

CONTENTS

A Brief History of the Shaw Brothers Studio by David Desser 6

Cast & Crew with Film Notes by Simon Abrams:

- King Boxer** 17
- The Boxer from Shantung** 19
- Five Shaolin Masters** 21
- Shaolin Temple** 23
- Mighty Peking Man** 25
- Challenge of the Masters** 27
- Executioners from Shaolin** 29
- Chinatown Kid** 31
- The Five Venoms** 33
- Crippled Avengers** 35
- Heroes of the East** 37
- Dirty Ho** 39

The Stars of Shawscope: Volume One by Terrence J. Brady 42

Lip Flaps & High Kicks by James Flower 48

About the Restorations 56





SHAWSCOPE

2

VOLUME ONE 第一卷



SHAWSCOPE

3

VOLUME ONE 第一卷

AN EXPLANATORY NOTE ON NAMES & LANGUAGES

While exploring the contents of this boxset (including this booklet), you may find instances where people are referred to by different names, depending on the language, context and who is speaking. Due to the fact that the films were made in a multilingual territory (Hong Kong) with cast and crew often hailing from several different countries, it is not uncommon even today for persons to be referred to by multiple spellings and translations of their names across the Chinese diaspora.

The primary reason for this is that, when many of these films were originally made, Shaw Brothers solely made films in Mandarin, the dominant language of the Chinese mainland¹, until the Cantonese language reasserted its place within Hong Kong's mainstream media towards the end of the 1970s. In order to outwardly present a unified cultural and ethnic identity, cast and crew members were almost always listed in the credits and in publicity materials under Mandarin transliterations of their names, regardless of their mother tongue. (It is much more common for Cantonese cast and crew to be referred to by their birth names today.)

For example, the director of *Challenge of the Masters* may be referred to in the bonus features as "Lau Kar-leung", his Cantonese name, but is listed in the credits of the film itself as "Liu Chia-liang", the Mandarin version of his name that he was frequently billed under. Similarly, though the Korean birth name of the director of *King Boxer* is Chung Chang-wha (sometimes referred to as Jeong Chang-hwa), he is listed in the opening credits as "Chang Chang Ho" and in the trailer as "Cheng Chang Ho", both crude Mandarin transliterations of his name. (Complicating this further is the fact that Shaw Brothers was not always scrupulously consistent in how it translated some names: the surname "Yuan" might sometimes be spelled "Yuen", and so on.) As Hong Kong was under British colonial rule, Anglicized stage names were equally common for actors

hoping to make a big splash overseas, e.g. David Chiang, Alexander Fu Sheng and Gordon Liu.²

Chinese names are usually written with their surnames first, followed by their given names, regardless of dialect. Furthermore, a system of transliterating Mandarin names called *pinyin* has increasingly been implemented in the years since these films were made, which changed the way Mandarin names are adapted for the Roman alphabet.³ For example, a character may be introduced as "Tsai Te-Chung" on-screen, but the *pinyin* form of his name would be "Cai Dezhong". In the subtitles for the films, we have mostly (with some notable exceptions) favored the *pinyin* spelling for character and place names, as this is now the accepted international standard and more closely reflects how the name is pronounced. For the names of cast and crew members, however, we have generally elected to use the names under which they are most commonly known.

Wherever possible, we have attempted to standardize the usage of names for the sake of consistency, though for various reasons this is not always possible. We hope this is not too confusing for those who are discovering these films – and the talented people that made them – for the first time.

NAME

Frankie Chan

Chang Cheh

Chen Kuan-tai

Chi Kuan-chun

David Chiang

Chung Chang-wha

Alexander Fu Sheng

Ho Meng-hua

Hsaio Hou

Kara Hui

Lau Kar-leung

Lau Kar-wing

Kong Do

Kuei Chih-Hung

Philip Kwok

Danny Lee

Gordon Liu

Tu Lung

Ni Kuang

Wang Lung-wei

Wong Yue

AKA

Chan Fan-kei, Chen Xunqi, Chen Yung-yu

Zhang Che

Chen Guantai, Chan Koon-tai

Chi Kuan-chi

Chiang Da Wei, John Chiang

Jeong Chang-wha, Cheng Chang Ho

Fu Sheng, Alexander Sheng

He Menghua, Homer Gough

Xiao Hou, Chen Hsaio Hao, Hsaio Hu

Hui Ying-hung, Hui Yinghong, Kara Wai

Liu Chia-liang, Lau Ka-liang, Liu Jialiang

Liu Chia-yung

Chiang Tao, Donald Kong

Gui Zhihong

Kuo Chue, Kuo Chui, Kwok Chun-Fung

Danny Lee Sau-yin, Li Hsiu-hsien, Li Xiuxian

Liu Chia-hui, Lau Kar-fai, Liu Jiahui

Dick Wei

I Kuang, Yi Kuang

Johnny Wang, Lung Wang, Huang Lung-Wei

Wang Yu, Wong Yu, Wong Chi-kuen

(NOTE: The above list is not intended to be exhaustive, and many, many other examples exist.)

¹ Standard Mandarin is also known as Putonghua ("Common Language"), and since coming to power in the mid-1950s, the Chinese Communist Party has succeeded in imposing it as standard throughout China, despite the survival of many regional dialects and other languages like Tibetan.

² In a film like *Heroes of the East*, which involves Japanese cast members, it can be even more confusing: a Cantonese synopsis can bill the leading lady as Kun Tse, whereas her name in pinyin is Gongzi, both of which are local readings of her actual Japanese name, which is Yumiko.

³ As part of its efforts to rationalize the complicated Chinese written language in the 1950s, Mao's communists developed pinyin to be more 'scientific' and accurate than earlier systems (e.g. Wade-Giles), many of which were invented by missionaries.

Special thanks to Jonathan Clements and Tony Rayns for their assistance in assembling this note.





A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SHAW BROTHERS STUDIO

by David Desser

When in 1925, the four Shanghai-based Shaw brothers – Runje (1896-1975), Runde (1898-1973), Runme (1901-1985) and Run Run (1907-2014) – began their film studio, Tianyi (“Unique”), it was either a completely immodest or wildly prophetic name for their fledgling concern. Yet, “unique” is surely what they became. For unquestionably the Shaw Brothers Studio HK (the name eventually hit upon) was arguably the most important, certainly the most prolific, and undoubtedly the most influential film studio in the history of not just Hong Kong cinema, but of any Chinese cinema anywhere in the world. The 750 films it produced and released in Hong Kong stand apart in quantity and quality from any films made in any Chinese language. And in the late 1960s through the 1970s (perhaps world cinema’s greatest decade), Shaw Brothers gave even Hollywood a run for its money, not just in Asia, but even on the screens of the mighty – and mightily insular – USA itself.

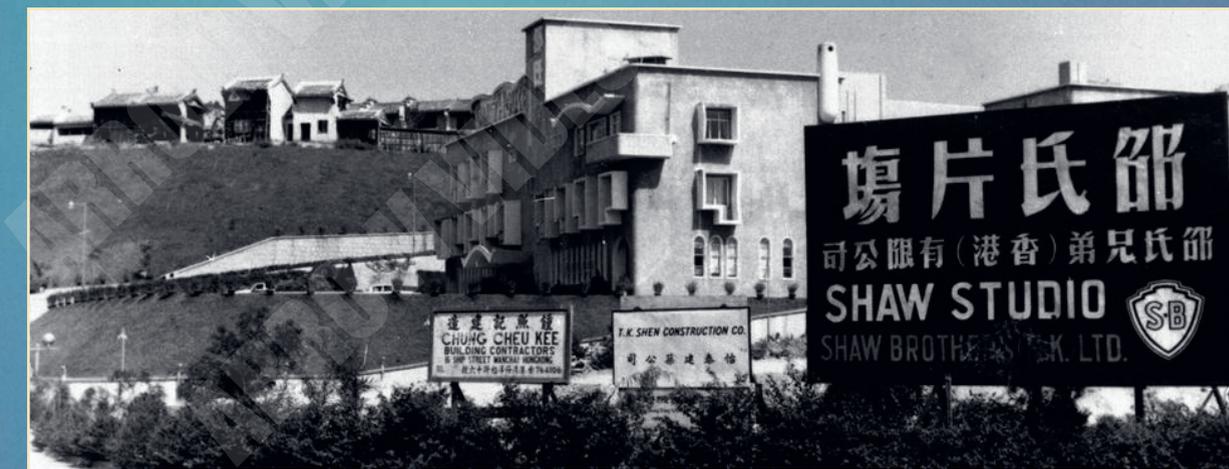
In light of the mostly conservative (though sometimes, deceptively, a little to the left) values of the famous Shaws’ martial arts movies, it is entirely appropriate that elder brother Runje, the first director and general manager of Tianyi, insisted that he was totally opposed to the trendy European style that was being adopted by some other studios. He publicly announced that Tianyi’s films would “stress traditional moral and ethical values, promote Chinese civilization and avoid becoming Europeanized.”¹ Tianyi’s first film was *A Change of Heart* (aka *Repentance*) in 1925, a drama about which little is apparently known save that it was anti-war. Their second film, though it does not survive, was both a commercial hit and clearly a harbinger of things to come: *Li Feifei the Heroine* (*Nüxia Li Feifei*, 1925), not only an early martial arts film but perhaps the first one to feature a woman. The studio quickly became the most prolific of the era and among the most successful by working in a variety of genres (melodrama, costume, comedy), increasing its talent pool of directors and actors and expanding

its distribution market in both domestic Chinese cities and throughout Southeast Asia, making it the first Shanghai studio to recognize the vast potential of that region. Indeed, Runje sent his two younger brothers to Singapore in 1928 where they set up a company to distribute the films of Tianyi to the Southeast Asian Chinese diaspora. The success of the studio and the vision of Runje also led the studio to produce one of the earliest Chinese sound films, *Spring on Stage* (*Li Pingqian*, 1931).

Meanwhile, the younger brothers were going like gangbusters in both Singapore-Malaya and Hong Kong in the 1930s. In 1940, the brothers began building a studio in Singapore for producing Malay and Cantonese pictures. Equipment and technicians from Hong Kong were then imported to begin work on a Malay film featuring local Malay actors and actresses as well as popular

Malay *kronchong* (an Indonesian musical style) singers. In 1941, Shaw embarked on the construction of a new film production facility, called Singapore Film Studios. When the Pacific War broke out on the Chinese mainland in 1937, Runje closed the Shanghai studio and left the film business to Runme and Run Run. Sadly, the Japanese attacks on Singapore and their rapid conquest of Hong Kong left the movie business in shambles.

The first post-war Malay film, titled *Night Time in Singapore* (*Singapura Diwaktu Malam*), premiered on November 15th 1947. Shaw’s local Malay film enterprise was formally incorporated as Malay Film Productions on August 23rd 1949. The studio’s productions were mostly helmed by Indian directors who were assisted by Chinese and Indian technicians, though Filipino and Malay directors were hired later on. Malay Film Productions produced more than 150 films during its heyday, heavily



¹ Anon, “1925: The Start of a Legendary Studio”, *The Chinese Mirror: A Journal of Chinese Film History* (blog), <http://www.chinesemirror.com/index/2011/04/1925-start-legendary-studio.html>

influenced by *bangsawan* (Malay opera) and the traditions of Indian cinema. The company was, however, plagued by frequent labor strikes and declining profits in its latter years, and liquidated in 1967.² However, by this time Shaw Brothers Ltd (HK) was the most successful studio in the British territory, virtually without competition.

Before the Second World War, Hong Kong was a minor outpost of Chinese culture and civilization. As a British colony and a Cantonese-speaking territory, it was alienated from both the dominant Mandarin language of the mainland and the Shanghainese of the “Hollywood of the East”. Nevertheless, Tianyi looked southward when, in 1933, it teamed up with Cantonese opera singer Sit Kok-Sin to make the first Cantonese talkie, *White Golden Dragon* (*Baijin long*). This film proved to be very successful, and in 1934 led to the establishment of the Tianyi Studio (Hong Kong) to make Cantonese films. Fifteen films followed; sadly, a vault fire (possibly arson) destroyed the films which have thus disappeared from view. Production head Runje handed Tianyi over to his brother Runde, who renamed the studio Nanyang (South Sea) to reflect its new geo-economic outlook. Having no production experience, Runde turned the producing reins over to younger brother Runme and between the two of them managed to make around eighty films in Cantonese until the Japanese occupied Hong Kong at the outbreak of the war in the Pacific.

After escaping from the Japanese during the occupation of Hong Kong, Runde resumed the running of Nanyang in 1946; he renamed it Shaw & Sons Ltd in 1949. Runde devoted Shaw & Sons strictly to the production of Mandarin films – tiny Hong Kong thus became the site of both Mandarin and Cantonese productions, with the latter resulting in more films, albeit from dozens of companies, until Shaws (and a handful of Mandarin-language concerns) won out. Yet, for quality, there was no competition; the Mainland emigrés reconstituted their Shanghai glory days in the British colony. From 1952 until 1958, Shaw & Sons made over 70 films. Though this is nothing to sneeze at (an average of 10 films a year), during the same period the Cantonese superstar Kwan Tak-hing made 52 films in his iconic

role as Wong Fei-hung, along with 23 other films. In other words, Kwan Tak-hing made as many films himself as Shaw & Sons did in the same seven years.

Youngest brother Run Run Shaw, on the other hand, had the remarkable ability to see the big picture, set a goal and, one way or another, achieve it. Perhaps his fondest wish was for overseas recognition. Shaws had long possessed a presence in Chinatowns across the world, particularly in North America. Toronto, New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Honolulu all had theaters owned outright by the Shaws, who were able to feed this circuit for the many expats of the Chinese diaspora. But Run Run Shaw had bigger fish to fry: international acclaim. His first step on this road took place when he joined forces with Masaichi Nagata, the head of Japan’s Daiei Studios, in forming the Asian Film Festival. Daiei was itself equally concerned with global appeal following the Golden Lion triumph of *Rashōmon* at the 1951 Venice Film Festival and the flurry of films that competed in the years thereafter. Daiei even managed the gold-standard of distribution in the US for a handful of films. Unsurprisingly, the Japanese dominated the awards for the first half dozen years of the festival. The first Hong Kong film to break Japan’s streak was the MP&GI-produced *Our Sister Hedy* (*Siqian jin*) in 1958, though, oddly, Shaws’ Li Han-hsiang took Best Director for *Diao Chan*, which also took Best Screenplay and Best Actress for their superstar, the lovely and tragic Linda Lin Dai. The Shaw Bros and their star director Li took Best Picture in 1959 with *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (*Jiangshan meiren*) and again in 1960, then a run of Best Picture awards in 1965, ‘66 and ‘67.

But it was always the international marketplace of awards and distribution that Run Run Shaw desired. To this end, he began a series of co-productions with Japanese companies and would soon import talent from Japan, starting with the great cinematographer Tadashi Nishimoto. After beginning his career in Manchuria during the war, Nishimoto worked at the short-lived Shintōhō studio and served, according to film historian David Bordwell, as assistant director on Japan’s first



anamorphic widescreen film, *The Meiji Emperor and the Great Russo-Japanese War* (*Meiji tennō to Nichi-Ro daisensō*, 1957). That same year he went to Hong Kong and began an unprecedented career at Shaws, demonstrating the use of cinemascope and color. Under the name of Ho Lan-shan, he would work with the studio’s greatest directors, including Doe Ching, Li Han-hsiang, King Hu and, interestingly, two

major Japanese filmmakers who would come to the studio in the middle of the 1960s, Umetsugu Inoue and Kō Nakahira. He would also shoot color ‘scope cinematography for Korean action specialist, Chung Chang-wha (aka Jeong Chang-hwa). Such was his skill and reputation that he worked behind the camera on Bruce Lee’s directorial debut, *The Way of the Dragon* (*Menglong guo jiang*, 1972) and is credited as co-cinematographer on *Enter the Dragon* (1973). Arguably, however, the most important decision made by Shaw Brothers came about at the end of the 1950s.

Though Hollywood was often called “The Dream Factory” in its Golden Age of the 1930s, that sobriquet truly belongs to the Shaw Brothers Studio following the completion of their facility in Clearwater Bay on Kowloon. Named “Movietown”, when it officially opened in 1961, it employed 1,500 people and was the largest privately owned studio in the world, boasting a dozen soundstages, a backlot, residential buildings for actors and crew as well as private homes across its sprawling 46-acre site. Even before completion of the studio, Run Run Shaw – who had taken over as production chief and renamed the studio as Shaw Bros. in 1958 – had nostalgic visions of a mythical China, along with a desire to transform his regional company into a global powerhouse. With the completion of Movietown, a virtual China was created. As described by Hong Kong critic Sek Kei: “Its permanent street sets comprised mostly exquisite bridges, rivers, city walls, palaces and pavilions, and shops gracing the landscape of ancient China.” The so-called ‘loss of the Mainland’, as the Communist Party asserted their stronghold over the nation throughout the 1950s, had many Chinese people in Hong Kong (especially the large ex-pat community of Mandarin speakers), Taiwan and elsewhere pining for a China from which they had been banished.

To deliver this magical, perfect, impossible China, Shaw hit upon a genre of musicals that led to their first Golden Age – an age of sumptuous production design, soaring scores and women of ethereal and almost unattainable beauty. Called “*huangmei diao*” (lit. yellow plum tunes), the form is based on traditional (Chinese) opera, but with more modern cinematic techniques. (It

is easily distinguishable from the acrobatic, spectacular Beijing Opera and the toned-down version of Cantonese Opera, the latter a staple of the Cantonese cinema of the 1950s.) It also featured the kind of gender-bending popular in Asian cinema, in this case women taking all the lead roles, male and female. From 1958’s *Diao Chan* through 1977’s *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Jingyu liangyuan Honglou meng*), Shaw produced more than thirty of these musical extravaganzas drawn from folklore, literature, and other theatrical sources. The most popular of these were some of the studio’s most successful films of 1959-1965, reaching its apogee with *The Love Eterne* (*Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingta*) in 1963, the most popular film in the history of Hong Kong cinema until the martial arts craze began in 1966. The genre was dominated by the likes of superstar Ivy Ling Po, who played male roles and also did her own singing, while the illustrious Li Li-hua also performed her own musical numbers. Some of the most beautiful of the women, those who played the female roles, included Linda Lin Dai and Betty Loh Ti, whose singing voices were dubbed. Stories of impossible and doomed romances brought tears to the largely female audience, who were probably more entranced by the story, setting and style than any politics underlying the films. In fact, though the British Colonial masters of the territory had a largely hands-off policy when it came to Hong Kong movies, one thing they did insist upon was no overt anti-China (or anti-British) content. So popular were the *huangmei diao* films that Shaw attempted to use them to achieve their dream of global popularity. They almost succeeded: *The Magnificent Concubine* (*Yang Guifei*) competed for Gold at Cannes in 1962 and managed to win a Technical Grand Prize. Costume films without the operatic scores also played in competition at Cannes in this period, including 1960’s *The Enchanting Shadow* (*Qian-Nü youhun*, a romantic ghost story starring Betty Loh Ti) and 1963’s *Empress Wu Tse-tshien* (*Wu Zetian*, starring Li Li-hua as the 7th century Empress of China). None took the Palme d’Or and none managed an Oscar nomination despite being submitted to the American Academy. An attempt in 1964-65 to release these films at New York City’s 55th Street Playhouse proved just this side of disastrous, and Shaw’s dream of a China

that could transcend regional boundaries would have to wait almost a decade.

By the late 1950s, when the Shaws began to shoot their films in color and cinemascope, Mandarin-language films out-grossed Cantonese-language productions, which had to make up in quantity what they could not compete with in quality. In 1964, Shaw’s greatest competition, Motion Picture & General Investments Limited (MP&GI) – the more cosmopolitan of the two – took a couple of hits when their production head, Loke Wan Tho, died in a plane crash (ironically on his way home from the Asian Film Festival) and their biggest star, Grace Chang, retired. But 1964 was a bad year all around, as Shaw’s superstar Linda Lin Dai committed suicide at 29. The suicides of Betty Loh Ti in 1968 and Margaret Tu Chuan in 1969 further decimated the ranks of Mandarin cinema’s gorgeous leading ladies. Meanwhile, director Li Han-hsiang departed for Taiwan where he established his own production company. The *huangmei diao* had seen its last.

Outside forces, too, did not help the life and times of the *huangmei diao* or the period costume film. The aging of its female stars, the Cultural Revolution on the Mainland, and the inroads made by television all shifted audience demographics. In response to the younger, more demanding audience, Shaw began to produce new genres, including modern, cosmopolitan musicals similar to those made half a decade earlier by MP&GI (but with more up-to-date stars and style), modern-day action thrillers in the James Bond 007 model, and martial arts films under the influence of Japanese samurai movies. Meanwhile, a good deal of the female and much of the adult male audience was siphoned off by television. Rediffusion TV, a subscription cable service that was quite expensive but garnered large audiences via communal viewings in tea shops, began in 1957, and even greater inroads in home viewing occurred when Shaw Brothers itself began television operations in November 1967. The new station broadcast both Cantonese-language and English-language channels, TVB Jade and TVB Pearl, respectively.

² Anon, “Shaw Ventures Into Local Malay Film Productions”, *History SG: An Online Resource Guide*, <https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/6854ed6a-4614-4ecc-b728-278f0a8ffb98>

In order to modernize both its production methods and its style, Shaw turned to a handful of overseas filmmakers, in particular from Japan and Korea. Their sparkling, cosmopolitan musicals were given over to Japan's Umetsugu Inoue, whose prestige and power was such that he did not assume a Chinese name in the credits, unlike most of his overseas colleagues. Inoue would make seventeen films for Shaw Brothers from 1967 to 1971, a prolific output aided by the fact that he remade and reworked half a dozen of his Japanese films. *Hong Kong Nocturne* (*Xiangjiang huayue ye*), the first of these, set the tone for the rest of Inoue's career. Peter Chen-ho, a stalwart at the female-dominated MP&GI who became equally foundational at Shaws with his pleasant looks, fine singing and dancing ability, is the ostensible lead in the film, but its interest and success lies with the women, led by the tall, lithe, 21-year-old dancer Cheng Pei-pei, supported by equally young stars Lily Ho Li-li and Chin Ping (only 18 at the time). *Hong Kong Rhapsody* (*Huayue liangxiao*, 1968), with 20-year-old Li Ching – already a veteran actress at her tender age – would follow the same model, as would films like *The Singing Escort* (*Qingchun wansui*, 1969) and *The Yellow Muffler* (*Yunü xichun*, 1971). Inoue would also deliver lighthearted comedies like *The Millionaire Chase* (*Diaojin gui*, 1969), *Apartment for Ladies* (*Nüzi gongyu*, 1970) and *The Venus Tear Diamond* (*Zuanshi yandao*, 1971), part of a legacy of sparkling, fast-paced wit and glamour, quite at odds with the China-centric *huangmei diao*. These films represented a new and dynamic Hong Kong.

So, too, did the films of another Japanese director, Kō Nakahira, who directed under the Chinese name Yeung Shu-hei. Though he made just four films from 1967-69, they are each of them exemplary of the new action thriller or youth melodrama. First up was *Inter-Pol* (*Tejing 009*, 1967), a James Bond knock-off. The film features veteran Mandarin-language actor Tang Ching, who'd recently come over to Shaw Brothers from Cathay (the restructured MP&GI company set up in the wake of Loke Wan Tho's death) as ladies'-man action-hero Agent 009. A bevy of beauties, including Margaret Tu Chuan, Lily Ho and Tina Chin Fei, seduce and are seduced by the dashing hero in what is obviously a film not to be taken seriously, but which provides

endless entertainment. So, too, does *Trapeze Girl* (*Feitian nülang*, 1967), featuring another Shaw beauty, Fang Ying, who was equally at home in costume dramas and up-to-date action thrillers.

Another Japanese director brought in to make Western-style action films, or what were sometimes called 'Hong Kong films with a Japanese flavor', was Akinori Matsuo, who worked under the Chinese pseudonym Mak Chi-woh. *Asia-Pol Secret Service* (*Yazhou mimi jingtan*, 1967), released a few weeks before *Inter-Pol*, is another affectionate James Bond-lite film, featuring Jimmy Wang Yu, whose stardom cannot be underestimated (and will be discussed momentarily), along with Fang Ying, with a mixed Chinese and Japanese cast (which made it easier to reshoot the film in Japan substituting for Wang Yu and Fang Ying). Matsuo's third and final film for Shaw is the exciting girl-with-gun thriller, *The Lady Professional* (*Nü shashou*, 1971), featuring Lily Ho, truly one of the busiest actresses in the decade from 1965-1974. Still, the masterpiece of the action films by Japanese directors is Nakahira's *Diary of a Lady Killer* (*Lieren*, 1969), a risqué remake of his own 1964 Japanese original, *The Hunter's Diary* (*Ryōjin nikki*, 1964). As successful as these films by this handful of Japanese directors would prove to be, nothing compared to the New Style Martial Arts film.

If the *huangmei diao* could be transformed into a martial arts movie, the result would be King Hu's *Come Drink with Me* (1966). No surprise, perhaps, for the Beijing-born filmmaker who had been the assistant director for Li Han-hsiang on *The Love Eterne* and who had made his directorial debut in 1964 with *The Story of Su San* (*Yu Tangchun*), a classic opera starring the glorious Betty Loh Ti. Fight choreography modified from Beijing Opera and Japan's Zatoichi the Blind Swordsman series, a period setting, and a gender-bending performance by Cheng Pei-pei made this film one of the early masterpieces of the martial arts cinema and a huge commercial success. It certainly made Cheng Pei-pei the "Queen of Swordswomen" and established King Hu's reputation as a major director. Convinced by his mentor Li Han-hsiang to work in Taiwan, Hu would make his first martial arts masterpiece, *Dragon Inn* (*Longmen kezhan*,

1967), and follow it with his next magnum opus, *A Touch of Zen* (*Xia nü*, 1969). Sadly, the box-office receipts did not match the obvious artistry of these films and Hu would struggle for the rest of his career.

Back in Hong Kong, Hu's compatriot at Shaw Brothers, the Hangzhou-born Chang Cheh, who similarly had emigrated to Hong Kong after the Communist Revolution, with a stop-over in Taiwan, created a cinematic revolution with *The One-Armed Swordsman* (*Dubi dao*) in 1967. This would famously become Hong Kong's first film to gross more than HK\$1million and set the tone for Chang's combination of Japanese action aesthetics, American rebellious characters and Chinese *wuxia* (knight errant) heroes.³ For Chang, no more female and feminized action heroes; now it would be buff boys and bloodletting. Of course, Chang's particular slant on the *wuxia* film didn't spring fully grown. His first martial arts film was *Tiger Boy* (*Huxia*



jianchou, 1966) which was shot, unusual for a Shaw Brothers film at this time, in black and white. Not given any of the studio's established stars, he took on two newcomers by the names of Jimmy Wang Yu and Lo Lieh. Working without a martial arts director, he used the basic skills and athleticism of his young stars and exaggerated only a little on the fights. The film was a hit.

The speed with which Chang worked was astonishing. Eight months after the release of *Tiger Boy*, he came out with *The Magnificent Trio* (*Biancheng sanxia*), a close adaptation of Hideo Gosha's Japanese action classic, *Three Outlaw Samurai* (*Sanbiki no samurai*, 1964). Although the glamorous women (Margaret Tu Chuan, Chin Ping and Fanny Fan Lai) receive top billing, there's no denying the film belongs to the muscular men (Wang Yu, Lo Lieh and Cheng Lei, who had made his debut in *Tiger Boy*). Just as important, Lau Kar-leung (aka Liu Chia-liang) began his long association with Chang as martial arts director, and would later become a hugely important director in his own right. Lau had worked in the Cantonese film industry as fight director for many of the numerous Wong Fei-hung films starring Kwan Tak-hing. Lau was a Hung Gar kung fu master, a disciple of the lineage of the legendary Wong Fei-hung himself; Lau's father, Lau Cham, was a pupil of Lam Sai Wing (known as 'The Magnificent Butcher'), who was one of Wong Fei-hung's greatest pupils. In 1967, the year of the influential *One-Armed Swordsman*, Chang also released *The Trail of the Broken Blade* (*Duanchang jian*) and *The Assassin* (*Da cike*). The blood-soaked martial arts choreography in these films was unlike anything seen before in either the Mandarin or the Cantonese cinema. Chang called the athleticism and masculinity featured in his films *yanggang* (tough masculinity).

With *Golden Swallow* (*Jin yanzi*, 1968) Chang worked for the first of two times with Cheng Pei-pei along with Wang Yu and Lo Lieh. But it was in 1969 that Chang worked with two of the young men who would further revolutionize the martial arts cinema and Shaw Brothers itself. First up was *The Invincible Fist* (*Tieshou wuqing*) which gave Lo Lieh a starring role opposite

the beautiful Li Ching... but also, just as importantly, David Chiang in a supporting role. And then came *Dead End* (*Si jiao*), a modern-day youth melodrama that gave Ti Lung his first starring role (in only his second film) and David Chiang a more prominent one. This was history in the making; Chang would pair Ti and Chiang in more than 25 films between 1970 and 1977. He would later introduce the muscular Chen Kuan-tai, as well as the acrobatic, mischievous Alexander Fu Sheng, who tragically died in a car crash aged 28 in 1983 and was a direct influence on Jackie Chan.

As much as Chang had continued to keep martial arts films at the top of the box-office heap (only Cheng Pei-pei managed to prevent the biggest hits from being all-male all the time) he did himself one better in creating the cult classic *The Five Venoms* (*Wu du*, aka *Five Deadly Venoms*) in 1978. And thus was also created the Venom Mob of Chiang Sheng, Philip Kwok, Lu Feng, Sun Chien, and Lo Meng. Many of them (sometimes all) appeared together in almost 20 films thereafter, with wonderful titles like *Invincible Shaolin* (*Nan Shaolin yu bei Shaolin*, 1978), *Magnificent Ruffians* (*Maiming xiaozhi*, 1979), *Shaolin Daredevils* (*Jaapgei mongming deui*, 1979), *Ten Tigers of Kwangtung* (*Gwongtung sap fu yu hau ng fu*, 1980, which also features Ti Lung and Alexander Fu Sheng) and perhaps the most creative and wonderful of these films, *Crippled Avengers* (*Can que*, 1978).

As Chang and his young men electrified the screen, soon there appeared the directorial efforts of former fight master Lau Kar-leung. He made a star out of his adopted brother, Gordon Liu Chia-hui (Lau Kar-fei). His breakout role was as the young Wong Fei-hung in *Challenge of the Masters* (*Liu A-Cai yu Huang Feihong*) in 1976. In 1977, there appeared one of the truly iconic films of the genre, *Executioners from Shaolin* (*Hong Xiguan*), with Gordon in a featured role, Chen Kuan-tai as the hero and Lo Lieh as one of the truly great villains: Bai Mei, he of the white flowing unibrow. Gordon would get his due, however, with another of the iconic cult films of the genre, *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (*Shaolin sanshi-liu fang*, 1978).

How successful were these New Style Martial Arts films? In 1970, at the height of the genre, every single film in Hong Kong's box-office Top Ten was a martial arts movie. And of the Top Ten, all save one were from Shaw Brothers (Cathay's *From the Highway* [*Luke yu daoke*] marked the studio's last entry on the chart). In 1971, nine of the top ten were martial arts films, and the same held true for 1972. These were the years of Bruce Lee's films from Golden Harvest with *The Big Boss* (*Tangshan daxiong*), *Fist of Fury* (*Jingwu men*) and *The Way of the Dragon* taking in a total of an incredible HK\$13 million – Shaw may have rued the day they offered Lee only the standard contract for a young actor. Still, Shaw placed more than half of the Top Ten in those years with martial arts movies of their own. Yet, by 1973, tastes had changed towards blood-and-guts action. Six of the Top Ten were not martial arts movies, and never again throughout the decade would martial arts so dominate the box-office. For that matter, neither would Shaw Brothers.

With all the brilliance of Chang Cheh, and others like Chor Yuan, Lo Wei and Ho Meng-hua churning out hit after hit, it would be the Korean action specialist Chung Chang-wha (aka Jeong Chang-hwa) who would deliver Run Run Shaw his longed-for international breakthrough. Chung had directed Lo Lieh in *The Valley of the Fangs* (*Elang gu*) in 1970 and *The Swift Knight* (*Lai ru feng*) in 1971, both of which featured action choreography by Lau Kar-wing, the younger brother of Lau Kar-leung, and another kung fu expert himself. These period swordplay movies performed as expected, and Shaw duly assigned Lo Lieh to star in a somewhat different kind of film, featuring mostly hand-to-hand combat as pioneered by Wang Yu with his directorial debut, *The Chinese Boxer* (*Long-hu dou*, 1970), and Bruce Lee in *The Big Boss*. Chung's film was not a major release for Shaw, rather a program picture; but *King Boxer* (*Tianxia diyi quan*), as it was originally titled in English in 1972, was seen by a buyer for Warner Bros (whose popular television series *Kung Fu* got the studio excited about martial arts movies). Warner snapped up the film, retitled it *5 Fingers of Death* for US release in 1973 and thus was the history-making moment for the Shaws, who had a genuine box-office bonanza on their hands. Indeed, dubbed into many languages, the film was a world-wide success. Perhaps

³ https://hkmdb.com/db/movies/reviews.mhtml?id=4705&display_set=eng

THE MARTIAL ARTS MASTERPIECE!

Sights and sounds like never before!

SEE one incredible Onslaught after another!

PALE before the forbidden ritual of the steel palm!

CHEER the young warrior who alone takes on the evil war-lords of martial arts!

COME PREPARED for the thrill of a lifetime!



LEARN THE SECRET OF THE **5 FINGERS OF DEATH**

it was ironic that a mere programmer, a B-picture, made with little fanfare by a Korean director with a second-line star, should have turned the Shaw Brothers studio from a regional success into an international powerhouse. Subsequently, the studio was involved in co-productions with the UK, Italy, Sweden and the US. Of course, the year 1973 was also the slow beginning

of the end for the glory-days of the Mandarin cinema and its magnificent martial arts movies.

Although shifting demographics – the aging of the Mandarin emigrés and the baby boom of Cantonese speakers – found the Mandarin film slowly fading, ironically the Shaws themselves

aided in the decline. TVB became the dominant broadcast outlet in the territory and all the programming was in Cantonese; and they helped bring about the return of Cantonese cinema with the hugely successful *House of 72 Tenants* (*Chatsap-yi gafonghaak*, 1973). Directed by the veteran actor/director Chor Yuen and boasting an all-star cast, the film famously outgrossed Bruce Lee's international co-production *Enter the Dragon* in Hong Kong. A very specifically Cantonese film, it demonstrated the viability of big-budget films made in the local dialect. Shaw Brothers' competitor Golden Harvest picked up the Cantonese dialect ball and ran with it with the help of the hugely popular Hui Brothers (Michael, Sam and Ricky) while Shaw continued to produce Mandarin-language films, especially martial arts movies. But trouble was in sight and by the early 1980s, the end had come. With around 750 films over the years, Shaw Brothers Studio (HK) was by far the most successful film company in the history of Chinese-language cinema and their films – the lustrous *huangmei diao* operas, the glamorous musicals, the intense melodramas, and, above all, the creative dynamism of the martial arts movies – have come to both reflect and define Hong Kong itself.

David Desser (Ph.D., University of Southern California) is Professor Emeritus of Cinema Studies at the University of Illinois. He is the author of *The Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa* (UMI Research Press) and *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (Indiana University Press); the co-author (with Lester Friedman) of *American Jewish Filmmakers* (U of Illinois Press); and the editor of *Ozu's Tokyo Story* (Cambridge University Press).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study. Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003
 Poshek Fu, ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008

Vivian P.Y. Lee, *The Other Side of Glamour: The Left-wing Studio Network in Hong Kong Cinema in the Cold War Era and Beyond*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020







KING BOXER

天下第一拳 / Tiānxià dìyī quán (Mandarin) / The Number One Fist in the World (Chinese title, translit.) / Five Fingers of Death (USA) / The Invincible Boxer (USA re-release)
Original release date: April 28th 1972 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Lo Lieh Zhao Zhihao
Wang Ping Song Ying-ying
Wang Chin-feng Yan Zhuhong
Nan Kung-hsun Han Long
Tien Feng Meng San-yeh
Chao Hsiung Okada
Tung Lin Meng Tianxiong
Chen Feng-chen Lu Daming
Ku Wen-tsung Song Wuyang
Fang Mien Sun Xinpei
Chan Shen Wan Hongjie
Chin Chi-chu Chen Lang
Yu Lung Duwei
Yang Shih Russian Strong Man
Hung Hsing-chung Huang Kou

CREW

Directed by **Chung Chang-wa**
 Written by **Chiang Yang**
 Cinematography by **Wang Yung-loong**
 Assistant Directors **Shen Wei-chun, Chang Ching-po**
 Martial Arts Instructors **Lau Kar-wing, Chen Chuan**
 Art Direction by **Chen Chi-ju**
 Edited by **Fan Kung-jung**
 Sound Recording by **Wang Yung-hua**
 Original Music by **Wu Ta-chiang**

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

Veteran boxer Song Wuyang is beaten up by Wan Hongjie, and saved by his daughter Ying-ying and a disciple, Zhao Zhihao. Later, the old boxer advises Zhao to improve his fighting technique at the Shang Wu Institute in order to capture the All China Boxing Trophy. On the way, Zhao rescues a girl, Yan Zhuhong, from Wan Hongjie and his thugs. At the institute, Zhao discovers that the manager, Meng Dongshan, his son, Meng Tianxiong, and a thug, Chen Lang, scorn Song Wuyang and the institute's coach, Sun Xinpei, and are bullying the locals. Chen Lang becomes Zhao's bitter enemy, and the latter leaves the institute to further his training with Sun Xinpei in order to oppose Wan Hongjie, Chen Lang, Meng Dongshan and his son. When a jealous former classmate, Han Long, injures Zhao's hands in a fight, Yan Zhuhong rescues him and they fall in love. Soon, though not fully recovered, Zhao is picked to fight in the great tournament. The same evening, old Song Wuyang dies. Meng Dongshan now finds little use for Han Long and has his eyes gouged out. After Zhao wins the trophy, the blind Han Long kills Meng Dongshan and his son, and gains Yan Zhuhong's love. Zhao and Song Ying-ying set off together for home.

SPOILERS

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

When Warner Bros. retitled and re-released the martial arts drama *King Boxer*, their *5 Fingers of Death* was hailed as the start of a new trend: “a kind of film new to most local audiences” declared the *New York Times*’ otherwise agnostic Roger Greenspun.¹ That line was published on March 22nd 1973, five months before *Enter the Dragon* catapulted Bruce Lee into the firmament of international superstardom (even more so than Lee’s previous successes in Hong Kong and mainland China).

That said: *King Boxer* didn’t exactly come out of nowhere. Its revenge plot is more than a little reminiscent of *The Chinese Boxer* (*Long-hu dou*, aka *The Hammer of God*, 1970), and the two films also share a few of the same principal cast members, including Chao Hsiung, Lo Lieh, Fang Mien, and Wang Ping.

King Boxer is, however, distinguished by its creators’ refinement of that film’s narrative into a dazzling melodrama. Their movie is not “all about the fighting”, as Greenspun claimed, but rather the many little tragedies that pave the way for Zhihao (Lo), a gifted martial arts student whose talent is also a burden for his loved ones, and some of his rivals.

Writer Chiang Yang and director Chung Chang-wa expand *The Hammer of God*’s focus so that their movie is less about righteous displays of sadistic violence, and more about the many little steps that Zhihao must take before he can assume the role that everybody knows he’s destined for. His will is as focused and irresistible as the missile-like projectiles – mostly outstretched palms and clenched fists – which launch themselves at viewers head-on during *King Boxer*’s fight scenes, as if from an unheralded 3D gimmick.

But Zhihao’s successes don’t just belong to him. Much of *King Boxer*’s ensemble drama suggests that it takes a village to teach a man the Iron Palm technique, as *Den of Geek*’s Craig Lines argues when he notes that “*King Boxer* thrives on a rich ensemble of characters, most of whom feel strong and well-developed enough to be heroes in their own right.”² Everybody makes sacrifices to buy enough time for Zhihao to either recover or become great. Even Zhihao’s chaste love interest Ying-ying (Ping) reminds him of all the little people that he’s unwittingly stepped on to claim his crown, particularly her self-sacrificing father Master Song (Mien): “You must win this time. It is Father’s wish.”

In real life, Lo became a staple of Shaw Brothers’ martial arts productions, as *Budomate* magazine’s Greta Dibyo jokes when she writes that Lo “seems to have appeared in about three out of every five movies made in Hong Kong between 1970 and 1980.”³ As for *King Boxer*, it remains thrilling today not only for how its creators synthesized their influences, but for how their movie paved the way for so much of what followed it. Or, put another way: Lo Lieh walked so that Bruce Lee could run.

REFERENCES

- “Film: ‘5 Fingers of Death’.” *New York Times*. Roger Greenspun. March 22, 1973. <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/03/22/archives/film-5-fingers-of-death-the-cast.html>.
- “King Boxer: The Enduring Legacy of a Martial Arts Classic.” *Den of Geek*. Craig Lines. September 6, 2017. <https://www.denofgeek.com/movies/king-boxer-the-enduring-legacy-of-a-martial-arts-classic/>
- “Lo Lieh, The Epitome of Kung-Fu Treachery.” *Budomate Magazine*. Greta Dibyo. <https://budomate.com/lo-lieh/>.

TRIVIA

For the film’s initial release in Chung Chang-wa’s home country of South Korea, retitled *The Iron Man*, distributor Shin Sang-ok (who had directed films for Shaw Brothers in the past, and was later notorious for being kidnapped by Kim Jong-il) falsely sold the film as a Korean co-production to avoid paying import taxes, and the film was cut by almost ten minutes, including the removal of all of the gore to please the local censors.

The film is set in Hebei province, i.e. the countryside around Beijing. The use of the term *guoshu* to refer to martial arts, and the presence of Japanese ruffians and corrupt local warlords in north China date the events of this film to sometime between 1928 and 1937.

To promote the American release, soul singer Bunny Sigler released the 7” single “Theme for ‘Five Fingers of Death’” on Philadelphia International Records in 1973. It isn’t featured in any version of the film nor does it reference anything specific from it, but it’s still worth listening to in all its funky glory!

NAME THAT TUNE

The intro to “Theme to *Ironsides*” by Quincy Jones underscores the scenes where Zhihao unleashes his five-finger fury, and was directly homaged in Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill: Volume One* (2003). Among the other source cues used in the film are “Death at the Whyte House” and “Moon Buggy Ride” from *Diamonds are Forever* (1971) by John Barry, and “End Titles” from *Camille 2000* (1969) composed by Piero Piccioni.



THE BOXER FROM SHANTUNG

馬永貞 / Mǎ Yǒngzhēn (Mandarin) / The Killer from Shantung (USA)
Original release date: February 11th 1972 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Chen Kuan-tai Ma Yongzhen
Ching Li Jin Lingzi
Tien Ching Li Caichun
Ku Feng Zhang Jinfa
Chiang Nan Yang Shuang
Feng I Fan Agen
Milano The Giant
Cheng Kang-yeh Xiao Jiangbei
Chen Hao Music Teacher
Liang Shang-yun Tan Si's henchman
Tang Yen-tsan Tan Si's henchman
David Chiang Tan Si
Wang Chung, Wang Kuang-yu Tan Si's Followers

CREW

Directed by **Chang Cheh, Pao Hsueh-li**
Produced by **Runme Shaw**
Written by **Ni Kuang, Chang Cheh**
Cinematography by **Kung Mu-to, Juan Ting-pang**
Assistant Directors **Ho Chih-chiang, John Woo**
Martial Arts Instructors **Tang Chia, Lau Kar-leung, Lau Kar-wing, Chan Chuan**
Art Director **Johnson Tsao**
Edited by **Kuo Ting-hung**
Sound Recording by **Wang Yung-hua**
Musical Director **Chen Yung-yu**

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

Ma Yongzhen, a modest young patriot, leaves Shantung to seek his fortune in Shanghai. On arrival he is befriended by Xiao Jiangbei. When the two are involved in a fight, underworld leader Tan Si sees and notes Ma's fighting techniques and tries to entice him into evil ways. Though impressed, Ma is sceptical, but soon, in another fight, he sides with Tan Si's men against gangster Yang Shuang's thugs. When he hears that a foreign wrestler is challenging the public to floor him, Ma decides to try his luck. He defeats the wrestler and angers Yang Shuang. A fight starts, and Ma routs the thugs and collects his winnings. Later he incurs the displeasure of his girlfriend, Jin Lingzi when he gains more territory and his reputation as a boxer increases. The feud between Yang Shuang and Tan Si continues, and Tan is murdered by Yang's men. Ma plans to avenge his death, but Yang is aware of this and lures the unsuspecting Ma into a trap, where he is fatally wounded by Yang's thugs. Ma kills Yang before he himself dies, and his dreams of fortune in Shanghai are ended. Saddened by the death of their friend, both Xiao Jiangbei and Jin Lingzi leave Shanghai.

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

The venal little curl at the edges of Chen Kuan-tai's mouth sets him apart from the other leading men in the Shaw Brothers' stable. Chen's suggestive grin is also the secret weapon that put *The Boxer from Shantung* over the top first in 1972, when it launched his career, and then later in the 1980s, when it inspired the "heroic bloodshed" films of Ringo Lam and John Woo. No small feat given that Chen's breakout role as ignoble prole antihero Ma Yongzhen is in one of eight movies that were either directed or co-directed by Chang Cheh in 1972 alone.

Chang, who discovered Chen after seeing him fight at a 1969 martial arts competition, cranked out *Boxer from Shantung* with co-director Pao Hsueh-li in thirty days, ten of which were devoted to the movie's climactic brawl (most Shaw productions took about two or three months to shoot).¹ ² That grueling finale leaves a mark thanks in no small part to Tang Chia's typically inspired stunt and fight choreography. But only Chen could make you believe that a Shantung naif is capable of body-slaming a teahouse to bits after catching a hatchet with his gut.

As Ma, Chen seems to pull the camera and his co-stars to him by sheer force of charisma. His grin isn't modest or polite either: he whips it out during an introductory fight with co-star David Chiang, and then before Ma takes Italian wrestler Mario Milano to the cleaners during their big match.

That's also the same unseemly smile that Ma flashes at frustrated chanteuse Jin Lingzi (Li Ching) when they first meet at her uncle's teahouse, and it's powerful enough to make her squirm from across the room. The look on Chen's face is an unambiguous declaration of intent, and it speaks for Ma with more conviction than any dialogue could, even louder than

a bold-faced declaration of intent like, "Maybe I'm nobody right now, but I aim to be better than you."

That sort of authentic chutzpah makes all the difference in *Boxer from Shantung* since it, like many of Chang's other movies, focuses on a consuming sort of tough guy fury. Shaw Brothers stunt coordinator Lau Kar-leung could easily be talking about Ma when he describes Cheh's general instructions: "the hero must never fall dead from a wound, but always had to rise and go on with the fight... A disemboweled man, even with his guts out, can still move, can't he?"³

Ma holds in his guts during his final brawl, but only because he, like so many of Chang's other revenge-obsessed protagonists, is hell-bent on a pyrrhic victory. Chen's character isn't strong enough to resist temptation, nor is he too proud to step into the ring with a brute like Milano as soon when he hears that man described as "unbeatable."

No wonder that Jin instantly recognizes Ma's unsentimental type: she rejects him after he tosses a coin at her feet, because she knows that Ma's fate is already sealed. Viewers know it, too, just by the way that Chen smiles when a teahouse attendant calls him "Boss Ma." That's not a hayseed's grin, but the hungry leer of a young man who won't stop until he's brought the whole house down around him.

REFERENCES

- ¹ "Interview with Big Brother Chen Kuan Tai." King-wei Chu. *Hong Kong Cinemagic*. January 2006. <http://www.hkcinemagic.com/en/page.asp?aid=223&page=1>
- ² "Act of Vengeance: An Interview with David Chiang." Gary Bettinson. *Post Script*. Fall 2011, Vol. 31 Issue 1. Online.
- ³ "Interview with Lau Kar-leung: The Last Shaolin." Olivier Assayas and Charles Tesson in collaboration with Elizabeth Cazer and Tony Rayns. *Cahiers du Cinema*. Issue 362/363 (September 1984). <http://members.spreed.com/molasar/hongkong/ch/lau-int.html>

TRIVIA

The historical Ma Yongzhen (1840-79) was a Muslim horse-trader and racer, who introduced the Chaquan martial arts style to Shanghai. The first film based on his life was a 1927 silent movie, but many subsequent adaptations, including this one, move the story to China's warlord era in the 1920s and 1930s.

The film was co-written by Ni Kuang, who also wrote or co-wrote the screenplays for every film in this boxset except for *King Boxer*. Ni is estimated to have written over 400 screenplays during his film career, including many of Shaw Brothers' most beloved classics. An examination of his fascinating life and career will be included in *Shawscope Volume Two*, coming soon from Arrow Video.

Both directors and much of the cast would reunite later that year for a loose sequel titled *Man of Iron* (*Chou lianhuan*). The film opens with a narration that recaps the events of the first film, then takes place 20 years later, with Chen Kuan-tai playing a different character.

The following year, an unofficial sequel named *Shandong laoniang* (released in the US by Crown International as *Kung Fu Mama*) was produced by Jung An Film Company and directed by Lung Chien. The film starts with the death of Ma Yongzhen (played here by 'Jimmy' Wang Yu), who is then avenged by his fierce mother (Ma's ma?) and siblings. That wasn't the only unofficial sequel released that year: *King Boxer* co-star Wang Ping played the title role in *Shan Dong da jie* (*The Sister of the Shantung Boxer*), directed by Wang Hung-chang for Yangtze Productions.

Though *The Boxer from Shantung* runs at 134 minutes in its full-length version (as seen on this Blu-ray), the film was cut by over 30 minutes for its 1980 American release by World Northal as *The Killer from Shantung*, losing huge swathes of the plot and graphic violence, especially in the finale. The 1975 German version (titled *Der Pirat von Shantung*) was even shorter, running a brisk 80 minutes!



FIVE SHAOLIN MASTERS

少林五祖 / Shàolín wǔ zǔ (Mandarin) / 5 Masters of Death (USA)
Original release date: December 25th 1974 (Hong Kong)

CAST

David Chiang Hu Dedi
Ti Lung Cai Dezhong
Alexander Fu Sheng Ma Chaoxing
Chi Kuan-chun Li Shikai
Meng Fei Fang Dahong
Feng Ko-an Zhang Jinqiu
Liang Chia-jen Qian Shan
Kong Do Chen Wenyao
Tsai Hung Bao Yulong
Wang Lung-wei Ma Fuyi

CREW

Directed & Produced by **Chang Cheh**
Written by **Ni Kuang**
Cinematography by **Kung Mu-to**
Edited by **Kuo Ting-hung**
Assistant Director **Wu Yueh-ling**
Musical Director **Chen Yung-yu**
Martial Arts Instructors **Lau Kar-leung,**
Lau Kar-wing
Sound Recording **Wang Yung-hua**

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

The Qing Emperor fears the martial artists from the Shaolin Monastery, and so he gives orders to burn it down. Most of the inmates who resisted the Manchus are either killed or dispersed. The lucky ones who escape included Hong Xiguan, in addition to five men, who flee to Central China. They are Cai Dezhong, Ma Chaoxing, Fang Dahong, Li Shikai, and Hu Dedi. These five heroes try to join forces with the other anti-Qing elements in Central China. Among the Shaolin men is Ma Fuyi, a traitor, who in league with the Manchu henchman, Chen Wenyao, plots to destroy the Shaolin heroes once and for all. Ma Chaoxing is captured by the traitor, but he refuses to reveal anything. Meanwhile, Hu Dedi, with the help of Chieftain Kao, and the chieftain's followers, rush to the rescue of Ma Chaoxing. A fierce battle ensues, and Ma is freed, but the brave chieftain dies. The anti-Qing patriots begin to realize that in order to lick the Manchu lackeys, led by Chen Wenyao, Bao Yulong, and others, they must improve their kung fu skill, because their opponents are also experts in martial arts. Then the patriots return to the gutted monastery, where they spend more than a year perfecting still more kung fu techniques, such as the 'Crossed Fists', 'Triple-Jointed Stick', 'Rolling Technique', 'Tiger Stork Technique', and 'Pole Technique'. The decisive battle is fought, resulting in the complete routing of the Manchu gangsters. But Fang and Li also die martyrs to liberty. The anti-Qing forces are further reinforced by the arrival of fresh troops from Admiral Zheng Chenggong of Taiwan. More bitter struggles against the Manchu tyrants follow...

SPOILERS

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

In 1974, director Chang Cheh and action choreographer Lau Kar-leung worked together on four features about the destruction of the Shaolin temple. These movies play fast and loose with historical events and often end with a hard-earned symbolic victory for the temple's remaining students against the Qing dynasty's otherwise implacable emissaries – symbolic because, in the real world, the resistance against the Qing did not truly win out until the abdication of the Last Emperor in 1912.

Five Shaolin Masters is the last of these collaborations, and it feels like an appropriate climax for Chang and Lau's working relationship. They quarreled on the set of Chang's *Marco Polo* (*Mage Boluo*, aka *The Four Assassins*, 1975), and Chang was already talking about moving to Taiwan. Around the same time, Lau considered quitting the movie business to open his own martial arts school in America; he ultimately chose to continue working with Mona Fong and the Shaw Brothers at their Clearwater Bay, Hong Kong-based Movietown studio lot.¹

Lau also took credit for the Shaolin Temple cycle's focus on "heroes who really existed" – he claimed that Chang "didn't understand kung fu very well" – a subject that Lau would explore further once he became a director in his own right in 1975, and soon thereafter in his formative *36th Chamber of Shaolin* films.

Five Shaolin Masters certainly feels like the tipping point for Chang and Lau: it's their leanest martial arts showcase, or "a series of fight scenes interrupted by occasional dialogue," as Z. Ravas writes in his *City on Fire* rave.² Filmed mostly in Taiwan, *Five Shaolin Masters* climaxes with a five-way duel that only ends once our Shaolin heroes are caked in layers of blood, dirt, and sweat. Their victory is exhausting and inevitable, since they've spent the rest of the movie either training and/or fleeing. A variety of weapons and grisly finishing moves are

then deployed to maximalist effect, confirming Hong Kong film historian Sean Gilman's contrast of Chang's "materialist" view of Shaolin kung fu with what Gilman calls the "serene theology" of Lau's *36th Chamber* films.³

There's some comedy in *Five Shaolin Masters*, but it's just shy of gallows humor, like when happy-go-lucky monk Ma Chaoxing (Alexander Fu Sheng) feigns nonchalance after his fellow Buddhists save him from being tortured by the traitorous monk Ma Fuyi (Wang Lung-wei). "You are ill-tempered," Chaoxing tells Fuyi, adding: "I will come visit you when I have time." That line's only funny once you realize that time's already run out for Ma Chaoxing and his fellow Buddhist fugitives.

Still, *Five Shaolin Masters* remains a testament to Chang and Lau's collaborative genius and, more specifically, to their knack for transforming any fight scene into an event unto itself. *Five Shaolin Masters* is also an exhausting highlight reel and a fitting bookend to *Three Styles of Hung School's Kung Fu*, the dreamy 10-minute short that preceded screenings of *Heroes Two* (*Fang Shiyu yu Hong Xiguan*, 1974), Chang and Lau's first Shaolin temple film. Though Chang and Lau would still work together on a handful of worthy follow-ups, including *Disciples of Shaolin* (*Hongquan xiaozi*, 1975) and *Boxer Rebellion* (*Baguo lianjun*, 1976), they'd never collaborate on another movie that feels so quintessentially theirs.

REFERENCES

¹ "Interview with Lau Kar-leung: The Last Shaolin." Olivier Assayas and Charles Tesson in collaboration with Elizabeth Cazer and Tony Rayns. *Cahiers du Cinema*. Issue 362/363 (September 1984). <http://members.spreed.com/molassar/hongkong/ch/lau-int.html>.
² "Five Shaolin Masters aka 5 Masters of Death (1974) Review." Z. Ravas. *City on Fire*. September 2, 2011. <https://cityonfire.com/five-shaolin-masters-1974/>.
³ "Five Shaolin Masters and Shaolin Temple (Chang Cheh, 1974 and 1976)." Sean Gilman. Medium. July 24, 2013. <https://medium.com/the-chinese-cinema/summer-of-sammo-five-shaolin-masters-and-shaolin-temple-62ac20f54a70#>

TRIVIA

The Manchu officials twice refer to Zheng Chenggong (a.k.a. Koxinga), the Ming-loyalist rebel who runs the resistance from Taiwan. But he has been dead for several years; when Chen Yonghua announces he is an agent of "Prince Zheng", he means Zheng Jing, Koxinga's son, who did indeed send troops to aid the ill-fated Revolt of the Three Feudatories in 1674. The rebels' slogan, "Resist the Qing, Restore the Ming" is writ large on the wall of Chief Gao's headquarters.

The couplet displayed on the pillars in Chief Gao's headquarters calls for the people of the world to defy the Qin [sic, not Qing], referring to the ancient state that first conquered the kingdoms of ancient times. Its ruler, who ultimately became the First Emperor, is best remembered today for the Terracotta Warriors that guard his tomb.

Watch out for a fresh-faced (and uncredited) Gordon Liu in one of his first film roles, though he barely gets a chance to show his moves before he meets the business end of a spear.

NAME THAT TUNE

Much of the score is taken from Italian film soundtracks and library music released by RCA Music, including the following: "Identikit", "Identikit 2", "Eros", "Fuoco" and "Colpo Rovente" from *The Syndicate: A Death in the Family* (Colpo Rovente, 1970) by Piero Piccioni; "Atmosfera angosciosa" from *A Minute to Pray, A Second to Die* (*Un minuto per pregare, un istante per morire*, 1967) by Carlo Rustichelli; "Guerra Delle Pignatte" and "Attesa E Bivacco" also by Rustichelli, from *In Love, Every Pleasure Has Its Pain* (*La Betia* ovvero *in amore per ogni gaudenza ci vuole sofferenza*, 1971); "Omertà" by Gianni Oddi, from the RCA library album *Style*; "Docks-Notturmo" by Carlo Savina, originally written for the film *Femmina* (aka *La grande sauterelle*, 1967) and also found on the RCA compilation *Drammatici e musiche di tensione psicologica 5*, in which "Atmosfera angosciosa" was also featured.



SHAOLIN TEMPLE

少林寺 / Shàolín sì (Mandarin) / Death Chamber (USA)
Original release date: December 22nd 1976 (Hong Kong)

CAST

David Chiang Hu Dedi
Ti Lung Cai Dezhong
Yueh Hua Li Shikai
Wang Chung Fang Dahong
Liu Yung Ma Chaoxing
Wang Lung-wei Ma Fuyi
Alexander Fu Sheng Fang Shiyu
Frankie Wei Hung Hong Xiguan
Philip Kwok Lin Guangyao
Shan Mao Huixian
Shih Szu Yan Yongchun
Ku Feng Man Kuei
Li Yi-min Huang Songhan
Tang Yen-tsan Chu Tu
Chi Kuan-chi Hu Huiqian
Kang Kai Qing Officer
Tsai Hung General Ching
Ku Wen-tsung The Abbot

CREW

Directed by **Chang Cheh**
Produced by **Runme Shaw**
Written by **Ni Kuang, Chang Cheh**
Cinematography by **Kung Mu-to**
Edited by **Kuo Ting-hung**
Musical Director **Chen Yung-yu**
Martial Arts Instructors **Chao Wei, Yen Yat-liang**

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

In defiance of Qing authority, many patriotic people rush to the Shaolin Temple to learn kung fu. However, the Qing are intent on crushing the Temple and its monks and students, thereby nipping their teachings in the bud. The Shaolin pupils are Fang Shiyu and Hu Huiqian, as well as many other courageous youths. Fang Shiyu is the son of Miao Zuihua, a successful female pupil of the well-known woman hermit and martial artist, Wu Mei. The main motive for these two youngsters Fang and Hu to enter the Shaolin temple to learn martial arts is to avenge their fathers' death who were both killed by the pro-Qing, Wu Tang clique. Wumei, who is a teacher at the Shaolin Temple, agrees to instruct Hu Dedi and Cai Dezhong in the terrible art of using a whip as well as fists. In return, Hu and Cai must help Fang and Hu instruct the other residents of the Shaolin Temple. Huixian, an abbot at the temple, is a spy for the Qing Dynasty and secretly tries to disrupt the work of the temple. Collaborating with his subordinate Ma Fuyi, Hui is ready to attack the trainees from within the Temple, if and when the Ching soldiers are prepared to mount their attack upon the temple. Once Fang and Hu have successfully completed their training at the Shaolin Temple, they wish to leave in order to avenge their fathers' deaths; but fearing that their teachers will refuse permission, they choose to run the gauntlet by fighting their way past 108 wooden robots. Whilst struggling with the robots, the traitorous Huixian, Ma and their henchmen, suddenly pounce upon them. Fortunately, several other patriotic monks arrive in the nick of time to save the lives of Fang and Hu. In due course, because Fang and Hu succeed in avenging their fathers' deaths, they return to the Shaolin Temple. Meanwhile, the Shaolin Temple is suddenly attacked by several thousand Qing troops who are aided by the traitors within that have immobilized and weakened the other monks by secretly putting poison into their well. The highest Shaolin authority and many of his followers die in a fire which subsequently rages through the Temple. Fang, Hu and Cai rally the remaining survivors and mount a successful counter-attack killing many of the Qing soldiers and traitors. When the battle is over, only eight survivors remain, Fang, Hu and Cai among them. They continue to fight the Qing Dynasty under the Shaolin banner.

SPOILERS

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

Shaolin Temple is an unusual product – and maybe even a casualty – of its time. Made in 1976, *Shaolin Temple* was the first movie that director Chang Cheh made about the destruction of the Henan monastery without action choreographer and frequent collaborator Lau Kar-leung. In some ways, *Shaolin Temple* feels like a coda to Chang and Lau's "Shaolin Temple" cycle of features from 1974 – *Heroes Two* (*Fang Shiyu yu Hong Xiguan*), *Men from the Monastery* (*Shaolin zidi*), *Shaolin Martial Arts* (*Hongquan yu Yongquan*), and *Five Shaolin Masters* – even though it takes place right before the Henan monastery burns down, making it a sort of prequel.

Shaolin Temple is about Shaolin kung fu's embattled legacy, which seems fitting given that many martial arts fans and scholars seem reluctant to give Chang credit for his contributions to the other "Shaolin Temple" movies. His movies are also often dismissed as inauthentic – film scholar Poshek Fu speaks diplomatically for a certain line of criticism when he notes Chang's "limited knowledge of the popular traditions of South China."¹ Even Lau criticized Chang, as in a 1984 *Cahiers du Cinema* interview where he stresses that Chang is "not Cantonese... That's why he was never able to show the link between master and disciples well in his kung fu movies."²

Shaolin Temple presents a strong counter-argument, especially given its focus on the tension between (some) Shaolin students' desire to fight and their teachers' hopes for an enduring legacy. There is, in other words, a grim sort of symbiotic relationship between the Shaolin masters and their apprentices: the temple's new students want to learn because they are young and brash ("I'd rather die if I can't get in"). And their teachers need to help them mature – and

not just as martial artists – given the Henan temple's certain doom ("This sacred place will be ruined"). So when the Grand Master (Ku Wen-chung) is asked why new students must be admitted, he says: "We have no choice." His fellow monks then prepare their students for a spectacular pyrrhic victory: "Winners can't win everything. Losers won't lose it all. Got it?"

But as the movie goes on, we see a genuine rapport develop between Lo Shum's avuncular Master librarian and his two pupils, Lin Guangyao (Philip Kwok) and Dao Zhu (Bruce Tong). There's also an aura of calm and mystery surrounding Wu Mei and her nocturnal conversations with apprentices Cai Dezhong (Ti Lung) and Hu Dedi (David Chiang). These dialogue scenes make *Shaolin Temple* so much more than just a long runway to a few characteristically thrilling action set pieces.

I tend to agree with *Silver Emulsion's* Will Kouf when he writes that *Shaolin Temple* is more about "controlling inner negativity, building up confidence and ultimately becoming a better person, instead of fighting and training specifically for that purpose."³ I also think that *Asian Action Cinema's* David Rees might be right when he calls *Shaolin Temple* the "quintessential Shaw Shaolin movie."⁴ Timing is everything, and *Shaolin Temple's* time may finally be here.

REFERENCES

- ¹ "Introduction: The Shaw Brothers Diasporic Cinema." Poshek Fu, *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. University of Illinois Press, 2008. Page 19.
- ² "Interview with Lau Kar-leung: The Last Shaolin." Olivier Assayas and Charles Tesson in collaboration with Elizabeth Cazer and Tony Rayns. *Cahiers du Cinema*. Issue 362/363 (September 1984). <http://members.spre.com/molasar/hongkong/ch/au-int.html>.
- ³ "Shaolin Temple (1976)". Will Kouf. *Silver Emulsion*. March 2, 2018. <https://www.silveremulsion.com/2018/03/02/shaolin-temple-1976/>.
- ⁴ "Shaolin Temple (1976) – Review". David Rees. *Asian Action Cinema*. <https://asianactioncinema.co.uk/shaolin-temple-1976-review>.

TRIVIA

In addition to the four Shaolin cycle films mentioned above – *Heroes Two*, *Men from the Monastery*, *Shaolin Martial Arts* and *Five Shaolin Masters* – some fans also include Chang's *Disciples of Shaolin* and *The New Shaolin Boxers* (*Cai lifa xiaozhi*, 1976) as part of the series, though these two films are not about the classic heroes of the other films.

The nun Wu Mei is keen for her disciples to train the girl Yan Yongchun, because Yongchun is destined to become famous in Cantonese legend as the founder of her own martial art. *Yongchun* (in Cantonese, *Wing Chun*) would be made famous worldwide by its celebrity disciple Bruce Lee.

The events of several other martial arts movies happen off-screen during this film, including the come-uppance of Fang Shiyu [Fong Sai-yuk]'s nemesis Tiger Lei, which is merely mentioned in passing in dialogue between two monks.

NAME THAT TUNE

The first few notes of the opening credits music is from *My Blood Makes a Noise* (*Ore no chi ga sawagu*, aka *Kill My Dad*, 1961) by Takanobu Saitō, and the same cue plays in full later in the film. At least two cues from the De Wolfe Music library, "Victorian Mystery C" by Paul Lewis and "Red Mud" by Danielle Thomas, appear in the film, and can be found on CD1 included with this collection.



MIGHTY PEKING MAN

猩猩王 / Xíngxīng Wáng (Mandarin) / Orangutan King (Chinese title, translit.) / Goliathon (USA)
Original release date: August 11th 1977 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Danny Lee Chen Zhengfeng
Evelyne Kraft Ah-wei
Hsiao Yao Wang Cuihua
Ku Feng Lu Tien
Lin Wei-Tu Chen Shiyu
Norman Chu Ah Long
Wu Hang-sheng Ah Pi
Chen Ping Lucy
Ted Thomas Commissioner
Steve Nicholson Commissioner's Aide

CREW

Directed by **Ho Meng-hua**
Produced by **Runme Shaw, Vee King Shaw**
Written by **Ni Kuang**
Cinematography by **Tsao Hui-chí, Wu Cho-hua**
Edited by **Chiang Hsing-lung, Thom Noble,**
Pepita Noble
Music by **Chen Yung-Yu, De Wolfe**
Production design by **Johnson Tsao,**
Chen Ching-shen
Assistant Directors **Hung Ke, Wu Shih,**
Tong Yuan, Wen Yao-hua
Special effects by **Sadamasa Arikawa,**
Koichi Kawakita, Keizo Murase

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

A gigantic animal, the Mighty Peking Man, emerges in the Himalayas in the wake of a violent earthquake, and makes its way to the jungles of India. An entrepreneur from Hong Kong, Lu Tien, intends to lead an expedition to India to capture the Mighty Peking Man and put it on exhibition throughout the world. A young Hong Kong explorer, Chen Zhengfeng is also interested in going to India to find the Mighty Peking Man, and Lu Tien invites him to join his exploration party. The agreement between Chen and Lu Tien is that Lu Tien will bear the costs of the expedition and if the Mighty Peking Man is captured alive, he will be put on show worldwide. However, Chen rejects the offer, insisting that the animal should be used for scientific research only. Chen Zhengfeng's singer girlfriend, Wang Cuihua (Hsiao Yao) turns her attentions to his brother, Chen Shiyu, and in his heartache and desperation, he accepts Lu Tien's offer and joins the expedition to India. They eventually reach the dense jungles of India, and with the assistance of local guides, the explorers traverse the wild, impenetrable forests, high cliffs and dangerous marshes, encountering on their way fierce elephants, tigers and snakes, which kill many of the party; after a while, the surviving members of the exploration party turn back, leaving Chen on his own. Undaunted, Chen presses on and finally comes face to face with the Mighty Peking Man, who makes a move to attack him. Fortunately a pretty girl, Ah-wei, restrains it and orders it to carry the unconscious Chen to her cave. In due course, Chen becomes their trusted friend, and Ah-wei begins to fall in love with him. Chen plans to take Ah-wei and the Mighty Peking Man back to civilization, and when Lu Tien learns of it, he forces Chen to hand the creature over to him, under the terms of their agreement. Upon their arrival in Hong Kong, Lu Tien makes arrangements to show the Mighty Peking Man to the public in the Hong Kong Stadium. Meanwhile Ah-wei, upon finding Chen in an embrace with Wang Tsui-hua, runs away. Huge crowds go to watch the antics of the Mighty Peking Man, and Ah-wei sees on television the pitiful plight of the creature. She rushes, weeping, to the scene. Lu Tien, pretending to comfort her, then tries to rape her. The Mighty Peking Man sees this, and breaks the chains binding it, then rushes to her defense. Lu Tien manages to escape before it can catch him, and the Mighty Peking Man chases him through the streets of Hong Kong, trampling underfoot buildings, flyovers and other structures, before catching up with Lu Tien and killing him. Meanwhile, the army and police have begun an assault on the Mighty Peking Man to halt his rampage. The enraged Mighty Peking Man climbs to the top of Connaught Centre, the city's highest building, and the army and police mount an all-out attack upon the creature, but the attack fails. Chen and Ah-wei also go up to the top of the Connaught Centre to try to help the Mighty Peking Man. Upon seeing them, the Mighty Peking Man calms down. But the army and police take advantage of this, and concentrate their fire upon the creature, which eventually blows up the plant room of the building and in the process killing the distressed Mighty Peking Man.

SPOLERS

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

Most American critics didn't know what hit them when Quentin Tarantino re-released *Mighty Peking Man* back in 1999. It was one of only two Hong Kong movies that Tarantino distributed as part of his Rolling Thunder home video label; the other one was *Chungking Express*. Critics knew how to read that movie, but *Mighty Peking Man*?

An exuberant 1977 rip-off of the Dino DeLaurentis-produced remake, *Mighty Peking Man* originally played in Hong Kong five months after its, uh, predecessor. Hong Kong film buff John Charles reports that the movie "made a quick exit from HK theaters and reportedly did no better in other territories."¹ America was one such territory, where *Mighty Peking Man* was re-presented as *Goliathon* in 1979; then nothing for the next twenty years.

Mighty Peking Man at least made sense at the time, as part of a mild wave of cheap Kongsploitation titles like *A*P*E** (aka: *Attacking Primate Monster*), *King Kung Fu*, and *Queen Kong* (all 1976). But in 1999, *Mighty Peking Man* was a just a good "bad movie." The rear projection! The stilted acting! The cheap effects! The one thing that everyone could (and still can) agree on – Fay Wray stand-in Evelyne Kraft looks great in a distressed bikini.

Another oft-remarked upon feature: *Mighty Peking Man*'s indelible marriage of the 1933 *King Kong*'s naïve exoticism with a uniquely sleazy (or at least powerfully embittered) showbiz cynicism. Downhearted hunter/explorer Chen Zhengfeng (Danny Lee) heads to the Himalayas to forget his unfaithful careerist girlfriend (Hsiao Yao), who abandoned Johnny for his brother Shiyu, a TV director. Chen's faith in humanity is momentarily restored by the pure love of Ah-wei (Kraft), a beautiful Tarzan-like foundling, and her

animal friends, including colossal ape Ah-wang (sometimes played by suit designer Keizō Murase, including the movie's climactic fire stunt).

But Chen is immediately reminded of his objections to Hong Kong, and its corrupting, pseudo-civilized influence, after he returns from India with a bewildered Ah-wang in chains and a distressed Ah-wei by his side. Gone are the days of gorging on oversized fruit and frolicking with a drugged-up leopard, replaced suddenly by an assault of studio cameras and aggressive suitors, like Lin and Chen's sex-creep patron Lu Tien (Ku Feng). Lu tries to force himself on Ah-wei. Ah-wang gallantly objects, and suffers the consequences.

Mighty Peking Man is therefore best appreciated as a hysterical protest against the same exploitative forces that inspired it. There are plenty of gorgeous miniatures and explosions thanks to Tōhō Studios special effects expert Sadamasa Arikawa, as well as a killer giant ape paw, some quicksand, and an unforgettable flashback. Roger Ebert was right to praise the film's "general goofiness"² as was the *Chicago Reader*'s Lisa Alspector for finding good humor in the movie's "sexual-jealousy theme"³. *The Mighty Peking Man* is a triumph of bad taste over common sense, and, as the *Quentin Tarantino Archives*' Pete Roberts concludes, "simply an exciting film to watch."⁴

REFERENCES

- ¹ Hong Kong Filmography, 1977-1997. John Charles. McFarland & Company, Inc. 2000. Page 207.
- ² "Mighty Peking Man." Roger Ebert. *Chicago Sun-Times*. April 30, 1999. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/mighty-peking-man-1999>.
- ³ "Mighty Peking Man." Lisa Alspector. *Chicago Reader*. <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/mighty-peking-man/Film?oid=1056035>.
- ⁴ "Mighty Peking Man." Pete Roberts. *The Quentin Tarantino Archives*. December 4, 2017. https://wiki.tarantino.info/index.php/Mighty_Peking_Man.

TRIVIA

Rumors that a European version titled *Colossus of Congo* features more nudity from Evelyne Kraft, additional gore and a different ending are currently unsubstantiated (they are not in the German version named *Der Koloss von Konga*), but the Hong Kong theatrical trailer (included on this Blu-ray) does feature alternate shots not seen in the final film including, yes, a topless Kraft.

The Connaught Centre (today's Jardine House), site of the climactic confrontation, was then the tallest building in Hong Kong. Known for its distinctive round-portal windows, it was nicknamed in local slang "the House of a Thousand Arseholes."

NAME THAT TUNE

Most of the music is from the De Wolfe (or "De Wolfe", as it is misspelt in the opening credits) Music library, some of which can be heard in CD1 included in this boxset. Also featured in the film are "Montée au Calvaire" by Vladimir Cosma (from the album *Patchwork Orchestra 3*, released by Alouettes Éditions SARL), as well as "Invocazione Tragica" by Gino Marinuzzi and "Barbaresca" by Teo Usuelli (both from an Italian compilation titled *Azione 1*, released by RCA Records).

The song that plays as Chen and Ah-Wei make love has never been released, but the opening credits of the US release (titled *Goliathon*) list it as "Could It Be Love" sung by Jan Butler and written by Frank McDonald and Chris Rae, both regular contributors to the De Wolfe catalog.

陸阿采與黃飛鴻



CHALLENGE OF THE MASTERS

陆阿采与黄飞鸿 / Lù A-cǎi yǔ Huáng Fēihóng (Mandarin) / Luk⁶ A³-choi² yu⁵ Wong⁴ Fei'hung⁴ (Cantonese)
Original release date: May 7th 1976 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Chen Kuan-tai Lu A-Cai
Gordon Liu Wong Fei-hung
Wong Yue Lin Tu-chiang
Lily Li Xiulien
Kong Do Renliang
Chiang Yang Wong Kei-ying
Lau Kar-wing Yuan Zheng
Cheng Kang-yeh Zeng Xing
Feng Ko-an Yangzhong
Lau Kar-leung Zhen Er-hu
Shih Chung-tien Peng Yungang

CREW

Directed by **Lau Kar-leung**
Produced by **Run Run Shaw**
Written by **Ni Kuang**
Cinematography by **Tien-You Wang**
Production Manager **Hsieh Chih**
Sound Recording **Wang Yung-hua**
Art Director **Johnson Tsao**
Edited by **Hu Ta-wei**
Make-up **Wu Hsu-ching**
Martial Arts Instructor **Lau Kar-leung**

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

The streets of Guangdong are being decorated for a fire-cracker competition, the highlight of a traditional festival, which calls for the demonstration of kung-fu techniques. Wong Fei-hung, the 17-year-old son of famous kung fu master Wong Kei-ying, is frustrated because his father won't teach him martial arts. Constable Yuan Zheng, also a kung-fu master, comes to Lu A-cai, Wong Kei-ying's master, in search of a robber, Zhen Er-hu. Seeing Fei-hung before his residence, Yuan is much impressed by the young man and recommends Lu to teach him kung fu. In spite of his friend's advice that he is not ready, Fei-hung joins the fire-cracker contest. Being nimble, he succeeds in grabbing a cracker, but can't get away with it when surrounded and fought by the disciples of Peng Yungang, another kung-fu master. Finally, he is rescued by his friend Lin Jiang, who is badly injured while doing so. Despite his performance in the contest, Lu sees Fei-hung's potential and decides to adopt him as his disciple, taking him to the countryside for training. Meanwhile, Yuan Zheng spots Zhen Er-hu in a teahouse and accepts his challenge to a duel. During the match, Yuan is killed by Zhen's hidden weapon. After completing his training, Fei-hung challenges Zhen Er-hu to a duel, and beats him after a vicious fight. The robber is then handed over to the police. In another cracker competition, Peng arms his men with secret weapons to counter Fei-hung's contestants. But Fei-hung and his comrades win an overwhelming victory, in spite of stiff resistance from Peng's men. In an ensuing fight, Fei-hung knocks down the ringleader of his rival team, but bearing in mind his master's teaching of winning an opponent's heart, he spares his life. Deeply moved, Peng repents over his misbehavior and openly apologizes to Fei-hung's father.

SPOLERS

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

Challenge of the Masters is sort of an unusual origin story for the indestructible folk hero Wong Fei-hung, here played by a young Gordon Liu. Wong is often presented as a populist dynamo, but *Challenge of the Masters* re-imagines him as a cocky student who must learn when to throw a punch, and when to turn the other cheek.

And while *Challenge of the Masters* begins with a thrilling martial arts demonstration – shot in front of a white background that underscores the scene's graceful choreography – the movie doesn't really end, but rather pauses on a freeze-frame of a blade as it is slapped out of its owner's hands. "Don't fight," Wong learns, because "there's no end to kung fu."

There are, however, some noteworthy precedents for *Challenge of the Masters*, whose opening scene feels like an extension (or maybe a reclamation?) of the demo-focused *Three Styles of Hung's School of Kung Fu*, a stylistically similar 1973 short film that was also choreographed by *Challenge of the Masters* director Lau Kar-leung.

Challenge of the Masters was also Lau's sophomore feature as a director after *The Spiritual Boxer (Shen da)*, a 1975 martial-arts comedy that, despite its box office success, was still a relatively impersonal exercise for Lau. "To me, an action movie must have funny parts," Lau later told *Cahiers du Cinema*.¹ "The fact is that kung fu is basically not very varied, with always the same gestures and moves. An audience gets tired of it very fast."

Challenge of the Masters was also an extension of Lau's hope to simultaneously build on and break away from staid conventions. Here, we see him working to incorporate the "Chan Buddhist" (i.e. Zen) tradition in Shaolin kung fu,

which martial arts scholar Fanon Che Wilkins describes as a "nonsecular branch of the Buddhist tradition that is essentially atheistic."²

Wilkins might as well be quoting from (or summarizing) *Challenge of the Masters* when he, paraphrasing the Shaolin Gong Fu Institute, explains that "the martial dimension of the physical practice of kung most likely developed out of a need for self-defense and engaged in violence 'to better understand violence' and consequently to avoid violence altogether."³

Because while *Challenge of the Masters* does build to a (rather satisfying) confrontation between Wong and the villainous Er-hu (Lau himself), it's more about developing a private sort of discipline, as we see when Wong trains with his unsentimental master Lu A-cai (Chen Kuan-tai), as well as the sort of competitive *esprit de corps* that we see during the movie's rousing Pao celebration scenes.

Challenge of the Masters is not just a decisive step towards Lau's milestone *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin (Shaolin sanshi-liu fang, 1978)*, but also a compelling declaration of intent and of personal faith ("More forgiveness, less aggression"). Here we see Lau doubling down on his mission as a filmmaker: to promote the "moral discipline" at the heart of martial arts. Because as Master Lu says: "if you can conquer their hearts, that will be real victory."

REFERENCES

¹ "Interview with Lau Kar Leung: The Last Shaolin." Olivier Assayas and Charles Tesson in collaboration with Elizabeth Cazer and Tony Rayns. *Cahiers du Cinema*. Issue 362/363 (September 1984). <http://members.spreed.com/molasar/hongkong/ch/lau-int.html>.

² "Shaw Brothers and the Hip-Hop Imagination." *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. University of Illinois Press, 2008. Page 232.

³ *Ibid*, page 233.

TRIVIA

Wong Fei-hung (1847-1925) was played by Kwan Tak-hing in at least 77 films, beginning in 1949 and culminating in Golden Harvest's 1981 film *Dreadnought (Yongzhe wu ju)* – the most any one actor has played the same character in cinema history. Kwan's portrayal directly influenced Gordon Liu as a child: "I thought Kwan Tak-hing was very manly playing Wong Fei-hung, he was everything that a Chinese man ought to be... I was impressed by his kung fu, and the way he rescued others. He would never kill a villain, instead he would teach them to be good. That kind of hero made a deep impression on me, so I decided to take kung fu classes." Liu would play the role of Wong for Lau Kar-leung again in *Martial Club (Wu guan, 1981)*.

Lau Kar-leung got his start as an actor and choreographer on the early Wong Fei-hung films (beginning with 1953's *Huang Fei-hong yi gun fu san ba*) under the wing of his father, Lau Cham, who had learned Hung Gar martial arts from Lam Sai-wing, one of Wong Fei-hung's pupils.

In a break from the vague dating of many other Shaw kung fu movies, this film begins in the Year of the Wooden Rat (1864), when the historical Wong Fei-hung would indeed have been 17 years old.

NAME THAT TUNE

Throughout this film, we hear snatches of the tune "On the General's Orders" (*Jiangjun ling*). This melody, first written down in 1841, was added in 1956 as the theme to some of the later Wong Fei-hung films starring Kwan Tak-hing, and would be most famously re-used in Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China (Wu zhuangyuan Huang Feihong, 1991)*, with the addition of lyrics from James Wong to make the song "A Man Should Better Himself" (*Nan'er dang ziqiang/Namyi dong jikeung*).



EXECUTIONERS FROM SHAOLIN

洪熙官 / Hóng Xīguān (Mandarin) / Hung⁴ Hei'gun¹ (Cantonese) / Executioners of Death (USA)
 / Shaolin Executioner (US VHS) Original release date: February 16th 1977 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Chen Kuan-tai Hong Xiguan
Lo Lieh The White-Browed Hermit (Bai Mei)
Wong Yue Hong Wending
Lily Li Fang Yongchun
Cheng Kang-yeh Xiaohu
Gordon Liu Tong Qianjin
Tien Ching Wang Ye (Royal Chieftain)
Kong Do Gao Jinzhong
Shen Lao Fang's Uncle
Lao Hai-shen Chan Zhishan

CREW

Directed by **Lau Kar-leung**
 Produced by **Runme Shaw**
 Written by **Ni Kuang**
 Production Manger **Hsieh Chih**
 Cinematography by **Lo Yun-cheng**
 Art Director **Johnson Tsao**
 Edited by **Chiang Hsing-loong**
 Sound Recording **Wang Yung-hua**
 Make-up **Wu Hsu-ching**
 Martial Arts Instructor **Lau Kar-leung**

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

The Manchu troops, tipped off by the treacherous White-Browed Hermit, burn down the Shaolin Temple, which houses the patriotic Chinese. In the midst of the conflagration, the Rev. Zhishan is killed by the White-Browed Hermit in a terrible duel. The inmates of Shaolin Temple, including Hong Xiguan, Tong Qianjin, and Xiaohu, break out from the burning temple, pursued by the Ching soldiers, led by Gao Jinzhong. During the chase, Tong Qianjin is killed. The Shaolin patriots gradually infiltrate the populace, winning their support. Hong Xiguan meets a woman kung fu expert, Fang Yongchun, in a small village and marries her. Later, they have a son, whom they name Hong Wending. In order to avenge the Rev. Zhishan's death, Hong Xiguan has been learning the "Tiger Fist" technique, but his wife urges him to also learn the "Crane" technique, which might defeat the White-Browed Hermit's tactics. However, he disregards her advice. When their son is 10 years old, Hong Xiguan challenges the White-Browed Hermit to a fight, thinking he may be able to defeat him, but he is unable to do so. As well as being beaten by the Hermit, he is also attacked by Gao Jinzhong and his henchmen. Fortunately for Hong Xiguan, the timely intervention of Xiaohu saves his life, but Xiaohu is killed. Hong Xiguan then practises diligently the "Tiger Fist", hitting at the vital parts of a brass figure, while Hong Wending learns the "Crane" technique from his mother. Hong Wending and his mother try in vain to prevent a duel between Hong Xiguan and the White-Browed Hermit when the boy is 17 years old, and the fight ends in the death of Hong Xiguan. Hong Wending, taking the advice of his mother, then learns some of the "Tiger Fist" techniques from a manual left behind by his father. Thus armed with the combined skills of "Crane" and "Tiger", Hong Wending challenges the White-Browed Hermit. A very fierce fight ensues, culminating in Wending jumping up onto the Hermit's shoulders and gouging out his eyes. Hong Wending kills the White-Browed Hermit, thus avenging the death of his father, as well as that of the Rev. Zhishan.

SPOLERS

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

"There are some films that you've just got to see" Quentin Tarantino once told *Cinefantastique's* Craig Reid, referring specifically to *Executioners from Shaolin*.¹ Tarantino, like the Wu Tang Clan before him, not only paid homage to *Executioners from Shaolin* in his own work ("Wu Tang Clan Ain't Nuthin' Ta F' Wit" and *Kill Bill: Volume 2*, respectively), but also compared director Lau Kar-leung with Sam Peckinpah, if only "in terms of rethinking an established genre, using the same rules of the genre yet still delivering his own meditation of the genre." Tarantino's right, but *Executioners from Shaolin's* fight scenes are in a class of their own, more like Busby Berkeley's kaleidoscopic musical numbers than Sam Peckinpah's slow-motion gundowns.

Lau's film is also unusual, even downright eccentric, in large parts. I mean, how many other martial arts classics pit an imperious, malignant eunuch (Lo Lieh) against a youthful avenging son (Wong Yue), the latter of whom dresses in drag and only develops a winning edge thanks to his synthesis of Hung Gar kung fu's masc-presenting tiger style and the femme-coded crane style kung fu? Not quite "zero" – Lo Lieh directed the daffy and delightful 1980 sequel/remake *Clan of the White Lotus* (*Hong Wending san po bai lian jiao*) in which he also reprises the Hermit role, though Wong's character, now played by Gordon Liu, does not do drag – but you get the idea.

Executioners from Shaolin is, however, an indelible showcase for Lau as an action filmmaker, from its blistering introductory scene, a surreal, red-tinted soundstage deathmatch, to its ferocious, bloody freeze-frame climax. The movie's revenge narrative, scripted by Shaw Brothers mainstay Ni Kuang, is fairly straight-forward and by-then generic, but Lau makes it his own by turning Wending into a joyful spirit of shaolin

kung fu and its focus on spiritual balance.

Yue's effete performance also helps Lau to "playfully [recast] martial arts in terms of sexuality", thereby "[disrupting] the basic tropes of the genre" as film programmer Cheng-Sim Lim argues in her liner notes for UCLA's traveling 2003 "Heroic Grace: The Chinese Martial Arts Film" series.²

Lau's focus on Wending is essential to *Executioners from Shaolin's* formally dazzling and emotionally thrilling action scenes, if only for how Wong's effete hero gives Lau a mandate to be even more playful in his choreography. Lau pulls out most, if not all of the stops. He alternates between undercranking (to goose the action of momentum-driving fists and feet) and slow-motion (for bodies gracefully arcing and falling, as if Peckinpah's gunfighters were also ballet experts). Lau also dances alongside his nimble performers, then repeatedly barrels into them with a few crash-zooms for extra impact.

Lau draws viewers into his camera's frame, leading us along invisible lines of action that expand and contract as the scenes demand. His camera circles, lunges, settles, then pushes back in; he routinely backs us into a corner, then forces us out again using rhythmic, bite-sized cuts. Peckinpah, Berkeley, send over whoever you've got: Lau's accomplishments are his own, and *Executioners from Shaolin* is a master-class in action filmmaking.

REFERENCES

¹ "Hong Kong Calling." Craig Reid. *Cinefantastique*. October 1, 2003. Page 40.
² "Executioners from Shaolin (Hong Xiguan) (Hong Kong, 1977)." Cheng-sim Lim. UCLA. <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/events/2003-02-28/executioners-shaolin-hong-xiguan-hong-kong-1977>.

TRIVIA

Lo Lieh reprised the role of Bai Mei, the 'White Browed Hermit', in Ho Meng-hua's *Abbot of Shaolin* (*Shaolin yingxiang bang*, 1979). Other Shaw Brothers films in which the character appears include *Chang Cheh's Shaolin Avengers*, played by Chen Hui-lou, and the opening of *Chang's Shaolin Rescuers* (*Jie shi ying xiong*, 1979), played by Chow Kin-ping. Gordon Liu would of course play the role (as "Pai Mei", the most common English translation of the name) in *Kill Bill: Volume 2* in 2004.

The first time we see the Red Boat players, they are putting on a play about Yue Fei (1103-42) a hero of the resistance against the medieval Khitan invaders. He calls them "Tartars", which was also used as a coded term of scorn for the Manchus. Yue Fei remains a figure of heroic resistance and incorruptibility, and is credited with the authorship of the resistance anthem "The River All in Red."

The priest Bai Mei can only be harmed at the Hour of the Goat, which is between one and three o'clock in the afternoon, when the shadows start to lengthen. Each Chinese "hour" lasts for two hours on a standard clock.

NAME THAT TUNE

Sharp-eared *kaijū* fans will hear Akira Ifukube's score for *War of the Gargantuas* (*Furankenshutain no Kaijū: Sanda tai Gaira*, 1966) used during the film.



CHINATOWN KID

唐人街功夫小子 / Tánggrénjiē gōngfū xiǎozǐ (Mandarin) / Tong'yan⁴-gaa¹ gong'fu¹ siu²ji² (Cantonese)
Original release date: December 2nd 1977 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Alexander Fu Sheng Tam Tung
Sun Chien Yang Jianwen
Philip Kwok Siu Bak-lung
Lo Meng Wong Fu
Tsai Hung Wong Mo
Wang Lung-wei Tsui Ho
Jenny Tseng Lei Wa-fung
Shirley Yu Lena
Susan Shaw Sinwa

CREW

Directed by **Chang Cheh**
Produced by **Mona Fong, Run Run Shaw**
Executive Producer **Chen Lieh**
Written by **Ni Kuang, James Wong, Chang Cheh**
Cinematography by **Kung Mu-to**
Art Director **Johnson Tsao**
Editor **Chiang Hsing-loong**
Make-up **Wu Hsu-ching**
Musical Director **Chen Yung-yu**
Lyrics **James Wong**

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

Tam Tung, who had escaped to Hong Kong from Mainland China at the age of 18 or 19, helps his grandfather to run an orange-squash stall. One day, a triad named Tsui Ho and some friends of his, discover that Tam is a skilful martial artist, and so Tsui Ho challenges Tam to a kung fu contest. Tam accepts the challenge and wins, and Tsui's wife then asks Tam to rescue her cousin from the triad members' custody, promising to give him a quartz digital watch as a reward. Tam risks his life to rescue the girl from the rogues, but this incident leads to ill-feeling between Tsui Ho and Tam Tung, which culminates in a fight during which Tsui is injured at Tam's hands. Tam arranges to stow away on a ship bound for San Francisco, USA. Once there, Tam gets a job in Chan Fu's restaurant in Chinatown, San Francisco, where he meets a young fellow-worker, Yang Jianwen, from Taiwan. Yang, a hardworking student, who earns his pocket-money in his leisure by waiting on tables, is also a skilled martial artist like Tam. The Green Tigers Club, led by Wong Fu, rivals with the White Dragon Club, led by Siu Bak-lung, for control of a Chinatown extortion racket; both leaders are martial artists, and immigrants from Hong Kong. Soon, Tsui Ho comes to San Francisco, where he conveys a secret message from his boss to Wong, urging him to expand his influence quickly in order to control the whole Chinatown area. One day, Tam thrashes several gangsters from the Green Tiger Club. This incident delights Siu Bak-lung, who later learns many things about Tam from his mistress. Later, Tam is sacked by his employer for having gone to the defence of Yang against threatening triad members of the Green Tiger Club. Siu Bak-lung then tries to win over the unemployed Tam by giving him food and shelter. A fierce battle breaks out between the Green Tiger Club and the White Dragon Club, resulting in the defeat of the Green Tigers and the death of Tsui Ho at the hands of Tam. After this victory, Tam lives in style in the company of sexy Sinwa, who was Wong's former mistress. Before long, Yang is shocked by the death of Tam, following a police raid on the Chinatown triad societies.

SPOILERS

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

In his memoir, *Chinatown Kid* director Chang Cheh describes star Alexander Fu Sheng's on-screen persona: "good-looking, excellent physique, a delicate blend of rebelliousness and liveliness, a good comic sense."¹ These qualities define the *xiaozi* character (Mandarin slang for "brat" or "kid"), a trend-setting, cross-genre protagonist that Chang and Sheng turned into a type with *Disciples of Shaolin* in 1974. Jackie Chan also found success playing *xiaozi*-style naifs, but Sheng's influence on Chan is most evident in *Drunken Master* (*Zui quan*, 1978), which Chang compares with the 1974 Sheng vehicle *Shaolin Martial Arts*.

Chang didn't think much of the films he made for the Shaw Brothers after he returned to Hong Kong (from Taiwan) in 1977, dismissing five years' of work as "tired, worn out wuxia and fist-and-kick action films" that "warrant little mention."² But Sheng's performance in *Chinatown Kid* perfectly illustrates Chang's reverence for his *xiaozi* star.

Sheng plays Tam Tung, a Hong Kong immigrant trying to make it in San Francisco (filmed mostly on soundstages at the Shaw Brothers' Clearwater Bay studio). Tam is defined both by his martial arts prowess and his dog-worthy loyalty. He's materialistic, transparent, and eager to provide for his loved ones, especially his near-blind, Hong Kong-based grandfather (Ho Wang Ching) and his best friend, fellow penniless dishwasher Yang Jianwen (Sun Chien).

Tam is also easily seduced (gotta have that digital watch!), which gives Chang and co-writer Ni Kuang a few opportunities to lament the exploitative behavior and materialistic values of small-time predators like preening druglord Tsui Ho (Wang Lung-wei), a fellow Hong Kong transplant, and Bay Area crime boss Siu Bak-lung (Philip

Kwok). People are alike all over, and most of them are as selfish as Tam and Yang are innocent.

The longer cut of *Chinatown Kid* that's featured in this boxset doesn't really alter so much as it fleshes out Tam's inevitable rise and fall from grace. There's more melodrama, longer fights, and better pacing in a few scenes. But Tam is still very much who he is in the shorter version because Chang's camera still loves Alexander Fu Sheng. You can see it in the way that he cuts down a four-minute gang fight, a clash between Sin and Tsui Ho's men, into a relatively lean two-minute *mano a mano* fight between Tam and Tsui Ho.

You can also see Chang's love for Sheng when Tam spits at Chih Ching-wang's greedy restaurant owner boss, who offers Tam an extra month's pay just so he'll quit the restaurant faster (street-fighting is bad for business). Spitting may be an impotent gesture, but it still inspires the sort of fierce audience identification and loyalty that only a star can.

Tam's loogie also illustrates Chang's definition of good filmmaking: he says, paraphrasing Sir Run Run Shaw, that "If the audience sees what you want them to see, that's a good shot."³ Chang may have directed better *xiaozi* films, like *The Delinquent* (*Fennu qingnian*) – co-helmed in 1973 with Kuei Chih-Hung, about whose work Chang wrote, "both the directing and acting were brilliant, but it wasn't a sensation" – but *Chinatown Kid* is his (and Sheng's) best *xiaozi* star vehicle.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Chang Cheh: A Memoir. Chang Cheh. Hong Kong Film Archives. December 31, 2003. Page 96.
- ² Page 74.
- ³ Page 84.

TRIVIA

Though the majority of the film was shot in Shaw Brothers' Movietown studios in Hong Kong, Chang Cheh did shoot some footage of Fu Sheng on the actual streets of San Francisco a year earlier in 1976, some of which is used in the final film.

With one lead from Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong and another from Mandarin-speaking Taiwan, the uncut *Chinatown Kid* features a mix of Cantonese and Mandarin throughout. (When the heroes first meet in Chan's restaurant, both Tam Tung and Mr Chan switch effortlessly between both languages, depending on whom they're talking to.) The shorter, sanitized Alternate Version, exhibited in more conservative territories like Malaysia, is dubbed in Mandarin throughout.

NAME THAT TUNE

Most of the music in the film is from the De Wolfe Music library; see CD1 in this boxset for more information on specific cues.

The catchy opening credits song, "The Ghost Calls You Poor" (*Gwai giu nei kung*), was performed by singer-actor Albert Cheung (born Cheung Mo-hau, aka Zhang Wuxiao), and written by Cantopop singer-songwriter James Wong Jim (born Wong Jum-Sum), who is also credited with co-writing the film as "James Wong" and has a cameo as a gambler. A close friend of co-writer Ni Kuang, Wong was a genuine polymath who, in addition to writing and performing over 2,000 songs (including several iconic film & TV themes), was also a film director, screenwriter, actor, columnist and talk show host. Among the films Wong wrote theme songs for are *Game of Death* (*Seimong yauhei*, 1978), *A Better Tomorrow* (*Yinghung bunsik*, 1986) and its sequel (1987), and *A Chinese Ghost Story* (*Sin-Neui yauwan*, 1987, which he also scored). A heavy smoker (responsible for his distinctively husky vocals), he died of lung cancer in 2004, aged 63.



THE FIVE VENOMS

五毒 / Wǔ Dú (Mandarin) / Ng⁵ Duk⁶ (Cantonese) / Shaolin Deadly Poisons / The 5 Deadly Venoms (USA)
Original release date: August 12th 1978 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Chiang Sheng Yang De
Sun Chien Gao Ji/Ma Teng
Philip Kwok Meng Tianxia/He Yu
Lo Meng Liang Shen/Li Tao
Wei Pai Qi Dong/Hong Wentong
Lu Feng Zhang Yiaotian/Tang Shankui
Wang Lung-wei Wang Hsin
Ku Feng Yuan Lao-fu-tzu
Tu Lung Huang Yen
Sun Shu-pei Lin Guang
Liu Huang-shih Men Hua
Lin Hui-huang Prison Gaoler
Wang Ching-ho Constable
Shen Lao Fruit Vendor
Wang Han-chen Prison Coroner

CREW

Directed by **Chang Cheh**
Produced by **Mona Fong, Runme Shaw**
Written by **Ni Kuang, Chang Cheh**
Cinematography by **Kung Mu-to, Tsoo Hui-chi**
Art Director **Johnson Tsao**
Edited by **Chiang Hsing-loong**
Make-up **Wu Hsu-ching**
Martial Arts Instructor **Liang Ting, Tai Chi-hsien,**
Chu Lu-feng

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

The School of Five Venoms is notorious among martial artists for the evil deeds of its disciples. The master of the school Huang Yen has retired from the martial world for years. Before he dies, he feels so guilty about all the evils associated with the name of their school that he orders his youngest disciple Yang Te to go and stop the other disciples from carrying on with their wicked ways eliminating them if necessary. There are five disciples of the Five Venoms active in the martial world, each of them excelling in a special kind of kung fu named after a venomous animal. These five disciples are Tang, who represents the Centipede, Hung the Snake, Ma the Scorpion, He the Lizard, and Li the Toad. These five disciples from the same school never show their real identities and they do not all know each other. And Yang De, whose mission is first of all to find the five of them, has never even met them or known their real name. Yang De was told by the master before his death that he could find these other five disciples through Yuan, a former classmate of the master who is hoarding some treasures that belong to the school. And the master predicted that those five disciples would be after Yuan and the treasure. Two of the disciples, Ma and He, have become constables, and another disciple Hung is a rich celebrity in town. Hong joins the first disciple Tang in forcing Yuan to hand over the treasures. When Yuan refuses to do so, they kill him and his whole family. When Ma arrives at the scene, he accidentally finds the map which shows where the treasure is hidden. When Yang De arrives in town, he picks up clues suggesting that Tang might be the killer of Yuan's case, and reports it to He at the yamen. With the help of Ma's friend Li, the two constables Ma and He arrest Tang. Through their kung fu styles, Yang recognizes Tang as the first disciple the Centipede, and Li the fifth disciple the Toad. Ma is actually in league with Hong and Tang to rob Yuan of the hidden treasure. So Ma and Hong bribe the judge and the trial for Tang is put off. Meanwhile, they try to frame Li up as the real murderer. Li resists when Ma tries to arrest him, so that Ma has to use his secret weapon 'the Scorpion darts' thus exposing his identity as the third disciple of the School of the Five Venoms. The observant Yang De by this time realizes that Tang, Hong, Ma, He and Li are the other five disciples he is looking for. Since Li is dead, and He is the only righteous one among the four left, Yang teams up with He and eventually gets rid of Tang, Hong and Ma, thereby accomplishing his mission.

SPOLERS

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

1978: a magical year for Western kung fu fans thanks to the knockout one-two punch of *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* and *The Five Venoms*. For the Wu Tang Clan's RZA, *The Five Venoms* was "the film that made me become a kung fu fanatic."¹ That quote could just as easily speak for *Kill Bill* director Quentin Tarantino, or any number of American grindhouse-weened cinephiles of a certain age.

At the same time: even martial arts buff Matt L. Reifschneider admits, on a ranked list that was published by Shaw Brothers distributors Celestial Pictures, that *The Five Venoms* is an unusual choice for the top spot – and is "certainly going to come with its fair share of detractors" – for the "Top 15 Chang Cheh Films."² But whoomp, there it is. Imagine if *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967) or *Vampire Circus* (1972) were overwhelmingly considered to be the best Hammer films, ranked even higher than standard-bearers like *The Curse of Frankenstein* and *Horror of Dracula* (both 1958). It kind of makes sense now, but also, wait: how did all that happen?

The Five Venoms was made about two years after director Cheh Chang shut down Chang's Film Co., his Shaw-financed Taiwanese production company, and returned to Clearwater Bay. He'd signed a new five-year contract (and promised to deliver 25 new features), but that contract was not renewed despite the immediate popularity of *The Five Venoms* and a few succeeding Venom Mob star vehicles.

The Five Venoms was an inimitable hit, partly because of the excitement generated by its main gimmick: an "Avengers-Defenders War"-style battle royale waged by five masked animal-style fighters. That movie's action choreography and amped-up violence also reflect its creators' extra efforts to maintain their inevitably diminishing audience. So you get more acrobatics, more gore, and more in-camera effects, all

of which remain effective today.

The Venom Mob was also essentially Chang's version of a boy band (though some members were childhood friends). Three of the Venoms had previously trained in Taiwanese opera at the Fu Sheng School; besides them, Sun Chien was a martial arts contest winner and Lo Meng was, uh, a very ripped accountant (and adept at mantis-style kung fu).³ Most of the other mobsters had also previously worked with Chang as stuntmen and supporting cast members on earlier projects like *Marco Polo* (1975) and *Chinatown Kid* (1977).

Unlike those films, *The Five Venoms* not only caught on with then-contemporary viewers, but also spawned a formula that Chang would chase with varying success in follow-ups like *Crippled Avengers* (1978) and *Five Elements Ninjas* (*Wudun renshu*, 1982). Still, what distinguishes *The Five Venoms* is its creators' unique combination of technical expertise and exploratory zeal. That makes all the difference in a mystery/action hybrid whose athletic, ferocious leads spend most of their time discovering and then teaming up with each other.

A remake of *The Five Venoms* was announced in 2006 – *The Big Hit* (1998) director Kirk Wong was attached to direct⁴ – but never produced. Good: the original movie is lightning in a bottle, a fluke of timing and craft whose thunderous echoes only grow louder with time.

REFERENCES

- ¹ "Wu-Tang's RZA Breaks Down 10 Kung Fu Films He's Sampled." *Vanity Fair*. September 3, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZ67KyHX-cY>.
- ² "From Wuxia to Bashers, Epics to Gimmicks: Top 15 Chang Cheh Films." Matt L. Reifschneider. Celestial Pictures. <http://www.shawbrothersuniverse.com/from-wuxia-to-bashers-epics-to-gimmicks-top-15-chang-cheh-films/>.
- ³ "Kung Fu Legends: The Venom Mob." Craig Lines. *Den of Geek*. December 14, 2016. <https://www.denofgeek.com/movies/kung-fu-legends-the-venom-mob/>.
- ⁴ "Shaw Classics Get a Remake." Andrew Sun. *South China Morning Post*. November 8, 2006.

TRIVIA

The Wu Tang Clan have frequently sampled and otherwise paid tribute to this film, in songs such as "Da Mystery Of Chessboxin'" from their 1993 debut album *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* and "Intro (Shaolin Finger Jab)" from their third album *The W* (2000). Members of the Wu Tang have also sampled the film in their solo work, such as Ol' Dirty Bastard ("Snakes" from 1995's *Return to the 36 Chambers: The Dirty Version*) and Masta Killa ("Born Chamber (Intro)" from 2004's *No Said Date*). An all-female rap group in the late-1990s was named the Deadly Venoms; RZA produced two songs on their debut album.

NAME THAT TUNE

Much of the music from the film (and *Crippled Avengers*) is from the De Wolfe music library (see CD2 in this collection). "Ice Floe 9" by Pierre Arvey was featured the same year in Jackie Chan vehicle *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin* (*She-he babu*, not a Shaw Brothers production) and the extended Cannes cut of *Dawn of the Dead*, and had already been prominently heard in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975).



CRIPPLED AVENGERS

殘缺 / Cánquē (Mandarin) / Chaan⁴kyut³ (Cantonese) / Handicapped Avengers / Mortal Combat (USA)
/ Return of the 5 Deadly Venoms (USA) Original release date: December 21st 1978 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Chen Kuan-tai Du Tiandao
Lu Feng Du Chang
Philip Kwok Chen Shun
Sun Chien Wei Datie
Sun Chien Hu Agui
Chiang Sheng Wang Yi
Wang Lung-wei Steward Wan
Yang Huan Ju Gaofeng
Ching Miao Li Zhengying
Pan Ping-chang Du's Wife
To Lung Tiger of the South

CREW

Directed by **Chang Cheh**
Produced by **Mona Fong, Runme Shaw**
Written by **Ni Kuang, Chang Cheh**
Cinematography by **Tsao Hui-chi**
Edited by **Chiang Hsing-loong**
Art Director **Johnson Tsao**
Make-up **Wu Hsu-ching**
Musical Director **Chen Yung-yu**
Martial Arts Instructors **Lu Feng, Tai Chi-yin, Chiang Sheng**

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

The character of Du Tiandao, a great martial artist, changes greatly from kind into cruel and cold-hearted after his wife is brutally murdered by an unlawful society, the Three Tigers of the South. The Tigers also chop off the arms of his beloved son, Du Chang, in the same attack. Since then, Du Tiandao has hated everyone he comes across and, together with his son who he has fitted with two metal arms, cruelly abuses anyone who offends them. One day, as Du Tiandao and Du Chang have a meal in a restaurant, they hear someone making a speech nearby. As they approach, the speechmaker Wei Datie luckily manages to escape. But a hawk standing nearby, Chen Shun, who had applauded the speech, attracts the attention of Du Tiandao, who gouges out his two eyes. When they return home, Du Tiandao orders his servants to bring Wei Datie to him. When Wei arrives, Du Tiandao forces him to drink a cup of poison and then claps his hands hard over his ears, leaving Wei deaf and dumb. As Chen is blind and unable to make a living, Wei lets him to stay in his metal shop. Soon after, disaster befalls another young man, Hu Agui. As he quarrels with his boss, he shouts that as long as he has his hands, he would not die of starvation. But, Du Chang overhears him and, thinking that Hu is mocking his armless state, chops the man's legs off with his powerful metal arms. Later, Hu is also given shelter by Wei Datie. Finding out that his crippled victims are staying at Wei's, Du Tiandao sends his servants to attack Wei's metal shop. He also warns the local peasants to isolate the three crippled men. One day, a young, warm-hearted martial artist, Wang Yi, visits the town. When he discovers what has happened to the three men, he promises to avenge them. However, Du Tiandao and his son defeat Wang, forcing him to wear a special vice-like crown which leaves him brain damaged. By chance, the three other victims learn that Wang Yi is a disciple of Li Zhengying, a highly renowned martial artist. Wei Datie, Hu Agui and Chen Shun accompany Wang Yi to see Li Zhengying, who promises to teach them martial arts so that they can take revenge on Du Tiandao and Du Chang. After practicing for three years, Li finally decides that the four men are ready to deal with the Du family. The four abused and crippled men return to the village and wreak their revenge on the vicious Du and his son.

SPOILERS

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

Crippled Avengers was originally released in America as *Return of the 5 Deadly Venoms*, though it's less of a sequel than a pastiche of by-then familiar elements from director Chang Cheh's previous films. For starters, *Crippled Avengers* doesn't feature all of *The Five Venoms'* title cast members: Tourette's syndrome kept Wei "Snake" Pai from rejoining the other "Five Weapon Guys", as they became known in Taiwan.¹ Chiang Sheng tagged in for Wei, having also co-starred in *The Five Venoms*; Chiang was joined by Chang regular Chen Kuan-tai, who had just returned to the Shaw Brothers after a year-long break.

Crippled Avengers is also another Chang-helmed revenge story starring physically challenged heroes, as in the Chang-helmed smash *The One-Armed Swordsman* (*Dubi dao*, 1967) and a couple of Jin Yong adaptations, all written or co-written by Chang's *Crippled Avengers* co-writer Ni Kuang (*The Water Margin* [*Shuihu zhuan*, 1972] is especially noteworthy, though Chang preferred both *The Brave Archer 3* [*Shediao yingxiong chuan sanji*, 1981] and *Legend of the Fox* [*Feihu waizhuan*, 1980]).²

Tradition is essential in *Crippled Avengers*, even if it sometimes doesn't seem that way (especially when compared with Chang's Shaolin Temple films). Martial arts expert Dr. Craig Reid explains: "The presence of disabled heroes in wuxia novels and Chinese martial arts cinema speaks to the notion that regardless of your physical abilities, you can overcome any problem if you dedicate yourself to practicing kung fu."³ Kung fu buff Brendan Davis runs even further with that concept: "maimed heroes endure because they embody perseverance and the ability to adapt to changing conditions."⁴

Adaptability is also key to *Crippled Avengers'* success, which only seems fitting since Venom Mobsters Chiang and

Lu Feng served as the film's "deputy directors" with Chang (according to Lu), as well as action directors along with *The Five Venoms'* choreographer Robert Tai Chi Hsien.⁵ That gave an edge to the movie and its very Chang-ian concern with valorous perseverance. The title characters (Chiang, Philip Kwok, Lo Meng, and Sun Chien), a group of physically or sensory impaired fighters, are hellbent on punishing the men who crippled them, the wanton bigshot Du Tiandao (Chen) and his piston-powered/dart-shooting/iron-arms-wielding son Chang (Lu). Chang and his father use their grievances as an excuse to hurt others while our heroes only pick (and end) fights as a sort of therapeutic self-care.

The movie's climactic melee is consequently a spectacular exhibition of the Venom Mob's acrobatic skills, the ultimate flex given their characters' cognitive or physical challenges. Several weapons are employed in this fantastic sequence, but none are as character-defining for the Venoms as a set of metal rings that Chiang and Lo use together to disarm Lu's proto-cyborg villain. As a weapon, a ring can either be a hook to draw or keep an enemy close by, or a makeshift barrier to keep them away. And once it's in motion, a ring can build its own momentum, and even seem to move by itself. *Crippled Avengers* features some of the smoothest action filmmaking in Chang's considerable oeuvre, and is easily one of his best collaborations with the Venoms.

REFERENCES

¹ *The Ultimate Guide to Martial Arts Movies of the 1970s: 500+ Films Loaded with Action, Weapons, & Warriors*. Dr. Craig Reid. Black Belt Communications. November 1, 2010. Page 60.
² *Chang Cheh: A Memoir*. Chang Cheh. Hong Kong Film Archives. December 31, 2003. Page 109.
³ Reid, Page 60.
⁴ "Crippled Avengers: Graceful and Acrobatic Action with a Twist." Brendan Davis. Celestial Pictures. <http://www.shawbrothersuniverse.com/crippled-avengers-brendan-d-review/>.
⁵ "Cool Ass Cinema Presents: An Interview with Former Shaw Brothers Star & Director/Action Choreographer, Lu Feng." Cool Ass Cinema. September 18, 2016. <http://www.coolasscinema.com/2016/09/cool-ass-cinema-presents-interview-with.html>

TRIVIA

The Venom Mob (in varying configurations) would appear in several more films directed by Chang Cheh over the next few years. Look out for the following in *Shawscope Volume Two*, coming soon from Arrow Video: *Invincible Shaolin* (*Nan Shaolin yu bei Shaolin*, 1978), *Magnificent Ruffians* (*Maiming xiaozhi*, 1979), *Kid with the Golden Arm* (*Jinbi tong*, 1979) and *Ten Tigers of Kwangtung* (*Gwongdung sap fu yu hau ng fu*, 1980).



HEROES OF THE EAST

中华丈夫 / Zhōnghuá zhàngfū (Mandarin) / Jung'wa' jeung'fu' (Cantonese) / Shaolin Challenges Ninja / Challenge of the Ninja (USA) Original release date: December 30th 1978 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Gordon Liu Ho Tao
 Yasuaki Kurata Takeno
 Yuka Mizuno Yumiko
 Hitoshi Ōmae Black Belt Karate Expert
 Takeshi Yamamoto Swordsman
 Nobuo Yana Spear Expert
 Yujiro Sumi Karate Expert
 Manabu Shirai Nunchaku Expert
 Yasutaka Nakazaki Sai Expert
 Naozo Kato Japanese Master
 Lau Kar-leung Drunken Master Su

CREW

Directed by Lau Kar-leung
 Produced by Mona Fong, Sir Run Run Shaw
 Screenplay by Ni Kuang
 Cinematography by Arthur Wong
 Art Director Johnson Tsao
 Edited by Chiang Hsing-loong, Li Yen-hai
 Make-up Wu Hsu-ching
 Musical Director Chen Yung-yu
 Martial Arts Instructors Lau Kar-leung,
 Tang Wei-cheng

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

Ho Tao marries a Japanese girl, Yumiko, in a marriage arranged by his father, a merchant based in Japan, who wishes to cement his business relations with the girl's father, Kar Tin. Ho Tao is a scholar and a martial artist who practices Chinese martial arts. Ho Tao knew Yumiko in his youth in Japan, but after he was sent back to China for further studies, he forgot about her until his father brought her to China to arrange their marriage. Ho's neighbors think he beats his wife, making her cry out every morning. Ho is surprised by the rumors and one morning, he wakes up early and follows her. He finds her practicing karate and judo and realizes that the cries she makes as she practices are what the neighbors have heard. Ho wants his wife to practice Chinese kung fu instead of Japanese martial arts, but she refuses, leading to constant arguments between the couple. One day, Yumiko discovers a martial arts practice-room filled with Chinese weapons. She places all her martial arts instruments in the room and puts aside her husband's weapons. When Ho returns home and sees what his wife has done, he is furious and challenges her to a martial arts competition, Japanese-style versus Chinese-style. After their battle, Yumiko returns to Japan, making Ho's father annoyed and her own father angry. At home in Japan, she practices her Japanese martial arts with a handsome Japanese martial artist, Takeno. Ho's father returns to China to scold his son and insists that he bring Yumiko back to China. Ho's servant advises him that Yumiko may return if he writes her a letter, challenging her to another martial arts competition. However, this letter arouses the national feeling of the Japan Martial Arts Association and it sends a representative of each of the Japanese fighting styles, kendo, karate, judo, etc., to China to take part in the challenge and defend the perceived slight on Japan's martial arts tradition. Ho Tao takes up the mantle of Chinese martial arts and goes up against each of the Japanese fighters, showing his skill and bravery in a series of one-on-one fights.

SPOILERS

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

Heroes of the East is a deranged comedy of manners that also happens to be a nationalistic martial arts exhibition. Set in Shanghai (and then somewhere in Japan) during the 1930s, *Heroes of the East* uses the farcical pretext of an arranged marriage – stuffy but disciplined kung fu student Ho Tao (Gordon Liu) must try to get along with his petulant and punchy Japanese bride Yumiko Koda (Yuka Mizuno) – to prove the supremacy of Chinese kung fu over Nipponese martial arts.

Despite this stilted set-up, Yumiko and her extended family of Japanese fighters are way less caricaturish than they could have been. *Heroes of the East* was, after all, made in the wake of flag-waving hits like *One-Armed Boxer* (*Dubi quanwang*, 1971) and *Fist of Fury* (*Jingwu men*, 1972), both of which pit avenging Chinese martial artists against Japanese bullies. Thankfully, Sino-Japanese relations are only so interesting to *Heroes of the East* choreographer/director Lau Kar-leung, who spends most of his movie highlighting a cache of Chinese weapons, and how they can be used to disarm the most severe-looking opponents.

Lau's movie is most serious during a series of dynamic, though ultimately predictable, matches between Liu and a school-full of armed Japanese combatants, each one of whom represents a different fighting style. But even these fight scenes revolve more around slapstick comedy than self-serious jingoism, like when Liu uses peanut oil to defeat a burly judo expert (Hitoshi Ōmae) during an impromptu grappling match. This is, after all, a Lau-helmed comedy, so anything that doesn't serve to valorize Chinese kung fu isn't worth taking too seriously.

Heroes of the East's prefatory domestic scenes should hopefully prime contemporary viewers' expectations for a daft, but charming beat-'em-up that's often as sweet and silly as Koda. She's initially characterized by the weapons that she mysteriously produces from thin air, and the catalog-perfect furniture that she gleefully demolishes.

But like Koda's relatives, Mizuno's character simultaneously is and isn't as childish as she seems. She kicks through garden walls and decapitates stone cherubs with a giddy smile, but also somehow only becomes more charming as she gets more destructive. So, when Ho tries to disarm Koda with a dart hidden up his sleeve, she naturally returns fire with a dagger that indelicately smashes through a nearby glass door.

Lau's affection for Koda may be somewhat one-sided – ha ha, her karate outfit reveals her cleavage! – but it's still apparent, as *Eastern Kicks'* Alexis Sheftz argues when she notes that Koda's destructive behavior is “pretty much always justified” when contrasted with her husband's “prudish dickishness and bias.”¹

Lau's dynamic and involving action scenes are also a testament to his love of boastful antagonists who are, despite outward appearances, still more than capable of keeping up with Gordon Liu. So, while *Heroes of the East* is still ultimately a hearty flex for Chinese kung fu, it's also a light-hearted tribute to all the comic foils and goony heavies who teach Lau's champion how to not be a sore winner.

REFERENCES

¹ “Heroes of the East.” Alexis Sheftz. *Eastern Kicks*. January 22, 2017. <https://www.easternkicks.com/reviews/heroes-of-the-east>.

TRIVIA

The original British VHS release (titled *Shaolin Challenges Ninja*) of the film was missing the entire 5-minute nunchaku battle sequence, due to the British Board of Film Classification's long-held aversion to the weapon.

Yasuaki Kurata had already appeared in several Shaw Brothers films since Chang Cheh's 1971 film *The Angry Guest* (*E ke*), maintaining a dual acting career in Hong Kong and his native Japan. Though some filmographies list a film named *King Boxer* among his early credits, it is not the Shaw Brothers film in this boxset; rather, it is a 1971 film named *Xiao quan wang*, occasionally retitled *King Boxer* (or *King of Boxers*, or *The King Boxers*) overseas to capitalize on the Shaw film's success. Kurata has published two books about his experiences working in Hong Kong, *All About Chinese Kung Fu* (*Gekitotsu! Dragon Bujutsu*, 1983) and *Hong Kong Action Star Friendship Record* (*Honkon Action Star Kōyūroku*, 2004), though sadly neither are available in English.



DIRTY HO

烂头何 / Lǎntóu Hé (Mandarin) / Laan⁴tau⁴ Ho⁴ (Cantonese) / Dirty Avengers
Original release date: August 4th 1979 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Wong Yue Ho Jen
Gordon Liu Wang Tsun Hsin
Lo Lieh General Liang Jincheng
Tang Wei-cheng Chu Yi-feng
Ching Chu General Liang's assistant
Wang Lung-wei Fan Tin-kong
Kara Hui Crimson
Hsiao Hou Hsia Liu
Pan Ping-chang Female entertainer
Chen Szu-chia Female entertainer
Yu Tsui-ling Female entertainer
Marina Liao Female entertainer

CREW

Directed by **Lau Kar-leung**
Produced by **Mona Fong, Run Run Shaw**
Written by **Ni Kuang**
Cinematography by **Arthur Wong, Ao Chih-chun**
Edited by **Chiang Hsing-loong, Li Yen-hai**
Art Director **Johnson Tsao**
Martial Arts Instructor **Lau Kar-leung**
Make-up **Wu Hsu-ching**
Musical Director **Wang Ju-ren**

OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

Ho Jen, a chivalrous robber, likes to squander money on female entertainers. But, one night, he discovers that Wang Tsun Hsin, a millionaire, has monopolized all the girls. Under these circumstances, the two men meet. Wang takes a liking to Ho, but knowing he is a robber of licentious character, he tries to make him turn over a new leaf by helping him avoid arrest on several occasions. Ho being so obstinate, Wang decides to teach him a lesson. He deliberately plans on getting Ho wounded. Once wounded, Ho discovers that no doctor can cure him, so he finally turns to Wang for help. In exchange for curing his wound, Wang wants him to be his apprentice and for Ho to follow him wherever he goes. Though unwilling to submit, Ho has no choice. Emperor Kangxi has fourteen sons and one of them is to be chosen as his successor. Wang Tsun Hsin happens to be his 11th son. The 4th son, however, wants to succeed to the throne and, knowing Wang is in Guangdong, specially makes General Liang responsible for getting rid of Wang. Knowing Wang's keen personal interest in wine and Chinese art, they use this knowledge to try on many occasions to have him killed. But Wang is such a well-skilled martial artist that he outsmarts them. Unfortunately, at one point he is wounded in the leg, and Ho helps him escape. Understanding later that Wang is actually the 11th son of Emperor Kangxi, and a skilful martial artist, Ho willingly accepts him as master and learns from him the technique of martial art expertise. A big reward is offered to anyone who gets rid of Wang, and his whereabouts is known since people know of Ho. They, therefore, leave their hideout and head for the capital city. On the way, as expected, they are ambushed by General Liang's men, which they narrowly escape. When they arrive at the city, they are again hindered by General Liang and his men. Finally, they succeed in foiling the plans of the 4th son.

(NOTE: Though the official synopsis specifies Wang's father as the historical Emperor Kangxi, this information is not offered in the film itself and may be an inaccuracy introduced by Shaw's copywriter.)

FILM NOTES

by Simon Abrams

In 1978, Lau Kar-leung directed and choreographed *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin*, one of the most influential martial arts movies of all time, and one of three films that Lau directed that year. Lau's other two 1978 titles are both rock-solid – *Heroes of the East* and *Shaolin Mantis (Tanglang)*, the latter of which is almost as strong as its boffo title – but *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* towers over them both. Not surprising given that *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* was Lau's way of refashioning (and even surpassing) the formative Shaolin temple films that he and fellow Shaw Brothers iconoclast Chang Cheh previously collaborated on. Unlike Chang, Lau was a true believer in martial arts, and filmmaking was his way of spreading the good word: "My only aim in making a film is to exalt the martial arts."¹

In 1979, Lau directed three more movies, and all of them are comedies. Among these three, *Dirty Ho* stands out for a number of reasons, chief among them its relentless swing-for-the-fences slapstick humor. Full of tongue-in-cheek humor and gobsmacking sight gags, *Dirty Ho* is the work of an emboldened pop artist.

Like *The Spiritual Boxer*, Lau's 1975 solo directorial debut, *Dirty Ho* was Lau's way of staying honest with his audience, a sort of "ironic take on the martial arts genre" that, as *South China Morning Post's* Richard James Havis argues, "subverts all of Lau's earlier themes of chivalry and Confucian codes of honor, and highlights the fact that the martial arts shown on screen are artifice."² Because according to Lau, "an action movie must have funny parts,"³ and *Dirty Ho* has enough to make up for Lau's entire 1978.

Best of all: *Dirty Ho* flies so fast and far away from what Lau does in *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* that it never feels like

a lurching transitional movie. Gordon Liu stars as Master Wang, a hedonistic martial arts master and Manchurian prince who half-trains, half-uses Wong Yue's titular dupe to uncover and defeat an imperial coup. Ho thinks he's a faithful student to Liu's unconventional teacher, but he's really just an instrument of his master's will, much like Kara Hui's strung-up pipa in the now-iconic scene where Wang defends himself from a frustrated Ho by manipulating her limbs like a puppet.

Dirty Ho is a sort of anti-manifesto to counter the impending genericization of *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin*. You can't take this stuff too seriously, *Dirty Ho's* fight scenes reassure viewers, especially during an inspired parody of *Crippled Avengers*, the 1978 Chang-helmed follow-up to the Venom Mob vehicle *The Five Venoms*.

Still, you should pay attention to *Dirty Ho*, especially if you want to see some of Lau's most playful action filmmaking. Lau and Liu inevitably returned to the *36th Chamber* twice, first in 1980 and then in 1985. But before then, *Dirty Ho* made great sport of its genre's flagging tropes and formulaic storytelling. Leave it to Lau Kar-leung to turn a daffy comedic flex into one of the Shaw Brothers' most thrilling go-for-broke spectacles.

REFERENCES

- ¹ "You Couldn't Be a Martial Arts Hero Without Honor and a Moral Code, In This Director's Eyes." Richard James Havis. *South China Morning Post*. August 23, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/entertainment/article/3098111/you-couldnt-be-martial-arts-hero-without-honour-and-moral>.
- ² "How Gordon Liu Became a Martial Arts Superstar Thanks to Shaw Brothers Movies Like *Dirty Ho* and the Eight Diagram Pole Fighter." Richard James Havis. *South China Morning Post*. June 6, 2021. <https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/entertainment/article/3135865/how-gordon-liu-became-martial-arts-superstar-thanks-shaw>.
- ³ "Interview with Lau Kar-leung: The Last Shaolin." Olivier Assayas and Charles Tesson in collaboration with Elizabeth Cazer and Tony Rayns. *Cahiers du Cinema*. Issue 362/363 (September 1984). <http://members.spreed.com/molasar/hongkong/ch/lau-int.html>.

TRIVIA

The patch on Ho's head is a *lantou* (literally: "rotten head"), a herbal remedy, sometimes used in Chinese drama to signify that a character has a skin disease or other affliction. Hence the film's Mandarin title, *Lantou He*.

Co-star Wong Yue is not to be confused with 'Jimmy' Wang Yu, the star of Chang Cheh's *The One-Armed Swordsman* (1967) and other martial arts classics. Wong Yue (birth name Wong Chi-kuen), sometimes even credited as Wang Yu, was allegedly given his screen name by Run Run Shaw as an act of spite against 'Jimmy' for leaving the studio.

Kara Hui was only hired to be an extra in the film, until the original actress hired to play the role of Crimson suddenly quit. Lau Kar-leung had noted Hui's abilities when she filmed a impressive audition tape for Chang Cheh's *The Brave Archer (Shediao yingxiang zhuan, 1977)* and hired her to take over. Lau and Hui would work together many times afterwards, most notably when she played the titular role in *My Young Auntie (Zhang bei, 1981)*, soon to be included in *Shawscope Volume Two* from Arrow Video.

NAME THAT TUNE

Several music cues from the film are from the De Wolfe music library (see CD2 in this collection).



THE STARS OF SHAWSCOPE VOLUME ONE

by Terrence J. Brady

Shaw Brothers Studio of Hong Kong: not just a motion-picture studio, but a vastly profitable business model that allowed Run Run Shaw to dominate the local film industry. The sharp-eyed mogul adopted Western practices of integrating production, distribution, and exhibition in running his "Movietown," and like the Hollywood counterparts of the Golden Age, talent was signed to lengthy contracts. Shaw also established an actors' training school, where he shaped his own stars and production crews, plus in-house publications promoting these new players which created legions of avid fans worldwide.

Shaw's perennial director, Chang Cheh, was always searching for raw prospects as he recognized fresh faces were a novelty for the film-going audience. He had a knack for procuring gifted novices which started with Jimmy Wang Yu and Lo Lieh. Chang later discovered Ti Lung, David Chiang, Wang Chung, Alexander Fu Sheng, Kara Hui Ying-Hung, Chi Kuan-chun, and the Venom Mob. He was also quick to secure amazing behind-the-scenes specialists such as Lau Kar-leung, Tong Gai, and John Woo.

It's understood that without Run Run Shaw, this "dream factory" wouldn't have attained the status it enjoyed; however, it is undeniable that the talent behind the studio is what truly made Movietown flourish and endure.

LO LIEH



If one were to compile a list of the Shaw Brothers' greatest antiheroes, the name Lo Lieh (1939-2002) would easily top the charts. Along with "One-Armed Swordsman" Wang Yu, Lo was the first generation of Chang Cheh's yanggang stars and venerated as the embodiment of kung fu treachery.

The dark, husky Indonesian, originally named Wang Lap-Tat, was born to parents of Cantonese descent. At the age of ten, he attended a British-run school in Hong Kong and later furthered his education in Beijing. As a teen, Lo practiced Fut Ga Kuen or Buddhist Family Fist. Instead of pursuing a teaching position, he applied to Shaw's newly established Southern Drama Group. After his successful training, he signed an actor's contract embarking on a career of over 200 productions.

Lo Lieh holds the claim to fame for appearing in Chang Cheh's first Shaw action sequence; *Butterfly Chalice* (*Hudie bei*, 1965). He eventually found his niche as a reliable scoundrel with his rugged looks, curling lip, and set of piercing eyes, in which Lo brought intelligence and an ominous charm to his villainous roles. Lo came

to international attention with *King Boxer* (1972), aka *Five Fingers of Death*. His portrayal was permeated with anguish and defiance as he endured a cathartic journey from neophyte to victor.

Other notable performances included *Magnificent Trio* (*Biancheng sanxia*, 1966), *Golden Swallow* (*Jin yanzi*, 1967), *Brothers Five* (*Wuhu tulong*, 1970), a delightful yet sinister Taoist priest in *Executioners from Shaolin* (1977), and a conniving Manchu general in *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978). He also directed several films, including the top-tier *Clan of the White Lotus* (1980). A Lau Kar-leung choreographed shape-fest spectacle, this movie highlighted Crane and Tiger systems plus a unique style labeled Embroidery Fist.

Lo Lieh was a devout Buddhist renowned for his gentle off-screen demeanor. On the morning of November 2nd 2002, he suffered a life-ending heart attack in Shenzhen, China. One of kung fu film's earliest perennial villains, Lo's legacy is immortalized for his prolific body of work.



DAVID CHIANG



The first member of Chang Cheh's second-generation team hailed from a family of thespians. Heavily promoted by the director, David Chiang Da-wei became one of Shaw Brothers' most prominent performers for his sophisticated acting chops and whimsical, acrobatic martial arts.

David Chiang was born Chiang Wei-nien in Suzhou, a city west of Shanghai, also known as the "Venice of China." His parents, Hung Mei and Yim Fa, were popular players in Mandarin cinema, and thus at age 4, Chiang had his screen debut. After numerous childhood roles, and later stunt work as an adult, he officially signed a three-year contract with Shaw Brothers in 1968. The actor appeared in a bevy of wuxia productions such as *The Invincible Fist* (*Tieshou wuqing*, 1969), *Have Sword, Will Travel* (*Bao biao*, 1969), and *The Wandering Swordsman* (*You xia'er*, 1970).

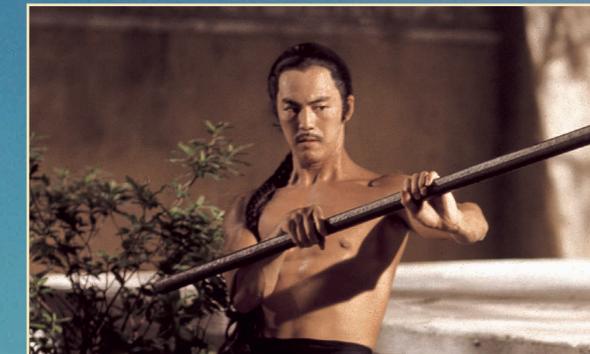
Chiang possessed a gentle, effete quality, which he capitalized on to undermine opponents with his crafty, enigmatic methods. Within a few short years, the cheeky performer attained superstar status by securing the Best Actor Award for the carnage-fueled *Vengeance!* (*Bao chou*, 1970). Along with director Chang and actor Ti Lung, Chiang became a third of the "Iron Triangle" that seized the global box office by storm for the first half of the 1970s.

Chiang's petite stature and ordinary appearance were not movie star traits but his cool, calculating smirk and carefree, swashbuckling persona earned him hordes of fans. His resumé is long and varied but some career highlights included reinventing the character made famous by Wang Yu in *The New One-Armed Swordsman* (*Xin dubi dao*, 1971), *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* (*Qi jin shi*, 1974), *The Condemned* (*Si qiu*, 1976) which he also directed, and *Shaolin Mantis* (*Tanglong*, 1978).

David Chiang has a deep appreciation of the martial arts and was friends of the late Bruce Lee. What started out as swingy arm boxing in his earlier pictures developed over the years, and two premier samples of his advancement were on display in *The Loot* (*Zeizang*, 1980) and *The Challenger* (*Ti guan*, 1980).



TI LUNG



Tall, dark, and handsome: the trifecta standard for Hollywood's leading men of yesteryear that included Clark Gable, James Stewart, and Cary Grant. For the Hong Kong silver screen, one name above all exemplified this description, and that honor went to Ti Lung, Shaw's prototypical matinee idol.

Born in 1946 as Tam Fu-wing, Ti Lung began his martial arts journey at 14, studying Wing Chun under Sifu Jiu Wan who had trained alongside Yip Man. After graduating from the prestigious Eton School of Hong Kong, he worked in the tailoring industry, but soon found his true calling after answering a Shaw Brothers advertisement seeking new talent. One of the few chosen, his Shaw schooling instructed the budding actor with a wide range of acting and fighting techniques such as Muay Thai and Taekwondo.

Ti Lung got his initial break in *Dead End* (*Si jiao*, 1969) which featured Asian movie queen Li Ching, but more importantly, paired him with David Chiang. Film audiences approved as the brotherly duo collaborated on numerous blockbusters which dominated the martial arts genre in the ensuing years. Ti's classic looks and ropes of muscles embodied vitality and strength, and he possessed a textbook persona for Chang Cheh's blood-soaked martial tragedies.

His portrayal as a merciless general in *Blood Brothers* (*Ci ma*, 1973) secured him Outstanding Performance honors at the 11th Golden Horse Awards. Other hits followed that included a tormented assassin in *The Avenging Eagle* (*Lengxue shisan ying*, 1978), and a drug-addicted fallen hero in *Opium and the Kung-Fu Master* (*Hungkyun daisee*, 1984). Ti's most prolific association though was with director Chor Yuen, and his transcendent swordplay adaptations, starting with *The Magic Blade* (*Tianya mingyue dao*, 1976) as the Clint Eastwood-like roving swordsman.

Ti Lung personified the purest virtues of gallantry. His considerate and gentle characters were equally balanced with exhilarating weapons displays and martial prowess. Ti's career did not cease after Shaw's closure but reinvigorated in the 1980s and 1990s, culminating in awards and global recognition.

CHEN KUAN-TAI



There are actors who make kung fu movies, and then there are martial artists who act. Chen Kuan-Tai is part of this latter group, along with luminaries Lau Kar-leung and Bruce Lee. Chen's masculine poise and charming, fearless screen presence placed him on the same playing field as other Shaw A-listers.

Chen Kuan-Tai was born in Guangdong but raised by his paternal grandfather in Hong Kong. He began his martial arts training at age seven, studying a variety of combat skills, but eventually

found tutelage under Chan Sau Chung, aka the Monkey King. He evolved into a free-fighting champion and expert in Tai Shing Pek Kwa and was soon approached by Lau Kar-leung and Tong Gai. Following multiple film cameos and stunt work, Chang Cheh cast him in a winning-lottery-ticket project.

The Boxer from Shantung (1972) thrust the fledgling actor into the spotlight in this fierce, blood-spattered rags-to-riches saga. A box office smash, Chang utilized his new cinema idol as a tough but simple man misled by happenings beyond his control. Chen followed up with *Man of Iron* (1972), *The Flying Guillotine* (*Xue dizi*, 1975), and *Challenge of the Masters* (1976). In *Executioners from Shaolin* (1977), a historically-based tale by Lau, he provided the viewers with one of his best performances yet.



Litigation over Chen's indie film, *The Iron Monkey* (*Tie houzi*, 1977), temporarily put him at odds with Run Run Shaw. He soon returned to the studio, rejoining Chang Cheh and the Venoms as an evil-hearted father in *Crippled Avengers* (1978), which launched a second career at Movietown. *Killer Constable* (*Wanren zan*, 1980), *The Master* (*Bei pan shimen*, 1980) and the Sun Chung horrorfest *Human Lanterns* (*Renpi denglong*, 1982) are just a few of Chen's memorable productions, in a profession still going strong after fifty years.

Shaw Brothers' "everyman," Chen Kuan-tai was a Hong Kong version of Hollywood icon Charles Bronson. As one of the first Shaw actors who was a real-life kung fu practitioner, he drew his audience in with a magnetic air of power and confidence, yet still projected compassion and vulnerability.

ALEXANDER FU SHENG



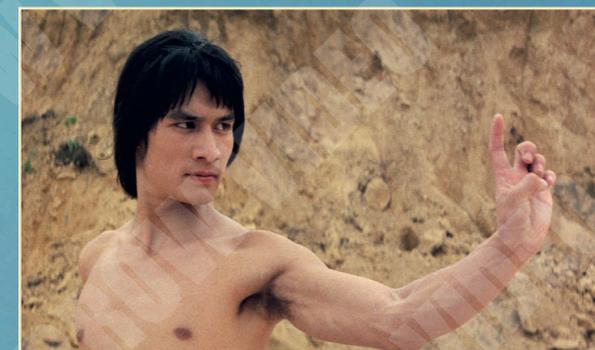
While Chang Cheh was recognized for developing new talent, there was one peerless actor whom he most cherished. Starting his film resume as a grad of the newly formed Shaw-TVB training school, Fu Sheng (1954-1983) developed into one of Shaw's most treasured and highest paid actors in their arsenal.

Born Cheung Fu-Sheng in the Northern Territories, Alexander was the ninth child of 11 to an influential patriarch who had numerous dealings in finances and local politics. Not interested in following a traditional career, Fu Sheng tried his hand at acting which proved to be an effortless fit. He made short appearances in some Chang directed projects during his training, and upon graduating, signed an 8-year contract with the studio.

Fu Sheng's first starring role was the mythological saga *Na Cha the Great* (*Nezha*, 1974) where he formulated the man-child persona that became a staple for subsequent films. Pairing up with Chen Kuan-tai, his role as Fang Shiyu in *Heroes Two* (1974) established him as a bona-fide martial arts player. Later performances in *Five Shaolin Masters* (1974), *Disciples of Shaolin* (1975) and *Shaolin Temple* (1976) solidified his popularity, but it was *Chinatown Kid* (1977) which garnered him international acclaim.

Despite box office successes as a leading man, Fu Sheng embraced his naïveté and incorporated zany comedy (which Jackie Chan later capitalized on). After working with Chang Cheh for 25 films, his career branched out when he joined Sun Chung for the striking classic, *The Avenging Eagle* (1978). He also paired up with Lau Kar-leung (his real-life sifu) for *Legendary Weapons of China* (*Shiba banwu yi*, 1982) and *The 8 Diagram Pole Fighter* (*Ng-long baatgwa guan*, 1984). He made 43 movies during his lifetime – all at Shaw Brothers.

Fu Sheng cultivated a deftly complex screen persona. His outward boyish charms and juvenile flairs proved to be sufficient foils for his on-screen adversaries. One of the most beloved performers in the Hong Kong entertainment industry, Fu Sheng was destined for greater things, if not for a tragic car wreck which cut his life short at 28.



GORDON LIU



A multitude of stars have emerged from Movietown over the years, and their award-winning performances have assembled a throng of fans across East Asia and beyond. Of these incredible talents, one of the most internationally recognizable is the bald-headed Shaolin Temple icon, Liu Chia-Hui.

Better known as Gordon Liu, he was born in Canton in 1955 with the birth name of Sin Kam-hei. His parents did not wish him to study martial arts, so he secretly became a student of Lau Cham, father of Lau Kar-leung. After graduating high school, Gordon dabbled in various jobs until director Lau invited him into the film industry. The duo, who were now god-brothers, ultimately teamed up with Chang Cheh's squad in Taiwan, in which Gordon made his Shaw debut in *Shaolin Martial Arts* (1974).



After a few more projects, he rejoined the elder Lau in Hong Kong and was assigned co-star status in the Shaw productions *Challenge of the Masters* (1976) and *Executioners from Shaolin* (1977). While successful works, these were mere stepping stones to the role of a lifetime. Gordon skyrocketed to fame after shaving his head for the part of monk and Shaolin hero San De in *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978). The ultimate training flick was an instant fan favorite and his career exploded from then on.

As a Hung Kuen practitioner, Gordon and director Lau made some of the most dynamic martial arts movies to grace the silver screen. In a world of wires and CGI, their films embodied the true spirit of the arts. Long and wide takes, intricate choreography, and authentic kung fu styles were staples of their efforts and key examples of this were showcased in *Heroes of the East* (1978) and *Martial Club* (1981).

With his distinguished role as the venerable monk, Gordon Liu succeeded to be the figurehead for Shaw's Movietown. In recent years, however, the actor has evolved into an international spokesman for the martial arts genre thanks in part to appearances in Hollywood's *Kill Bill: Volumes One & Two* (2003/04).

Terrence J. Brady is a graduate of the film program at Loyola University Chicago and has been writing freelance for 30 years. A Shaw Brothers aficionado since the late-70s, he is the author of the book Alexander Fu Sheng: Biography of the Chinatown Kid.



LIP FLAPS & HIGH KICKS

by James Flower

If you've ever seen a typical American or British parody of classic Hong Kong kung fu cinema – whether it's the showdown between Mike Myers and prospective father-in-law James Hong in *Wayne's World 2* (1994) or Steve Odenkirk's feature-length skit *Kung Pow! Enter the Fist* (2002) – one recurring joke leaps out in amongst all the mandatory crash zooms and high-pitched yelps. It is, of course, the immediately visible discrepancy between the actors' lip movements and the English dialogue ostensibly being issued from said mouths. You know the drill: the actor on-screen speaks in a flurry of syllables for several seconds; the voice on the soundtrack simply says, "Okay then." While this is often a gross exaggeration of the general standard to which most films were dubbed, the association between kung fu (or indeed East Asian genre cinema in general, such as the original Shōwa-era *Godzilla* films) and incompetent dubbing persists to this day, aided in no small part by the fact that, for many years, there was no other readily accessible means to see the films in question.

For decades, dubbing foreign-language films into English was a practice looked upon with disgust by 'serious' cinephiles. A dubbed film – irrespective of the dub's qualities – was, in the eyes of these cinematic zealots, an assortment of crimes all at once: a betrayal of the filmmakers' original intent, on a par with, say, the cropping in pan-and-scan video masters, or the ghastly colorization of black-and-white films; a spit in the face of the actors on-screen, their natural performances hastily defaced by some anonymous hack in a studio thousands of miles away; and a malignant means of cultural erasure, the rhythms and references of the original spoken language literally whitewashed by tin-eared Brits and Yanks, with character names witlessly Anglicized from "Chen Zhengfeng" to "Johnny Feng". Simply put, if you were watching the film this way, you weren't really seeing it at all.

The greatest crime these dubbed versions committed was their

overwhelming dominance in the Anglophone marketplace. Kung fu cinema already had an uphill battle in terms of critical respectability – inevitably so given the often assembly-line means of their production – but condescending attitudes around dubbing

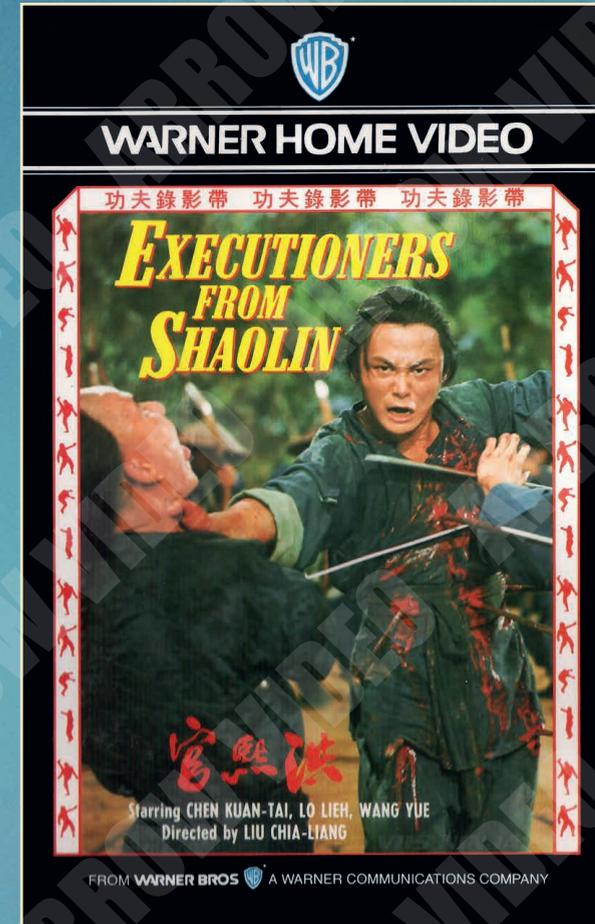


often led to the films being unfairly dismissed as cookie-cutter schlock. Due to a baffling and stubborn long-held reluctance on Sir Run Run Shaw's part to make the Shaw Brothers catalog widely available on home video, it was basically impossible as a fan in the west to see them in Mandarin or Cantonese, unless

you were determined enough to track down a multi-generation bootleg copy of a Chinese VHS or got wind that a beaten-up 35mm print was playing a Chinatown fleapit somewhere. Thus, it was inevitable that most viewers' first exposure to these films would, indeed, be the English-dubbed versions, whether it was via the grindhouses on 42nd Street in New York City, on American television as part of World Northal's *Black Belt Theater* syndication package (still spoken of in hushed, reverent tones by fans of a certain age) or the few, blink-and-you-missed-them official VHS releases from companies as varied as Warner Bros and the much-beloved British indie label Made in Hong Kong. A huge, thriving bootleg market was born in the vacuum, but these were still predominantly dubbed, cropped and censored versions, many of them allegedly sourced from stolen *Black Belt Theater* master tapes.

It was only in the new millennium when Celestial Pictures bought up the Shaw library, began restoring them by the hundreds and putting them out on DVD that things changed for the better. DVD (and later Blu-ray), thanks in large part to its interactive nature, was a revelation in how foreign-language cinema was presented. Instead of the monolingual dubbed/pan-and-scan hegemony of times gone by, audiences around the world could now see films remastered in their original aspect ratios with a plethora of audio and subtitle language options, all available at the click of a button. Furthermore, the increased availability of Celestial's new restorations meant that Shaw Brothers retrospectives were finally programmed in 'respectable' theaters, and films that had barely seen the outside of a Times Square grindhouse were now receiving critical acclaim in arthouses. Trendy celebrity endorsements by the likes of Quentin Tarantino (hot on the heels of his *Kill Bill* diptych in 2003-04, which even kicks off with a Shaw Brothers logo) and the Wu Tang Clan's RZA, who would make his own homage to the genre with *The Man with the Iron Fists* (2012),

didn't hurt either. Audiences – and, indeed, the films themselves – were finally freed from marketplace constraints, and now Shaw's legacy could be properly re-appraised.



One unexpected consequence of the choice DVD and Blu-ray has offered is that, in recent years, a growing movement has sought to reclaim the English-dubbed versions from the cultural slagheap. That is not to say that this movement argues the dubbed versions are better, or even equal to the Mandarin and Cantonese originals, but rather that the dubs hold historical significance as the means through which Asian action cinema was able to break geographical and cultural barriers and build a loyal fanbase around the world. What was once an industrial necessity, looked upon with scorn, was now seen as an inseparable part of those films' legacy, transcending simple nostalgia and equally worthy of preservation and scholarship in its own right. Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park, writing for *The Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, even coined a name for the critical rehabilitation of the dubbing phenomenon, especially as it became clear with hindsight that variable lip sync did not impede new audiences embracing the films: 'dubbese fu'. In this new context, the dubbing may be less analogous to pan-and-scanning but rather, say, the perceived jerkiness of handcrafted stop motion animation compared to the fluidity of CGI – to criticise it for its lack of 'realism' (or, as Magnan-Park, says, to "valorize only the perfect lip synchronization version of the audiovisual contract") is to miss the point, as the ensuing artifice is all part of the fun.

In the case of Shaw Brothers productions, including all twelve films collected in this boxset, this argument gains particular weight once we take into account that the English dubbing was an integral part of the studio's post-production workflow. Part of the antipathy towards English dubs in the west is due to the misconception that dubs are almost always commissioned after the fact by opportunistic Western distributors. While there are certainly cases where this is true – take, for example, Kroger Babb's notorious bastardization of Ingmar Bergman's *Summer with Monika* (*Sommaren med Monika*, 1953) as *Monika, the Story of a Bad Girl!* (1955) – more often than not, dubs were originally commissioned by the original studio before the film was exported in the first place, a process known as 'internationalization'. Dubbing was certainly not confined to the Anglosphere either, as

it remains to this day the dominant mode of exhibiting foreign-language content in territories such as Germany, Italy and Spain – countries that, like the US and UK, often have nationalist and imperialist histories inextricably woven into their cultural fabric.

In the case of films made in Hong Kong, this process was further complicated by the socio-political context in which the country existed, namely its status as a territory under British colonial rule (formerly under Chinese rule before being ceded by the Qing Dynasty in 1841) on the outskirts of mainland China. In a nutshell, while most of the population spoke Cantonese as a first language, the English speech of its British rulers and the Mandarin dialect of the Chinese mainland were still commonly spoken in various aspects of Hong Kong life. This linguistic dichotomy extended itself to the national cinema, where local studios like Shaw Brothers and Cathay privileged Mandarin productions over Cantonese ones as the former were much easier to export and thus much more profitable. Consequently, many of the films featured in this boxset were originally produced in Mandarin, and the reason you see no Cantonese language option offered for those films is that none was produced, regardless of the language spoken by the local population (and indeed, much of the cast and crew involved). Indeed, it was only in the late-1970s that Cantonese filmmakers like Lau Kar-leung were permitted to make top shelf films in their native tongue – as long as Mandarin and English options were offered as well, of course.

But how to film for two or three different languages at once? Make the same film multiple times with different actors and crew, as Universal had once done years ago with productions like *Spanish Dracula* (1931), shot at night on the same sets as its English counterpart? That would not do for a notorious penny-pincher such as Run Run Shaw (though the studio had experimented with this approach on some Korean co-productions in the 1960s). Like the Italians, who exported their Gothic horror and spaghetti western films to English-speaking audiences at a furious speed, Hong Kong studios embraced the cheapest and quickest way of achieving this: 'post-synch' sound. As opposed to recording 'direct sync' sound – using the original audio of the

actors performing during the original filming – all the sound in the films was entirely manufactured, assembled in sound studios against the edited picture. David Chiang described the logistical and financial benefits of this approach in an interview with Gary Bettinson for *Post Script*:

We didn't use sync sound, because without it we could shoot the film faster. We could shoot one picture in three months, but if we used sync sound it would add another two or three weeks to the schedule. So usually we shot the film silent, and then dubbed the sound after shooting. We did this for every film.

Here's where purists' insistence on watching these films in the 'original' language is rendered slightly (though not entirely) moot: in many cases, the actors on-screen were not dubbing their own dialogue, regardless of language. Chiang confirms in the same *Post Script* interview that he only had the opportunity to dub his own dialogue after making *The Empress Dowager* (*Qingguo qingcheng*, 1975), once he had overcome his own insecurities about his voice and his technical abilities. When Chen Kuan-tai started acting in films like *The Chinese Boxer* (*Long hu dou*, 1969), he still didn't know how to confidently speak Mandarin, so he learned his dialogue phonetically and his performance was later overdubbed by a fellow Shaw contract player named Cheung Pooi Saan, who regularly dubbed Chen in other films subsequently, including his starring role in *The Boxer from Shantung* (1972). This practice was by no means confined to Shaw Brothers, either; infamously, even the mighty Bruce Lee's voice was replaced in all three of the films he made for Golden Harvest prior to *Enter the Dragon* (1975), despite being fluent in both Cantonese and English. (The Cantonese dubs for these three films were recorded in the 1980s, years after Lee's untimely death.)

Post-synch allowed for a trilingual workflow in which Mandarin, Cantonese and English versions could be assembled in-house at Shaw Brothers Studios and released simultaneously with maximum expediency and at minimum cost. The recording of the English dub would be outsourced to an experienced (well, mostly) team of Hong Kong-based freelancers, all from disparate backgrounds. The man given the responsibility of heading said team was an entrepreneurial Welshman named Ted Thomas (born Thomas Edward Juson in Cheshire, England in 1929), a colorful and controversial figure who, soon after settling in Hong Kong in the mid-1950s following a stint in the Royal Navy, had become Run Run Shaw's top English-language consultant by the end of the decade. Throughout the 1960s, Thomas worked as a television and radio reporter by day and, by night, led a motley crew of voice actors under the umbrella name Axis International, dubbing all manner of worldwide productions into English, including *Godzilla* and *Zatōichi* films from Japan. (Thomas' work can also be heard in some of the English dubs on the Shōwa-era *Gamera* films released on Blu-ray by Arrow Video, namely *Gamera vs. Barugon* [1966], *Gamera vs. Gyaos* [1967] and *Gamera: Super Monster* [1980].)



To try and give his vocal performances an international flavor, Thomas often affected a mid-Atlantic accent that, in its somewhat stilted and monotone execution, often served to underline the uncanny nature of the whole enterprise. (This stands in contrast to, say, Peter Fernandez attempting a pseudo-Japanese – or mid-

Pacific? – accent in Titra Sound Studios' English dubs of classic *kaijū* films; a valiant and well-intentioned attempt to remain faithful to the original source material that nonetheless has not always aged well for modern sensibilities.) Thomas' sole on-screen performance featured in this collection is in *Mighty Peking Man*, as the British military official pursuing the eponymous creature; ironically, his voice is replaced by another actor!

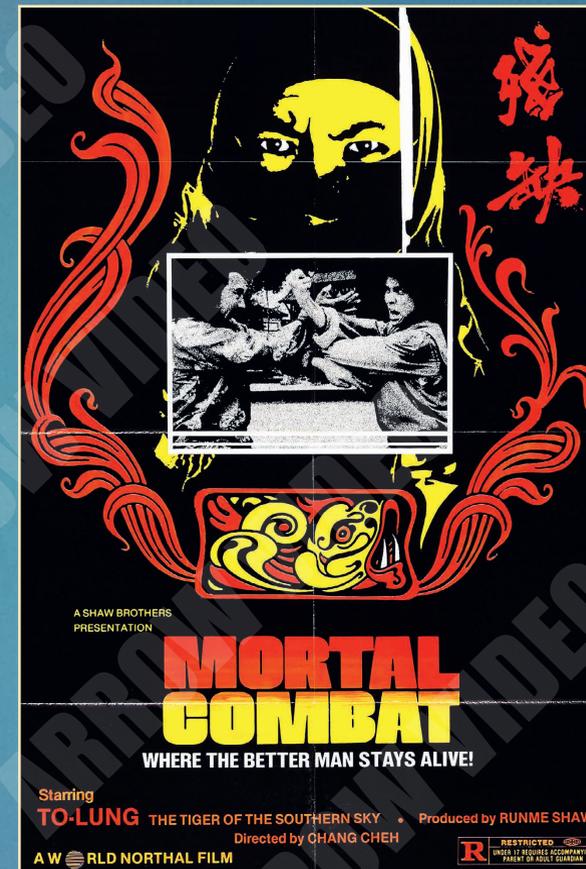
Other parts in these dub tracks were played by a revolving door repertory company that included Warren Rooke, Barry Haigh, Chris Hilton, Ron Oliphant, Graham Earnshaw, Saul Lockhart, Ian Wilson and his wife Lynn, Linda Masson, Mandy Cooke, Angel Chapman and several others over the years, all hailing from English-speaking territories including Great Britain, the United States and Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and South Africa. Prior experience in voice acting was certainly not essential, nor necessarily was proficiency in Chinese. By the time an American named Peter Boczar landed in Hong Kong in 1976, striving in vain to be the next kung fu film star, he inadvertently found his way to Axis International after being handed Ted Thomas' phone number by a mutual acquaintance in a pub. Instructed by Thomas to meet him at the Shaw Brothers Studio in Clearwater Bay at a specific time that evening, Boczar found himself thrust into the midst of a recording session, and despite a bumpy start, he was immediately recruited to join the voice team.

In collaboration with fellow government worker Oliphant, who wrote the scripts for the dubs and directed the sessions, Thomas worked out a cost-effective and efficient method for dubbing the films that resulted in a turnaround time of around "five or six hours" (as opposed to the standard 20 to 30) for a 90-minute movie, which helped Axis monopolize the business for a time. Firstly, Oliphant used a 1/2" cassette tape of the Chinese audio to painstakingly count the syllables being spoken and write English dialogue (using studio-supplied translated scripts of varying quality, as he did not speak either Mandarin or Cantonese himself) that matched the number of syllables as closely as possible. A black-and-white print of the film would be divided into several 30-to-60-second chunks, referred to as "loops", which would be

projected multiple times during recording. Carefully counting the lines of dialogue and amount of performers required (though actors frequently voiced multiple roles in the same film, sometimes within the same scene), Thomas was able to book the minimum amount of studio time required for the actors to arrive, do as many takes as required to get the lip sync and delivery more or less correct for each loop before moving on to the next one, and record the whole film in one marathon session, usually fuelled by chain smoking and an influx of Chinese takeout food. As everyone involved had day jobs, sessions usually started at 6pm and ended somewhere between midnight and 2am.

Soon, some of Thomas' regular performers (such as Barry Haigh, Matthew Oram and Rik Thomas – no relation) set up their own companies, though competition was friendly and work was plentiful enough to diplomatically split between them; according to Boczar, Thomas got all the Shaw Brothers films while Haigh got the Golden Harvest films, for example. (Though this hasn't stopped Thomas claiming he was the English "voice of Bruce Lee" on multiple occasions, an honor actually belonging to Haigh, Michael Kaye and Vaughan Savidge. Thomas also credits himself with dissuading Lee from dubbing his own performance due to his inexperience at voiceover work.)

While the dubbing procedure itself may sound rather rushed and haphazard, unlike less conscientious dubbing houses, Thomas and his cohorts prided themselves on the care they took in matching the lip movements (or "lip flaps") on-screen as closely as possible. The newly scripted dialogue could not simply translate what had been written in Chinese, but as recounted by Magnan-Park, "focused on a syllable-by-syllable match, paying special attention to the closed mouthed b, m and p utterances, which only addressed the labials but not the fricatives." This was often especially difficult not just because of the differing sentence structures between the two languages, but also how many linguistic conventions in Chinese dialects could not be directly translated into English. For example, though a Chinese actor might use the word 'but' to break up a sentence, just as an English speaker would, the pronunciation of the Mandarin equivalent word *keshi* would result in two spoken

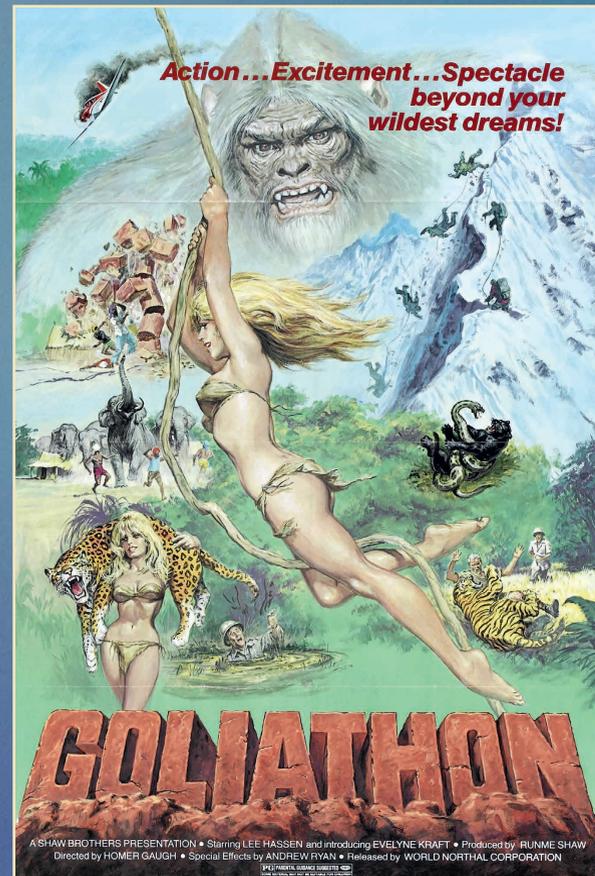


syllables rather than one. Thomas and Oliphant's solution? Liberal use of the phrase "but still", used interchangeably with "so then". (As Thomas himself recalled in 2011: "What else do you say if you have got two syllables (to record), and you don't want to say anything particularly?!")

In spite of their hard work, however, any attempts to match the "lip flaps" would frequently be undermined by technical issues later on in the workflow, be it sloppy or apathetic sound editing, or "slippage" inadvertently caused when the magnetic soundtrack was transferred to the optical track on the print. As such, they found their efforts frequently lumped in with that of their less competent competitors. Perhaps the critical snobbery surrounding dubbing made this an inevitability anyway. No matter; as the dialogue had little-to-no presence in the fight scenes (which, of course, were what audiences were primarily there to see), if any loose lip sync inadvertently created an 'otherworldly' effect (or "dubbese fu", as Magnan-Park called it), it was all the better to hold the audience's attention in the scenes in between the fights. (It should be noted that one side effect of post sync is that variable lip sync can often occur as much in the Chinese-language audio as in the English dub.)

While the more elitist view may simply dismiss dubbing as a lowbrow concession to lazy illiterates, a more sympathetic and egalitarian perspective has emerged recently. As the monolingual distribution model has eroded in the modern era thanks to home video and streaming, dismissals of dubbing now risk coming off as ill-advised gatekeeping, a last-ditch attempt to elevate one mode of engagement over another – when all that really matters, arguably, is that said engagement is taking place. Reading subtitles concurrently with absorbing the images on-screen is an acquired skill, and dubbing has ensured that international productions like those of the Shaws consistently maintained a mainstream global presence outside their countries of origin. It is also wrong to assume that a distaste for subtitles is confined to purveyors of 'lowbrow' cinema – for example, the great French experimental filmmaker Chris Marker insisted on his films being presented in a dubbed version when shown outside France, for the simple reason that as long as audiences were reading subtitles, they were being not just distracted, but actively distanced, from the images on-screen.

Do not take any of the above to mean, however, that I am actively endorsing the validity of the English dubs over and above the



original Mandarin and/or Cantonese audio! While the films may not always feature the voices of the original cast, they were written and filmed in Mandarin (or Cantonese in the case of *Dirty Ho*, though even before this it was not uncommon for a mix of languages to be spoken during filming) nonetheless, and viewing

them this way will always lead to a richer and more culturally appropriate viewing experience. The shortcuts taken in preparing the English dubs, from working with poor translations to retooling the dialogue to fit the lip movements, mean that they remain a diluted and compromised version of the film, regardless of how carefully they may have been prepared or how entertaining they may be. Take, for example, *Heroes of the East*, a film centred around the longstanding culture clash between Chinese and Japanese martial artists. After several scenes in which actors from the two countries speak their own language, the impasse is finally broken in the final scene, in which Gordon Liu's climactic speech is simultaneously translated by Yasuaki Kurata into Japanese for his assembled countrymen. Only in the English dub, the characters present have already been speaking the same language throughout the film, and the finale ultimately comes across as Kurata obnoxiously talking over Liu for no apparent reason!

A newcomer to the Shaw universe may be understandably overwhelmed by the various options offered on these Blu-rays, and not sure where to start. Assuming you are comfortable reading subtitles, and wish to watch the film in the language it was originally produced in, simply press "Play" once you see the main menu screen. The Blu-rays enclosed in this set have been authored so that the default audio track that plays is the 'correct' one, meaning Mandarin with English subtitles for all films except *Dirty Ho*, which automatically plays in Cantonese with English subtitles. However, it was unthinkable that we would not also carry over the English dub tracks, which are accessible via the Setup menus on each disc. (If you have the time and inclination, perhaps try watching both original and dubbed presentations back-to-back.) Whichever poison you prefer, Arrow Video are delighted to be able to cater to all tastes in these definitive Blu-ray presentations.

REFERENCES

The Art of Dubbing: An Interview with Ted Thomas. 2011 featurette by Steve Ryfle, from *Godzilla vs. Megalon* DVD/Blu-ray by Media Blasters.

Anon (2015, as "stethacantus"); "How The North American Release of the Shaw Brothers Movies Was Botched" <https://discover.hubpages.com/entertainment/How-The-North-American-Release-of-the-Shaw-Brothers-Movies-Was-Botched>

Chu, King-wei (2006): "Interview with Big Brother Chen Kuan-tai" <http://www.hkcinemagic.com/en/page.asp?aid=223&page=4>



Earnshaw, Graham (2019): "King [sic] Fu Film Dubbing" <https://earnshaw.com/writings/memoirs/king-fu-film-dubbing>

Homenick, Brett (2017): "Man of a Thousand Voices! Hong Kong Voice Actor Ted Thomas on His Prolific Dubbing Career!" <https://vantagepointinterviews.com/2017/05/17/man-of-a-thousand-voices-hong-kong-voice-actor-ted-thomas-on-his-prolific-dubbing-career/>

Homenick, Brett (2020): "Chasing Kung Fu Dreams! Peter Boczar on Acting and Dubbing in Hong Kong!" <https://vantagepointinterviews.com/2020/07/25/chasing-kung-fu-dreams-peter-boczar-on-acting-and-dubbing-in-hong-kong/>

Magnan-Park, Aaron Han Joon (2018): "Dubbese fu: The kung fu wave and the aesthetics of imperfect lip synchronization", *The Journal of Chinese Cinema*, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.



ABOUT THE RESTORATIONS

All twelve films in this boxset are presented in their original 2.35:1 aspect ratios with their original Mandarin, English, and Cantonese (where applicable) monoaural soundtracks. Every effort has been made to present these films in their original and complete versions using the best materials available.

Five Shaolin Masters, *Shaolin Temple*, *Mighty Peking Man*, *Executioners from Shaolin*, *Heroes of the East* and the shorter Alternate Version of *Chinatown Kid* were remastered by Celestial Pictures in 2003-2007, as part of an initiative to digitally restore the entire Shaw Brothers library. The High Definition masters of these restorations, which included the original Mandarin and English mono soundtracks, were supplied to Arrow Films by Celestial Pictures.

King Boxer, *The Boxer from Shantung*, *Challenge of the Masters*, *The Five Venoms*, *Crippled Avengers*, *Dirty Ho* and the longer international cut of *Chinatown Kid* have all been newly restored by Arrow Films in 2021, in collaboration with L'Imagine Ritrovata, Hong Kong Film Archive and Celestial Pictures.

The original 35mm negatives for *King Boxer*, *The Boxer from Shantung*, *Challenge of the Masters*, *The Five Venoms*, *Crippled Avengers* and *Dirty Ho* were scanned at L'Imagine Ritrovata Asia and restored in 2K resolution at L'Imagine Ritrovata, Bologna. The films were graded at R3Store Studios, London. These restorations have used the entire film negative without resorting to the practice of "frame-cutting" resulting in the loss of film frames at each negative splice point.

The mono mixes were remastered from the original sound negatives at L'Imagine Ritrovata. Additional sound remastering was completed by Matthew Jarman/Bad Princess Productions. The audio synch will often appear loose against the picture, due to the fact that the dialogue and sound effects were recorded entirely in post-production, as per the production standards of the period.

A 35mm Internegative of the International Version of *Chinatown Kid* was scanned at L'Imagine Ritrovata Asia and restored in 2K resolution at L'Imagine Ritrovata, Bologna. The film was graded at R3Store Studios, London.

The mono mix was remastered from the original sound negatives at L'Imagine Ritrovata. Additional sound remastering was completed by Matthew Jarman/Bad Princess Productions.

An additional scene from *Chinatown Kid* missing from the original elements was scanned from a vintage 35mm print and graded in 2K resolution at American Genre Film Archive (AGFA).

All original materials supplied for these restorations were made available from the Hong Kong Film Archive via Celestial Pictures.

Restorations supervised by **James White** and **James Flower**, Arrow Films.

L'Imagine Ritrovata, Bologna: **Gilles Barberis**, **Alessia Navantieri**, **Charlotte Oddo**, **Caterina Palpacelli**, **Davide Pozzi**, **Elena Tammaccaro**

L'Imagine Ritrovata, Asia: **Bede Chang**, **Kay Ng**, **Kathy Li**

R3Store Studios: **Gerry Gedge**, **Jo Griffin**, **Rich Watson**

Bad Princess Productions: **Matthew Jarman**

Celestial Pictures: **Jolie Lo**, **Angela Fung**, **Gigi Ko**, **Apple Chiu**, **Elton Lee**

Excerpts from vintage 35mm feature print elements for *King Boxer*, *Mighty Peking Man*, *Five Shaolin Masters* and *Shaolin Temple* and vintage 35mm trailer prints for *King Boxer*, *Shaolin Temple*, *Mighty Peking Man*, *Chinatown Kid*, *Heroes of the East* and *Dirty Ho* were scanned and graded in 2K resolution at American Genre Film Archive (AGFA) and R3Store Studios.

Additional print materials were made available from American Genre Film Archive (AGFA), Harry Guerro, Scott Napier and King-Wei Chu.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs & Booklet Produced by **James Flower**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert**, **Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**

QC **Aidan Doyle**, **Alan Simmons**

Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**

Authoring **Leroy Moore**, **The Engine House Media Services**

Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Artwork **Sam Gilbey**, **Matthew Griffin**, **Chris Malbon**, **Jacob Phillips**, **Ilan Sheady**, **Tony Stella**, **Darren Wheeling**, **Jolyon Yates**

Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

- Simon Abrams
- Alex Agran
- Frédéric Ambroisine
- Bret Berg
- Terrence J. Brady
- Bede Cheng
- Apple Chiu
- King-wei Chu
- Jonathan Clements
- Travis Crawford
- Sebastian del Castillo
- Petra Deacon
- David Desser
- Warren De Wolfe
- Matt Frank
- Angela Fung
- Harry Guerro
- Dan Halsted
- Alex Kidd
- Gigi Ko
- Elton Lee
- Jolie Lo
- Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park
- Jacob Milligan
- Keizo Murase
- Scott Napier
- Catarina Palpacelli
- Ivan Peycheff
- Davide Pozzi
- Tony Rayns
- Jon Robertson
- Daisuke Sato
- Susan Shaw
- Mirko Stegman
- Kath Summersgill
- Elena Tammaccaro



