

PREFACE

Golden Harvest was established in 1970, the beginning of a critical period which, in many ways, marks a turning point in the history of Hong Kong cinema. The advent of free-to-air television not only brought new challenges to the film industry, but also nurtured a fresh crop of talent. The relaxation of film censorship led to a rise in depictions of violence and sex; Cantonese was beginning to overtake Mandarin as language of choice for mainstream productions; and independent filmmaking by small companies was booming. Golden Harvest was not only part of these different trends and developments, but was often a driving force behind them.

Commercially speaking, Golden Harvest established itself as a rival to Shaw Brothers as early as the 1970s, and was unquestionably the most successful of all new film companies of the period. It maintained its status as a major player in the industry throughout the 1980s and 90s. Indeed, it may be argued that Golden Harvest has been the most commercially successful and stable film company in Hong Kong from 1970 to 2000.

This Golden Harvest research project coincides with our work on the *Hong Kong Filmography* series, which has stepped into the 1970s. It also marks a continuation of our previous research efforts into two major Hong Kong film companies before the rise of Golden Harvest – Cathay Organisation and Shaw Brothers. Cathay quit the film production business the same time Golden Harvest was set up, and the younger company took over the Yung Hwa Motion Picture Studios from Cathay. In addition, during its first decade, Golden Harvest was locked in fierce competition with Shaws, and on many occasions, it

directly or indirectly affected many developments and executive decisions within the ageing film empire. One might, therefore, say that the story of Golden Harvest is at the same time an extension of the stories of Cathay and Shaws.

Researching Golden Harvest is by no means an easy task. This is partly because the organisation structure of Golden Harvest was even more complex than that of Cathay and Shaws which ran their own production studios. On the one hand, Golden Harvest operated on a similar system as these other two companies, in that it was involved in a wide range of businesses, including production, distribution and studio filming. In certain cases, it even expanded into business areas previously unexplored by Hong Kong film companies. For example, at one point, Golden Harvest was actively involved in making Hollywood-style motion pictures and had a specialised, independent department devoted to capturing a greater overseas market. Yet unlike Cathay and Shaws, Golden Harvest developed a business strategy of diversification. It owned a great number of satellite companies which worked and filmed for Golden Harvest, but from time to time, it engaged the services of film companies from outside as well. It also delegated different aspects of its business to a variety of partnering companies. For instance, Golden Communications was a company responsible for the overseas distribution of Golden Harvest films, as well as the filming and production of Hollywood features. All Golden Harvest films were developed by Cine Art Laboratory, and although the two companies worked closely together for many years, Cine Art was not, strictly speaking, part of Golden Harvest. Only in 1991 did Golden Harvest formally acquire Cine Art, just before it became listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

Making sense of the complex web of relations between Golden Harvest and these other companies is both a challenging and necessary task. To cite an obvious example, Golden Harvest went public in 1994, but this only involved its film distribution businesses; film production remained private. Misunderstandings can easily arise if such distinctions were not made clearly. This book mainly focuses on the film production businesses of Golden Harvest, and there is relatively little discussion on Orange Sky Golden Harvest Entertainment (Holdings) Limited, a branch of Golden Harvest that deals mainly with film distribution.

The oral histories from people who worked at Golden Harvest were invaluable in helping us gain a better understanding of its complex company structure. We have interviewed several individuals, particularly executives, who have helped shape Golden Harvest as a company. They include Mr Raymond Chow, founder of Golden Harvest; Mr Albert Lee, a major figure in the company's overseas distribution business; and Mr Louis Sit, Production Manager from Golden Harvest's early years. They have offered us an insider's view of Golden Harvest, and have also helped us gain a deeper insight into the company at its various stages of development.

It is hardly possible for a single volume to cover in detail over 30 years of Golden Harvest's history of filmmaking. When putting together this book, we have primarily focused our attention on the company's early years in the 1970s, and while we also discuss its

development in the 1980s and 90s, the coverage is not as extensive. Also, our original intention when compiling this volume was that we would not deliberately devote any article to Bruce Lee, as a great amount of excellent research on the action star has been published in recent years (including *Bruce Lee Lives*, published during the 2010 Hong Kong International Film Festival, as well as the accompanying pamphlet to a major Bruce Lee exhibition at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum this year). However, it turned out that Bruce Lee is impossible to ignore in the story of Golden Harvest. Without having planned for it, Bruce Lee figures in many of our writers' work here. It is testament to his iconic status and importance that he seems to permeate every aspect of Golden Harvest's history as a film company.

Our efforts here represent a preliminary step in what is no doubt a long and promising process of research. As one of the most important film companies in Hong Kong cinema, we expect Golden Harvest to continue to feature prominently in our future projects. [Translated by Rachel Ng]

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