

From the Editor

The market and capital from Southeast Asia provided a lifeline for Hong Kong's filmmaking after World War II. During the 1950s and 60s, the need to cater for overseas Chinese hailing from different provinces propelled Hong Kong to become a major 'dream factory', which produced motion pictures in Mandarin, Cantonese, as well as the Amoy and Chaozhou dialects. In order to satisfy the demand of the Chaozhou diaspora in Southeast Asia, film distributors in the 1950s had a wealth of works dubbed into the mother tongue of these communities. Shortly after, there came some bona fide Chaozhou-dialect films that featured topics familiar to this specific market, with Chaozhou song numbers thrown in to enhance audience appeal.

Hong Kong's first Chaozhou-dialect costume film, *The Story of Wang Jinlong*, came out in 1955. The female lead Fanny Ha continued to star in a number of projects and became somewhat a driving force for the industry. In 1959, the Dongshan Chaozhou Operatic Art Association came into existence, actively staging performances and readying itself for film production. Fong Hau-yuk, who once covered singing parts for Chaozhouese-dubbed films, left Xin Tian Cai Chaozhou Opera Troupe for Dongshan and starred in *Pearl Liu Thrice Tries Yu Zhi Lan* (1960). But the real sensation didn't come until the Guangdong Chiu Chow Opera Theatre's visit to Hong Kong in May and June of 1960, as well as the runaway success of the Yao Xuanqiu-starring Chaozhou opera film, *The Story of Sixth Madam Su* (1960), across Singapore, Malaya and Hong Kong. Filmmaking in the dialect thus became hugely profitable for merchants of Chaozhou descent both in Hong Kong and overseas. Even Wu Yuanxiang, the Amoy film producer, also dabbled in the business.

Meanwhile, members of the Xin Tian Cai Troupe, who first provided singing talents for Chaozhouese-dubbed films behind the scenes, became hot commodities for film studios. Among them was Chan Chor-wai, a homegrown Hong Kong actress who specialised in male roles and went on to become a household name in Southeast Asia. In a matter of years, Xin Tian Cai and Dongshan emerged as two major performing troupes in Chaozhou-dialect cinema. Their products became the cards with which Kong Ngee and Shaw Brothers, two prominent distributors in Singapore and Malaya, contended with each other. Sadly, the boom subsided soon after the mid-1960s, leaving behind a filmography of over 160 titles before it died down altogether.

Chaozhou-dialect film has long been a forgotten page in Hong Kong cinema history. Luckily, in the early years after the Hong Kong Film Archive opened its doors, a sizeable volume of literature on locally-produced dialect films was gathered under the tutelage of the former Research Officer, the late Yu Mo-wan. His successor Wong Ain-ling carried on with his work and commissioned Su Zhangkai, a Singaporean

researcher on Amoy- and Chaozhou-dialect cinemas, to glean useful information from newspapers of Singapore, Malaya and Thailand. His findings laid the groundwork for the listing of 1950s Amoy- and Chaozhou-dialect productions in *Hong Kong Filmography Vols III & IV*, published in 2000 and 2003 respectively.

Over the past decade, with the concerted efforts of colleagues at the Film Archive and the generous donations made by film enthusiasts and organisations, our Amoy- and Chaozhou-dialect film collection had grown considerably. Recently, our Research Unit picked up again the work on these two regional cinemas. Further to the 2012 publication titled *The Amoy-dialect Films of Hong Kong* which comprises data of some 240 titles, this year we moved on to the current volume on Chaozhou-dialect films. To begin with, our Research Officer Po Fung commissioned Su Zhangkai again to comb through *World Daily*, a Chinese-language newspaper from Thailand, to fill the void left behind by the missing issues of *Sing Sian Yit Pao*. And since many of the Chaozhou films had come to theatres in Hong Kong, we also made an effort to assemble information from local newspapers and put together a separate Chaozhou-dialect filmography. Oral history is another indispensable part of this monograph. Thanks to the help of industry veterans, we managed to reach some retired Chaozhou film workers. Some of the interviews are now documented under the 'Reminiscences' section of the book, and the remainder incorporated into 'Biographical Notes'.

As for the essays, we have invited experts and scholars from home and abroad to widen our scope of analysis. Po Fung places our subject in the broader context of dialect cinema, sharing his observations of how Chaozhou-dialect film learned from its Amoy counterpart, and how it absorbed the essence of Cantonese opera film in fashioning itself into a stylised operatic film genre. Stephanie Chung Po-yin, from a historical perspective, traces the footsteps of Chaozhou emigrants and thus the development of this regional cinema. Yung Sai-shing discusses the Cold War politics that set the stage for the boom of Chaozhou-dialect film; Lin Chunjun, a Chaozhou opera specialist from Mainland China, looks back on the Chaozhou opera pictures co-produced by Hong Kong and the Mainland. Su Zhangkai conducts a case study of *The Story of Sixth Madam Su* and examines how the film fuelled interactions across different media in Singapore upon its release, whereas Louie Kin-sheun looks into the three variations on *Meeting in the Reed Field* in Chaozhou-dialect cinema. Music being a central element in Chaozhou films, Lau Fok-kwong, a music expert in Hong Kong, guides readers through the riches of Chaozhou opera music accompaniment with two films as example; there is also a discourse by Yu Siu-wah on the interplay between Guangdong and Chaozhou music in films performed by the Xin Tian Cai Troupe. Lastly, I myself delve into the legend of actress Chan Chor-wai to pay

homage to this key figure in the industry.

I hereby extend my gratitude to film veterans who sat down to talk to us and furnished us with precious resources on this subject, namely Fanny Ha, Chan Chor-wai, Cheung Ying-yin, Chan Man-cheong, Lily Chan, Law Chi, Lau Fok-kwong, Fong Hon-chong, Chow Lok, Lau Sik-chun, Lee Mei-ying, Yeung Man, Cheng Shun-ying, Ting Man *et al.* In particular, we express heartfelt condolences to Chan Chor-wai, who had granted us two interviews over the past 15 years, as well as the deceased Chen Wenchang. We are also grateful for Cantonese film director Chan Cheuk-sang and actor Danny Li, who worked together on the Chaozhouese-dubbed *Chen San and Fifth Madam* (produced by Xinhuanqiu Film Company, 1961). The firsthand information they gave us made the film's information as detailed in this volume more complete and accurate. Our special thanks also go to local Chaozhou opera connoisseur Tam Dik-suen, who introduced us to Chan Yim-ngo, the daughter of Chan Wing-ming, the leading musician at the Dongshan Chaozhou Operatic Art Association. The collectables Ms Chan donated to us are truly invaluable. With the selflessness of the aforesaid guests and friends, this book becomes much more substantial and, thankfully, the sound of Chaozhou opera film, which had been hardly audible for half a century, becomes clearer than ever.

May Ng

(Translated by Elbe Lau)