flesh and the spirit'. The female lead was played by Dorothy Fu. She represented the flesh, and Lei Jiexin represented the spirit. Chan Chun-wah played the male lead, a writer and an artist. Sun's idea was to present culture clash between East and West via the writer, a man of culture. The film was accepted into competition at the Cannes Film Festival. It was quality work, but it was sadly never released in Hong Kong.

Succumbing to Commercial Pressure; Directing Erotic Films

It was all very practical at first. I wanted to continue to work as a director, so I made 'category III films' to eventually get back to making art films. But it didn't work out. The first 'category III film' that I made based on purely commercial considerations was *Love and Blood*. *Adventure in Denmark* was the second one. At the time, the three-tiered rating system had yet to be established—'Not suitable for children' was the only warning and restriction offered. The establishment of the three-category system essentially led to my ruin; I felt like a condemned man.

Adventure in Denmark was extremely successful. Jimmy Wang Yu's *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) made over HK\$1 million. Ticket prices were HK\$1.50 (for the front rows), HK\$2.40 (for the back rows) and HK\$3.50 (for the gallery seats), so it was about the equivalent of tens of millions of dollars today (Note: the film grossed a total of HK\$1,198,031, causing the press at the time to dub Ho the 'million-dollar-director'). The lead actors may be familiar to you; Helen Poon still makes appearances on television; Michael Chan Wai-man and James Yi were also in it. The rating system was not in place yet, but the film was sold on sex and violence. Chan played a boxer who conquered



Directed by Ho Fan, *Adventure in Denmark* (1973) made over one million dollars at the box office. He was subsequently dubbed the 'million-dollar director'.

fighters in Denmark with his fists. Yi's character, meanwhile, conquered Denmark's loose women with his sexual prowess. Once people heard the plot, they were sold on its idea of 'fist and pillow'. As Sir Run Run Shaw said, 'sex and violence' is the universal formula for box office success. That formula still applies today because it's human nature! Most people want to see popcorn movies. Sex and violence are what people look for in entertainment, aside from family entertainment.

At the time, the investors were confident that my name on the marquee of a 'category III film' would be a box office draw. I negotiated two-picture deals—one 'category III film' and one *wenyi* film. Some investors accepted my proposal. Those that refused reneged the second part of the deal after I completed a 'category III film' for them. People thought I was crazy to follow a 'category III film' that made money with a *wenyi* film that lost money. They urged me not to do it, that my box office reputation was at stake!

Shaw Brothers 'Danish' Erotica Controversy

Some said *Adventure in Denmark* and *Sexy Girls of Denmark* (1973) were two titles of the same story. In fact, I started my project first. Both films were shot in Denmark, with the same backdrop and plot. The investor of *Love and Blood* and I came up with the plot. I left Shaw Brothers and quit acting because the company didn't let me direct. But Shaws went ahead and assigned Lui Kay as the director, with Denmark as the backdrop. We both flew to Denmark on the same day, released our films on the same



Love and Blood (1972)

day and ended our theatrical runs on the same day. (Note: *Sexy* was released on 16 March 1973; *Adventure* was released on 28 June). Our film was distributed through the Golden Harvest cinema circuit, while their version went out through the Shaw Brothers cinema circuit. We won by a nose; their box office receipts hit HK\$1.1 million while ours hit HK\$1.19 million. When Shaws saw that I had won, they were very pragmatic; they recruited me to work for them as a director. I later directed *Girl with Long Hair* for them.

The Thwarting of *Demon* and an Encounter with Federico Fellini

After I achieved the ‘million-dollar-director’ status, a Filipino company named Empire Cinema Center Ltd paid a fortune to sign two directors—I was one, and the other was Ng See-yuen. It was around 1973. I started on the pre-production for *Demon* but the project was scrapped in the end. It never came to fruition! The leads were Henry Yu Yang and Jenny Hu. The supporting cast included Law Lok-lam and Chen Sing.

The martial arts choreographer for *Demon* was Yuen Woo-ping, with John Woo was the assistant director. The film was to be shot on location in Spain, so I went there to scout locations and find a local production manager, supporting actresses and stunt actors. When everything was set, the boss went back to Hong Kong and carried out principal photography for seven days. I was still in Spain when I received news that the boss had lost money gambling and didn’t have the funds to complete the film. He

ordered me to take the crew back to Hong Kong, then he said that he would return to the Philippines to raise money and restart the production. In the end, I didn't shoot a single day for the film.

I was quite upset and angry at the time. I went to Italy to visit Sung Chia-wen, who was a classmate of Pai Ching-jui and Liu Fang-kang at The Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome. I used my own money to go there and sat in on the classes. I never studied film in Hong Kong because the programme was three years long. I was a working director and had to make a living. At the time, Fellini was shooting a film in Rome. I shook his hand and asked him, 'Film critics claim that each shot in your films is imbued with artistic and philosophical intent, that each shot has deep meaning. Is it true? Isn't it a pain to put so much thinking into every single shot?' He said it was all rubbish and told me not to listen to the critics. Since he was Fellini, people naturally looked for meaning in each shot, even the throwaway ones. He also said, 'One day, when you become a director as famous as me, you'll understand the truth of what I'm saying. By then, hordes of sycophants will volunteer to interpret each shot for you, gilding the meaning.' I've always remembered those words. After we shook hands, I was so happy that I didn't want to wash my hands. People give standing ovations to his films; he gets even more respect than a king. This is how much respect Italians have for artists.

I love Fellini's work. I must confess that he greatly influenced me. *8½* (1963) and *La Dolce Vita* (1960) in particular, were seminal to my development as a filmmaker. I borrowed inspiration from him in depicting the artist's inner conflict between the flesh and the spirit. I also ended my film with a woman in white representing the purity of youth.

Capturing the Beauty of the Female Form on Films

Some believe that film investors like to hire female stars whom they're attracted to. That's actually quite rare. It's usually the director who discovers an actress, and those things are usually consensual. It's the same in any line of work; a matter of quid pro quo. The bosses usually gave me the freedom to choose the actress. They felt it'd be better to leave the job to me when it comes to aesthetics. When I'm casting an actress, I first examine their facial profile, then their form and figure.

The three-category rating system had yet to be introduced. In fact, the most explicit content that my films had was the focus on the beauty of the female form. Shaw Brothers' *Girl with Long Hair* was adapted from a popular novel. The lead actress Danna knew what she was selling. I could only achieve box office success with films like these. The *wenyi* films that I made during the same period were all flops. I had become a financial successful director very early in my career. People thought I was crazy for not capitalising on my success. They couldn't understand why I alternated between making *wenyi* flops such as *The Miserable Girl* and successful erotic films such as *Girl with Long Hair*.

I used new actors instead of big stars in my 'category III films'. The bosses said my name alone was enough for pre-sales. I had my way of working with new talents and didn't need to hire stars. I liked to experiment, shaping different styles with young talents. The exception was *Love and Blood*, which had Alan Tang. New actors are like clean slates; they're malleable like clay. Stars have established personas and habits that are difficult to break. They have a certain image to maintain. I could manipulate them like chess pieces on a chessboard.

Some actresses were quite uninhibited; there was no need to clear the set. One actress in particular even instructed the crew sneaking a peek from the rafters to come down and watch because she worried about their safety! She said she felt no shame at all because her body was God's creation. How generous she was! I'll reveal her name since I'm praising her: It was Danna from *Girl with Long Hair*. It happened during filming at the Shaws. She was very natural, very sex positive; there was nothing salacious or lewd about her. One film critic called her 'the most wholesome erotica star'. It's not unusual for actresses to demand a clear set for scenes with nudity. Sometimes the girls will accidentally slip some nudity; I don't like to use those footage, and neither do the actresses.

Using Photography to Pioneer 'Aesthetic Erotica'

I was a good photographer and I made *wenyi* films that fared poorly at the box office, but I wanted to be a director. The investors recruited me to make 'category III films' because they recognised my talent in photography. As a photographer, I was known for portraits and photos of city life. I didn't take nude photos of women. The investors hired me because I photographed beautiful women with an 'aesthetic photography style'. I ended up pioneering a new genre of 'aesthetic erotica'. Audiences loved it. But investors later warned me that it wasn't enough to guarantee good box office. Audiences wanted to be titillated. They said that my films didn't contain enough 'lewd' content and were too focused on artistic and aesthetic concerns.

They essentially wanted more explicit content. My films had them, but filming sexual positions and tricks wasn't my expertise. I was trying to sell the beauty of the female form, but people wanted to see different sexual positions. That wasn't my forte, but my films did well at the box office anyway; they satisfied the audiences' need for visual stimulation.

The difference between art or pornography depends on the director's approach. To have artistic merit, a script should have substance and meaning, with well-developed characters and a solid story—the very antithesis of my 'category III films'. Those films contained no plot. They were just a random mishmash whose sole purpose is to showcase the naked girl engaged in sexual activity. The narrative had no structure, no real 'drama' to speak of.

Experimental in Shooting and Value Post-Production

When photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson proposed the idea of the ‘decisive moment’, he was talking about releasing the shutter to capture people, objects, events, time and space at a precise moment. It’s the climax, the tipping point, the moment of truth. It’s about achieving the perfect image that does not require darkroom manipulation. His proposition was very influential in the world of photography, but I took a very different approach. After I had worked in film productions, I realised that the post-production process was as integral to film as it was to photography. I considered the darkroom process a form of ‘secondary creation’. The image is only half-complete when the shutter button is pressed. Darkroom manipulation is a mean of re-editing the shot. It was the other half of the process, just as audio mixing, sound effects, voice-overs are part of post-production.

Some students majoring in communication understand what I mean. They know that post-production editing is integral in both photography and filmmaking. They took the negatives of their old photos and modified them on the computer. The results were very successful and interesting. That’s why doing a bad job on a film set is nothing to be afraid of—it’s possible to change everything in post-production. Liu Jai-chang liked to use music to create continuity. I once did a cameo in one of his films. I wasn’t given any lines. He told me to improvise something and he would replace my speech with music or a song later before transitioning to another scene. There are many different ways to approach post-production. I sometimes used audio-monologues, voice-over, sound effects, etc. My approach to creating continuity depended on the context. I loved to experiment with new ideas, but my attempts to incorporate experiments in my ‘category III films’ were often met with criticism.

Directing in Hong Kong and Taiwan after Immigrating to the US

My family and I immigrated to the US in 1979. My wife and son became naturalised citizens after residing there for five years. Since I was in demand in Hong Kong and Taiwan at the time, I often came back to work on films. I became an ‘astronaut’ (a term coined in the 1980s and 1990s to describe Hong Kong émigrés whose family immigrated overseas while they continued to live and work in Hong Kong.) The immigration authorities took away my green card as a result. There was no point in staying in the US because I didn’t want to immigrate anyway. I’m proud to be Chinese.

I was considered one of the most prolific Hong Kong directors working in Taiwan. The first film that I made there was *The Miserable Girl*, followed by *Two for the Road*, *Desire* (1987) and *L’Air Du Temps* (1990, Taiwan).

I cast Ying Tsai-ling and Wang Fu-shih for *Two for the Road*. They both had great range as actors. Juliana Chiang Yu, Ng See-yuen and I co-wrote the script. It was

released in Hong Kong through the Golden Harvest cinema circuit, but it flopped, of course. (Note: the film was released under a different Chinese title for its Hong Kong theatrical release in April 1984). At one of the midnight preview screenings, a man accosted me and said, 'Ho Fan, you conned me into watching a boring art film! Give me my money back! I'm one of your devoted fans. Promise that you won't make this type of boring art film again.' Yet, the film was a critical success and even made it onto a top ten film lists in Taiwan. Hsu Li-kong, who went on to produce many of Ang Lee's films, was the director of the Film Library of the Motion Picture Development Foundation (i.e. today's Taiwan Film Institute). He selected both *The Miserable Girl* and *Two for the Road* to be part of their permanent collection and even invited me to present a talk. But *The Miserable Girl* has never been released in Hong Kong because I didn't dare to release it there!

I've worked with many film companies, including Shaw Brothers, D&B Films Co. Ltd, Golden Harvest, as well as Taiwan's Central Motion Picture, Taiwan Motion Picture Studio and Hsu Feng's Tomson Films. Produced by Tomson, *Desire* was adapted from a famous novel (Note: the novel was by Kuo Liang-hui)—a proof of a script's importance! The decision to cast the wholesome girl next door, Shirley Lu, as the lead in an erotic romantic drama created quite a stir. Released by the D&B Films cinema circuit, the film became one of the highest-grossing Taiwanese films to be released in Hong Kong. In Taiwan, it ranked sixth in a list of 'top ten domestic films with sexual themes and content' and ranked first in audience polls. The critical reception of this film was good. Perhaps the critics didn't find the film lacking in dramatic content because it was an adaptation. Kuo once told me that she liked the films that I made with her and that she didn't mind my editing. She knew how things are done in the film industry. She was such a graceful person.

Riding Mid-80s Category III Wave; Having a Winning Streak at Box Office

A few years ago, German Film Annual Report named my film *Yu Pui Tsuen* (1987) a Hong Kong classic. That's the original version of *Sex And Zen—The Virgin Years* (1996). *Yu* was a faithful adaptation of the *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, which included Buddhist teachings. The film ends with the protagonist abandoning his hedonistic lifestyle to become a monk after his spiritual awakening. It had some 'zen' elements. Silver Bird Films was the producer of the original film. When its owner suddenly passed away, the company shut down and all of their films were sold to another company. The new company edited out all the Buddhist and enlightenment elements from the original version, including the ending; without the philosophical and spiritual scenes, the film ended up being purely a pornographic string of sex scenes! I was furious that they re-edited my film without my consent, but I was in no position to stop them from making money. They renamed the film to *Sex And Zen—The Virgin Years* in English and literally 'Uncut Version of *Yu*

Pui Tsuen in Chinese, then they re-released it into cinemas. It went on to become the highest-grossing erotic film at the box office. The film was terrible. My reputation was damaged and I didn't make a single cent out of it.

Erotic Nights (1989) was an aesthetic erotica film about a painter. It was the first category III film to be released in Singapore. Box office records were smashed, and there were traffic jams outside cinemas. In the end, the local government had to order cinemas to stop showing the film. It also did well at the box office in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, though it had less to do with me than the perfect confluence of timing, people and conditions. I drew from my background in art and photography for the film. For example, I played with the idea of figure drawing and threw luminescent paint over the bodies of the actors and had them roll around naked on the canvas. It was a parody of modern art practices. After the male and female characters rolled naked in paint, they were covered with a kaleidoscope of colours, fusing the human figures and the painting into one. I applied my foundation in art and photography to make so-called 'aesthetic erotica'. The boss used this as a selling point; D&B dubbed me 'the master of aesthetic erotica'. It made me blush terribly.

During shooting, if an actress accidentally exposed parts of herself that could not be shown on screen, I would edit out the problematic footage. But on one occasion, the boss went to the lab to look for the clips and edited them back into the film. It was vulgar, distasteful, a breach of trust, and an insult to the filmmaking profession. But he was right from a box office perspective. I conducted my own market research. Viewers who watched the film twice returned to see the accidental exposures. It was a form of voyeurism; they just wanted to see those salacious images and leave. The film was *Temptation Summary* (1990); it ended up doing very well at the box office, grossing over HK\$10 million. The sequel, *Temptation Summary II* (1991), and *Erotic Nights* both exceeded the HK\$10 million mark. It was considered quite successful at that time. I was opposed to extending the gratuitous shots. Naturally, the critics panned the films, leveling criticisms at the weak narrative and the pornographic content. I can only say that I was a victim of circumstance. I made some money and I received the director's fee and bonuses, but some bosses cheated me out of my bonuses. Others were so unscrupulous that they used my name to sell a film but refused to compensate me. These were the pitfalls of being a director of erotic films. My family was aggrieved at how they treated me.

Making *Wenyi* Films in the 1990s

The Sichuan Concubines (1994) was financed with Hong Kong money, shot entirely in Taiwan. Su Tong served as a consultant on the film. (Note: Su Tong was one of the scriptwriters and the author of the novel *Poppy House* on which the film was based.) We decided to shoot the film in China for the authenticity, but the boss insisted that we

make a category III film in order to secure overseas presales. Su said that he didn't mind having 'category III scenes' in the film, but it would be problematic to shoot such scenes in China because Taiwan didn't have the same authenticity as China. Nevertheless, we managed to find locations that looked like Shanxi and Yunnan, though we also had to raise our budget. I consulted with Su over the script, but he didn't join us on location in Taiwan. The script was still based on his story, though we ended up changing it quite a bit.

The original Chinese title of *L'Air Du Temps* was *The Current Trend*. It was a subsidised film made for the Taiwan Film Culture Co. The script was quite good and had received a screenwriting grant from the government. Scriptwriter Chang Li-qun and I revised the script on set. That company was a government agency known for producing quality films with healthy themes and content. We were able to cast Yang Ching-huang, Chang Kuo-chu and Hong Kong's Idy Chan in the lead roles. I relished making this kind of drama about everyday people, but it didn't fare well at the box office, especially in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong distributors changed the Chinese film title to 'High Society Saint'. They intentionally used 'saint' because the Chinese character sounds like the character for 'sex'. I wonder whether people picked up on the pun? The film isn't about high society, nor was it about a saint, so the title was totally a sham. Naturally, the film was a flop just like other Taiwan *wenyi* films. It was never released in Hong Kong (Note: released in Hong Kong in 1997). They've never seen my *wenyi* films because their impression of me stopped at 'erotica' films.

Branded as a 'Category III Director'

I have directed 25 films, mostly with financing from Hong Kong. A third was shot in Taiwan and the remaining two-thirds were shot in Hong Kong. One-third of them were *wenyi* films, with the remaining two-thirds being 'category III films'. Most of the *wenyi* films were made in Taiwan. The bosses in Hong Kong were very pragmatic and refused to invest in *wenyi* films. They wanted commercial content, gimmicks and box office guarantees. I wanted to extend my career, so I sold out. Whenever I made a 'category III films', I tried to give it more substance and make it more tasteful and artistic. But the bosses didn't allow me to use my own scripts. Things don't always work out.

Not many investors have artistic cultivation and passion for cinema. I've always hoped to meet an investor that truly love films because they wouldn't torture a director or give them a hard time. 'Erotic films' do not always have negative connotations in other countries. In Taiwan, they call the genre 'erotica'. I think 'erotic films' sounds better. In Hong Kong, 'category III films' are considered cheap, lewd and vulgar, all of which have negative connotations. Some students that studied and compared my early *wenyi* films with my later 'category III' hits concluded that they felt like they were watching the work of two different filmmakers. If my name was omitted, they wouldn't have known that the films were all made by the same person. Some even went as far as calling me 'Dr. Jekyll

and Mr. Hyde'. It's true. The early films represented the films that I wanted to make. The later films represented the films that the bosses wanted me to make; they were perverted, market-driven, and made under the duress to secure presales in overseas markets. When I was a guest lecturer in San Francisco, the students were respectful. After studying my early *wenyi* films, they said they couldn't understand why I made 'category III films' late in my career. They accused me of lacking conviction as an artist.

I was naïve and idealistic when I first joined the film industry. I subsequently gave in because I was afraid of losing out on directing opportunities. Many foreign films also contain sexual content, but the scenes aren't gratuitous; they work in service of the drama to advance the plot. Hong Kong's 'category III films', however, focus on the sexual content; the dramatic content is secondary. I tend to make the sex scenes a little longer than needed, then I cut it down in the editing room. But the bosses didn't let me cut them; they felt that I was burning money.

Scholars and artists like to examine the substance of 'category III films'. Political films and horror films can also be 'category III'. Even the violence and brutality in war films can be considered category III-worthy. The term 'category III' should be a neutral term, but it has a certain stigma attached in Hong Kong. The current generation of media and cultural workers are unfamiliar with my early *wenyi* films. They just label me as a 'category III director'.

Directors Are Like Gods

I've been spending the past few years in the US (Note: referring to the mid and late 1990s). I got a green card, and I have been fortunate enough to have been offered film-related work and art exhibitions in the US. A few film companies also approached me to discuss future film projects, introducing me to the American independent film community. No one was interested in me at first, then the Museum of Modern Art approached me. After presenting talks at several universities, people in the US gradually became familiar with my film work. Some journalists wrote about me and recommended my films. Many people show up at screenings of my films at film festivals. Three film companies have approached me with offers.

They watched my films in VHS tapes, and they knew me as an 'expert of low-budget films'. Whether it was the *wenyi* films from the early days or the later 'category III films', I excelled at making films with low budgets. Two companies have approached me with interesting projects. One wanted me to direct a film about the struggles of Chinese railroad workers over a century ago, but I had to use a script written by Americans instead of my own script. The story is about Chinese workers going to the US over a century ago to work in mines. They were small and agile, and they were chosen to ignite the fuse for explosives in the mountains. Those that move fast enough live, but many of them don't make it. The story has blood, sweat and tears, and no category III content.



A group photo with old friends from Ho Fan's last visit to Hong Kong in December 2014. From front row right: Ada Loke, Ho Fan, Lam Yut-hang, Sek Kei; from back row right: Alex Cheung Kwok-ming and his wife, Wong Hoi-shan, Law Kar

I really wanted to make that film, but it's hard to raise several million US dollars for the budget.

Another company wants to make a film about the Cultural Revolution and its historical significance through foreign eyes, but the stakeholders are worried that the film might be too controversial and potentially be banned for political reasons. The chances to work with this company are slim. One other company approached me to direct an 'ultra-category III film'; the producer wanted me to make something even more lurid, but I refused. My family is completely against it; after achieving some recognition in the US, why would I sully my reputation by making 'category III films' again? Some of my friends in the film industry, however, were surprised that I passed up the opportunity to direct a foreign film. Still, I respect my family's wishes; if I do something they don't approve, then I would find myself in a conundrum.

Why do I want to direct in my old age? Because being a director is great! Li Han-siang said we (directors) are very lucky. When I was a Shaw Brothers' director, I was given money to have fun, achieving fame and fortune along the way. It was the most amazing job in the world. Li's words make so much sense. I think that directors are like little gods. They decide on the fate of characters, their joys and sorrow, emotions and desires. They get to edit the picture, to dictate the rules of the world that they create. Where else can one find that kind of satisfaction? That's why I'm obsessed and hopelessly addicted to filmmaking. [Translated by Sandy Ng]

Tong Shu-shuen: Making Films as a Response to Innermost Questions

Interviewer: Wong Ain-ling (18 July 2006)

Collated by May Ng

The western world in the 1960s and 70s was inundated by a wave of new cultural ideologies and movements that rippled across the globe and fluttered Hong Kong society, making an impact correspondingly deeper and wider on the young minds of those who were pursuing their education abroad, inspiring a string of stylistically creative work in literature and arts. In more ways than one, the small oeuvre of Tong Shu-shuen, comprising *The Arch* (1970), *China Behind* (completed in 1974 and released in 1987), *Sup Sap Bup Dup* (1975) and *The Hong Kong Tycoon* (1979), embodies this ideological rifting: as varied as they are eclectic in their historical and social backdrop, her films are tinged with despondency, a result of being caught in the cultural crossroads between East and West, as well as traditional and modern values. Rendered unsparingly and spark, they possess a cinematic style at once harmonious, profound and subdued.

In this interview excerpt, Tong Shu-shuen discussed the creative process and exploration of her first three films. In doing so, she shed light on the hardship faced by an iconoclast filmmaker, a lone trailblazing artist who remained steadfast in quest of seeking answers to her innermost questions. Hers is a dialogue that provokes thought and admiration.

The Arch: A Product of Cultural Clashes

I was born in Hong Kong but my upbringing was unlike that of mainstream Hong Kong society. My family lived in the countryside. Apart from going to school, I rarely ventured into town and I wasn't familiar with places like Queen's Road Central or the main roads in Tsim Sha Tsui. My parents were very open-minded—and slightly westernised, too. They gave us free rein and brought us up to believe that nothing was too difficult to

accomplish and that failure was not an option—that everything was possible.

I took film studies at the USC (University of Southern California) upon graduating from high school. After college, I stayed there and worked for an advertising agency, making commercials. When I was studying in the US, I read up on existentialism, which left a profound impact on my mind and prompted me to examine my own cultural background. The script of *The Arch* (1970) was conceived and written so to ponder the questions that were weighing on my mind.

The Arch was adapted from one of Lin Yutang's stories (Note: 'The Chastity Arch' in *Famous Chinese Short Stories*). With a narrative backbone that probes into traditional Chinese moral values, it weaves together snapshots of ordinary people's lives, highlighting clashes and raising questions about the different perspectives of East and West culture. Writing the script probably took me only one tenth of the time I needed to raise funds for turning it into a film. As luck would have it, I was introduced by a friend to an overseas Chinese, Mr Paul D. Lee, a self-made businessman in Chicago. Although Mr Lee had never dabbled in filmmaking, he was a most filial son and wanted to dedicate *The Arch*, a film that sings praises of a chaste widow, to his mother who had endured countless hardship in raising him as a single mother. Mr Lee generously financed the budgeted US\$35,000.

Arduous Filming on Cathay's Abandoned Set

Returning to Hong Kong, I navigated through an array of obstacles and enlisted the help of Jeanette Lin Tsui, a friend of my elder sister, who got my script into the hands of Paul Yui of Cathay Organisation. Seeing that it was a substantial work and meticulously rendered into scene-by-scene storyboards in the Hollywood style, different from the scripts of a Hong Kong or Taiwanese production at the time, Yui intuited that the director was probably serious in her intentions, contrary to the rumours circulating. He agreed to lease me a small, long-abandoned set at Cathay Studios for a minuscule rent and even lined up a cast of actors. After securing Roy Chiao as our male lead, we began searching for our Madame Tung, to no avail, because no established actor would consider working for an unknown director. My American friend Henry Miller (Note: a notable US novelist) read the script and thought Lisa Lu would be perfect for the part. 'But we couldn't afford her,' I exclaimed. Mr Miller generously offered, 'I'll pay her out of my pocket then.' This way, he managed to get Lu on board the project in Hong Kong.

Hilda Chou Hsuan (cast as Madame Tung's daughter) was Cathay's contracted actress. Funny how things worked out sometimes: none of the actors—not Roy Chiao, Lisa Lu nor Li Ying—bore the faintest resemblance to what I had in mind for the characters. Yet this casting gave unexpected layers and depth to my original concept. Though the finished film looks like it was done by the book, it was no more than the result of happenstance and accumulated improvisations.

I didn't like to play by the rules when it came to shooting. I would discuss with my cinematographer the storyboard of each scene every day, but I also allowed myself to be flexible. When filming scenes with spoken lines, I'd make up dialogues impromptu or give free rein to the actors. Either way, the film is not best remembered for its dialogues.

I didn't know Subrata Mitra (Note: a cinematographer known for his long-time collaboration with Satyajit Ray, a famous director in India) prior to the making of the film. He was recruited through a mutual friend out of my admiration for Satyajit Ray and his works. It's a pity that Mitra wasn't welcomed by the Hong Kong crew with open arms—some even threatened to quit if Mitra stayed on. To me, Mitra was without a doubt a conscientious artist.

Due to budget constraints, we rented a long-abandoned studio perched on top of the slopes of Cathay Studio that was reserved for 'seven-day-quickies' (Note: referring to the shoddy Cantonese films made around mid-20th century). The antiquated equipment at our disposal did nothing but invited disdain from the crew. My insistence on laying old stones and light green bricks on the walls of the Tung mansion was vehemently rejected by the crew, who deemed the back-breaking work of hauling those building materials uphill unworthy of a film to be shot in black-and-white. Turned out this Herculean task of set construction was more than amply rewarded: the set practically came alive, oozing an archaic charm and laying a foundation on which to complete the entire construction, individual rooms and all. Our set design eventually won Best Art Direction at the Golden Horse Awards (Note: *The Arch* swept four awards at the 9th Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan in 1971: a special award for Best Creativity and awards for Best Leading Actress, Best Black-and-White Photography and Best Art Direction for Black-and-White Films).

People in the studio regarded our work with suspicion, mocking and snickering behind our back; even the newspapers joined in the jeering. Veteran crew members watched the way Mitra carefully studied the visual quality of the costumes' fabrics one by one under the light, making comparisons and deliberating with me to pick the best suited one, and thought we shouldn't have fussed over the costumes when we were shooting in black-and-white. What's more, Mitra was adamant about creating lighting with a wooden box of his own design, which comprised two rows of ordinary light bulbs inside and a sheet of rice paper mounted over it, emitting light that was soft and natural. Again, our veteran crew members took offence at this and threw a fit, hurling a heavy chandelier at us from the roof of the studio. In their eyes, we were two lunatics—one a plump Indian and a skinny American-Chinese girl—maniacally absorbed in our mischievous horseplay.

Filming in Hong Kong took 20-something days. With patches for eye care, Mitra was unfit for outdoor filming in mountainous areas. The task fell on me to find his replacement for our location shooting in Taiwan. Through Jeanette Lin Tsui, we were put in touch with a local production crew, who then recommended Professor Chi Hu-che to be the director of photography overseeing the shoot. A genial gentleman, Professor Chi was poles apart from the studio crew in Hong Kong, generous in imparting knowledge to his juniors and gracious in adopting and mastering Mitra's style.

Though looking like it was done with by the book, *The Arch* (1970) was a result of happenstance and accumulated improvisations. Pictured here is the leading actress, Lisa Lu.



The shoot in Taiwan took place in a real location—every path and farm house in the village were real, not constructed. We shot in Taiwan for 17 days—what a memorable and excruciating 17-day endeavour it had been, just to cope with the sheer number and complexity of location shoots involved. Our crew had to cover a vast array of sites, many of which required us to rough it out in the wilderness for days and in primitive dwellings for some nights. It was draining, both mentally and physically, but we had to finish shooting the remaining half of the film in those 17 days because Lisa Lu had to return to the US immediately afterwards.

Just as we were about to slam the clapperboard down for the scene of Captain Yang and his mounted troops trotting down the slopes and arriving at the village, we were abandoned by some bad influences among our crew members, who attempted but failed to get extra money from us, leaving Professor Chi and his several student assistants, the cast and myself to our own devices in the deep of a forest. Professor Chi refused to give in and even joined me in persuading the cast and crew to finish the scene before finding our way down the mountains.

I was sapped of energy when the filming wrapped. I didn't know any post-production talent in Hong Kong and requested that the films to be sent back to the US for editing. Mr Lee was kind enough to furnish the extra amount in covering the post-production expenses in the US.

Les Blank was enlisted to do the editing. I knew him when he was still doing his doctorate at USC. The 1970s was a psychedelic era and it was perhaps a subconscious attempt on our part to infuse the narrative with psychedelic sensibilities. The first half of the film is slow-paced, and it builds up like a movement of symphony, tying the inner conflicts of the characters with the visual tempo the way Les Blank and I agreed upon. Blank differed from me in one aspect, though. He was heavily influenced by Freud and tended to read everything as a symbol. He found it necessary to make clear in each and every frame, explaining the embedded meanings—sometimes it's a sexual symbol, other times a phallic symbol—whereas my lens were guided by my sensibilities and it never

crossed my mind to employ symbolism deliberately. Apparently, his views were shared by many film critics in Hong Kong, though I would never contest them.

As early as I conceived the idea for the film, I had plans to set the unique sounds of the Chinese *guqin* and *pipa* against the poetic visuals. Lisa Lu was friends with Lui Tsun-yuen, who was then teaching Chinese music at the UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) and hooked us up. I sat down with Lui and watched on repeat the scenes that needed music. Then I described how I envisioned the music to be. Lui then undertook to compose and play the music, to give the fullest expression to the words left unspoken in the hearts of the characters. Looking back, though, I think there might have been too much music.

***The Arch* on General Release in France**

Les Blank submitted the film to the San Francisco International Film Festival after the editing and post-production work was done (Note: in 1968). I was in Europe when I received a telegraph out of the blue, bearing the good news that my film was selected for screening. *The Arch* was critically well-received at the festival.

The Arch was invited to be showcased at the inaugural Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival the following year. Alone, I headed to Cannes armed with two suitcases containing the film reels of *The Arch*. My brother sent an apprentice from his Parisian studio to Cannes, carrying two evening gowns, to be my assistant and plus one. We didn't know a single soul at the event—we had neither the support of a studio nor a country to represent, just two Cannes novices with some promotional flyers printed out and put up around town ourselves.

Pierre Rissient, a well-known French critic, saw the film at the Directors' Fortnight and convinced a buyer to option the rights. Initially booked for a five-day run at a cinema in Paris, the film generated such a buzz among audiences and critics that the distributors were emboldened to release it in a dozen of cities across France—a phenomenal success that spanned quite a few months.

I was hoping the film could secure theatrical release in Hong Kong, but none of the distributors here would take an interest in a black-and-white, small-screen art film. At last, a film distributor (Note: Mok Yuen-hei) managed to negotiate for its release in several cinemas, albeit a poor slot of four weekdays. The film did so unexpectedly well at the box office that a second run was scheduled. Sadly, whatever fervour there was, had already cooled down by then.

Filming *China Behind* in Taiwan

The story of *China Behind* was conceived after I'd settled down in Hong Kong. The Cultural Revolution was raging through China and many young, middle-aged intellectuals



China Behind (completed in 1974 and released in 1987)

were left-leaning politically. While a lot of us were eager to play our part in the development of our motherland, I found it baffling that the local and international media were swamped with news stories of youths risking their lives to flee from the Mainland. Putting together news and insider stories readily available in Hong Kong, such as the policies announced and power struggles among the leadership, with the material I gathered from the interviews with a few dozens of Mainland refugees who survived their flight to Hong Kong, I had the basis for my story of *China Behind*.

China Behind adopted the style of a news documentary and was made on a shoestring budget, even smaller than that for *The Arch*, though I couldn't remember the exact figure. Again it was my belief of 'nothing was too difficult to accomplish and failure was not an option', which once again drove me to undertake this daunting task of delving into my innermost questions.

Since no ideal locations, except for the few last scenes, could be found in Hong Kong, I had to head off to Taiwan again. A script, under the working title 'The Dissidents', was submitted to the relevant departments for approval. Without a hitch, we were granted permission by the Ministry of Culture and the other departments dealing with overseas Chinese affairs, which lent their support to the filming of what was deemed an 'anti-Communist' film.

I met a group of young local cinephiles, including Fred Tan and Cheuk Pak-tong, and brought them on board to help with the planning and filming. They introduced me

to Chang Chao-tang, a proficient documentary photographer. Chang's black-and-white photography was pretty impressive. When I invited him to be my cinematographer, he initially declined my offer, citing his inexperience with lighting. I said it was fine and told him to work with the camera using natural light—it was the documentary style that I was after.

I couldn't remember how many days the filming went on, only that it didn't take long anyway. Running short on equipment, we had to borrow cameras from another film crew; sometimes we couldn't even get hold of an adapter and the assistant had to hold the lens with his hand. When film ran out, we had to make do with borrowed stock, even film scraps. It truly was how the film was made.

With anti-Communist sentiments smouldering in Taiwan, young Taiwanese students simply refused to play the people under the Communist leadership. Every night we went to the college dormitories and did our best to change their minds, but only a handful of them would eventually turn up for the shooting. In my mind, I pictured epic scenes of rows of students doing morning exercises on the sports ground, of commotion amid the historic, social upheavals of the Cultural Revolution. Try as we might, we couldn't create the grandiose atmosphere we were hoping for. When we asked to film in the chemistry laboratory, the lab supervisor rejected our request flatly, claiming that such a facility wouldn't possibly exist in Communist China. Since no one knew how to sing those Red Guard's revolutionary songs, Cheuk Pak-tong and I took it upon ourselves to lead the sing-along. It was just as well that all the sound and dialogue was dubbed in post-production. It was such an all-consuming process that when the filming wrapped, all our young crew members collapsed on the floor from exhaustion.

I sent the films back to Hong Kong for editing. *China Behind* didn't get past the censors, save for one or two private screenings at Studio One. Many of those who saw the film assumed it was shot in the Mainland clandestinely; even people of left-wing organisations wondered how and where the film was made. It was only many years later that the ban was lifted. Luckily it didn't leave us in the red because its worldwide rights had been sold to balance the books.

Sup Sap Bup Dup: Hong Kong's Ukiyo-e

Jeanette Lin Tsui later proposed that I make another film with her as producer. I couldn't possibly refuse her because she was such an immense help in bringing *The Arch* to fruition. The script of *Sup Sap Bup Dup* was my own creation. A term in Shanghai mahjong, 'Sup Sap Bup Dup' refers to a winning hand made up of 13 mismatched tiles. It'd been several years since I returned to Hong Kong and I wanted to portray my impressions of Hong Kong with its vastly different social classes and lifestyles in an anthology of 13 segments. What is in the minds behind the westernised façade of those youngsters frolicking in the rooftop pool? How did the upper-class ladies living a



The swimming pool scene in *Sup Sap Bup Dup* (1975)

life of luxury (as depicted by Julie Yeh Feng) spend their days? What is their preferred entertainment? The sense of loneliness and nostalgia for the homeland that overwhelmed the sizable group of Mainland intellectuals who had fled south to Hong Kong (personified by Wu Jiexiang)... Collectively, they formed the visual brushstrokes of an *ukiyo-e* of Hong Kong society.

Perhaps because *Sup Sap Bup Dup* was built on a different premise—unlike my previous two films as a quest to answer my innermost questions through filmmaking—it might struck one as light and playful, even trifling, when it was all the more a poignant portrait of my then status as a sojourner.

Shot from the rooftop of a commercial high-riser, the film begins with a bird's eye view of four westerners playing mahjong in the middle of the road at the heart of Central. It was my take on their complacent sense of superiority and feeling of entitlement. *Sup Sap Bup Dup* can be described as a farcical panorama on Hong Kong society—much like a farce in the theatre.

After completing the film, Raymond Chow said to me in his most courteous voice, ‘You did a great job with the film but it has no commercial value. Do you mind if we play around with it a bit?’ I didn’t mind at all and gave them a free hand. Since the film was to be sold for overseas release in Singapore, Taiwan and other places, it was probably edited into different versions. I never had the chance to watch them anyhow. [Translated by Agnes Lam]

Henry Chan:

A Cinematographer Needs Ample Equipment to Tell Good Stories

Narrated by Henry Chan (30 January, 24 February and 1 March 2018)

Interviewer: May Ng

Collated by May Ng and Hui Pui-lam

Born in Hong Kong and graduated from the London Film School in the late 1960s, Henry Chan returned to Hong Kong in the 1970s and honed his craft in the advertising industry before becoming a director of photography. Born in the post-war baby boom era, he was one of the few western-educated and trained cinematographers in Hong Kong. During the disappearance of Cantonese cinema in the 1970s, filmmakers were out hunting for cinematography talents who would lend a visual impetus to a new variety of themes and styles in their search for new paths. Chan emerged as a promising talent to watch at the convergence of two cinematic eras, helping the camera for out-of-the-box directors such as Patrick Lung Kong, Tong Shu-shuen and Leong Po-chih. Chan's flair was further recognised by King Hu, who enlisted his services for *Raining in the Mountain* (1979) and *Legend of the Mountain* (1979). He didn't disappoint and played a major part in the creation of the two Hong Kong cinema classics. Now residing in the US, Chan reflects on this breakthrough period with mixed emotions: frustration at the many production limitations and struggles to adapt to the local way of filmmaking, as well as gratitude for the lessons learned from each filming experience. He met King Hu and found a kindred spirit who was on the same creative page as he was. Despite resource constraints and a lack of support during the shoots, Chan excelled in his craft with his expertise and shrewd judgement. Drawing from his experience of working on western films, the cinematographer shed light on the limitations for local film productions back then and illuminated a portrait of the Hong Kong filmmaking industry in his time.

From Film School to Film Set

I was born in Hong Kong. My family moved to the UK in my teen years around 1965, and I grew up in Birmingham. After completing my secondary education, I enrolled in the Headington College of Art, majoring in graphic design. That's when it occurred to me that I had a greater interest in painting and photography. I decided to apply to the London Film School (LFS). Essentially a postgraduate film institution, the LFS rejected my first application. Undaunted, I prepared a simple storyboard with an animation comprising a series of still photos that I attached to my second application the following year. Not only did I get accepted, I was also awarded a small scholarship.

As my passion for filmmaking grew, I decided to choose cinematography as my vocation after my graduation from LFS. Back in those days, people with no industry experience—including those graduating with a first honours degree—were denied membership in the trade union. In fact, it's impossible to launch a film career without becoming a member of a filmmaking union. No experience meant no job, so film graduates, myself included, took on anything that came our way. Being a Chinese made me stand out from the rest, not to mention that I didn't mind working overtime or working for free, so I got several job opportunities. Then luck came my way. Peter Watkins was making *The Peace Game* (1969) and I was offered the chance to work under Peter Suschitzky, the director of photography, as an assistant in one of his second unit crew. This was an incredible learning experience. I was introduced to the principles and structures of the trade union during the filming process. Unfortunately, many film companies or producers in Hong Kong have yet to embrace the trade union system to this day.

Shooting Commercials in Hong Kong

I came to know Sven Nykvist when we shot *The Peace Game* on location in Stockholm, Sweden. Nykvist was an internationally acclaimed cinematographer and long-term collaborator with Ingmar Bergman. He had a profound influence on me, showing me that the role of a cinematographer took a fine balance of creativity and technicality. Nykvist and Suschitzky were both sincere souls with big hearts.

I returned to London after the shoot. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) kicked off production on the *Whicker's Orient* TV series, a documentary series that would be filmed on location around Southeast Asia, including Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Hong Kong. I was hired as a camera assistant for its shoot in Hong Kong. Watching lion dances at the Hong Kong Festival, I was suddenly homesick. I realised that this is what Hong Kong looks like, and that I knew so little about Chinese traditions. After filming for a little more than a week, the crew left for Singapore or other locations. I was allowed to stay three more days to take some supplementary shots and street views. During this time, I made the acquaintance of Charles Wang and his father, TC Wang,



Mitra (1977) was the first film shot by Henry Chan in Hong Kong.

of Salon Films (Hong Kong) Limited (now called the Salon Films Group). Salon Films specialised in producing corporate commercials and made me an offer that I couldn't refuse. Although I came with prior experience in filmmaking, shooting commercials called for a different language. I brushed up on my skills on the job for around a year and somehow became a well-known name.

Debuting with *Mitra*

Patrick Lung Kong was set to begin shooting *Mitra* (1977). A friend introduced us, and I showed him my portfolio, which contained works from my photography exhibition at the LFS. Lung liked my photos and we touched on the subject of 'light'. I explained to him how I used photography to tell stories and I used light to express emotions. There were so many things to talk about. He invited me to be the cinematographer for *Mitra*, but I would have to work hands-on with the camera. I wasn't well acquainted with Hong Kong's film production culture because I grew up in the UK, where that role would be staffed by a lighting cameraman who was also a camera operator, so I didn't think too much of Lung's request. I met some people during my stint at Salon Films whom I brought along with me as first camera assistant (Note: Paul Chan) and gaffer (Note: Cheung Sing-tung).

The film was filmed on location in Persia (Iran). It was only after we touched down that I realised we hadn't applied for a filming permit. Hongkongers are used to filming even without a permit. Since it was extremely inconvenient for us to get around Persia, we resorted to filming clandestinely. There was this one time when my assistant and I were travelling in the same car. We were capturing scenes of the mountains on a handheld camera, as instructed by the director, when our car was intercepted by two military vehicles. My assistant and I knew we were in big trouble. Our translator said

there was a military base down the mountains, and we were filming without a permit. I told my assistant, 'Quickly take the film roll out and replace it with a new one.' The people in those two vehicles took my assistant and I into custody, confiscated the film roll and interrogated us separately. Luckily we had switched the film rolls in time. This filming experience taught me the Hong Kong way of film productions: a script is often non-existent and you can't ask the director too many questions. It's a rather difficult position for someone like myself, a young and green cinematographer who wanted nothing more than to do his best.

In the West, there was a system that separates system of shots into A, B, C, D. We would first film all the shots from the same direction as A, followed by those facing the same direction as B. In Hong Kong, however, they shot from any angle as they pleased. For example, there was this scene of two cars colliding head-on. Patrick Lung Kong wanted us to film the wide shot of the collision before getting the close-ups. But the crash would have actually happened when we do the close-ups, so I asked him, 'Will it be a real head-on crash or do I cheat with the camera?' He told me to do tricks with the camera, so I had to figure out how to position the camera to capture the two vehicles leading to a point of impact, followed by an imagined 'Bang!' that would effectively lend itself to be cut to a close-up shot. I didn't have the chance to rehearse the scene or see the real objects. Before I knew it, the director was shouting, 'The cars are coming.' I had to hurriedly set the camera rolling. Lung asked if it was OK, and I said it was acceptable because it would cut to a close-up. We just kept on going from there. Lung knew his stuff when it came to cinematography, so it was easy for us to reach consensus on visuals.

I watched the film on the big screen when it was released in cinemas. It left me both excited and disappointed. We filmed with neither technical backup nor a script, and only the most rudimentary equipment. I could barely accomplish a tenth of what I set out to do. Yet, I got to learn the Hong Kong way of production and the way I had to film in that system. The experience was priceless.

Collaborating With Tong Shu-shuen on *The Hong Kong Tycoon*

Cecile Tong (Tong Shu-shuen's English name) was a very talented director, but *The Hong Kong Tycoon* (1979) was made on a shoestring budget and I could only do my best with what was at my disposal. I remember our first meeting when Cecile and I discussed at length about how to make an unconventional Hong Kong film at the lowest possible cost. During preparation, Cecile, William Chang Suk-ping (Note: the film's assistant director) and I had talked through things quite a few times. The three of us came from western cultural backgrounds, having returned from the US, Canada and the UK respectively. We had an instant rapport. Our plans were to use a western approach to tell a story that reflected the Hong Kong society and make a low-budget film that didn't look like a low-budget film.

Due to the lack of funding, equipment was scarce and even lighting presented a big challenge. *Tycoon* was the story of a man who climbs his way up the social ladder, all the way to the middle class and into the upper echelon. We began filming at places frequented by common people, such as wet markets and corner stores. The night streets of Hong Kong were aglow with strings of light bulbs from *dai pai dong* (open-air street stalls that serve cooked food) and *dai tat dei* (bazaar markets). So I thought I would create this very typical and appealing visual image of the city by taking a leaf out from someone's book. Cinematographer John Alcott shot *Barry Lyndon* (1975, directed by Stanley Kubrick) using dim lighting and overexposure to extraordinary effect. I mimicked these techniques; instead of using a key light, I used the lightbulbs as my light source for scenes at the *dai pai dong* and other similar settings. Even when we moved onto those tastefully decorated skyscrapers and private clubs, there was no special lighting to speak of. We did set up lights, but we went for the most natural look possible.

We didn't even have a camera dolly; we created our own backyard invention—a makeshift dolly track with no curved sections. The camera could only move from point A to point B. Fortunately, after consulting with Cecile, I kept the camera movements to a minimum because she didn't want a lot of dolly-in and dolly-out shots, preferring to use editing instead. Tina Ti was invited to make a cameo appearance in a party scene. Since rehearsal was not possible, I had to shoot the entire scene with a handheld camera on the spot. It was rather challenging, but the actual shoot was relatively straightforward and smooth.

Cecile's style of shooting was rather experimental. She didn't seem to like rehearsals, and she didn't really work on blocking with the actors. That was often a big problem for me. Luckily the three of us were always on the same page when it came to visuals. We didn't have a video assist back then and I had to describe to her the camera movement and effects after each take. Cecile struck me as a meticulous director. It's a pity that the three of us were not 'Hong Kong' enough and our sense of humour was lost on the Hong Kong audience. Watching this film after so long, I still feel that Cecile did her best to tell a good story. It's definitely a notch or two above average films.

In King Hu's Good Graces

When I wasn't making films, I kept shooting commercials. Once, I was working on a commercial with Wu Sau-yee when he said to me, 'Lo Kai-muk and I are business partners. We're going to invest big in a film and have King Hu as the director.' I'd heard of King Hu back I was in the UK, so I asked Wu if I'd be able to meet the director. Wu said it would be his pleasure to introduce us and recommend me to work for Hu. I thought he was only joking with me. Then one day Wu told me that Director Hu wanted to see me. During our first meeting, I set out my principles of filmmaking, and it turned out that we shared very similar values. The one thing that we had the most commonality on was our systematic way of working. Hu showed me storyboard drawings of each

Raining in the Mountain
(1979)



scene and we shared our ideas on the use of cinematic language, tone, to designing costumes, lighting and mood. Our meeting went on for a long time. I thought, even if I didn't land the job as his cinematographer, it was already wonderful to get to know such a remarkable director. When Hu rang me up and offered me the job, I was so excited that tears welled up in my eyes.

Soon I travelled to Korea with the team to film *Raining in the Mountain* (1979) and *Legend of the Mountain* (1979). There I was at the airport, thrown off at the deep end with a group of strangers—the assistant director and a lot of film stars—virtually all unfamiliar faces except Sylvia Chang. Each person brought along with them three, four suitcases while I had only a single piece of luggage. Then someone came up to me and said, 'That's all you've brought? We know Director Hu too well. Last time we worked with him, we were away from home for four, five months.'

Not giving his remarks much thought, I took my suitcase and set off with an assistant (Note: Poon Tak-yip) and a lighting technician (Note: Cheung Sing-tung). I knew that it would be a challenging project and so I brought along my own Zenon HMI light, the latest model at the time.

I was in preparation for filming as soon as I reached Korea. Hu brought his own camera equipment, so I began running tests and recruit for assistant positions like dolly man and gaffer.

I didn't speak Mandarin back then and my Cantonese wasn't up to snuff, so Hu communicated with me in English most of the time. Hu was a director who knew exactly what he wanted. He knew clearly how each shot would be framed and would talk me through the storyboards to acquaint me with what he had in mind; we even discussed of ways to achieve the right tone. Our filming schedule took us from one city to another and one province to the next. The biggest challenge was shooting the two films back-to-



Henry Chan won the Best Cinematography with *Legend of the Mountain* (1979) at the 16th Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan.

back; *Raining in the Mountain* was shot in cities from the west to the east, while *Legend of the Mountain* did the opposite. Everyone in the team was excited and happy working under Hu. However, since we had a very large international team, there was a lot of interpersonal problems as well.

Hu knew clearly his stylistic preferences and insisted on creating atmospheric smoke and fog effects on set. I told him that creating theatrical smoke was a specialty in Europe. How could we achieve it? In the West, special effects specialists installed plastic tubes filled with smoke and release the smoke along the bottom of slopes. Their control of the devices was masterful, and the effects were stunning. Sadly, such specialists were not to be found in Korea. So we hired two Koreans, each carrying a sprayer for pest control, to spray streams of smoke and wait for them to settle. When the wait was almost over, we would roll the camera. The smoke was totally beyond our control because the sunlight and wind directions changed constantly and drastically. We had to improvise as we went along. I understood what Hu wanted to achieve, so I described to him the idea of ‘the magic hour’, the quarter of an hour before sunrise and sunset. That amazing palette of colours would provide a fascinating backdrop for filming and we ended up shooting a lot of footage.

Filming in Arduous Circumstances

Hu brought an Arriflex 2C camera, the preferred handheld camera for filming action scenes. Since it’s a handheld camera with a motor at the bottom, I couldn’t position the machine low enough to get the low-angle shots I wanted even when I lied on the ground.

We had to dig a hole and set the camera in it, then we installed a rotatable periscope to the viewfinder. The images we viewed were all squeezed, or flattened. Luckily, the Arriflex had a de-squeeze function, but the images we saw were unclear, and we weren't able to see the focus and sharpness. We just had to make use of the equipment we had at our disposal.

The most difficult aspect of our work was that we couldn't view our filmed footage at the end of each day. The film rolls were sent to a laboratory in Seoul to be processed. Things got even more complicated when the production for the Kodak 5254 film we were using discontinued halfway through the shoot, to be replaced by a new 5247 film stock. Fortunately, I had prior experience in using the 5247 film stock when I was making commercials in Hong Kong. The problem was that the 5247 had a green tint while the 5254 had a red one. It was difficult to mediate the perceptible differences between the two colour tones. Even the skin tones would turn out differently—the 5247 had a fresh sheen while the 5254 had a red tint. I decided to place filters on the lens to adjust the colours and calibrate the skin tones, trying to match the two film stocks as much as possible.

Since we couldn't watch the footage, the director rang up the laboratory and asked if the films turned out OK. The lab said they did. After some months, we finally got to look at the footage. We went to this obscure little village which boasted a small picture house. I was already quite troubled because I didn't know if the cinema's equipment was up to standard. The entire cast and crew, including Sylvia Chang, Hsu Feng and Shih Chun, were present at the screening. Partly because of the substandard projection facilities, some of the shots had distorted colours and images. Even worse, the night scenes came out as a mesh of blurry darkness. All eyes were on me when Hu asked, calmly, 'Do you think this projection is what it is?' I said that there's no way I would believe that my shots would turn out pitch-dark, so he instructed, 'Good, let's keep watching.' A wave of sadness washed over me. Could I have screwed up a big production? I began second-guessing myself, agonising over whether I had messed up at any one point or if my Korean assistant had something muddled up along the way. Hu went to Seoul to watch the film again that weekend. He returned and told us that everything turned out well and there's no problem whatsoever.

A lesson I had learned from Hu that I would remember for the rest of my life was the ways to film a fight scene, one of which involved 'cheating with the camera'. For example, when we filmed a close-up of a character running, we would lay a 100-foot track to facilitate our improvised dolly shot. We would consider ourselves lucky if the footage from one-fifth of the dolly track turned out to be usable. Sometimes a dolly is unable to keep up with a running actor, and vice versa. Even when the two in sync, the camera might not be in focus. Without the benefit of the video assist, the director had to ask me if it was OK after each take. We'd move on if I said so.

When we were shooting close-ups of an actor in motion, I suggested to the director, 'Since the shot is so tight, we can hold the camera upright at one spot and attach a rope

to it, with the other end secured to the actor's body. This way, the actor could run 360 degrees around the camera in a circle, as we pan the camera to follow the movement.' He thought it was a great idea and we shot all our close-ups this way.

Winning a Golden Horse Award With *Legend of the Mountain*

There was an incident during filming that had left an indelible mark in my memory. One day, Lo Kai-muk (Note: co-producer of *Raining in the Mountain*) and producer Wong Cheuk-hon (Note: co-producer of *Legend of the Mountain*) came to visit us on set. Lo invited me to his hotel room and showed me a briefcase packed with brand-new US\$100 banknotes. He said he had prepared US\$500,000 in cash to be given to the Korean crew and production members. He added, 'Please urge him (Note: King Hu) to get on with the filming and keep going. We've already been shooting for more than ten months.'

It turned out that *Legend* and *Rain* were two of the proudest times in my life. The two films were accepted into many well-known international film festivals, and my cinematography received a lot of good reviews. With *Legend*, I went down in history books as the first Hong Kong cinematographer to win Best Cinematography at the Golden Horse Awards (Note: at the 16th Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan in 1979). I'm very honoured to be a part of the history.

Restraints From Local Production Environment and Conditions

Before I went to Korea to work on the King Hu films, I shot Leong Po-chih's *No Big Deal* (1980, with cinematographer Ken Tobat). Leong and I had known each other for a long time, having begun our careers in shooting commercials. I expected his big screen work to be infused with his own brand of humour and artistry. So when it turned out that he had adopted the same approach as with making commercials, filming without a complete script or storyboards, the process could only be regarded as a frustrating experience.

Patrick Lung King, Leong Po-chih and Tong Shu-shuen were all top-notch directors of Hong Kong cinema and I am honoured to have worked with them. The problem was that the Hong Kong film industry at the time couldn't provide the support I needed to achieve what I envisioned. I had to face reality head-on, doing my utmost under the many constraints.

I had teamed up with a few up-and-coming Hong Kong New Wave directors in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Ronny Yu and I were neighbours. When I returned home from filming *Raining in the Mountain*, Yu asked me to lend him a hand in a low-budget film, *The Servants* (1979), which he co-directed with Philip Chan. Even though the script was yet to be fully fleshed out when the filming kicked off, Yu had studied filmmaking in the US and thus had a strong grasp of film production. Both he and Chan belonged to a new generation of directors who borrowed stylistically from the West. It was a well-

thought-out production and the filming process was a pleasant one.

I chose to work on *Flash Future Kung Fu* (1983) because Kirk Wong was a director who stood out from the pack. Both of us were good at visualising what we had in mind. We were two film buffs who couldn't get enough of Western productions and conversations flew easily between us. Our works were similar stylistically too, so the film had no shortage of surrealistic details. It was just that there was neither the budget nor technical expertise to realise our ideas.

Due to limited capacities and technical knowhow, laboratories in Hong Kong lacked the capacity of their Western counterparts to perform colour calibration and lighting adjustment. Besides, striking a second print incurred extra costs. So I could only do my best to accommodate the laboratories and producers in Hong Kong, trying to make it work without asking too much of the laboratories.

When I first came back to Hong Kong, the kind of Hong Kong films that impressed me the most were films like Bruce Lee's *The Big Boss* (1971). Japanese cinematic techniques had a profound influence on Hong Kong productions in the 1970s. For example, since the Japanese filmed in the Cinemascope (widescreen) format, Hong Kong followed along. But when the generation of cinematographers returning from abroad, like myself, teamed up with a crop of up-and-coming directors, we tended to ditch the widescreen format. We wanted to shoot in the 1.66:1 or 1.85:1 aspect ratios to reflect the films' atmosphere and scripts. Kirk Wong's *Flash Future Kung Fu* was shot in the 1.66:1 ratio, not the widescreen mode.

Almost all *wuxia* and kung fu films of the 1970s had the same staging and composition. Once 'action' is shouted, then it's close-up then zooming out to a flurry of fists and kicks. Martial arts choreographers also had no regard for the standard frame rate of 24 frames per second (fps) for motion capture. If an action sequence was deemed not fast or furious enough, they would simply reduce it to 22 fps or even less. Images filmed this way looked comically animated. Film workers in the West often teased our Hong Kong films of looking like cartoons. That's how films were made back in the 1970s.

Helming as Director-cinematographer for *Obsessed*

In 1983, I made my directorial debut with a low-budget production, *Obsessed*. I couldn't remember much about the story except that it had a simple plot about a girl who had fallen out with her family. I had to juggle the dual role of director and cinematographer. Many unhappy issues that had cropped up during filming. This upsetting memory, coupled with my past experiences in other film projects, made me all the more determined to leave Hong Kong if I was to take my film career further and to do the things I wanted. I realised that Hong Kong valued film stars, directors and, of course, box office, over the production.



Photographed with the lead actress, Cherie Chung during the shoot of *Golden Swallow* (1987)



Henry Chan (right) returned to Hong Kong with an invitation from Peter Chan (left) to film. The two collaborated favourably in three productions, one of them was *He's a Woman, She's a Man* (1994).

A Stint With Cinema City in the 1980s

In the 1980s, I was blessed with the chance to work with Karl Maka, Raymond Wong and Dean Shek at Cinema City for some five, six years, serving as the cinematographer on a string of films, including *Aces Go Places* (1982). I worked on these films for two reasons: first, as means for living; second, to fulfil my wishes in collaborating with some talented and acclaimed directors. But things didn't quite turn out the way I expected. More often than not, my questions on camera movements or editing of a particular shot were dodged by the directors or simply become misinterpreted as being distrustful of them.

That being said, my stint with Cinema City was pleasant. Karl Maka would often have a group of us over to his place to bounce ideas off each other in the study.

As I remembered it, the entire filmmaking system in Hong Kong was devoted to the sole purpose of maximising profits; everyone was in it for the money. I, too, took up a lot of work—though I can't recall the exact number. I was ready to immigrate to Canada, where I had planned to rebuild my career from scratch. My drive to make a living drove me to accept whatever work came my way.

Making *Golden Swallow* as Swansong to Hong Kong

In retrospect, one film stood out from all my works in Hong Kong: director O Sing-pui's *Golden Swallow* (1987). I returned from Canada in 1986 with the thought of making it a farewell production to Hong Kong cinema. I was decidedly quite ambitious in terms of techniques, with emphasises on using smoke, backlight and sidelight shots.

In Canada, I began a new chapter of my cinematography career in North America. One day I got a long-distance call with the news that Jimmy Heung wanted me to work in Hong Kong. So I went back and did several films with Win's Movie Production, which were either directed or executively produced by Wong Jing. It was during this period of

time that I had the good fortune of helming the camera for Ann Hui's *Starry Is the Night* (1988).

In the 1990s, I took part in director Tsui Hark's *The Master* (1992). Tsui found me in the US at the time. But I was not a fan of his use of wide-angle lens for close-ups and capturing action scenes at 22 frames per second, so I only worked on the project briefly before quitting. When I returned to Canada, Peter Chan invited me to work on *He's a Woman, She's a Man* (1994) in Hong Kong. I agreed on the hunch that Chan was a director who took his work seriously and that his choice of subject matter would strike a chord with me. This was followed by two more collaborations, *The Age of Miracles* (1996) and *Who's the Woman, Who's the Man* (1996).

Speed and cheap were the essence of Hong Kong film productions; quality only came second. Hong Kong productions didn't call for a lot of equipment because people didn't realise that filming equipment could make or break a film. The fact was, we needed certain equipment to tell certain stories and we needed certain lighting to convey a certain mood. Back in the 1970s, if we needed a tracking shot, we could only use an improvised dolly with the camera mounted on a tracked platform. The camera could only operate sideways or back and forth in straight lines, not up and down.

The advent of technology from the 1980s saw the replacement of the camera dolly with the new equipment like the steadicam. When I was working on Peter Chan's films in the 1990s, I was able to use newer equipment such as the Power Pod, gear heads, as well as hoists which could be raised and lowered to vary the elevation of cameras. Cameras and film stocks, too, had come a long way over the years.

Career as Sweet Dream

Who's the Woman, Who's the Man was the last film I made in Hong Kong. After that, I took my career to North America. Looking back, my time in Hong Kong cinema might have left me perplexed at times, but it did endow me a full measure of wisdom and a harvest of life lessons, the most important of which would be 'zap saang' (the ability to react in difficult situations). My production experience in Hong Kong also taught me to best accommodate budget concerns, while giving as many viable options to producers and directors as possible to streamline production.

Life is but a dream, and so are my filmmaking days. It has been an incredible honour to receive precious accolades and words of encouragement that have made my filmmaking dream all the more sweeter. [Translated by Agnes Lam]

Philip Chan:

I Wanted to Redefine the Crime Thriller Genre

Interviewers: Cecilia Wong and May Ng
(26 October 2017)

Collated by Eric Tsang



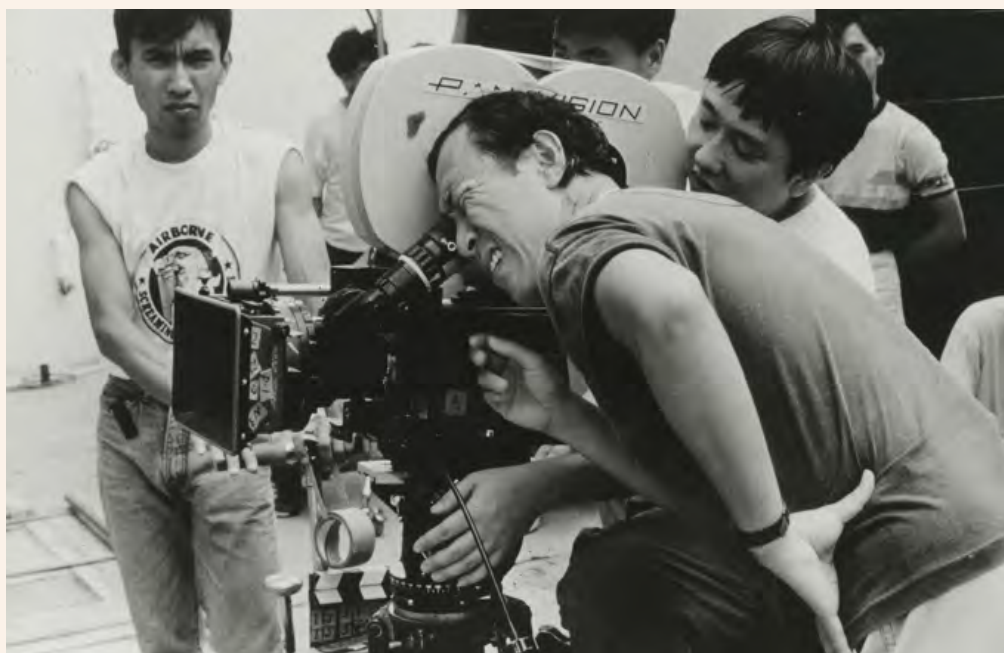
The term ‘legend’ is often overused, but it’s appropriate when it’s applied to Philip Chan. Dubbed a rising star in the force at the time, Chan joined the police force in the mid-60s and was responsible for solving a number of major cases. In 1975, Chan wrote the script for *Jumping Ash* (1976). What was initially a side project turned out to be a major turning point in his life. Following the box office success of the film, investor Jimmy Yip recruited Chan to join his company, Bang Bang Film Production. Chan gave up his ‘iron rice bowl’ career in the law enforcement for a career in entertainment. In the following decades, Chan conquers the film, television and music industries, working as scriptwriter, planner, director and producer behind the scenes, as well as an actor and emcee in front of the camera. He is one of the very rare multi-talented artists in the Hong Kong entertainment world.

In this interview, Chan discussed how he became involved with *Jumping Ash*, how he eventually joined the film industry and the burgeoning of the Hong Kong New Wave. He also discussed his career as a director and his collaborations with Johnny Mak and Michael Hui. His passion for filmmaking is evident throughout the interview.

Film and Music Are in My Blood

Philip Chan is my real name. My family is from Xinhui, now known as Jiangmen. I was born in Hong Kong in 1945, part of the baby boom generation.

The seeds of my filmmaking dream were sowed early when I was around eight or



On-set photo while directing *Mr Boo VIII Chocolate Inspector* (1986)

nine. My parents loved films and often took my four siblings and I to the cinema. The foreign films that I watched as a child left a strong impression on me. I loved being in the dark and entering worlds that were far beyond my own experience. Thanks to cinema, I also fell in love with music. When I grew a little older, my family moved to Mongkok. I would often sneak into the Victoria Theatre for matinee screenings. I watched countless Cantonese and foreign films, completely mesmerised by the stories and characters. When I grew a little older, I could afford to take my dates to the cinema. If I was single, there was all the more motivation to go to the cinema because I needed something to pass the time.

To ease the financial burden at home, I didn't go into university. Instead, I joined the police force as a trainee officer. During the Hong Kong 1967 riots, I was a 'Blue Beret' (member of the Police Tactical Unit [PTU]) and was not allowed to leave the police station. But I still managed to sneak out to watch *The East is Red* (1965) at the Astor Theatre because I had heard good things about it. Actually, I had already been on television. If people recognised me as a police officer, it would have been the end of me.

When I was young, I had lots of contact with people in the music or entertainment industry, or simply people who gravitated towards the public spotlight. Josephine Siao was the one that I hung out with the most. We learned the Hala Hala dance together. Michael Lai was my classmate at La Salle College. James Wong and Michael Hui were my seniors. When I got a little older, I often visited the Shaw Brothers to hit on actresses. We went dancing together. When I was stationed at the Kowloon City Police Station as

an inspector, I often went to Jiancheng Studio, which was located at the nearby Diamond Hill, to watch film shoots. That was how I became acquainted with Suet Nei and Kenneth Tsang Kong, and ended up going bowling with Patrick Tse Yin. Later on, I befriended Taiwanese actresses Chen Chen and Hu Yin-meng, as well as Melvin Wong kam-sun, Sam Hui and Teddy Robin—all of them were close friends of mine.

To quote Michael Hui, 'film and music are in my blood.' It was only a matter of time before these 'hidden' proclivities emerged. After serving the police force for 11 years, I was finally given the opportunity.

The First Film: *Jumping Ash*

Around 1975, I was promoted to superintendent and I was serving in the Crime Investigation Department (CID). At the time, I had already known Josephine Siao for many years. She said that she wanted to introduce me to Leong Po-chih because they were planning to make a film about drug trafficking in the Netherlands. They wanted me to serve as a research consultant. Later Po-chih immediately wanted to cast me as the lead when he met me, but the chief was opposed to the idea. I was quite bitter about that.

Since I was already doing the research, Po-chih and Josephine subsequently asked me to co-write the script with them. I'd had no scriptwriting experience at the time. Josephine taught me a lot of the technical aspects, and Po-chih taught me how to craft the characters. The three of us often acted out prospective scenes, improvising the dialogue. We would each think of the most outrageous things to say until we all broke down in laughter. Many of the dialogues and interactions in the film were created this way. The wondrous chemistry during this unique creative process allowed us to develop richer characters, mise-en-scène and dramatic tension. *Jumping Ash* actually contained a lot of Western humour—Josephine's American humour, Po-chih's British-style subtle humour, and my part-American, part-British sensibilities. There was even absurd humour similar to the *MAD Magazine*-style comic book satire. I had a great time during the creative process. I miss it dearly.

After the script was completed, I told them I couldn't act in the film but I did want to learn more. So I requested a four-month leave from my police duties and immersed myself in the film from pre-production to post-production. I got to know a solid group of behind-the-scenes crew, including Tony Hope, the cinematographer. His assistant Johnny Koo went on to become the cinematographer for *Long Arm of the Law* (1984). I also sat beside Po-chih during editing and listened to him talk about why certain shots needed to be cut, how to achieve various effects, etc. They made the film with the techniques and production standards of television commercials; each stage of process was meticulous and a high bar was set for every shot. The most satisfying part of the experience was being assigned to handle the film's soundtrack. I was responsible for every single stage

of the process, from recruiting talent for songwriting, arrangement, picking the vocalist, to recording. I compiled a variety of background music on tape, and divided the tracks with three separate open-reel recorders. When the soundtrack recording began, Po-chih, Josephine and I would be literally glued to the projector screen, each of us operating an open-reel machine. As soon as a preset marker appeared, one of us would hit the playback button and stop the track at that precise point. Each of us would had to react instantaneously, switching the machine on and off in synchronicity with the preceding music track. The entire manually operated process was not only 'low-tech' but also terrifying!

The term 'jumping ash' didn't exist originally. The more familiar police jargons were 'jumping powder' and 'getting ash'. 'Jumping powder' meant selling heroin. 'Getting ash' meant taking heroin. We combined the two and created the term 'jumping ash'. I suggested the title to Josephine. She said it was amusing. 'Jumping ash' sounded energetic in English, and people could easily associate the word 'ash' with 'heroin'. That was how the film title came about.

The film was entirely fictional. Before the script was completed, they had already decided to film on location in Netherlands and Kowloon Walled City. It was all a matter of convenience; Kowloon City district belonged to my jurisdiction. In my capacity as a police officer, if someone gave us any trouble there, I could easily deal with it. But we didn't actually film inside the Walled City; we were out on the periphery. Others also offered help—Michael Chan Wai-man, for example, used his connections in the Netherlands. Everyone invested personal resources into the film, which was why the production went so smoothly.

The film opens with an establishing shot in the Netherlands. Since we didn't record much ambient sound during the shoot, we had to fill the soundtrack with foley sound effects in post. I suggested to Po-chih that we could add some distant church bell ringing in the background, so that when the shot of Netherlands appears, it would immediately lend the scene some measure of authenticity.

Josephine Siao played a lounge folk singer in the film but she was not a singer by trade. Music lounges were quite popular back then. We would often hang out at Target Bar, located in the basement of the Grand Hotel in Tsim Sha Tsui. There was a folk singer there named Chan Lai-sze. She looked fashionable, but she was also down-to-earth. I noticed that her voice sounded very similar to Josephine's, so I asked her if she would be the playback singer for the film. I also asked my classmate Michael Lai to compose the theme song and James Wong to write the lyrics. It just happened that Michael was fighting with his girlfriend and James was having trouble at home. Their state of mind gave rise to 'Ask Me', a song about freedom, and defying conventions as well as sentimental attachment.

As for the theme song, 'The Big Hero', I was able to bring Liu Jai-chang on board as composer thanks to Josephine's connections. Naturally, James Wong wrote the lyrics.

He faxed the lyrics over and I tried to sing it, but they didn't feel refined enough for some reason. The song was meant to be an inspirational that could be sung in a large group, and it also had to express a policeman's loneliness and courage. Because of my previous collaborations with James and composer Joseph Koo on songs for television commercials and as a demo singer, I plucked up the courage and asked James to further refine the lyrics. It resulted in the version that we have now. The song was used as the theme song for *Jumping Ash, The Big Hero* (the 1977 television drama series) and a recent web drama series called *OCTB*. I can recall great memories every time I hear it. I miss James dearly.

The image of the Hong Kong police was quite negative at the time. This film changed public perception towards police officers to a certain extent because we tried to humanise police officers. We gave them personalities and portrayed both their personal and work lives. Officers are like ordinary people; they drink and hit on girls. They have good times and bad. They get into confrontations with the triads, and their efforts were often hampered by red tape and their own superior officers. But our young protagonist remains upright. This film was the first successful, realistic and positive cinematic representation of police officers. It was all thanks to the righteous yet flawed character played by Callen Leung. The film grossed over HK\$1 million in just three days. We threw a big party to celebrate. Its success also sowed the seeds of my future decision in leaving the police force.

As a child, I thought detectives in Cantonese films were very cool. But after watching too many the same type of films, I realised their portrayals were quite outmoded. By the time I joined the police force and came into contact with the real world of policing, it became even more apparent that how fake and obsolete those film were—the detectives were still wearing fedoras, and the black plastic toy guns they carried were particularly irksome. Foreign crime thrillers like *The French Connection* (1971) and *Dirty Harry* (1971) were amazing, and we didn't have anything in Hong Kong that even came close to them. It gave me the incentive to make a great crime thriller. That's why when Josephine approached me and proposed to make a crime thriller that would redefine the genre, she found the right person.

Truth to be told, less than a third of my crime films were based on real life. Most of the stories were fictional. The character personalities were real, but the incidents depicted were all made up. Police officers spend most of their time interviewing witnesses and typing reports. The work is quite mundane.

Leaving the Police Force and Joining of Bang Bang

The original investor of *Jumping Ash* was a self-proclaimed heir to a rubber plantation empire in Malaysia. But a month or two before production, the investor disappeared. They subsequently contacted Jimmy Yip, the owner of Bang Bang Fashion. I still remember that Jimmy invested HK\$700,000 into the production.

Following *Jumping Ash's* success, Jimmy asked me to join his company to manage the advertising department. At the time, Bang Bang had a massive working capital; it sponsored programmes on both Rediffusion Television (RTV) and Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB). Both programmes were quite popular. Jimmy even wanted to establish a film production division and put me in charge. He asked about my salary in the police force. I said HK\$12,000 plus a driver. He offered me HK\$25,000. I thought to myself, it's truly a blessing if someone make you such a great offer to do a job that you're passionate about. I shouldn't dismiss such an opportunity. My wife (Note: actress Yu Ching) was very supportive. I also asked my good friend and senior in school, Michael Hui, for his opinion. He also supported my decision to leave, so I left the police force.

I was the only employee in Bang Bang's film division when it first started. The office consisted of only one room. We poached administrative staff from the fashion department. Apart from film production, I also had to take care of marketing for jeans and other apparel. I was also responsible in coordinating the two youth programmes on TV sponsored by our company. I didn't have to worry about TVB's *Bang! Bang! Kind of Sound*. Meanwhile, I cast up-and-coming young talents like Teresa Mo, Melvin Wong, Danny Chan for RTV's *Bang! Bang! New Ideas* and had them model Bang Bang's clothes. I became a big brother of sorts, responsible for planning programme content, scriptwriting and hosting the show.

I had a hand in every aspect of a film production. I served as the in-house associate producer. Whenever we needed to put together a crew, we would hire a production manager from outside to recruit staff. We didn't have any designated actors and so there were no contractual obligations to cast certain actors. We could just cast the one who was best suited for the character in the script. Conversely, we would make use of an established actor's image and personality to augment and complement a script.

Foxbat (1977) was my first production after I joined Bang Bang. The company recruited a number of talented new directors, starting with Yim Ho for *The Extras* (1978). Dennis Yu didn't work for us as a director but served as a creative producer. Ronny Yu was the indispensable production manager for *Jumping Ash*. He co-directed *The Servants* (1979) with me and taught me a lot about directing. *Charlie's Bubble* (1981) was the first production where I was finally a full-fledged director.

Jimmy Yip was very good. He never objected to my suggestions and didn't establish any restrictions over the production unit. Of course, he used the films as platforms to promote the Bang Bang Fashion brand. Bang Bang had provided us with a worry-free environment in which we could create and produce without commercial pressure. We were also given the freedom to develop unique marketing strategies for each film. Back then, our films were mostly screened in the Golden Harvest cinemas, and Bang Bang handled distribution in-house. We weren't privy to whether the film turned a profit or not, but we could tell from the boss's expressions. It wasn't difficult to break even as the film industry was booming at the time.

The *Foxbat* Setback

After *Jumping Ash*, someone introduced us to Terence Young, the director who had directed several James Bond films. Young brought along a six-foot tall, overweight African-American man named Rick Johnston. The two of them came with a thick folder filled with maps, photographs and various Hollywood actor profiles. They also had a stack of research about the drug trade in the Golden Triangle, as well as photographs of locations in Thailand and Taiwan shot from helicopters. They said that they wanted to collaborate with Bang Bang on a big-budget American action film about the drug trade in the Golden Triangle. Jimmy looked like he had won a lottery through discussions with them.

To ensure that the deal was legitimate, Jimmy asked his business partner in the US to do a background check on this person. By that very evening, the black fellow summoned Jimmy, Po-chih and me to his suite. He cursed and threatened us, questioning our motives in investigating him. He said that it was a serious insult! Jimmy was quite upset, but he had already paid the so-called 'earnest money' and spent a fortune just to host them. He ultimately decided against the collaboration, but Bang Bang had already paid for the copyright of the script. To mitigate losses, Jimmy asked Po-Chih to redevelop the story based on the film title, rewrite the script and make a big-budget film that could break into the US market. Handed with this 'hot potato', Po-chih recruited me to co-write with him. We based the script on the real-life story of Russian air force pilot, Viktor Ivanovich Belenko, who defected to the West by flying a MiG-25 'Foxbat' jet fighter to Hakodate, Japan. Then we incorporated that with a comedy that took place in Hong Kong, about a group of assassins and an ordinary civilian. We cast veteran American actor, Henry Silva, in a bid to secure international distribution for the film. Terrace Young might be credited as the director, but Po-chih was the one and only director of the film (Note: Leong Po-chih was credited as the director when the film was released in Hong Kong).

Foxbat was a huge investment, costing over HK\$1 million to make. That was considered a huge budget in those days. The stunt coordinator, Vic Armstrong, had previously worked on many James Bond films. He later went on to work on *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) as the stunt coordinator. Armstrong was in charge of the stunts in *Foxbat*; the ingenious Central-set car chase between the double-decker bus and ambulance was his design. Unfortunately, he broke his leg midway into the production, so he had to return to the UK to recover. I had to do my own car stunts in the end. My car had to 'fly' mid-air and crash through a double-decker bus. Actually, all I needed to do was to accelerate up the inclined wooden platform at the back of a truck and crashed into the double-decker. I would stop, and another stuntman would complete the rest of the stunt by driving the car through the double-decker a second time to land on the other side. As soon as I heard the director shout 'action', I floored the car up the wooden platform. When my car was about to hit the bus, I slammed on the brakes,

but it was too late. My mind went blank; I couldn't do anything but watched as my car smashed into the bus and come out on the other side, heading for a nosedive to the ground. Miraculously, the car got stuck halfway through!

We took the project in hopes of breaking into overseas markets. We wanted to use an international incident to capture the attention of audiences abroad. We wanted the involvement of foreigners from the very first start. We didn't consider casting Hong Kong actors as any of the leads. However, the film was still very much a Hong Kong production in terms of characters and settings. We only used the Foxbat jet fighter in the opening to introduce the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) into the plot. It was never mentioned again after that.

We basically rewrote the entire script. That's how James Yi's character and the narrative came about. In the film, he played a silly, bumbling fool similar to Charlie Chaplin's 'Tramp' persona. Yi had played similar roles in the past. Later, he just took any acting role that came along, and none of them allowed him to showcase his talent as a comedian. For some reasons, those films always had some kind of sex scenes involved. We all felt that he was right for the part—a silly and naïve man who would do anything to save face, but constantly suffered from the consequences of his hubris. He delivered a good performance.

Publicity Stunts for *The Extras*

We had always wanted to tell the story of an average man. James Yi's character in *Foxbat*, for instance, was a cook. After *Foxbat*, we were thinking of making a film about extras. So Director Yim Ho and I created a story about the extras, who were usually mistreated and yelled at on set. The film portrayed the struggles of ordinary people, exposing the seedy underbelly of film stars and human greed. It was a comedy completely in Yim Ho's. It's one of my favourite films.

Yim Ho was extremely well-read and quite confident. But at the same time, he was willing to take others' suggestions and made use of what he had learned into productions. The story might be the result of collective creation, but he was able to give the film a soul that wasn't present in the original script. Our collaboration had left a strong impression on me.

What's more amusing is the amount of research we did for our Chinese film title; we surveyed countless people of how to write the Chinese characters for 'Kei Lei Fei' (the Cantonese slang for film extras). We also asked a number of film veterans about how this term came about. We could not trace the origins in the end, so we just created our own version, which is the one that's commonly used today.

The publicity campaign for *The Extras* was also quite special. Prior to the official launch of its film posters and promotion campaign, we posted thousands of bills across the busy streets of Hong Kong that read: 'What actually is "Kei Lei Fei"?' This

successfully generated quite a bit of attention. By the time the advertisements went out, there was already quite a bit of buzz. After the film was released, 'Kei Lei Fei' became the commonly used term for extras.

Co-directing *The Servants* With Ronny Yu

Ronny Yu had been involved in the production of *Jumping Ash*. He previously studied filmmaking at the University of Southern California. Ronny was a great help to me during the production of *The Servants* because he had the proper training and I was obviously a late-comer to the game. He knew how to tell a story through the lens. He offered me a lot chances to direct, but he stepped in whenever I encountered technical issues. He also constantly gave me pointers on acting. This film came to fruition because of his generosity and collaborative spirit.

At first, we wanted to write about the characters played by Paul Chu and Hu Yin-meng. But we didn't want the story to be solely from a male perspective. At the time, we knew that Joyce Chan was particularly good at writing emotional scenes. So we collaborated with her in hopes of generating some creative sparks. After a number of brainstorming sessions, Joyce wrote the first draft. Ronny and I then wrote the director's script (shooting script). As always, I took care of the 'male content' in the film, such as things that were related to the police or crooks.

The Servants was unlike other crime films. It was about two cops who were close friends but had opposing values and mindsets. One was corrupted and didn't follow the rules; the other one was righteous and honest. Because the villain had waged a vendetta against them, the two cops reached a boiling point due to their conflicting interests. In the end, however, they chose friendship. It was considered quite a bold move at the time to resolve the narrative in such a way. I was particularly fond of the bad cop character. He was unlike the cops in other films who yelled at people constantly. I prefer characters with a mix of good and bad.

Michael Chan Wai-man and I were responsible for the fight scene in *The Servants*. We wanted to create a 'street brawl' with no action choreography. We had a great time filming the scene. Michael and I went to the police academy together in 1965. I was a trainee officer and he was a trainee constable. When we were at the academy, I often caught him sleeping in and skipping morning exercises. We became close friends later, and he often appeared in my films.

The ending of *The Servants* was Ronny's idea. If it wasn't for that, we wouldn't have known how to bring about the special bonding between men with a climatic conclusion. You certainly wouldn't have expected Paul Chu and I hugged and kissed, would you? So Ronny came up with the idea of using black-and-white photos, ending the film with our eyes and expressions. It was quite a subtle approach, leaving room for audience's imagination.

Collaborating With the New Wave Directors

Teddy Robin and Alex Cheung were the prime creative force behind *Cops and Robbers* (1979). Alex knew exactly what he wanted in terms of cinematography, direction and casting. Teddy was well-connected with the police and actors. My contribution was my knowledge and real-life experience of working in the police force, which helped shape characters such as the sergeant played by Wong Chung, who was killed early on in the film (Note: Philip Chan and William Ho were credited as the film's creative producers). This group of young people was full of passion and energy. Working together was a positive experience, and we produced good results. Alex was very talented. Whenever he was not satisfied with the camerawork, he would take the reins himself. Whether it was directing or camerawork, he was constantly breaking new ground for Hong Kong cinema.

Encore (1980), directed by Clifford Choi, was produced by Fu Shan, an independent production company. I believed it was Elaine Sun who convinced Albert Yeung to invest in the film. I was credited as producer, but I was actually involved with most aspects of the film, including the script. I was the one who discovered Danny Chan when he was still an unknown, recruiting him to play piano on Bang Bang's TV shows. I admired his talent and we became good friends.

The story came from Clifford; it was about a group of young people. We created nearly the entire outline together. Clifford also asked me to play Danny's uncle in the film.

I really liked the character played by Leslie Cheung because he was somewhat rebellious, like James Dean. But the role wasn't properly fleshed out. If it were, the character would have been deeper and given Danny's scenes greater impact. At the time we put a lot of effort into Danny's character to capitalise on his popularity. In contrast, Leslie was not that popular at the time because he had previously appeared in an erotic period piece (Note: *Erotic Dream of Red Chamber* [1978]). We were hoping that this film could turn his career around. We took their singing contest scene very seriously. It was filmed in the old campus of La Salle College. I paid special attention to the songs in the film because I love film music.

I believed when a generation of filmmakers who have both the talent and opportunity to make films isn't satisfied with the existing system, it is bound to break new ground in the industry with unprecedented creativity and production standard. This confluence of talented filmmakers making films in Hong Kong gave birth to the so-called 'new wave'. We were making films during the golden age of the Hong Kong cinema. Everyone was coming up with new ideas, trying to do something different than what had come before. No one was thinking about a 'new wave'; it was only a convenient term coined by the media to define the movement.

Chronicling First Love With *Charlie's Bubble*

Charlie's Bubble was based on my own story. When I was a Form 5 student at Good Hope School, I had a crush on a teacher. I was quite enamored at the time. Maybe because she was my first crush, that episode stayed in my mind long after. *Charlie's Bubble* told the story of a teacher-student affair. Quite daring, don't you think? To capture the feeling of first love, I approached my first love, Ha Ping-ping, to play the female lead. The two of us were forced to break up when we were young; her mother made her leave me and go overseas. I was devastated. This ordeal had haunted me for years. I hoped to heal old wounds by telling this sad love story. My first relationship left me feeling helpless about people's fate. That's why I named the film *Charlie's Bubble*, a metaphor of the fragile and transitory nature of human relationships, like soap bubbles made by children. Bubbles are beautiful in children's eyes; they float in the air like magic. Some bubbles come together and then separate, others remain alone until they crash to the ground and dissipate. Some even burst before they hit the ground. Like bubbles, the course of love is often random and dictated by fate.

Most people might not be aware that I worked as a demo singer for Joseph Koo for 11 years. I served as a background vocalist for countless TV commercial songs as well as a number of recording artists such as Yao Su-yung, Roman Tam and Adam Cheng. I came to know a lot of outstanding musicians and artists. I believed in finding the right composers, lyricists and singers for film soundtracks to convey the messages of the films. I found Ruth Chen's voice penetrating, yet pure and sweet, just like the beautiful teacher in *Charlie's Bubble*. That's when I asked her to sing the theme song, 'Colours in the Wind'. In the film, Cheung Kwok-keung played a character suffering from unrequited love. Only Ruth's song could give him relief and solace. Cheng Kok-kong also did an amazing job with the lyrics. He understood the message of my story: 'No need to sigh. No need to grieve. Don't ask where the wind is blowing...', they expressed the sentiments of the film perfectly.

Forging a New Path, Writing and Directing *Night Caller*

Later, Bang Bang underwent major restructuring. New colleagues were brought in, changing the environment completely. So I decided to leave with Dennis Yu and Ronny Yu to start our own film business. Unfortunately, we weren't able to reach a consensus, so I partnered with John Sham instead and founded Johnson Film Company.

Lau Leung-wah was the primary investor of Johnson Film Company. She had close ties with Golden Harvest. We never questioned her source of capital and opened a small office in Tsim Sha Tsui. Johnson Film Company only managed to produce two films: *Krazy Kops* (1981) and *Sealed with a Kiss* (1981). Our third film was going to be Tsui Hark's *Zu: The Warriors from the Magic Mountain* (1983). I had just begun working on the script with Tsui Hark when his contract mysteriously disappeared from the office. Ms Lau



Group photo of the cast and crew from *Sealed with a Kiss* (1981), produced by Johnson Film Company that was founded by Philip Chan and John Sham. From right: director Shu Kei, art director Rebecca Lee, cinematographer David Chung, producer Philip Chan, planning producer John Sham, actors Jade Hsu and Albert Au.

suddenly announced that she was withdrawing her support. The next day, production managers from Golden Harvest came and cleared out the office. Our plans to collaborate with Tsui Hark went up in smoke; he was now officially working under the Golden Harvest banner.

This was my second setback since *Foxbat*. I couldn't blame them entirely. Perhaps they lost faith in us because our two films didn't do well and they decided to take control of the entire production. That's one of the harsh realities of the film industry.

I later founded Pyramid Films. *Night Caller* (1985) was one of the films it produced. The film was inspired by an American novel about police officers. The author, Ed McBain, used to be a police officer as well. I only borrowed the basic concept of the story, the abduction of a police officer. I initially intended to write a gritty, realistic drama, but I failed to get support from the police department. So I changed my mind: why not make it surrealistic? I love surrealist films.

The art direction would be a key element in the film. So Peter Yung introduced me to Robert Luk. Robert took care of a lot of things for me, such as deciding the film's colour tone and supervising the set construction. I still remembered many of the funny anecdotes. For example, he suggested turning menswear inside out and had the two female leads wear them. The results were quite refreshing. Then there was a scene in which we needed Melvin Wong to jump over a table. The production manager noted that this particular table cost HK\$10,000. Robert said, don't buy it. He found a stool, put it



Night Caller (1985) was written, directed and played by Philip Chan. Pictured here is the lead actress of the film, Pauline Wong.

in position, and had someone cut out a metal sheet to place it on top of the stool. The whole thing cost only HK\$200 and Melvin jumped over it with no problem. On another occasion, the two of us were discussing how to dress Pauline Wong, who played the crazy killer in the end sequence. He said, 'She's a woman who has gone mad over unrequited love. She should wear a wedding gown before her death!' When I saw Pauline wearing the white dress, covered in blood and smiling with a gun in her hand, I wanted to kneel in front of Robert as a sign of my respect. He went on to win Best Art Direction at the Hong Kong Film Awards with *Night Caller*.

During those days, one of the main concerns was staying under budget and coming up with ways to save money. One of my proudest accomplishments was my device for the mud bath scene in which my character had to strangle Mickey Ng. We couldn't ask the actor to really submerge into the mud for the scene. So I came up with the idea of installing a wooden board halfway up the bathtub, with just enough space underneath to accommodate a person. The prop master then covered the top of the tub with mud. There were also two holes on the board for human arms to go through. When the camera started rolling, I stuck my arms into the mud through the hole, while Mickey was hiding under the board with his arms sticking out of the mud (through the holes), to simulate struggling movements.

I felt gratified to have completed a solid crime thriller under such adverse conditions.



Philip Chan and Pat Ha on the set of *Night Caller*.

The film had a surreal style, and there was even depiction of lesbian romance. I think Hu Yin-meng and Pauline Wong were perfectly cast. Melvin Wong had been a good friend of mine for a long time. We talked about future films projects whenever we met up and we finally co-founded a company and made this film. In the film, a hard-boiled police detective gets abducted by a psychopathic killer—not a standard narrative for a crime thriller. It subverted expectations in terms of the subject matter and as a crime film. I felt a great sense of accomplishment at the time.

The film was screened in the Golden Harvest cinemas for just a week. By Monday after the first weekend, the film had grossed HK\$210,000. Despite its impressive box office, our film was pulled out after a week because Golden Harvest had scheduled the release of its own big-budget production. Golden Princess was kind enough to re-release our film through the Royal Theatre circuit, the early momentum was lost. At the end, the film didn't do as well as it should have. We were naturally quite disappointed.

Writing the Screenplay for *Long Arm of the Law*

I didn't know Johnny Mak when I worked on Broadcast Drive for RTV's *Bang! Bang! New Ideas*. Later, he watched my crime thrillers and was fond of them. He was considering making a crime drama series, so he approached me to join the RTV production of

The Big Hero. I was offered the position of creative producer and we collaborated on scriptwriting. He would consult me about particular ideas or settings. I also acted in the series.

Due to our successful collaboration on *The Big Hero*, he approached me again to work on *The Long Arm of Law*. Johnny was famous for his drive and determination. Once he started a project, the only thing that mattered was achieving his vision. It was rare to encounter a director of his calibre in the Hong Kong film industry. It was Johnny who insisted on filming inside Kowloon Walled City. Shooting in such a location presented lots of challenges; the area was a hotbed of gangsters, drug dealers and criminal activities. It was quite difficult for the production crew, but Johnny's fearless determination and work ethic got the production unit into the Walled City for those exquisitely designed gun battles and action sequences.

The Long Arm of Law told the story of a group of illegal immigrants who have smuggled into Hong Kong from the Mainland. Johnny personally interviewed hundreds of mainland immigrants, taking note of specific characteristics and mannerisms. When we began writing the script later on, he incorporated his observations into the characters.

Johnny, Stephen Shiu and I gathered at Johnny's home to brainstorm ideas. I acted out both the dialogue and action of each scene then we exchanged feedbacks and suggestions. After each discussion, I took the notes home and wrote more scenes before the next meeting. Johnny wanted a polished script down to the last detail. Each scene in the script for *The Long Arm of Law* was fleshed out, from the mood to the actors' gestures. I derived much satisfaction from that experience as a scriptwriter.

Following the Trend: Directing Comedies

After John Sham and Dickson Poon founded D & B Films Co. Ltd., they approached me to direct their first production, *The Return of Pom Pom* (1984). Later, I also directed D & B's *From Here to Prosperity* (1986) and *Where's Officer Tuba* (1986) because John felt that I was a natural at directing comedies. Comedies were also the strongest box office draws at the time.

Michael Hui later asked me to collaborate with him on *Chocolate Inspector* (1986). Michael wanted to create a character that appealed to all age groups. Unlike the mean, stingy persona Michael portrayed in his previous films, which served as a social commentary and critique, the new character had to be straight out of a comic strip—suitable for a family comedy that children could enjoy. I embraced my inner child while making this film. Thanks to the excellent cast including Anita Mui, Roy Chiao and Michael Chow, the film was pretty solid. Not only was it invited to the Tokyo International Film Festival, Michael's screen persona had also made the necessary transition to appeal to family audiences. As a director, that was the film I was most satisfied with.



Philip Chan (front left) is a junior to Michael Hui (front right) at La Salle College. Not only were the two long-time collaborators on films, they were close friends for years. This is an on-set photo during the shoot of *Mr Boo VIII Chocolate Inspector* (1986).

The Satisfaction From ‘Playing God’

I often think that people who are able to get involved in the creative aspects of filmmaking are the luckiest. That’s because we are able to create a whole new world from scratch and bring characters to life from our imagination. We can determine what trials and tribulations they will encounter. We take control of the narratives and decide who the characters love and hate. Their fate is in our hands. For two hours, we immerse audience in a world where they experience laughter, tears or suspense vicariously through the characters on screen. The satisfaction derived from filmmaking is incomparable. As a filmmaker, I am almost like playing God. [Translated by Sandy Ng]





APPENDIX

Profiles

Writer: Po Fung

Translators: Piera Chen, Heidi Kwong and Elbe Lau



BAI Ying (1941 –)

Actor

Born in Beijing in June, 1941, Bai Ying is of Hui Muslim heritage. He came to Taiwan with his family at the age of eight. Bai joined the military after graduating from secondary school and left the military at the age of 21. He began training as an actor with the Union Film Company in 1966 and made his name known with his debut in King Hu's *Dragon Inn* (1968), playing the antagonist eunuch Cao Shaoqin. He later starred in Union's *Iron Mistress* (1969, Taiwan), *A Touch of Zen* (1970, Taiwan) and etc. Bai arrived in Hong Kong to advance his career in 1969, before the completion of his contract with Union. He acted in *The Eunuch* (1971), produced by Shaw Brothers, and later appeared in Golden Harvest's *The Invincible Eight* (1971) and *The Angry River* (1971).

An active and independent actor in the Hong Kong and Taiwan film industry in the 1970s, Bai is especially prolific in the *wuxia* genre. His popular works include *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973) and *The Valiant Ones* (1975) directed by King Wu; Taiwanese *wuxia* film *Assassin* (1976) starring Hsu Feng; and *The Venturer* (1976), produced by the Central Motion Pictures in Taiwan, and is set against the Republic Era in northern China. He won the Best Supporting Actor Award at the 14th Golden Horse Awards in 1977, with his performance in the 3D feature, *Super Dragon*. In late 1970s, Bai played a modern conscientious cop in *The System* (1979) and *The Saviour* (1980); subsequently he portrayed a triad boss in *See-bar* (1980), proving himself a versatile actor in contemporary films. He continued to act in Hong Kong and Taiwanese TV dramas in the 1980s and 90s. Bai appears occasionally in films and TV dramas in recent years. He now lives in Hong Kong.



Henry CHAN (1946 –)

Cinematographer

Henry Chan was born in Hong Kong in 1946. His family originated from the Bao'an District of Guangdong Province. Chan relocated to the UK with his family when he was a teenager and graduated from the London Film School in 1971. He took part in the production of *The Peace Game* (aka *The Gladiators*, 1969) during his study in the UK.

Chan returned to Hong Kong in 1973 and became a contract cinematographer of Salon Films Group for commercials. He served as the cinematographer for *Mitra* (1977) at the invitation of Patrick Lung Kong. Later he was the cinematographer for *No Big Deal* (1980) directed by Leong Po-chih and *The Hong Kong Tycoon* (1979) directed by Tong Shu-shuen.

From 1978 to 1979, he worked with King Hu in Korea on shooting *Legend of the Mountain* (1979) and *Raining in the Mountain* (1979). Chan was further awarded the Best Cinematography at the 16th Golden Horse Awards for his work in the latter.

Chan later became the cinematographer for two stylistically opposite films, *The Servants* (1979) and *Flash Future Kung Fu* (1983), and was also the cinematography consultant for *Aces Go Places* (1982). In 1983, he directed his first and only film, *Obsessed* (1983). In the same year, he began his career as a regular cinematographer for Cinema City and made a total of nine films including *Esprit d'amour* (1983), *Working Class* (1985) and *Lady in Black* (1987).

After immigrating to Canada in 1986, he came back to Hong Kong to work as a freelancer for different directors. His prominent works in this period include *Golden Swallow* (1987) and *Starry Is the Night* (1988). From 1988 to 1992, he was the director of cinematography for a number of films produced by Win's Movie Production, including *Casino Raiders* (1989), *Dance with the Dragon* (1991) and *Royal Tramp* (1992). Chan was also the cinematographer in the 1990s for Peter Chan's directorial works: *He's a Woman, She's a Man* (1994), *The Age of Miracles* (1996), and *Who's the Woman, Who's the Man* (1996).

Chan later shifted his base of career to North America, shooting films and TV dramas in the US and Canada. His works include *First Wave* (1998-2001) produced by Francis Ford Coppola, and Canadian TV drama *Human Cargo* (2004) that earned him many accolades. In 2005, he won the Best Cinematography (Dramatic Series) at the Leo Awards in Canada for his work on the TV series *The Collector* (2004-2006). He had also taught in the Vancouver Film School. Chan has retired and now lives in Las Vegas, Nevada, US.



Jackie CHAN (1954.4.7 –)

Actor/Director/Executive Producer/Producer

A native of Qingdao, Shandong Province, Jackie Chan was born in 1954 in Hong Kong and was given a birth name of Chan Kong-sang. He entered the Hong Kong-China Drama Academy ran by Yu Zhanyuan at age seven to learn Peking opera. With a stage name of Yuen Lau, Chan performed as one of the 'Seven Little Fortunes', an acrobatics and opera troupe that appeared in films and amusement parks. He started working as a stunt double and martial artist by 15.

Chan signed with Zhu Mu's Great Earth Film Company in 1972 and changed his stage name to Chan Yuen-lung. He served as a martial arts choreographer and acted with his senior Yuen Chau in *The Heroine* (1973). He further took the leading role in *The Cub Tiger from Kwantung* (1974). Later Chan appeared in Zhu Mu's *All in the Family* (1975) and *No End of Surprises* (1975) for Golden Harvest, as well as John Woo's *Hand of Death* (1976), while playing a more noticeable character.

Chan signed a contract with Lo Wei in 1976 and changed his stage name to Jackie Chan. He then starred in kung fu titles such as *New Fist of Fury* (1976) and *Shaolin Wooden Men* (1976) in Taiwan. Later producer-director Ng See-yuen 'borrowed' Chan from Lo and cast him in the kung fu comedies, *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (1978) and *Drunken Master* (1978), which showcased Chan's action skills and made him an instant star.

Shortly after Chan directed his first film *Fearless Hyena* (1979) for Lo Wei's company in 1979, he joined Golden Harvest and directed *The Young Master* (1980), starring himself. The film broke the Hong Kong box office record with over HK\$10 million. Since then, he has been a box office name for his thrilling action choreography. Some of his popular works in the 1980s included *Project A* (1983), *Police Story* (1985) and *Armour of God* (1987) and *Miracles* (1989). Released nationally in the US in 1996, Chan's *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995) was a massive box-office success. He had then ventured to Hollywood and starred in a number of American films. Chan has continued to work in the Mainland in recent years, starring in a number of hits such as *CZ 12* (2012), *Kung Fu Yoga* (2017) and *Bleeding Steel* (2017).



CHAN Koon-tai (1945 –)

Actor/Director/Executive Producer

A native of Guangdong born in Hong Kong in 1945, Chan Koon-tai has practiced martial arts of Tai Shing Pek Kwar Moon (monkey and axe hammer style) since young. He became a firefighter after graduating from secondary school in 1963. He quit the job to join the film industry in 1967. Chan later won the lightweight champion at the First Southeast Asia Kung Fu Tournament in 1969. He acted in *Wong Fei-hung Bravely Crushes the Fire Formation* (1970), and served as the martial arts choreographer for *Cold Blade* (1970). He was soon scouted by director Chang Cheh and played the leading role in *Boxer from Shantung* (1972), which sold over HK\$2 million and shot Chan to fame after John (David) Chiang and Ti Lung. One after another, Chan starred in high-grossing films by Chang, such as *Four Riders* (1972), *The Blood Brothers* (1973) and *Iron Bodyguard* (1973). Chan stayed with Shaw Brothers and acted in features made by other directors when Chang founded Chang's Film Co. and filmed in Taiwan. After appearing in gangster blockbusters *The Teahouse* (1974) and *Big Brother Cheng* (1975) directed by Kuei Chih-hung, Chan became a household name as the main character, Big Brother Cheng; he also excelled in kung fu films *Challenge of the Masters* (1976) and *Executioners from Shaolin* (1977) directed by Lau Kar-leung.

After the completion of his self-starring and directed *The Iron Monkey* (1977), Chan had a dispute with Shaw Brothers over the terms of his contract. It was later resolved in 1978 and he returned to Shaws, with following popular works such as *Killer Constable* (1980). Chan made a debut appearance in *Blowing in the Wind* (1980), a TV drama of Rediffusion Television (RTV) in 1980; his portrayal of the drug lord was a huge success. He appeared in films for other production companies in the 1980s, after his contract with Shaws was completed. In 1990, Chan founded J & J Film Company and produced four films, including *Sleazy Dizzy* (1990) and *Blood Stained Tradewind* (1990), before stepping away from cinema and ventured into business. He made a comeback in 2000, occasionally appearing in films that were mostly of the action genre, such as *Dragon Tiger Gate* (2006), *Gallants* (2010), *Once Upon a Time in Shanghai* (2014) and *The Master* (2015).



Philip CHAN (1945.1.25 –)

Director/Screenwriter/Actor/Executive Producer

Philip Chan was born in Hong Kong in 1945. His family originated from Xinhui, Guangdong. He was the lead vocal for the popular school band, The Astro-notes during his school days. Chan joined the police force in 1965 and was promoted to the Divisional Commander of Police of the Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D.) in 1975. In his spare time Chan would still work at the backstage, doing harmonising tracks for films and live performances. He also collaborated with Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) and provided subject matter for its TV drama *CID* (1976). Upon the invitation of Josephine Siao, he joined the writing team to work on the script of *Jumping Ash* (1976), infusing the story with his experience as a police. As the film became a box office hit, Chan resigned from the police force and joined Bang Bang Film Production, working on features such as *Foxbat* (1977) and *The Extras* (1978). He also worked on *The Big Hero*, the crime series from Rediffusion Television (RTV) as a planning producer, screenwriter and actor. In 1978, he joined TVB and appeared in TV dramas including *Interpol* (1978) and *New CID* (1980). In 1979, Chan co-directed with Ronny Yu *The Servants* (1979), for which he was also the screenwriter and one of the main actors. His contribution to the Hong Kong cop cinema in the 1970s was remarkable.

In the 1980s, Chan founded Johnson Film Company with John Sham and produced *Sealed with a Kiss* (1981) and *Krazy Kops* (1981). He also directed *Charlie's Bubbles* (1981) for Bang Bang. His other prominent directorial works include *Night Caller* (1985), *Mr Boo VIII Chocolate Inspector* (1986) and *Front Page* (1990). Chan further served as the screenwriter for *Long Arm of the Law* (1984), a box-office hit directed by Johnny Mak.

A versatile filmmaker and artist, Chan has been active in various administrative and directorial capacities of many media organisations as well as entertainment business companies. In December 2017, he held his first solo concert.



CHANG Cheh (1924.1.17 – 2002.6.22)

Director/Screenwriter/Executive Producer

Born in 1924 in Hangzhou, China, Chang Cheh received education in Shanghai. He studied politics in the Law Faculty of the National Central University in Chongqing during World War II. Before the end of the war, Chang was appointed as a special cultural commissioner to station in Shanghai. He penned the scripts of *Girl Behind a Mask* (1947) and *Romance in a Deserted Manor* (1949) for Cathay Film Company at the time. In 1948, he went to Taiwan to shoot and later became the co-director of *Storm Over Ali Shan* (1950) with Chang Ying.

Chang came to Hong Kong in 1957 and co-directed *Wild Fire* (1958) with Helen Li Mei. He joined Motion Picture and General Investment Co. Ltd. (MP & GI) in 1961 as a screenwriter, and switched to Shaw Brothers in the following year. His directorial debut at Shaws was *The Butterfly Chalice* (co-directed with Yuan Qiufeng, 1965). *Tiger Boy*, directed by Chang premiered in 1966 and was regarded as one of the groundbreaking feature of the new *wuxia* genre. His *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) further made him a 'million-dollar director' and a box office name. He went on and made the equally popular *The Assassin* (1967), *The Golden Swallow* (1968) and *Returned of One-Armed Swordsman* (1969), bringing fame to actor Jimmy Wang Yu while setting the trend for Hong Kong *wuxia* cinema.

In 1970, Chang won the Best Director Award with *Vengeance!* (1970) at the Asia-Pacific Film Festival; John (David) Chiang was also awarded as the Best Actor for the same film. Chang later directed high-grossing films such as *The New One-armed Swordsman* (1971), *Boxer from Shantung* (1972) and *Four Riders* (1972), which brought actors like Ti Lung, Chan Koon-tai and Wong Chung to fame. In 1973, he established Chang's Film Co. in Taiwan, producing films such as *Shaolin Martial Arts* (1974) and *Disciples of Shaolin* (1975) that catapulted Alexander Fu Sheng to stardom. Chang shut down his company in 1976; he returned to Shaws' and shot *The Five Venoms* (1978), which had nurtured new stars like Philip Kwok and Lo Meng (aka Turbo Law). Chang later adapted a series of novels by Jin Yong and made *The Brave Archer* (1977), *Legend of the Fox* (1980) and *The Sword Stained with Royal Blood* (1981). In 1983, Chang left Shaw Brothers once again for Taiwan and tapped into the Mainland's film market in 1985, for which he shot a number of kung fu titles including *Great Shang Hai 1937* (1986) and *Cross the River* (1988). In 1993, he directed his last film *Ninja In Ancient China*. He was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Hong Kong Film Awards in April, 2002. He passed away in Hong Kong on 22 June of the same year.



CHOR Yuen (1934.10.8 –)

Director/Screenwriter

A native of Mexian, Guangdong Province, Chor Yuen's original name is Cheung Po-kin. His father, Cheung Wood-yau was a famous actor of Cantonese cinema. Chor graduated from the Faculty of Chemistry at the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. He arrived in Hong Kong in 1956 and entered the film industry, working alongside Ng Wui as an assistant director and screenwriter. He joined Kong Ngee Motion Picture Production Company in the following year and learned screenwriting as well as directing from Chun Kim; and co-directed *Blood Stains the Valley of Love* (1957) with Chun. Chor directed *The Natural Son* (1959) on his own in 1959, but only rose to fame with the *The Great Devotion* in 1960. From 1962 onwards, he started shooting for other production companies, making him the backbone among emerging directors in the 1960s. He has been a prolific filmmaker of versatile style, with famous *wenyi* titles such as *A Man's Betrayal* (Part One and Two, 1962), *The Mad Woman* (1964), *Winter*

Love (1968) and *The Prodigal* (1969); comedies including *The Diary of a Husband* (1964), *The Precious Mirror* (1967) and *The Pregnant Maiden* (1968); sensational and intricate contemporary features like *Black Rose* (1965), *Spy with My Face* (1966) and *To Rose with Love* (1967) that center around heroines; as well as the musical film *Purple Night* (1968).

As Cantonese cinema suffered a downturn in late 1960s, Chor joined the Cathay Film Company in 1970 and made four features, including *Violet Clove & Firebird* (1970) and *Cold Blade* (1970). When Cathay ceased production in 1971, he joined the Shaw Brothers during which he directed *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (1972), penned by Chiu Kang-chien. The film was a breakthrough for Shaws in terms of both plot and cinematic style. In 1973, he adapted a well-known stage play into a Cantonese comedy *The House of 72 Tenants*. With a star-studded cast from Shaws, the film broke box office records and led to a resurgence of Cantonese cinema. In 1976, Chor adapted Gu Long's *wuxia* novels and made *Killer Clans* and *The Magic Blade*. The two box-office hits subsequently set the trend of adapting Gu Long's novels for Hong Kong and Taiwanese television and cinema. Chor himself has directed 18 films based on the works by Gu Long.

After Shaws ceased production in 1985, Chor became an independent director and appeared occasionally in films. *Blood Stained Tradewinds* (1990) is last film he has directed. He joined Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) as an actor in 1991 and retired in 2004.



HO Fan (1937.10.8 – 2016.6.19)

Director/Actor

A native of Guangdong born in Shanghai in 1937, Ho Fan came to Hong Kong in 1949 and graduated from New Asia College. Ho dedicated much of his time to photography since his school days and was well-known for his shots of Hong Kong streets of the 1950s and 60s. From 1958 to 1965, Ho had been elected into the top ten of The Photographic Society of America (PSA) for eight consecutive years.

In 1960, he went for an examination at Shaw Brothers and was recruited as an actor. He began his film career as a continuity on *The Swallow Thief* (1961), directed by Griffin Yuen Feng. He later acted in titles such as *Love Without End* (1961) and *The Female Prince* (1964); and was cast as the lead, Buddhist monk Tong in *The Monkey Goes West* (1966) and its three sequels of the same series. During this period, Ho also made experimental films such as *Big City Little Man; Gulf* (1966), which won him the Best Film Award at the Banbury International Film Festival in the UK; *Lost* (co-directed with Sun Po-ling, 1970) that was accepted into competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

Ho left Shaws in 1969. Three years later, he directed his first film *Love and Blood* (1972) and later made *Adventure in Denmark* (1973), an erotic feature about the sex industry in Denmark. Though he had directed comedies such as *The Adventurous Air Steward* (1974) and *wenyi* films like *The Miserable Girl* (1975), he was frequently invited to make erotica, including *Girl with Long Hair* (1975), *Body for Sale* (1976) and *Go a Little Crazy* (1977), which moulded actresses such as Danna, Liu Yaying and Chan Wai-ying into erotic icons.

He immigrated to the US with his family in 1979 and continued to direct in the 1980s and 90s with works such as *Expensive Tastes* (1982), *Desire* (1987), *Yu Pui Tsuen* (1987), *Temptation Summary* (1990), *Hidden Desire* (1991) and *The Sichuan Concubines* (1994). Ho passed away in the US in 2016.



HSIA Tsu-hui (1933.11.10 –)

Director

Born in Jiangsu, Nanjing in 1933, Hsia's father was an air force pilot of Kuomintang. Hsia moved to Taiwan with his family in 1948 and graduated from Fu Hsing Kang College, studying film and drama. He joined China Motion Picture Studio in the 1960s, directing documentaries and military education films. When Li Han-hsiang filmed *Storm Over the Yangtse River* (1969) and later *The Story of Ti Ying* (1971) for China Motion Picture, Hsia was appointed as the assistant director to Li. He further composed the music for the latter, winning Best Music (Non-musical) at the 9th Golden Horse Awards. Hsia's directorial works in Taiwan included *Blood Splashing Over Rainbow Bridge* (1973) and *A Sentimental Girl* (1974).

Upon the invitation of Li Han-hsiang in the mid-1970s, Hsia served as Li's assistant director on *The Empress Dowager* (1975) and *The Last Tempest* (1976). He later decided to stay in Hong Kong and continued to work as an assistant director for Li in Shaw Brothers. Some of their collaborations include the 'Qianlong Series' (1977-82) and *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (1977). While at Shaw Brothers, Hsia participated in directing *Hello, Sexy Late Homecomers* (1978), a segmental feature shot by several renowned directors. He also returned to Taiwan and directed *Cold Current* (1976), the first TV drama shot on 16mm in Taiwan.

In 1982, after Li Han-hsiang left Shaw Brothers to film in the Mainland, Hsia went back to Taiwan to shoot TV dramas. In the 1980s, he had offered uncredited assistance to Li in making films such as *The Snuff Battle* (1988) and *The Empress Dowager* (1989). In the 1990s, Hsia was the executive director to Li for four erotica including *The Demon Wet Nurse* (1992). In 1992, he directed *The Legend of White Snake* (1992), an utter high-rating TV drama series in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Mainland, starring Angie Chiu and Cecilia Ip. In 1996, he assisted Li to shoot the TV drama *Burning of Efang Palace*. Hsia took the directing chores and finished the project after Li died of a heart attack during production. Hsia has now retired and lives in Hong Kong.



King HU (1932.4.29 – 1997.1.14)

Director/Screenwriter/Actor

Born in Beijing in 1932 to a family from Yongnian County, Hebei, Hu went to Peking Academy for his secondary education. He arrived in Hong Kong in 1949 and joined Great Wall to work in its art department in 1952. He switched to Yung Hwa in the following year. While working in the art team for *Humiliation for Sale* (1958), he was recruited by director Yan Jun as an actor and appeared in *The Long Lane* (1956), with critical acclaim to his performance.

He signed a contract with Shaw Brothers in 1958 and acted in films such as *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (1959) and *The Deformed* (1960). Hu was also the assistant director to his good friend Li Han-hsiang on *The Enchanting Shadow* (1960) and the executive director on *The Love Eterne* (1963). His directorial debut was a *huangmei diao* feature, *The Story of Sue San* (1964). He later directed a *wuxia* title, *Come Drink with Me* (1966) for Shaws, which turned out to be a commercial success. Hu left Shaws in 1967 and went to Taiwan to establish the production department and studio for Union Film Company Ltd.. His first production with Union Film, *Dragon Inn* (1968), was a great hit in both Hong Kong and Taiwan. Hu then directed *A Touch of Zen* (1971), of which featured more sophisticated cinematic artistry, winning the Technical Grand Prize in Cannes in 1975. The International Film Guide further heralded him as one of the world's top five directors in 1978.

After shooting *A Touch of Zen*, Hu had a dispute with the head of Union Film, which compelled him to return to Hong Kong and found the King Hu Film Productions. He then shot two *wuxia* films with groundbreaking action styles, *The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973) and *The Valiant Ones* (1975) with investment from Golden Harvest. Hu later travelled to Korea and made *Raining in the Mountain* (1979) and *Legend of the Mountain* (1979)—both demonstrating innovative and inspiring elements for the *wuxia* genre. In the 1980s, he directed films such as *The*

Juvenizer (1981) and *All the King's Men* (1983) in Taiwan. Hu was credited as the director for *Swordsman* (1990), but disagreements resulted in producer Tsui Hark finishing the film. His last work was *Painted Skin* (1993) that was shot on location in the Mainland. Hu died in 1997 while undergoing surgery in Taiwan, when he was about to embark on the production of *The Battle of Ono*.



Michael HUI (1942.9.3 –)

Director/Screenwriter/Actor/Producer

Born in Guangzhou in 1942 and a native of Panyu, Guangdong, Michael Hui moved to Hong Kong with his family in 1950. He later graduated from the Department of Sociology of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He joined Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) in 1968 when he was studying in university and hosted TV programmes such as *Interschool Quiz Contest* and *Enjoy Yourself Tonight*. Hui was soon joined by his younger brother, Sam in hosting *The Hui Brothers Show* (1971-72), an enormously popular comedy show that put both their names on the map.

Hui was then invited by director Li Han-hsiang to star in *The Warlord* (1972), a Mandarin comedy directed by Li, after his return to Shaw Brothers. Hui's debut was an instant hit, followed by *The Happiest Moment* (1973), *Scandal* (1974) and *Sinful Confession* (1974). When his proposal of directing films himself was turned down by Shaws, he made a shift and joined Golden Harvest. Hui wrote and directed *Games Gamblers Play* (1974) under his own production company, the Hui's Film Company. This Cantonese comedy, starring both Michael and Sam, scored over HK\$6 million at the box office and broke Hong Kong record. Their collaboration in the following year, *The Last Message* (1975) also became the top grosser of the year. In 1976, *The Private Eyes*, in which his another brother, Ricky, joined them in the lead, earned a record high of HK\$8 million and more. *The Contract* (1978) and *Security Unlimited* (1981) again topped the box-office chart of respective years, with the latter another record-breaker grossing over HK\$17 million, making Hui one of the most sought-after names of Hong Kong cinema in the late-1970s. These runaway hits had further successfully broken into the markets of Taiwan and Japan. Hui received the accolade of Best Actor for his performance in *Security Unlimited* at the inaugural Hong Kong Film Awards in 1982. He later directed *Teppanyaki* (1984) and starred in *Mr Boo VIII Chocolate Inspector* (1986). After leaving Golden Harvest in 1987, Hui acted in box-office hits such as *Chicken and Duck Talk* (1988), *Mr Coconut* (1989) and *Front Page* (1990). He appeared only occasionally in films in the 1990s, with recent performance in a Taiwan film, *Godspeed* (2016).



Sam HUI (1948.9.6 –)

Actor

Sam Hui, a native of Panyu, Guangdong, was born in Guangzhou in 1948 and moved to Hong Kong at the age of two. In 1966, Hui, as the lead singer, formed the band 'Lotus' with friends and hosted a pop music programme for Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) in the following year. He earned a bachelor degree in Psychology at The University of Hong Kong by the early 1970s. Hui co-hosted the high-rating comedy show, *The Hui Brothers Show* (1971-72) with his elder brother Michael and gained tremendous popularity. He acted in *Back Alley Princess* (1973), *Chinatown Capers* (1974) and *Naughty! Naughty!* (1974), after Golden Harvest took him in as a regular actor in 1972. Two years later, he co-starred with Michael in *Games Gamblers Play* (1974) and composed its theme song 'The Mischievous Duo' as well as sidetrack 'Twin Stars' Love Song' that were already popular before the film release. *Games Gamblers Play* subsequently grossed over HK\$6 million and broke the then box office record of Hong Kong. Hui was later featured in a series of the Hui Brothers' money-spinners including *The Last Message* (1975), *The Private Eyes* (1976), *The Contract* (1978) and *Security*

Unlimited (1981); which all would become the highest grosser in their respective years. The songs that he composed and sang for the films remained as some everlasting masterpiece of Cantopop history.

In 1981, Hui joined Cinema City and starred in *Aces Go Places* (1982) that again broke box-office records. His following acting works such as *Aces Go Places II* (1983), *Aces Go Places III* (1984) and *Aces Go Places IV* (1986) were all commercial successes. Hui fell sick while shooting on location in Nepal for *The Legend of Wisely* (1987), and has reduced his onscreen performance since. His later acting works in the 1990s included *Swordsman* (1990) and *Front Page* (1990). Hui had appeared less onscreen after his leading role in *Laughters of "Water Margins"* (1993), until he made a comeback in 2000 as a main cast for *Winner Takes All*. Apart from his film career, Hui holds a respectable place in the pantheon of Hong Kong pop singers, excelling in composing, lyrics-writing and vocals.



Sammo HUNG (1952 –)

Director/Actor/Martial Arts Choreographer/Executive Producer

A native of Ningbo, Zhejiang, Hung was born in Hong Kong in 1952 with a nickname of 'Sam Mo'. His grandfather, Hung Chung-ho was a director in the 1930s and 40s. Hung enrolled in the Hong Kong-China Opera Institute founded by Yu Zhanyuan to study Peking opera, before he was ten; and performed with his schoolmates under the name of 'Seven Little Fortunes'. He began to participate in films as a child star from the 1960s onwards with a stage name, Chu Yuen-lung. In 1968, he became a martial artist and was promoted to martial arts choreographer in *The Golden Sword* (1969).

Hung was the martial arts choreographer for *The Invincible Eight* (1971), the inaugural production of Golden Harvest after its establishment in 1970. He had since then began his long-time collaboration with the company, mainly in assistance to director Huang Feng. Hung was the martial arts choreographer for a number of Huang's films such as *Hap Ki Do* (1972) and *When Taekwondo Strikes* (1973); as well as *The Valiant Ones* (1975), directed by the famous director King Hu.

In 1977, Hung directed and starred in the kung fu comedy, *The Iron-Fisted Monk* (1977). With a plump body, he performed swift kung fu moves and fights in the film and brought unexpected results; the film grossed over HK\$2 million at the box office. He then directed and acted in *Enter the Fat Dragon* (1978), also a box-office hit, in the following year for Fong Ming Motion Picture Enterprise Co. His image as an actor and director for kung fu comedies was consolidated since then. The films that he directed for Golden Harvest later on, such as *Warriors Two* (1978), *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* (1980) and *The Prodigal Son* (1981), scored one better than the previous at the box office. Films produced by his own company Gar Bo Films, including *Dirty Tiger*, *Crazy Frog* (1978) and *Odd Couple* (1979), were also hits.

He worked as a director for some Golden Harvest blockbusters in the 1980s, including *Winners & Sinners* (1983) and *My Lucky Stars* (1985) and *The Millionaires' Express* (1986). Hung also produced *Mr. Vampire* (1985) and *Lai Shi, China's Last Eunuch* (1988), which were both critically-acclaimed and popular. He left Golden Harvest in the late-1980s and founded Bojon Films Co., Ltd to direct and act in films such as *Pedicab Driver* (1989). Hung once went to the US to advance his career; playing the lead role in the TV drama series *Martial Law* (1998).

Hung clinched the Best Actor Award twice at Hong Kong Film Awards with his performance in *Carry On Pickpocket* (1982) and *Painted Faces* (1988). He is still active in Chinese-language films in recent years, with one of his latest work as a director and actor for *The Bodyguard* (2016).



KUEI Chih-hung (1937.12.20—1999.10.1)

Director

Kuei Chih-hung was born in Guangzhou in 1937. Upon completion of secondary education, he furthered his studies in theatre directing at the National Academy of Arts in Taiwan, and started making films in his spare time. He produced a black-and-white animation short film *Wu Song Kill a Tiger* (1954) and directed a few Taiwanese dialect films including *The Weird Gentleman* (co-director, 1963). In 1964, he served as the assistant director to Peter Pan Lei in shooting Shaw Brothers' *Lovers' Rock* (1964) and *Song of Orchid Island* (1965). Kuei was later invited by director Ho Moon-hwa to join Shaws while Ho was filming *The Monkey Goes West* (1966).

In 1970, Kuei assisted Shima Koji in shooting *Love Song of the South Sea*, in which Peter Chen Ho was cast as the lead. Chen was in serious illness at the time and led to the delay of production. After Shima returned to Japan, Kuei took over the project as the director and cast Chin Feng as the lead. The film, Kuei's first feature for Shaws, was renamed as *Love Song over the Sea* (1970) (co-directed with Shima Koji, 1970) after its completion. In 1973, his co-directorial work with Chang Cheh, *The Delinquent* (1973) made him rise to fame. Kuei later adapted Kong Chi-nam's novel *The Heroic Deeds of a Villain* and shot *Teahouse* (1974) and *Big Brother Cheng* (1975). The two films, which depict of how a teahouse owner confronts gangsters with customary practices from the triad, are widely regarded as significant pioneering work for Hong Kong gangster cinema in the 1970s. He also directed 'The Deaf Mute Killer' in *The Criminals 2 – Homicides* (1976), featuring stylised images created by his distinctive use of black-and-white visuals and extensive location shooting. The one and only *wuxia* film that Kuei made was *Killer Constable* (1980), which engaged a rare sense of satire, boldness and grit. In the 1980s, he directed a number of horror films such as *Hex* (1980) and *Hex after Hex* (1982) for Shaws. Kuei had also filmed for other companies under a pseudonym. He immigrated to the US and ran a pizza shop after leaving Shaw Brothers. Kuei passed away in 1999 in the US.



Joseph KUO Nan-hung (1935.6.5 –)

Director/Screenwriter/Executive Producer

Born in Tainan, Taiwan in 1935, Joseph Kuo Nan-hung's original name was Kuo Qingchi, alias Kuo Hong-ting and Jiang Binghan. He graduated from Kaohsiung Industrial High School in 1950 and enrolled in the filmmaking courses at Taipei's Asia Film Company in 1954, to study directing and scriptwriting. After that, he worked as a continuity and assistant director for Taiwanese dialect films. In 1956, he made his directorial debut *Lament of the Ancient Palace* (1958) with his own script. Kuo served in the army in 1959 and after two years' service, he founded Hongya Film Company Ltd in 1962. Kuo was the director for 23 Taiwanese dialect films in total, including the critically acclaimed and box-office hit *Take Care, Sir* (1964). He then took a break from shooting and furthered his film studies at the Shih Hsin School of Journalism.

Upon the invitation of director Li Han-hsiang, Kuo directed two widescreen and colour Mandarin *wenyi* film *When Dreams Come True* (1969) and *Love Is More Intoxicating Than Wine* (1967) for Li's Grand Motion Picture Company. Later he joined Union Film Company Ltd and made his first *wuxia* film *The Swordsman of All Swordsmen* (1968), a sellout in both Taiwan and Hong Kong. Kuo was thus recruited by Shaw Brothers to shoot *Mission Impossible* (1971) and *The Mighty One* (1972). While he was filming for Shaws, he established Hong Hwa Company and directed *Sorrowful to a Ghost* (1970), a production with the antagonist's name as title. Its box office surged past HK\$1 million and subsequently made him one of the highest-grossing *wuxia* directors. Kuo was active making *wuxia* and kung fu films in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1970s, with prominent works such as *The Ghost's Sword* (1971), also known as the sequel to *Sorrowful to a Ghost*; *Battle of the Mirror Guardian* (1971), an adaptation of the TV hand puppet show *The Scholar Swordsman* (1971); kung fu films

Triangular Duel (1972) and *The 18 Bronzemen* (1976), a production that created the signature image of Shaolin bronzemen. Over 100 first-run cinemas in Japan actually participated in a collaborative screening of *The 18 Bronzemen*.

In the 1980s, Kuo stepped away from directing and took several civil posts, including the Chairman of the Republic of China Film Producer Association (now called the Taiwan Film Producer Association) in 1982 and the Chairman of the Movie Producers & Distributors Association of Hong Kong in 1987. In 2000, he moved back to Kaohsiung permanently. He had also once taught in the Hong Kong Baptist University. Kuo dedicates in training new directors in Taiwan in recent years.



LAU Kar-leung (1937.10.6 – 2013.6.25)

Director/Martial Arts Choreographer/Actor

A native of Xinhui, Guangdong, Lau Kar-leung was born in Guangzhou in 1937. He started practicing Hung Fist, as well as moves from other kung fu clans, at the age of seven from his father Lau Cham. Lau moved to Hong Kong in 1949 with his family and ventured into the film industry the following year, taking up roles as a martial artist and bit player. He was featured in a number of Wong Fei-hung films, including *How Wong Fei-hung Defeated Three Bullies with a Rod* (1953) and *Wong Fei-hung's Rival for the Fireworks* (1955). In 1963, he became a martial arts choreographer and partnered with Tong Kai to design actions for *South Dragon*, *North Phoenix* (1963), directed by Wu Pang. Since then the two had become long-time collaborators and together they joined the Shaw Brothers. Lau choreographed a series of blockbusters directed by Chang Cheh at Shaws, such as *One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) and *The Golden Swallow* (1968) and *Boxer from Shantung* (1972), catapulting him into a distinguished career. He was also a martial arts choreographer for other film companies apart from Shaws. His use of wire harnesses in creating a levitation effect in Great Wall's *The Jade Bow* (1966), was further critically acclaimed.

In 1974, Lau ended his collaboration with Tong Kai and followed Chang to shoot in Taiwan for Chang's Film Co. In films such as *Heroes Two* (1974), *Shaolin Martial Arts* (1974) and *Five Shaolin Masters* (1974) directed by Chang, Lau began integrating Hung Fist into the choreography and that had become his signature style. In 1975, his dispute with Chang resulted in him returning to Shaws as a director. His directorial debut *The Spiritual Boxer* (1975), which featured Hong Fist's Five Animal Fist, was unexpectedly popular. He subsequently directed a series of 'real' kung fu films, including *Challenge of the Masters* (1976), *Executioners from Shaolin* (1977), *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978), *Shaolin Mantis* (1978) and *Martial Club* (1981). His image as a legitimate kung fu director was etched in the mind of audience, further making him one of the highest-grossing film directors at Shaw Brothers in the late-1970s to the early-1980s. Lau occasionally appeared in films; his portrayal of a desolate Monkey fist master in *Mad Monkey Kung Fu* (1979) was particularly impressive.

Shaw Brothers ceased production when Lau went to the Mainland to shoot *Martial Arts of Shaolin* (1986), a collaboration of Shaws and Sil-Metropole Organisation Limited in 1986. Lau then joined Cinema City and directed a few films. His later prominent works include *Drunken Master II* (1994), a fundraising project for the Hong Kong Stuntman Association. Lau's last directorial work was *Drunken Monkey* (2003). The last production he participated in as a martial arts choreographer, was *Seven Swords* (2005), directed by Tsui Hark. He was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Hong Kong Film Awards in 2010. Lau passed away from illness in 2015.



LAU Kar-wing (1943 –)

Director/Martial Arts Choreographer/Actor

A native of Xinhui, Guangdong, Lau Kar-wing was born in Shaoguan in 1943. He moved to Hong Kong with his family in 1949. Lau started learning Hung Fist at the age of ten from his father Lau Cham and elder brother Lau Kar-leung. He appeared occasionally in films alongside his father and brother in the early-1950s and became a martial artist later in the decade, following his brother and Tong Kai. He debuted as a martial arts choreographer in *The Elusive Golden Butterfly* (1966) and choreographed *Five Fingers of Death* (aka *King Boxer*, 1972), a sellout in the US, for Shaw Brothers in 1972. Lau was also once sent to Spain to help with the shooting of western films. He took the leading role in *The Inheritor of Kung Fu* (1974) directed by Chen Hung-lieh. Lau later left for Taiwan to work as a martial arts choreographer; he was the martial arts choreographer and lead in *Tiger & Crane Fists* (1976) and *One-arm Chivalry Fight Against One-arm Chivalry* (1977) for First Films. He also acted in *The Good, the Bad and the Loser* (1976), a *wuxia* comedy directed by Karl Maka, during his time in Taiwan. Lau returned to Hong Kong in 1976 and directed his first film *He Has Nothing But Kung Fu* (1977). The box office scored over HK\$1 million, consolidating Lau's status as a director. He founded Gar Bo Films with Karl Maka and Sammo Hung and made *Dirty Tiger, Crazy Frog* (1978), *Odd Couple* (1979) and etc. Afterwards, Lau established Lau Brothers Film Co. with his brother, for which he directed *Dirty Kung Fu* (1978) and *Fist and Guts* (1979). The kung fu comedies produced by these two companies demonstrated Lau's versatility in terms of action style and variety. Lau also acted frequently in films directed by his brother, who was then collaborating with Shaw Brothers. Their duel scene with ancient weapons in *Legendary Weapons of China* (1982) was in particular remarkable.

Lau was the director for *Till Death Do We Scare* (1982) and martial arts choreographer for *Aces Go Places II* (1983), both produced by Cinema City. He also directed a few blockbusters such as *The Dragon Family* (1988) and *Skinny Tiger & Fatty Dragon* (1990) for other film companies. Lau took part in Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* (1991) in 1991 as a martial arts choreographer and Ringo Lam's *Full Contact* (1992) in the following year as action director. His latest directorial work is *Innocent Killer* (1994). Since then, Lau only appears occasionally in films and TV dramas.



Bruce LEE (1940.11.27 – 1973.7.20)

Actor/Director/Martial Arts Choreographer

With a birth name of Lee Jun-fan, Bruce Lee was born in San Francisco, US in 1940. His father was the famous Cantonese opera star, Lee Hoi-chuen and his family originally came from Shunde, Guangdong. As a child actor, he started appearing in films in 1948, rising to fame with his performance in *The Kid* (1950) and *In the Face of Demolition* (1953). His vivid portrayal of an errant teenager in *The Orphan* (1960) further received critical acclaim.

After filming *The Orphan*, Lee went to Seattle, US in 1959 to further his studies. He founded the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute during his university years in 1962. In 1964, he performed at the Long Beach International Karate Tournament as guest. Two years later, he played the second fiddle, Kato in the US TV drama *The Green Hornet* (1966-1967). In 1967, Lee again demonstrated at the Karate Tournament in Long Beach and termed his own martial arts expression as Jeet Kune Do. From there he rose in fame in the US martial arts scene; numerous celebrities were trained by him. Lee also worked on and off the stage, from time to time, in the US show business.

He signed with Golden Harvest and starred in *The Big Boss* (1971), after returning to Hong Kong in 1971. With this film, Lee created a new martial art style characterised by his swiftness and fierceness. *The Big Boss* scored over HK\$3 million at the box office, making it one of the highest-grossing films in Hong Kong. Lee broke his own record with his subsequent title, *Fist of Fury* (1972) that earned over HK\$4 million. He later founded Concord Productions Ltd

with Raymond Chow and produced *The Way of the Dragon* (1972), for which he directed, wrote and starred in. The film made over HK\$5 million and became a milestone of Hong Kong kung fu cinema. The final duel of Lee and Norris Chuck at the Coliseum in the film had further been a classic for Hong Kong action films. After finishing shooting for Warner Brothers' *Enter the Dragon* in 1973, Lee passed away unexpectedly on 20 July the same year. *Enter the Dragon* was released posthumously while the unfinished *Game of Death* only wrapped up its shootings in 1978.



LEONG Po-chih (1939 –)

Director

A native of Taishan, Guangdong, Leong Po-chih was born in Northampton, the UK in 1939. Leong studied at the London Film School and earned a bachelor degree of philosophy at the University of Exeter. He joined the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as an editing trainee after graduation and moved back to Hong Kong in 1967 to work as a writer-director at Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB). Leong co-founded Adpower, an advertising company, with cinematographer Tony Hope two years later.

In 1976, Leong co-directed with Josephine Siao his first feature-length film, *Jumping Ash*. Characterised by realistic details and on-site shooting, the film established a new scene for Hong Kong cop cinema and was a sellout, charting at number two among local films at the box office that year. Leong went on to direct films, with prominent works such as *Foxbat* (1977), *He Lives by Night* (1982), *Banana Cop* (1984), *Hong Kong 1941* (1984), *The Island* (1985) and *Fatal Love* (1988). Both *Hong Kong 1941* and *The Island* were awarded the Best Cinematography at the Hong Kong Film Awards.

Incorporating concepts from *Banana Cop*, Leong once filmed *Ping Pong* (1986) for UK's Channel 4. In 1991, he directed the first Hong Kong-produced English feature, *Shanghai 1920* (1991), starring John Lone. From 1995 onwards, he spent three years on making the documentary series *Riding the Tiger* (1997-98) with his daughter Leong Sze-wing for UK's Channel 4, chronicling the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong to China. Leong later focused on shooting English films, such as *The Wisdom of Crocodiles* (1998), and *Out of Reach* (2004) starring Steven Seagal. In recent years, he has returned to the Chinese film industry and directed *Baby Blues* (2013) and *The Jade Pendant* (2017).



LI Han-hsiang (1926.4.18 – 1996.12.17)

Director/Screenwriter

Li Han-hsiang was born in Jinxi County, Fengtian Province (now Liaoning Province). He moved with his family to Beijing (now Beijing) in 1932. In 1946, he enrolled at the National Beijing Art College, studying painting with renowned painter Xu Beihong. He came to Hong Kong in 1947, working as a bit player, set painter, voice actor and assistant director. In 1953, Li, as an assistant director, came into people's line of sight as he helped Yen Chun in shooting *Singing under the Moon*. Upon completion of his directorial debut, *Blood in Snow* (1956), he joined Shaw Brothers. Li directed a series of *huangmei diao* films including *Diao Chan* (1958), *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (1959) and *The Love Eterne* (1963) for Shaws, inaugurating a craze of *huangmei diao* titles. His period features such as *Yang Kwei-fei (The Magnificent Concubine)* (1962) and *Empress Wu Tse-tien* (1963) were also excellent works of the genre. Some of his prominent works for Shaws included *The Enchanting Shadow* (1960) and *Back Door* (1960). In 1963, Li went to Taiwan to set up Grand Motion Picture Company. During his five years in Taiwan, he produced over 20 titles that were highly contributing to blooming of Taiwan film industry. Li also directed the *The Winter* (1969), which was known for its exquisiteness and delicacy.

He returned to Hong Kong in 1970 and later founded the New Grand Films, for which he

made *The Legends of Cheating* (1971) and *Cheating in Panorama* (1972). Li later filmed *Cheat to Cheat* (1973) for Bian Sing Motion Picture Co. The 'omnibus' format of these three films greatly impacted the scene of the 1970s cinema. His first feature after returning to Shaws in 1972, *The Warlord* (1972), came in second at the box office that year. Li also discovered the then-television star Michael Hui, who later became a comedy icon of the 1970s. Li continued to direct for Shaws, with a number of 'soft-core erotica' such as *Legends of Lust* (1972), *The Happiest Moment* (1973) and *Moods of Love* (1977). At the same time, he completed two big-budget period productions, *The Empress Dowager* (1975) and *The Last Tempest* (1976). Li further adapted the classic *Dream of the Red Chamber* into a period musical film, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (1977); Brigitte Lin's portrayal of Jia Baoyu, a male character, was also spectacular. He directed *Tiger Killer* (1982), a film that offers a different take on the amorous Pan Jinlian, before he left Shaw Brothers.

In 1982, Li went to the Mainland to shoot *The Burning of the Imperial Palace* (1983) and *Reign Behind a Curtain* (1983) on the authentic location of the imperial palace. Since then he had stayed in the Mainland to make films. Li died of a heart attack in 1996, during the pre-production of the TV drama *Burning of the Efang Palace* in Beijing.



NG See-yuen (1944.6.12 –)

Director/Screenwriter/Executive Producer/Producer

Ng See-yuen was born in Shanghai in 1944. His family originated from Zhongshan, Guangdong. He grew up and studied in Shanghai in his early years. Ng came to Hong Kong with his family in 1961. He enrolled at the Southern Drama Group of Shaw Brothers in 1967 and started working as a continuity for director Lo Chen after graduation. Ng was soon promoted to assistant director, helping Jimmy Wang Yu on filming the box-office hit, *The Chinese Boxer* (1970). He left Shaws in 1971 and directed his first feature, *The Mad Killer*, with Lo Chen billed as co-director. Ng rose to fame with his directorial work *The Bloody Fists* (1972), a sellout at the box office. In 1973, he founded Seasonal Film Corporation, with *Call Me Dragon* (1974) as its first production. In subsequent years, he made *Anti-Corruption* (1975) and *Million Dollars Snatch* (1976). Both with sensational news as subject matter, the films inaugurated a trend of realist crime films in Hong Kong. At the same time, Ng directed the popular *The Secret Rivals* (1976) and *The Secret Rivals, Part 2* (1977). In 1978, he produced and cast Jackie Chan in two kung fu comedies, *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master*, making Chan an instant star. One of the most successful independent filmmakers in the 1970s, Ng later produced Tsui Hark's *The Butterfly Murders* (1979) and *We're Going to Eat You* (1980).

Ng had focused on producing and stepped away from directing in the 1980s. His latest directorial work to date is *The Unwritten Law* (1985). He once went to the US to film the action feature *No Retreat No Surrender* (1986). He also produced *All for the Winner* (1990), starring Stephen Chow; the film took in some HK\$40 million and broke the box office record. Ng went to the Mainland in the 1990s to produce blockbusters such as *Once Upon a Time in China II* (1992) and *Dragon Inn* (1992). Since 2002, he has established the UME Cineplex in various Mainland cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing and Guangzhou. Ng has also served as the president for the Hong Kong Film Directors' Guild, the Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers, and the Chairman for the board of directors of the Hong Kong Film Awards for many years. He received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Hong Kong Film Awards in 2013.



Ti Lung (1946 –)

Actor/Director

A native of Xinhui, Guangdong, Ti Lung was born in 1946 with a birth name of Tam Fu-wing. He enrolled in Shaw Brothers' actor training course in 1968 and was scouted by director Chang Cheh. Ti made his debut in Chang's *Return of the One-Armed Swordsman* (1969) and subsequently took the leading role in Chang's contemporary feature *Dead End* (1969). From then on he became Chang's protégé, starring in a number of the director's high-grossing action titles, such as *Vengeance!* (1970), *The New One-armed Swordsman* (1971), and *The Duel* (1971). His role in *The Blood Brothers* (1973) further won him the Special Jury Award at the 19th Asia-Pacific Film Festival and the Special Award for Outstanding Performance at the 11th Golden Horse Awards.

Ti later went to Taiwan to shoot for Chang Cheh's own company, Chang's Film Co. He played the lead in *Five Shaolin Masters* (1974), *The Drug Addicts* (1974), and some other titles. He also directed *Young Lovers on Flying Wheels* (1974) and *The Young Rebel* (1975). Ti returned to Shaws in 1975 and began acting in the works of other directors; some prominent works include Li Han-hsiang's *The Empress Dowager* (1975), *The Last Tempest* (1976) and *Tiger Killer* (1982); Chor Yuen-helmed *wuxia* titles based on Gu Long's novels, such as *The Magic Blade* (1976), *Clans of Intrigue* (1977) and *The Sentimental Swordsman* (1977); as well as Sun Chung's *The Avenging Eagle* (1978) and *The Kung-fu Instructor* (1979). Ti was one of the most prominent actors of Shaw Brothers at the time.

In 1985, he left Shaws and joined Cinema City. Ti won the Best Leading Actor Award at the 23rd Golden Horse Awards for his leading role in *A Better Tomorrow* (1986). After his contract with Cinema City expired, he took part in films and TV dramas as a freelance actor. His performance in *The Kid* (1999) landed him the Best Supporting Actor Award at the 19th Hong Kong Film Awards. Ti Lung's recent works include *The Kid from the Big Apple* (2016) and *The Kid from the Big Apple 2: Before We Forget* (2017); he further garnered the Golden Lotus Award for Best Actor at the 7th Macau International Movie Festival with his role in *The Kid from the Big Apple*.



TONG Shu-shuen (1941 –)

Director/Screenwriter

A native of Yunnan Province, Tong Shu-shuen was born in Hong Kong in 1941. She later took her studies to the US, at the film department of the University of Southern California. Tong stayed in the US after graduation and made commercials.

She returned to Hong Kong in the late-1960s and filmed her first title, *The Arch* (1970). It was featured at various international film festivals such as Cannes, San Francisco and Locarno in Switzerland, with critical acclaim. *The Arch* also won the Best Leading Actress, Best Black-and-White Photography, Best Art Direction for Black-and-White Films and a special award for Best Creativity at the 9th Golden Horse Awards. Tong finished shooting in both Taiwan and Hong Kong in 1974 for *China Behind*, a film that depicts young intellectuals fleeing from China to Hong Kong during the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution was still raging at the time, thus most filmmakers in Hong Kong shied away from this sensitive topic. *China Behind* was banned for release in Hong Kong until 1987.

Tong later directed an omnibus film *Sup Sap Bup Dup* (1975); as well as *The Hong Kong Tycoon* (1979), telling the story of an ordinary man who went from rags to riches.

In 1975, Tong founded *Close Up Magazine*, a film magazine, on her own. Up until the magazine ceased publishing in 1978, it had a total print of 66 issues. Tong left the film industry and immigrated to the US in 1979.

Tong became the scriptwriter and producer for the China and US co-produced TV drama *Peking Encounter* in 1981, and went with the crew to Beijing for shootings. In 2012, Tong produced and wrote an English musical *I, Ching*, which was performed by a Hong Kong theatre group, Theatre Space in Los Angeles.



YEUNG Kuen (1931.12.18 – 2012.5.30)

Director/Screenwriter

Yeung Kuen was born in Guangzhou in 1931 with an original name of Yeung Cheung-kuen. After moving to Hong Kong in 1948, he enrolled in the China Film Academy ran by famed actor Wang Yuen-lung in 1956, to study screenwriting and directing. Yeung co-funded with his schoolmates after graduation to shoot *Flying Corpse on a Foggy Night* (1959), for which he served as the screenwriter and director. Yeung joined Tao Yuen Motion Picture as an assistant director in 1960, mostly collaborating with director Wu Pang. He left Tao Yuen in 1963 and made films as an independent filmmaker. Yeung was a long-time assistant director to director Mok Hong-si, and participated in filming the famous *Lady Bond* series (1966-1967).

In 1967, he became a director and made his debut feature, *The Lady Information Agent*, starring Woo Fung and Josephine Siao. Two years later, Yeung directed *Within Three Strikes* (1969), an action-packed wuxia film that belonged to the later phrase of Cantonese cinema. He also directed the erotic films *Lucky Seven* and *Lucky Seven Strike Again* starred by Tina Ti in 1970. Yeung turned the iconic role of Tam Bing-man on TV into the film *The Country Bumpkin* (1974), which sold over HK\$1.8 million and became one of the top ten highest-grossing Hong Kong films of that year. He signed with the prolific independent production company, Goldig Films in that same year and directed titles of different genres, such as *Enjoy Longevity – 300 Years* (1975), *The Hunter, the Butterfly and the Crocodile* (1976) and *Duel of the 7 Tigers* (1979). In 1982, he joined Shaw Brothers and directed *My Darling Genie* (1984), with Cherie Chung as the leading actress. Yeung had become an independent director since 1986; his last work was *Candlelight's Woman* (1995). He resided in the US until his passing on 30 May 2012 in New York.



YUEN Woo-ping (1945 –)

Director/Martial Arts Choreographer/Executive Producer

A native of Beijing, Yuen Woo-ping was born in Guangzhou in 1945. His father Simon Yuen Siu-tien, a famous martial artist of the northern schools, taught him the trade at an early age. He also learned action skills from Yu Zhanyuan. Yuen worked as a martial artist alongside his father in his teenage years and became a martial arts choreographer in 1971, designing actions for *The Mad Killer*, directed by Ng See-yuen. The two had later collaborated for several times; Yuen was the martial arts choreographer for Ng's kung fu titles, *The Bloody Fists* (1972), *The Secret Rivals, Part 2* (1977) and *The Invincible Armour* (1977). In the same time, Yuen also choreographed a wide range of actions films for Shaw Brothers. Upon producer Ng See-yuen's invitation in 1977, Yuen directed his first film, *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (1978), starring Jackie Chan. The film, combining Yuen's slick action choreography and Chan's skills, was a smash at the box office. They teamed up with Ng again on *Drunken Master* (1978) that grossed over HK\$6 million; Yuen was thus recognised as one of the most talented action director in the industry with promising box-office appeal. He subsequently directed a number of films, including *The Magnificent Butcher* (1979), *Dreadnaught* (1981), *The Miracle Fighters* (1982) and *Drunken Tai Ji* (1984), which were well-known for his choreographed actions.

In the 1990s, Yuen continued to score well in action choreography. His prominent works in this period include *Once Upon a Time in China II* (1992) directed by Tsui Hark, as well as his own directorial feature *Iron Monkey* (1993); both featured with breathtaking and spectacular fight scenes. He made a leap to the Hollywood in 1999 and became the action choreographer for the sci-fi thriller, *The Matrix*, a record-breaking blockbuster that further earned him international recognition. His later prominent works include *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Kill Bill: Vol. 2* (2004), *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004), *The Grand Master* (2013), *Ip Man 3* (2015). Yuen's most recent directorial work is *The Thousand Faces of Dunjia* (2017).

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