

*Witnessing the Birth of Asian Hollywood through the Hong Kong Film Archive: an
Informational Interview with the Head of the Hong Kong Film Archive*

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Abstract

Hong Kong Chinese-language cinema has a century-old history. In comparison to cinema in China, Hong Kong enjoyed a greater degree of political expression. The Hong Kong cinema industry produced a greater variety of Chinese-language films, without having to suffer from the constraints imposed by government censorship. For decades, Hong Kong reported to be the third largest motion picture industry in the world, after Bollywood and Hollywood, and the second largest exporter. However, Hong Kong cinema did not attract scholarly attentions until the mid-1980s. The HKFA is the first research-based institution to be established for documenting the history and evolution of the region's cinema. This article is a direct face-to-face informational interview with Richie Lam, Head of the Hong Kong Film Archive - who discusses the film collection, expertise at the HKFA, strategic plans at the HKFA, as well as the Institute's contributions to the film industry and popular culture.

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Introduction

Hong Kong Chinese-language cinema has a century-old history. In comparison to cinema in China, Hong Kong enjoyed a greater degree of political expression. The Hong Kong cinema industry produced a greater variety of Chinese-language films, without having to suffer from the constraints imposed by government censorship. For decades, Hong Kong reported to be the third largest motion picture industry in the world, after Bollywood and Hollywood, and the second largest exporter. However, Hong Kong cinema did not attract scholarly attentions until the mid-1980s. The Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA) is the first research-based institution to be established for documenting the history and evolution of the region's cinema. In this interview, Richie Lam, Head of the Hong Kong Film Archive discusses the film collection, expertise at the HKFA, strategic plans at the HKFA, as well as the Institute's contributions to the film industry and popular culture.

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Patrick LO (PL): Could you begin this interview by introducing yourself, your past training and professional experiences. In addition, could you also explain your current role(s) and duties at the Hong Kong Film Archive¹?

Richie Lam (RL): I am Richie Lam. I am currently serving as the Head of the Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA). Technically speaking, I am an arts administrator, not a film expert, but I absolutely love movies. Anyways, I graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and I majored in Government and Public Administrations. Although my major at university was not film-related, I have always been a keen moviegoer, even when I was still a student. And I have already been a big fan of the film festivals. Being able to work for the HKFA, I feel like I have won the lottery - because I really love my job, and I feel most fortunate to be working here.

As I remember, back in the mid-1980s, soon after I graduated from university, I started working as the Cultural Services Manager for the Hong Kong Government. In fact, I have worked in many different arts administration positions in the Government. For example, when I first entered the Government, I worked for the [Hong Kong] Space Museum² - to manage the venue operation. After that, I

¹ Hong Kong Film Archive (香港電影資料館) - Homepage. Available at: <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/HKFA/en/index.php>

² Hong Kong Space Museum - Homepage. Available at:

worked for the Cultural Presentations Section³ - to plan for the performing arts programmes for the Hong Kong public. After the Cultural Presentations Section, I worked briefly as the Training Officer for the museum curators in Hong Kong. And in 1993, I had a chance to be involved in the planning of the Film Archive. At that time, there were only 3 staff involved in the overall planning of the HKFA, and I was one of the team members. In 1997, I was transferred to the [Hong Kong] International Film Festival⁴ - to work as the Manager of the Festival. And then 2 years later, I was transferred again to the Hong Kong Cultural Centre⁵ - to manage the venue. And in 2000, I went to the [Hong Kong] Film Programmes Office⁶ to arrange for the corporatization of the Hong Kong International Film Festival which was originally organized by the Government. And then in 2002, I worked for the Hong Kong Antiquities and Monuments Office⁷ - doing something related to the protection and preservation of the local built heritage. In 2007, I returned again to the HKFA. So that was the summary of my career path and professional experiences up to now.

PL: Can you tell me whose idea was it to establish this Film Archive in Hong Kong? In addition, what were the aims and purposes for establishing the HKFA? Was the HKFA a governmental initiative?

RL: I would say only partially. Back in late 1980s, some cultural persons like Law Kar (羅卡) and Yu Mo-wan (余慕雲)⁸, who cared very much about the preservation of the local film heritage, requested the Government to open a film library in Hong Kong. At the same time, the Government also expressed interest in doing something similar. As a result, the Government engaged an archive expert from Canada to conduct a feasibility study; and the study concluded that it was both feasible and

http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/ce/Museum/Space/e_index.htm

³ Hong Kong Cultural Presentations Section – Homepage. Available at:
<http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/index.html>

⁴ Hong Kong International Film Festival – Homepage. Available at:
<http://www.hkiff.org.hk/eng/main.html>

⁵ Hong Kong Cultural Centre - Homepage. Available at:
<http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/HKCC/en/about/intro.html>

⁶ Hong Kong Film Programmes Office – Homepage. Available at:
<http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/ce/CulturalService/filmprog/english/programmes.html>

⁷ Hong Kong Antiquities and Monuments Office - Homepage. Available at:
<http://www.amo.gov.hk/en/main.php>

⁸ Further information on Yu Mo-wan (余慕雲) is available at:
<https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E4%BD%99%E6%85%95%E9%9B%B2>

possible to set up a film archive in Hong Kong. However, since film archive was new thing to Hong Kong, a lot of studies and research had to be conducted before making any final decisions on building the archive. So in 1993, we had a small team to begin the actual research and planning work for the film archive. Concurrently, apart from doing the research, we also started to build the film collections. Because we understood well that if we could not start the acquisitions process as soon as possible, many of the valuable film collections would soon disappear. As you understand, old films are very fragile materials and they simply cannot wait. So at that time, apart from gathering the information from the overseas archives, we also collected some films and printed materials mainly from individual collectors. During that time, we also approached many large film companies like the Shaw Brothers [Studio]⁹, and the Golden Princess¹⁰, to ask for donations of any film-related materials. Unfortunately, we were still very much under the planning stage at that time, so the responses from these big film companies were, “*Only until I can really see the Film Archive has been fully established, or the storage facilities for films are readily available, then we could seriously consider donating something to the Archive.... But not until then...*” As you can see, it was really challenging to begin building the collections for the Archive during the initial stage.

PL: From your perspective or from the Hong Kong Government’s perspective, why do they think the film industry in Hong Kong play such an important role in our local heritage? Is it a recent concept or it has always been very important since the early days?

RL: Films, in a sense, are really special cultural products; but in another sense, they are commercial products for the entertainment industry in Hong Kong. The film industry in Hong Kong has had a very long history - almost 100 years old. Especially during the 1950s or 1960s, we had a large quantity of films being produced in Hong Kong at that time, and we also carried the name, “The Hollywood of the East / 東方荷里活”¹¹ or something that was equally fancy. Hence, films are very important in Hong Kong, in terms of both their cultural and commercial values. In addition, to me, films are also a kind of carrier of social images, as well as social messages... Through a film, one can retrieve a lot of old information that you cannot find from a regular printed book or even from a photo. So the film industry

⁹ Shaw Studio (邵氏兄弟(香港)有限公司) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.shawstudios.hk/>

¹⁰ Golden Princess Film Production, Ltd. (金公主電影製作有限公司)

¹¹ “The Hollywood of the East / 東方荷里活” – for details, see *Cinema of Hong Kong* at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_of_Hong_Kong

or the film culture is a very important part of our local heritage in this regard. In addition, films could also reflect how we see society at a particular period of time. Apart from the documentary aspects, films can also give us the real pictures of the society in which we live, for example, the so-called feature films, the drama films, and the dramatic cinemas, etc. – they all reflect a kind of cultural values at that time. For example, during the 1960s, through films, you can find out about the way people lived in Hong Kong during that time. In fact not only in Hong Kong, but all over the world, many people find this art form [film] to be really important throughout different societies. As a result, many regions and countries have their own film archives. In fact, there is an international association called, The International Federation of Film Archives¹², and according to the information provided, there are altogether over 150 archives for films over the world. As a result, this International Film Federation serves as an important platform for the people who work for film archives like us to share and exchange our expertise and professional experiences.

PL: As one of the founding members of the HKFA, during the initial setup stage, did you need to develop a set of policies and the procedures for operating the Archive? While developing the procedures and policies for HKFA, did you adopt existing policies and procedures from other overseas institutions, i.e., to borrow ideas and techniques from them on how to operate film archive in Hong Kong.

RL: Yes, we did take references from other overseas archives. The idea of setting up a film archive in Hong Kong was indeed very new during that time. During the initial setup stage, we took references mainly from the film archives in the UK and in Australia. Yes, we did try to model the HKFA after their establishments in overseas. Of course, our Archive was comparatively much smaller and more compressed in terms of the whole structure.

PL: Why did you choose to take references from film archives in the UK and Australia, instead archives in other places, e.g., the USA?

RL: There was not really a special reason. It was simply because the UK's and Australia's governmental structures were very similar to that of Hong Kong's. Because Hong Kong was still a British colony then, and their structures were very similar to some of the governmental offices in Hong Kong. Besides, it was before 1997, and there were not any political considerations at that time; just for very

¹² International Federation of Film Archives – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.fiafnet.org/uk/faq/default.html>

practical reasons. For the North American models, we also took them into considerations; however, at that time, we really needed to set up the HKFA as soon as possible, so we preferred to start with a medium to a small-size archive that would be more manageable. Of course, ideally, we would want to have a large archive; as we had to consider the future developments; but you would need to take much much longer time for the overall planning, as well as getting the money from the Government.

PL: When you first tried to set up this HKFA, were there any legislations, rules that had to be followed, e.g., the copyright issues for films?

RL: In fact, at that time, or even now, we don't have any legal deposit legislations - NO legislation at all whatsoever. For Korea, they have this legal deposit legislation for films; but frankly speaking, not many regions or countries have this so-called legal deposit legislation, because films are really special products, especially for those commercial films. Even now we have to acquire the films actively ourselves, i.e., not to wait passively for the film production companies to donate or deposit their films to the Archive. We really have to actively go out to acquire the films from them instead!

Of course, it would be ideal to have an archive law, so that any films produced in Hong Kong will be deposited automatically to the HKFA; but in actual practice, it could be really complicated. Because when it touches upon the property rights and the copyrights of the film materials - to many people, they think these rights are very personal or even private, because these rights are closely related to the commercial values of the actual film products. As a result, the film companies were reluctant to give out their film productions to the Film Archive in our early stage. However, I still think that we need to take time to educate people, in order to change their mindset. I think it is very important for the HKFA to acquire, to preserve and to provide access to the movies for non-profit-making purposes. So far, we have collected over 10,000 copies of film including negatives and film prints. After eliminating the duplicate copies, we have collected around 4,000 to 5,000 titles of Hong Kong films. You have asked about the policies of the HKFA earlier, it is very simple - we collect Hong Kong movies, i.e., all movies related to Hong Kong; produced in Hong Kong; or produced by the Hong Kong filmmakers.... if we find any films belonging to these categories, we will collect them.

PL: You mentioned earlier, you worked in many different departments within the

Hong Kong Government, e.g., the Cultural Presentations Office, the Culture Centre, the Space Museum, etc..... would you say that these experiences in some way have contributed to your current work at the HKFA?

RL: Although I have previously worked in many different offices within the Government, many of them were somehow related to films. For example, I have previously worked for the Festival Office which organized the annual Hong Kong International Film Festival, and then the Film Programmes Office, etc. As you can see, all these past experiences are somehow related to the film business. Even for some other non-film-related offices which I previously worked for, I still believe the learned office procedures and practices could be adopted when running the HKFA.

Part of the training and the past experiences within the Government were certainly beneficial to my current work at the HKFA. In fact, the setup of the HKFA is very similar to other cultural related offices in the Government, although we are very different in many technical aspects. For example, we have engaged quite a number of contract staff to work for the HKFA, as we need a wide variety of experts from various backgrounds. And all those film and other technical experts are simply not available inside the Government. Hence, we need to open some contract positions to recruit them to work at the Archive.

PL: Please highlight your collections here at the HKFA, e.g., do you have any rare film items that you are very proud of; or any unique film items that are only available at this Archive?

RL: For example, we have a very valuable film of Bruce Lee (李小龍) entitled, *The Orphan* (人海孤鴻). The story behind this film goes all the way back to 1994, when our HKFA colleagues were receiving training at a film laboratory in UK, the laboratory manager told us that they had gathered some Asian films, maybe from Hong Kong, and they were about to dispose it. Because they knew that we came from the HKFA, so they wanted us to handle this film – perhaps to return the film to the appropriate archives or organizations... So we went to the storeroom to inspect the film. Wow! As it turned out, it was a very important film of Bruce Lee! This film was commercially released in Hong Kong in 1960, just prior to Bruce Lee heading to the USA.

PL: Okay! But since this film was released commercially, how come those people working at the rent laboratory did not recognize it?

RL: Because those people who worked at that laboratory in the UK could not read any of the film's information in Chinese – it was all so foreign to them. In addition, they were only the negatives of the actual film – like the negative of a photo - so the laboratory staff in the UK could not watch the entire film either. It was indeed one of the most important films of Bruce Lee that was made in Hong Kong, in addition to 4 other films that he shot after he returned from the USA. So we felt so fortunate that we were able to retrieve the film. In addition, we only needed to conduct very minimal restoration on this film, because it has been so well kept over the years.

PL: How did the negatives of a Hong Kong Chinese film end up in a film laboratory in the UK?

RL: Have you heard about the Eastman colour film? Back in the 1960s, for the processing of such films, they had to do it in the UK, USA or Japan, etc. Once the processing of all the negatives was complete in the overseas laboratory, the prints would be sent to Hong Kong for screening while the negatives would be left in the film laboratories. The HKFA would therefore have the opportunities of retrieving some of these negatives back to Hong Kong. We were indeed very lucky.

PL: Who are the main HKFA users? Are they mostly from Hong Kong or overseas? Are they just regular movie goers or they are serious scholars who are doing research on film studies at the HKFA?

RL: In 2011, a user survey was conducted, and according to the survey results, the average age group of our users is over 50, i.e., something between the age of 50 to 60. In other words, most of the local HKFA users are senior citizens or retired people. I think this could be related to HKFA's location, because we are located in a residential area. Our user groups are very different from that of the other public museums in Hong Kong. Also, many of them are situated in the heart of the city, viz. Tsim Sha Tsui, where you could attract a more diverse group of audience, including tourists from Mainland China and from other overseas countries. Anyhow, we still have younger audience group using the Archive, although the proportion is not really that large.

PL: Would you say a majority of the users come to the HKFA for entertainment purposes?

RL: Yes, a majority of them come for entertainment purposes. They come to see the exhibitions on the Ground Floor, to browse the magazines at the Resource Centre (Library), and also to attend the film screenings at the cinema inside the HKFA. Of course, we also get a lot of scholars and researchers from both local and overseas who come to the HKFA Resource Centre for research purposes.

PL: For the local and overseas scholars, what kinds of inquiries or requests would they usually make? What kind of information would they want to obtain from the HKFA?

RL: Normally, the researchers are interested in finding out information about the old movies, for instance, movies produced in Hong Kong during the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, they want to find information on the major film studios in Hong Kong, for example, the Shaw Brothers and the Golden Harvest, etc. The researchers could read our collection of old magazines in which much information on local film history could be found.

PL: Am I to understand that the Resource Centre (Library) would be responsible for answering this kind of questions? In other words, within the film archive, you also have a library, which you call the Resource Centre - so what are the purpose and function of the Resource Centre?

RL: The basic functions of the Resource Centre are to make our collections available for the public to access. You may say that the Resource Centre is a facility that the public or the researchers can come to conduct their searches and researches on the materials we hold. For the HKFA, in addition to collecting, and keeping the film materials, the ultimate goal is to make these materials accessible to the researchers, and to the general public, for appreciation and even for entertainment purposes – through which, the general public can learn about the film history, film industry and film culture in Hong Kong. Of course, the HKFA also has a Programming Team which is responsible for organizing various public programmes including film screenings, exhibitions, talks and seminars etc. That is another way to make our collection accessible to the public.

PL: How far ahead do you need to plan your public or outreach programmes?

RL: We usually have an annual programme plan for those film screening programmes and exhibitions. However, we also have initial ideas for more long-term

programmes say for 3 to 5 years. For example, for the coming year, in April 2014, we will have an exhibition on the theme of “Hong Kong gangster film”.

PL: Could you please tell me how does the HKFA develop ideas and plans for public programmes and exhibitions? While developing these programmes, how could you ensure that they are corresponding to the public’s needs and interests?

RL: There is a really complicated workflow, but I try to make it simple for easy understanding. First of all, we have a panel of colleagues, who would discuss all the ideas first, and then we will develop more concrete proposals for the different film programmes. In fact, we have already developed some ideas for our programmes for the next 5 years. But how do we develop them? Well, there are so many factors which will affect our programming considerations and decisions. First of all, we have to look at our film collections, for example, if we have acquired or restored some representative collections, we will certainly develop a series of special programmes to promote them – and that is one way. The other way is that we are systematically doing research on different film studios, film companies, film makers and film genres in Hong Kong, etc. So we can organize special programmes on these major film studios, for instance, on the Shaw Brothers; on Cathay Organization (HK) (國泰電懋); and also on the Great Wall (長城電影製片有限公司), Feng Huang (Phoenix) (鳳凰影業公司) and Sun Luen (長鳳新電影公司), etc.

We also launched programmes on important film makers for example, on Li Han-hsiang (李翰祥)¹³; Yi Wen (易文)¹⁴; King Hu (胡金銓)¹⁵, etc. – all these programmes were results of our research works and with a view to arousing the interest of the publics and researchers on Hong Kong film history.

PL: The HKFA offers a variety of public programmes and exhibitions every year, how can you ensure that you have the adequate funding for them? What resources are needed to implement the programmes proposed for the forthcoming year?

RL: Luckily, we have a rather stable budget from the Government every year around \$30 to \$35 million Hong Kong dollars for the operational expenditure of the

¹³ Li Han-hsiang (李翰祥). Further information available at:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Han-hsiang

¹⁴ Yi Wen (易文). Further information in Chinese available at:
<http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%98%93%E6%96%87>

¹⁵ Hu Jinqian (胡金銓). Further information available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Hu

organization. The budget would then be allocated to various functional units of the HKFA. Every year, we would come up with an annual programme plan for the approval of the Government.

PL: Have there been situations that you and your colleagues both thought, “Oh! This is such a great programme!” And you knew that HKFA audiences would also love it. But after you have submitted your proposal or funding application to the Government, they told you that they did not like your proposal and did not give you the funding that you sought?

RL: Frankly speaking, NO! Maybe because the Government has a lot of trust in our expertise, and therefore gives the Archive a great deal of freedom to do our jobs. Not all our colleagues are civil servants – in fact, some of them are engaged on contract terms who are professional in film research, editorial and programming. We have totally 7 different functional units within the HKFA. One unit is mainly responsible for the acquisition of films. We have another team which is responsible for the film conservation and preservation. As I mentioned earlier, we have a Programming Team and they take care of all the film exhibitions and the screening. And for the Research Team, the colleagues make use of the collected materials for conducting research on various themes, for example, doing research on film studios like The Golden Harvest; on film directors, such as, King Hu (胡金銓); on Bruce Lee (李小龍), etc. And then we have the Resource Centre which is staffed by the librarian colleagues who will take care of the printed and audio-visual collections and manage the Centre. And we also have the Systems Unit which takes care of the computerized system for recording the information of the archive collection. Last but not least, we have the Venue and Administration Unit looking after the daily administration and operation of the Archive.

PL: Throughout the years, the HKFA has developed many interesting programmes for the Hong Kong public - could you name one or 2 programmes, which you thought were great successes? Maybe you could tell me about a programme that you are really proud of, the audience loved it, it was also well received by the media, and also received a lot of support from the Government?

RL: I think it has to be the project on the famous Hong Kong movie actress, Linda Lin Dai (林黛)¹⁶ - it was no doubt an exhibition that we are really proud of. The

¹⁶ Lin Dai (林黛), 1934-1964, was a very famous Chinese actress of Hong Kong films in the Shaw Brothers Studio during the 1950s to 600s. Further information is available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lin_Dai

experience from the whole event was hard for me to forget, even until these days. Lin Dai committed suicide in 1964; and her son approached us in around 2008, as he generously offered to donate his mother's personal items to the Archive. It was my very first time to visit Lin Dai's residence. We could see that her family did not make any changes to the settings inside her bedroom since the day she passed away - and being able to witness that first hand was definitely an unforgettable and sentimental experience for me. We then collected all the items, and tried to re-create her bedroom in our Exhibition Hall. That particular exhibition on Lin Dai received overwhelming responses. It was so well received by both the public and the media that it actually broke the attendance records of our previous programmes.

PL: For those personal items taken from Lin Dai's bedroom, did you have to return them her family after the exhibition, or they were simply donated to the Archive?

RL: No, all those items belonging to Lin Dai were donated to the Archive. In fact, for the HKFA, we also take up a minor role of a museum, i.e., to keep some film-related artifacts such as movie cameras, projectors, costumes, props etc.

PL: In other words, this institute is not just an archive for films; but also a museum for personal items related to the film industry?

RL: Yes, that is correct!

PL: Could you give me another successful programme launched by the HKFA?

RL: Another example I want to give is not an exhibition, but a film. You might have heard of a long-lost film entitled, *Confucius* (孔夫子)¹⁷, directed by famous director Fei Mu (費穆).¹⁸ It is a black-and-white film made in 1940 in Shanghai, during the Japanese occupation. This film was very meaningful in terms of its main message, as well as its overall aesthetics. Director Fei Mu tried to use the character of Kongfuzi to promote the awareness of Chinese people about our own national image, giving us a sense of national pride during the Japanese oppression.

PL: How did you acquire this film, and when was it acquired?

¹⁷ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucius_\(1940_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucius_(1940_film)) ;
<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/cuoaa/confucious%20add.pdf>

¹⁸ Fei Mu (費穆). Further information available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fei_Mu

RL: As said, *Confucius* was a long-lost film. Originally, we thought that we would never discover this film again. Many people had tried to locate this film for over 50 years, but without success. This film was originally released in Shanghai in 1940, and it was then released again 8 years later in 1948. It then suddenly disappeared, and only the film's printed brochures were remaining. But in 2001 or 2002, a member of the public telephoned the Archive, saying that a relative had just passed away, and left behind some reels of films. As usual, we went to the site to check out the collection without much expectation. As the donor handed the film cans to us, we found one of the cans was labeled *Confucius* (孔夫子) in Chinese. As we saw this, we were all totally shocked and amazed! Initially, we were very skeptical about the real content of the film reels being handed to us. But later on, we were able to verify that it was indeed the long-lost *Confucius* that we have been searching for so long. This was another amazing experience for me.

PL: Did you also organize another exhibition or special film screening for promoting this long-lost film?

RL: We acquired that film at that time and frankly speaking, we don't have the expertise to handle it. First of all, it was a flammable nitrate film, so we had to put it aside first. We spent quite a lot of time researching this film including the details of its production background, copyright issues, condition of the film negatives, etc. to prepare for the restoration work. We had then collaborated with an overseas film laboratory in Italy to conduct the restoration work. That was the first large-scale restoration project of the Archive. Before that, we have conducted a number of restoration projects as well, but the scale was comparatively small.

PL: Which part of your work at the HKFA do you find most satisfying?

RL: In fact, when I first arrived at the HKFA many years ago, I worked as the Film Acquisitions Manager, and I absolutely loved my job then. I really did enjoy my job. For example, being able to collect, to rescue our film heritage - I have to say it was the most satisfying part of my job. Frankly speaking, I was happier and more satisfied when I worked as the Acquisition Manager during the old days. I truly enjoyed being the "Acquisition Person". How to build my networks; how to approach different people in the film industry; how to really acquire films to expand our HKFA collections...

PL: What about being able to see how the audiences' positive responses towards the

programmes developed by the HKFA - do you find it to be satisfying?

RL: Of course, most satisfying indeed! In addition, I have the chance to witness the developments of the HKFA in the past 20 years. When we first started the HKFA project in early 1990s, we only had a very small team for doing all the planning. Now, we have a team of 50 staff, although not of large scale, we still manage to organize many meaningful programmes for the public. The success of the HKFA is really a team effort, all our colleagues came from all sorts of professions, of very diverse training and backgrounds, etc. Without programming colleagues, we would not be able to develop any programmes to promote our unique film collections. Without our library colleagues, we would not be able to provide good public services to the public and to the film researchers. Without the conservation team, we would never be able to preserve the films, and make them available to our Archive audience. Without the acquisitions colleagues, we would not be able to develop such a rich and diverse film collections, as we now hold. So we really need all these different experts to work together, in order to get the HKFA to work.

PL: Would you prefer the HKFA to stay at where it is now, or would you prefer it to be somewhere around the Cultural Centre, e.g., to next to other museums in Hong Kong – via which you could attract more visitors or tourists?

RL: Yes, you may say that our present location in Sai Wan Ho is not that accessible. As I mentioned earlier, back in 1993, at that time, if we had not accepted this present site in Sai Wan Ho; and if we had chosen to wait for a more centralized location, I seriously don't think we could not have begun the HKFA immediately. I was directly involved in this project since its planning stage, hence, I totally understand how difficult it was to build the whole Archive from scratch. Of course, every single archivist or librarian would want their archive or library in a more centralized area, but in actual practice, it is very difficult to. As a result, we decided to take up a location in Sai Wan Ho. Maybe now is the time for us to think about opening a branch for the Archive in a more centralized location.

PL: Where would you prefer the new branch to be?

RL: I don't have any preferences at the moment. In fact, even with our current location, we have been arranging some of our programmes to be organized in the more urban areas, for example, showing our films at the Broadway Cinematheque¹⁹

¹⁹ Broadway Cinematheque – Hompage. Available at: <http://bc.cinema.com.hk/>

in Yau Ma Tei; at the lecture halls of the Hong Kong Science Museum and Hong Kong Space Museum in Tsim Sha Tsui so as to allow our publics to enjoy our film screenings without the need to come to the Archive premises. But of course, my ultimate goal is to find a place which is a much more convenient for our patrons. Some patrons already told us that the Archive is too far away from where they live. In fact, I have already conveyed my idea of a new urban branch for the Archive to our senior management, and hopefully, such idea can be materialized.

PL: What are the major difficulties and challenges that you and your colleagues are currently facing at the HKFA?

RL: I think the accommodation and storage issues are the challenges at the moment. Since our collection and staff size are growing, we are in great need of additional space for office and collection stores. In addition, the possible retirement of film stock (film celluloid) in the near future is probably another great challenging to us and in fact to the whole film archive community. With the rapid development of digital technology, many films are now produced by digital means and screened by digital projector in the cinema. It results in sharp drop in the demand of film stock which forces the production companies such as Kodak, Fuji and Alfa to stop the production of film stock. The diminishing demand also triggered the closing down of many film laboratories. With this trend developed, where the film archive ultimately can buy the film stock and process the film prints for screening? Will it be the end of "film projection"? The impacts will become more salient in the coming few years and a lot of discussion will be held among the film archives.

PL: Do you have anything else that you would like to add before closing this interview?

RL: I can easily talk about the HKFA for over 6 and even 10 hours. I really like to work in the Archive. I have previously worked in many different posts relating to cultural services and arts administration, but so far, this is the one that I enjoy working most.

PL: When watching a film, which cinematic elements do you enjoy most? Do you enjoy the aesthetics part, or the visual part (e.g., the graphic excitements) or the drama itself or the narrative part or the other nostalgic elements? Which part of the film do you think is most important?

RL: I can just say that I like watching movie in the cinema, not at home, because I can be enveloped in total darkness, being able to watch those moving images on the screen without any distractions; being able to immersed 100% in the story and the drama – that is what I really enjoy.

PL: To you, what elements are more important?

RL: To me, it has to be the drama, and the script. I really enjoy watching any films with good scripts. Of course, I also enjoy the visual aspects of the film. But I think the most important thing is the whole context – in order words, the actual script of the film should be the most important thing, because you really need a good convincing script to bind all these different cinematic elements together. A film without a good script, to me, is not a good film.

PL: Thank you very much!

RL: You are welcome!

Image 1. Exhibition *Zen and Sensibility Legend in King Hu's Drawing*



Image 2. Guided Tour of Exhibition



Image 3. Hong Kong Film Archive Premises

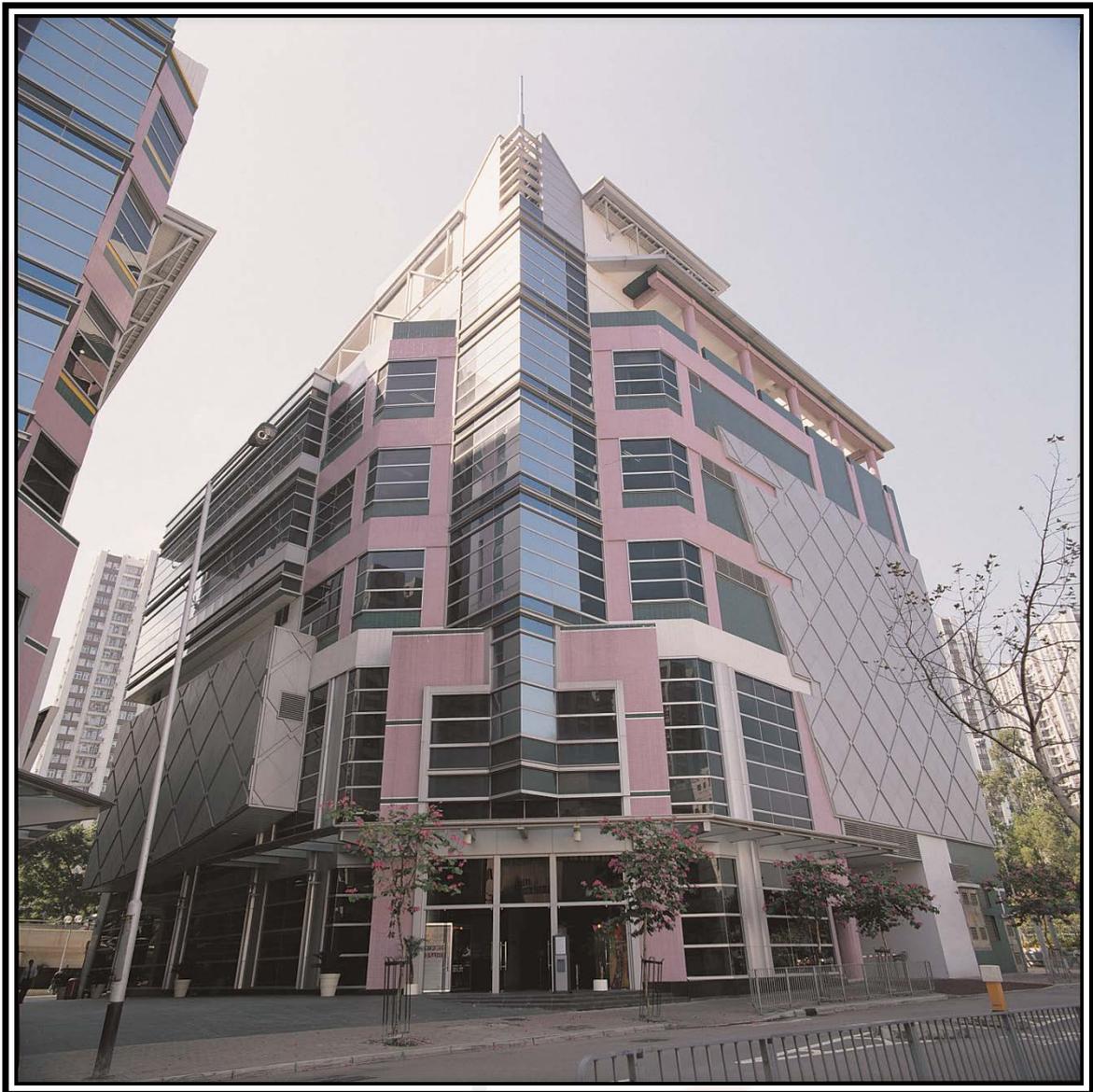


Image 4. Publication *Mastering Virtue - The Cinematic Legend of a Martial Artist*



Image 5. Restored Treasures *Confucius* (1940)



Image 7. Exhibition – *A Touch of Magic Veteran* - Set Designers Chan Ki-yui & Chan King-sam



