

Preface

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In 2018, I joined the Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA) as a member of the Programming Unit. When editing our promotional periodical *ProFolio*, we would invariably refer to our volumes of the *Hong Kong Filmography* series. Each hefty volume is filled with precious knowledge, as if they are grimoires containing the secrets of Hong Kong's film magic. Turning the pages, it feels as if one is engaged in a fascinating conversation with the city's cinematic past.

When I transferred to the Research & Editorial Unit in 2023, I noticed that the Unit's copies of the *Hong Kong Filmography* series were bookmarked with countless notes. These notes were made by our colleagues as they continued to uncover new information post-publication, for use in eventual revised editions and updates to our online search system. Evidently, a researcher's work never truly ends! Taking on the momentous responsibility of editing and publishing Volume IX of the series, I embarked on a fresh and challenging new journey.

Design Elements To date, the *Hong Kong Filmography* series comprise Volumes I to XIII as well as the revised edition of Volume I. Sporting spines of different colours, they represent the passage of time in Hong Kong's cinematic history. Volume IX has been meticulously designed to preserve the series' style while incorporating fresh and stimulating new elements.

Volume IX covers the prime of the Hong Kong New Wave movement, a period in which Hong Kong cinema was profoundly influenced by the spirit of innovation. The choice of navy-blue for the spine was inspired by the text colour used on the poster of *Love Massacre* (1981). The cover's Pop Art style design arranges iconic scenes of Hong Kong films in a playful, non-uniform manner—like storied treasures yet to be unearthed.

Film stills are featured in full colour across six pages within Volume IX, immersing readers in the unique aesthetics of films from the 1980s, such as the green glow and eerie haze captured in the still of *The Imp* (1981).

Background Volume IX documents 328 fiction films and 11 documentaries produced by Hong Kong companies and screened in Hong Kong from 1980 to 1982. This period saw over 110 local films produced per year on average as the city's film industry flourished. Unlike in France, where audiovisual materials have been subjected to the same regulations as books since the early 20th century, film screenings in Hong Kong did not require an extra copy to be submitted for archival purposes. As such, the efforts of our Acquisition Unit, as well as the generosity of copyright holders and donors, have been vital to the completion of this volume.

The research process was full of surprising discoveries as we went through sources ranging from film copies, digital files, video tapes, discs to even overseas versions of films with dubbing in foreign languages. Valuable information was also gleaned from handbills, journals, premier advertisements, review columns, overseas posters and the archives of

various institutions. These records of Hong Kong's cinematic culture and history can be found in every corner of the world, a testament to the influence of Hong Kong films on global culture.

We would like to express our special thanks to the Resource Centre of HKFA for their cataloging, archiving and preservation of materials; the Conservation Unit for their restoration work and assistance to us in viewing copies of films; and the Systems Unit for uploading the contents of the *Hong Kong Filmography* series to the online database. Notably, Volume IX lists only five films with unknown content due to the lack of existing audiovisual material. From the scant records, we can only determine that most of these films are erotica—a tantalising little mystery left to us from the period!

More than Meets the Eye While the *Hong Kong Filmography* series is principally designed to be a set of reference books, it is to me a project with a human touch. Throughout the production of the series, we curated a film database using Access. At the front of each film's Access entry is a page labelled 'Editors' Notes', showing comments and notes made by generations of writers and editors who had worked on the series over the years. Reading these records of challenges faced and solutions found, one feels as though they are exchanging diaries with pen pals across time and space! The notes are filled with back-and-forth discussions over issues that have been resolved or marked for future attention.

Readers may notice the asterisks (*) next to some of the English titles of films listed in this volume. These innocuous symbols reflect years of research! English titles of films that appeared in the opening credits or promotional material (such as posters, advertisements and handbills) at the time of screening have been marked with asterisks. No asterisks were added to titles found solely on media distributed overseas, including audiovisual materials (such as CDs or DVDs) or publications. To verify these titles, we trawled through page after page of archived materials while recording our findings. In some cases, as with *The Old Time Legend* (1980, aka *The Legend of the Six Dynasty*), both names were marked with asterisks as they could be found in the opening credits and promotional materials respectively. Additionally, the Chinese film titles listed in this volume were given the distinction between 'alternative' and 'working' titles. The former refers to titles under which films were screened in Hong Kong or elsewhere, while the latter refers to temporary titles adopted during the filming process. The tireless effort expended on verifying these unassuming symbols cannot be understated!

A 'Restrictive' System All dates listed for films in this volume are the dates on which they were officially released in Hong Kong cinemas to the general public. Incidentally, as I was attempting to update such dates on our Access database, I found the system maddeningly restrictive at first—dates could not be inputted into the database without following the specific format of 'Year/Month/Day'. As time went by, I came to appreciate the system's strict constraints, as it served as a safety net preventing erroneous information to be recorded.

Similar issues often arose when inputting the names of filmmakers. The database operates on a list of names compiled by previous editors, which the system strictly adheres

to when verifying subsequent inputs. For example, the renowned Frankie Chan Fan-kei was occasionally credited in films under his birth name Chan Wing-yuk. When inputting his name in the database, editors had to include his alias or the system would reject the entry. When inputting a name that is shared by multiple individuals, the system would remind editors to carefully select the correct one. Each new addition to the name list involved intensive research and multiple steps of verification.

Seeing the Big Picture in Small Details Each volume of the *Hong Kong Filmography* series chronicles films by date of release in Hong Kong, showing noteworthy information such as the top ten grossing films of each year, ratio of Mandarin to Cantonese-language films, and the genres most popular to audiences. Upon closer examination of Volume IX, one can see the subtle intentions behind the release dates of certain films. For example, *The Young Master*, *Crazy Crooks* and *Disco Bumpkins* all premiered during the Chinese New Year of 1980, adding to the festive cheer; the release of *Daughter & Father*, *Older Master Cute* and *One Heart One Spirit* over the summer of 1981 clearly aimed to draw younger audiences to cinemas. Astute readers may also notice that the premier of *Human Lanterns* on 14 July 1982 coincided with the Ghost Festival!

The films documented in this volume are predominantly in Cantonese (with a few containing some English, Japanese or Filipino dialogue). A number of films premiered with both Cantonese and English versions. About one-fifth of the films are in Mandarin, while one film—*Mistress Hsieng Ling* (1980)—is in Shanghainese. To help readers grasp the linguistic diversity of Hong Kong films in the 1980s, the film list in this volume denotes the names of Mandarin films in bold, and Cantonese films otherwise. Interestingly, most crew members of *Dragon Force* (1982) were given westernised names when the film premiered overseas. Director Michael Mak and cinematographer Gary Ho were renamed Michael King and Bob Huke to appeal to international audiences! For availability reasons, the overseas version of *Dragon Force* was used as reference for the entry in this volume. While the dubbed English dialogue invoked the style of a Cold War spy thriller, our records indicate that a Cantonese version full of local characteristics screened in Hong Kong at the time. For example, the characters Wai-Ta (‘Vita’) and Mak-Jing (‘Malt’) were clearly named after the popular local beverage, invoking a sense of familiarity among local viewers and reflecting down-to-earth humour of Hong Kong cinema.

Genre Insights We adopted a broad approach to selecting and defining the film genres listed in the *Hong Kong Filmography* series. In addition to those attested worldwide, we sought to include genres unique to Hong Kong cinema, such as martial arts, *wuxia* and Cantonese opera. Multi-genre films listed in this volume also follow an established set of rules. Volume IX introduces the ‘animation’ genre to the series with the first ever local feature-length animation *Older Master Cute* (1981) and its sequel, *Older Master Cute Part 2* (1982). The former is categorised as animation/martial arts/crime, while the latter is categorised as animation/comedy/*wuxia*. These two films represented a breakthrough in locally produced animated films and brought fresh experiences to moviegoers. Two other genres—science fiction and disaster films—make their debut in Volume IX. *Meteor* (1980) combines the two genres to tell the story of an impending meteorite collision with Earth—a rarity in Hong Kong cinema at the time.

From 1980 to 1982, many filmmakers claimed to produce films starring children that targeted younger audiences. We debated over whether we should classify all films starring mostly children during the period as ‘children’s films’. For guidance, we referenced *Merry-Go-Movies: Star Kids of HK Cinema in the 50s and 60s* (an HKFA publication), as well as *Hong Kong Filmography* Vol III’s categorisation of the classic film *The Kid* (1950). How the filmmakers classified their own work was also a major point of consideration. After thorough research and review, we decided to categorise *Our Darling Coach* (1980), *Do-Re-Me* (1980) and *Young Outcasts* (1980) under children’s films. *Daughter & Father* (1981) is categorised under ethics/comedy, while *Once Upon a Mirage* (1982) is categorised as a social/realist film. We hope that with the addition of the aforementioned film genres, the diversity of Hong Kong cinema can be more holistically represented in the *Hong Kong Filmography* series.

Nearly a quarter of the films in Volume IX are *wuxia*/martial arts films, reflecting the popularity of those genres at the time. With reference to archival evidence such as advertisements and posters, we have marked many of these films as ‘not suitable for children’ in the notes for their entries. However, in the absence of such evidence, some films containing elements that may be unsuitable for children are not marked as such in this volume. Interestingly, films deemed suitable for children at the time would actively use phrases such as ‘suitable for all ages’ or ‘for the whole family’ in their marketing, to entice whole families to go to the cinemas together.

Several films caught our attention during the categorisation process. *Romance in China* (1980) was filmed against the backdrop of scenic spots in Suzhou, Hangzhou and Zhejiang. With a plot centred around a tour guide and a tourist, the film deftly weaves the beautiful scenery into their blossoming romance. Given the structural characteristics of the film, we decided to categorise it as a fiction film rather than a documentary. *Soul of the Wind* (1982) captures the magnificent desert landscape of Xinjiang, delving into cultural traditions of the Cossack people such as marital customs, festive celebrations, horseback archery contests and goat races. As these elements are framed within an overarching plot, we have also categorised *Soul of the Wind* as a fiction film.

Once the categorisation process was completed, we proceeded to edit the synopsis of each film listed in Volume IX. We would need many more pages to recount the stories that arose from this process, so let’s save those for another time!

Conclusion Compiling Volume IX was like hunting for treasures across the starry skies of Hong Kong cinema. Although we conducted rigorous research to the best of our abilities, there are films listed in this volume which could not be fully accounted for. Some of these films lack any existing audiovisual records, while others only exist in versions distributed overseas. For such films, we have included only the information which could be verified through sources available to us. The existence of different versions of the same films also necessitated countless reviews and extensive investigation. We acknowledge that there is still room for improvement and welcome all readers to reach out to us for comments. Let’s shine a brighter spotlight on Hong Kong cinema together!

Due to the limitation of book length, Volume IX does not list short films, nor films produced by independent companies registered in Hong Kong that were not screened in Hong Kong cinemas. We hope to publish materials dedicated to these omissions in the future. We warmly invite readers to stay tuned to the HKFA website, social media, electronic newsletter and publications, and participate in our screening programmes to experience the magic of films which cannot be fully conveyed on paper. Finally, we express our heartfelt gratitude to the film veterans, researchers, scholars and ardent fans of Hong Kong films for supporting and contributing to the successful completion of *Hong Kong Filmography* Volume IX.