

## Preface

---

There is a picture of Patrick Lung Kong at work: sitting on the right is Sylvia Chang, in the middle is Alan Tang, reclining. The two have their heads bowed, looking down at the script in front of them. Lung Kong, middle-aged, is on the left, his body partly propped up by his left arm. He is looking at the other two. Clearly, he is going through the script with them. This picture was taken when they were making *Mitra*, the last of his released directorial works. The time was 1977, less than 20 years from 1958 when he first entered the film world, and about 10 years from 1966 when he directed his debut *Prince of Broadcasters*.

'Lung Kong defies simplistic characterisations,' thus begins Shu Kei in his article collected in this volume. When we started to work on this volume a year ago, I viewed once again all of Lung Kong's films. I, too, felt that Lung Kong is too complicated to be encapsulated in a few words. Lung Kong has a penchant for social analysis in his films: from the discussion of specific social groups such as petty urbanites in *Prince of Broadcasters* (1966), ex-convicts, women from well-off families, prostitutes, and middle-class couples, to that of Hong Kong society as a whole in *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (1970), the global political climate in *Hiroshima 28* (1974), the hardship of living, the oppression of the soul, the degradation of society, the aftermath of international political intrigues and the scars in human history. By maintaining that it is difficult to capture Lung Kong in all his complexities, I do not mean to echo the usual comment about his long-windedness. Rather, in his analysis of problems, Lung Kong moves forward with the times. He gives no categorical answers, nor should he be expected to. His conclusions are provisional, there to open up to new discussions just as they sum up the old. Whatever has yet to be resolved will naturally continue to evolve.

---

If there is still something ungrounded about *Prince of Broadcasters*, starting from his second film, *The Story of a Discharged Prisoner* (1967), Lung Kong anchored his characters in the urban jungle of Hong Kong. In the 10 years that followed, he observed and reflected on the growth of Hong Kong and the inhabitants there (with, of course, his own emphasis and limitation). He engages in the discussion of actual social issues and the complex questions about human nature, going so far as to appear on screen to speak his mind. He breaks out of the tradition of Hong Kong films (and other Cantonese films), and looks squarely at the drastic changes of the complex human heart. Good intentions are no longer enough to restore the balance, while a state of perplexity becomes the most realistic response. With the help of flashy narrative techniques, he goes to great length to break the confines of clichés and broaden the visual vocabulary of Hong Kong film. It is characteristic of him not to shy away from sensationalism. His films are not devoid of subtlety, however: the impoverished couple played by Lung Kong and Tina Chin Fei in *The Call Girls* (1973) was a rarity in Hong Kong films after the 1960s. Yet, barely three years later, *Laugh In* (1976) offered what is almost a tragic parodic version thereof in *The Call Girls*. In so many ways, his didactic, critical and ironic postures, his anxiety and desires, his thematic and aesthetic concerns, Lung Kong has not only identified the needs of his generation, but anticipated the points of attention for those who come after him.

If it is difficult to encapsulate Lung Kong in a few words, it is no easier to summarise the many studies of and the commentaries on his works collected here. I am grateful to Director Lung Kong for sharing with us orally his memories, and to various writers for their contributions. For their guidance and support, I wish to thank Wong Ain-ling, the former Research Officer of the Hong Kong Film Archive, Law Kar, Sam Ho, Kwok Ching-ling and Grace Ng. My thanks also go to the colleagues at the Editorial Section, including Elbe Lau, Shirley Wu and Cindy Shin, and especially Angel Shing, co-editor of this volume and collator of the Oral History interviews of Lung Kong, for the editorial suggestions that they gave me.

However untidy his topics may be, and however one may want to position his works in the course of film history, the moral tenets of Lung Kong's films—sincerity, mercy, steadfastness, and sacrifice are values that call out to be admired and cherished. Lai Man, Wong Wai, and Ha Wa should be the protagonists of *Prince of Broadcasters*. Their virtues are so pedestrian, and yet so dazzling to behold. For those who would not easily set aside considering the value of Lung Kong's films, the 10 years of his creative life must appear to be so fleeting. Even though in the process there emerged so many delightful surprises, controversies and so much food for thought, it all seems a pity that it's all over in such a short time. Should Lung Kong be held accountable for it, or should Hong Kong or Hong Kong film? And it is because of all these question marks that his works continue to be talked about to this day.

**Lau Yam**  
20 February 2010

Translated by Tam King-fai