





CONTENTS

Cast and Crew ... 4

A Deadly Beauty (2021)

by Anne Billson ... 7

King Hu and Run Run Shaw:

The Clash of Two Cinema Legends (2010)

by George Chun Han Wang ... 15

About the Transfer ... 43

COME DRINK WITH ME

大醉俠 / Dà zuì xiá (Mandarin) / The Great Drunken Hero (Chinese title, translit.)
Original release date: 7th April 1966 (Hong Kong)

CAST

Cheng Pei-pei Golden Swallow

Yueh Hua Fan Dabei (Drunken Cat)

Yan Chi-ching Abbot Liao Kong

Chen Hung-lich Jade-Face Tiger

Lee Wan-chung "Smiling Tiger" Zu Gan

Wong Chung Zhang Buqing

Shen Lao Wu Bao

Feng Yi Hou Zhen

Han Ying-chieh, Lin Chien-chuan, Ku Feng, Kwan Ying-chi

Jade-Face Tiger's Men

CREW

Directed by **King Hu**

Produced by **Run Run Shaw**

Written by **King Hu, Erh Yang (Ting Shan-hsi)**

Cinematography by **Ho Lan-shan (Tadashi Nishimoto)**

Martial Arts Director **Han Ying-chieh**

Assistant Directors **Erh Yang (Ting Shan-hsi), Tsou Han-pin**

Sound Recording **Wang Yong-hua**

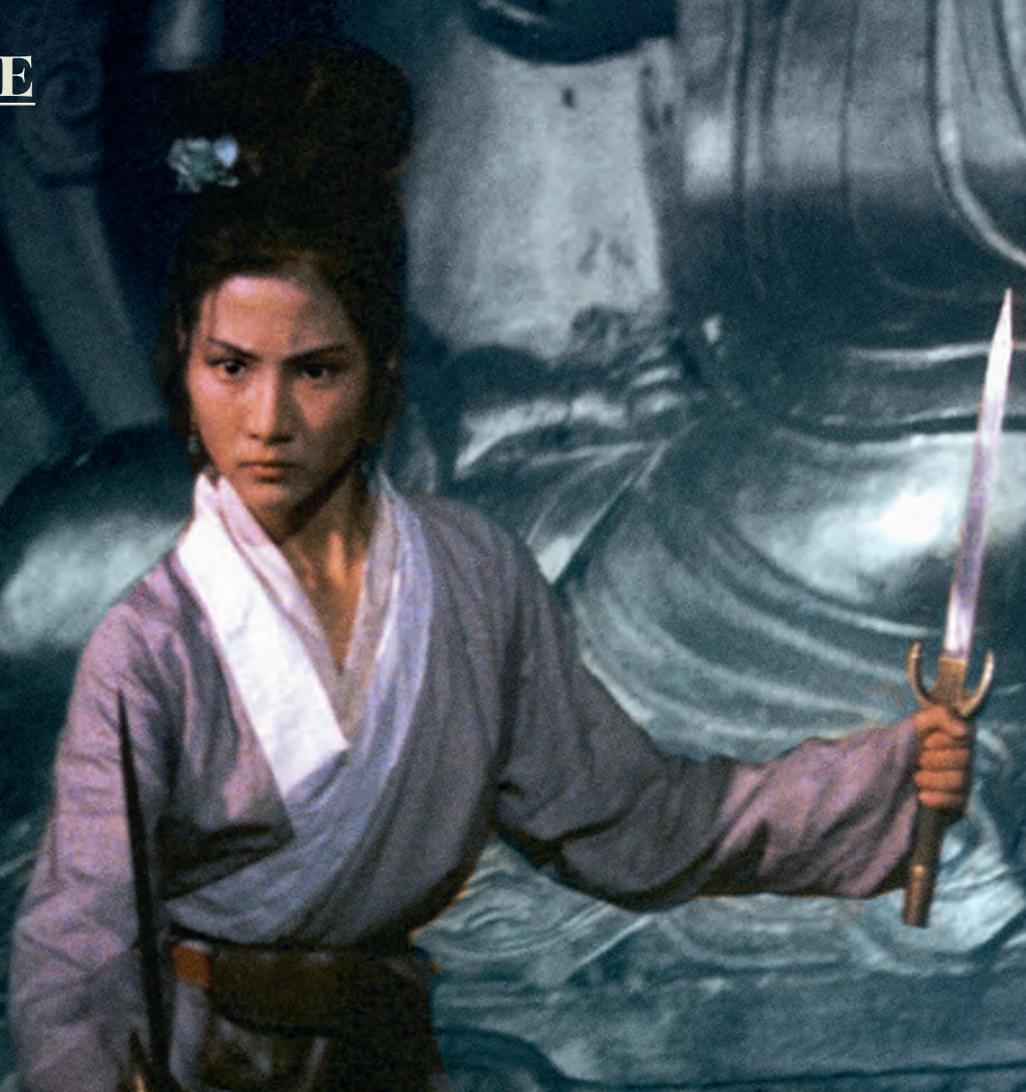
Set Decoration **Johnson Tsao**

Edited by **Chiang Hsing-loong**

Make-up **Wu Jiang**

Music composed by **Zhou Lan-ping**

Music supervised by **Eddie Wang**





A DEADLY BEAUTY

by Anne Billson

“A girl who is beautiful, but who can kill people as if they were cattle.” – Cheng Pei-pei¹

When Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wo hu cang long*) first danced across the screen in 2000, critics were lavish in their astonishment. “You’ve never seen a martial arts movie like this one,” wrote the reviewer for the *San Diego Metropolitan*. “Easily the best-acted film in the martial-arts canon... and its slant on feminist empowerment makes it the most unique,” gushed the reviewer from *Rolling Stone*, while the critic from the *New York Post* marveled, “You have never seen a movie like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* because there has never been a movie like it.”

Except there *had* been a movie like it. Many movies, in fact. Lee’s film was paying homage to an established Chinese subgenre: the *wuxia pian*, historical swashbucklers with fantastical elements and knightly heroes possessing martial skills so advanced they resemble superpowers, enabling them to pull off preposterous leaps or flit across rooftops like airborne ballerinas. (Kung fu purists would one day refer to such stunts, disparagingly, as “wire-work”.) In 2000, post *Alien* (1979)’s Ripley, and before *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) had spearheaded a boom in TV action heroines, western audiences were not yet accustomed to sees female characters fighting alongside – or against – the men. But Lee’s film cleaves to Hong Kong cinema tradition by making two of its four leading action roles female. Most tellingly, Jade Fox – the chief villain – is played by a bona fide *wuxia* legend: Cheng Pei-pei, who in 1969 had been hailed as “Queen of Martial Arts”.

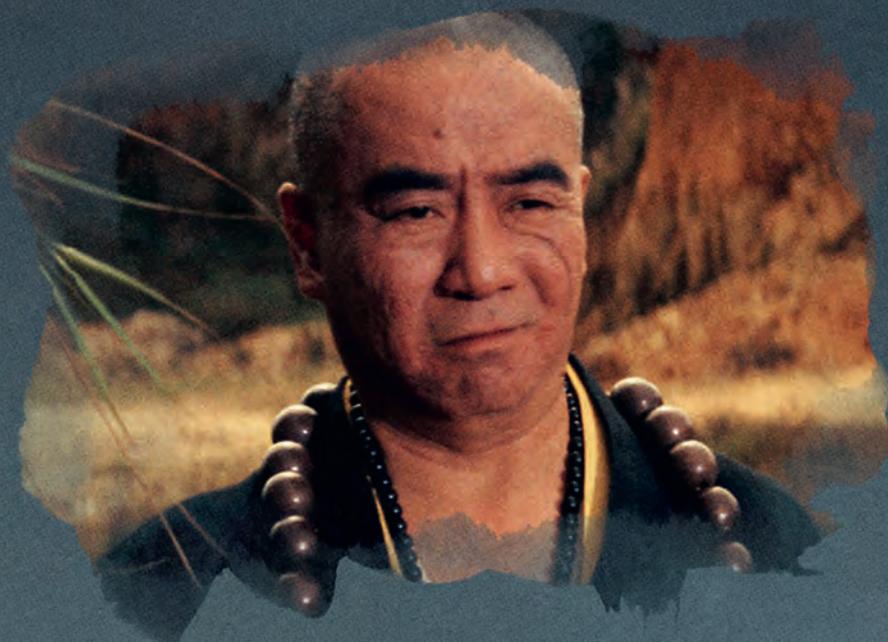
“Stardom is Her Destiny,” begins a 1965 article in *Southern Screen*, a Shaw Brothers-backed film magazine in which the studio promoted its up-and-coming starlets. “She is a willowy girl with an almond face, long pony tail, brilliant eyes, and matchless figure. But when the world learns of her fame, it will stem from the fact that she impersonates a man with perfection... Only 17, she hails from Shaw Brothers’ own stable, the training school, and was given a contract long before she graduated. Her ballet and acting have been the talk of the town because both are superb.”

In the early 1960s, it was not uncommon for actresses to play male roles in films adapted from *huangmei* opera (Ivy Ling Po, for example, specialized in playing male characters around this time). But the male impersonation that would be Chen's breakthrough was not in the film that the *Southern Screen* article was promoting: *The Lotus Lamp* (*Bao lian deng*, 1965), an all-singing opera adaptation in which 17-year-old Cheng plays the young male lead (and sprouts a comically unconvincing beard in the film's latter stages). The Shaw Brothers film that put her on the map would come out the following year: King Hu's *Come Drink with Me* (1966).

"We have at least 50 actresses and 25 actors," studio head Run Run Shaw declared in a 1964 interview. "In Hong Kong the actresses are more important." For the first half of the 1960s, his studio produced epic costume dramas, Chinese opera adaptations and romances starring female superstars such as Li Li-hua or Lin Dai. The films were in Mandarin, with lavish production design a world away from the everyday lives of Cantonese-speaking audiences in Kowloon's more impoverished districts. Cheng recalled in a later interview that Run Run Shaw didn't care for *Come Drink with Me* since it didn't feature enough pretty ladies, and its female lead spent half the film dressed as a man. Nevertheless, Hu's film inspired not just a new wave of *wuxia* film heroines, but a new way of filming combat that would influence later generations of filmmakers such as Tsui Hark.

Hu was born in 1932 in Beijing, where he studied at the National Art Institute before emigrating to Hong Kong in 1949. He worked as designer, radio producer, assistant film director and actor before his first directing credit with Shaw Brothers: *Sons of the Good Earth* (*Da di er nu*, 1965), set in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War. But he found his groove with his second film; *Come Drink with Me* is an intoxicating blend of action and intrigue set in 14th century China. Bandits kidnap a governor's son and threaten to kill him unless one of their leaders is released from prison. The kidnapped man's sister, disguised as a young male warrior called Golden Swallow, sets out to rescue him, helped by a mysterious beggar called Drunken Cat. After the kidnapping prologue, the first act takes place in an inn, making this the first of what is now known as Hu's Inn Trilogy (*Dragon Inn* [*Longmen kezhan*, 1967] and *The Fate of Lee Khan* [*Ying chun ge zhi Fengbo*, 1973] being the other two, though he also contributed an inn-set segment to the 1970 Taiwanese anthology film *Four Moods* [*Xi nu ai lei*]).

Come Drink with Me introduces many of the features that would recur in Hu's later work: the female swordfighter (sometimes dressed as a man), and an impression that no one is who they appear to be – not just Golden Swallow and Drunken Cat (played by Yueh Hua, on his way to being a regular Shaw Brothers presence), but also many of the inn's customers, who in the first of the film's big action set-pieces, turn out to be would-be



assassins commanded by Smiling Tiger (the film's Number Three Villain), who flicks open his fan to signal the attack on the lone warrior. Golden Swallow's every movement is precise and graceful as she effortlessly parries the objects thrown at her – a wine jug, coins and a bench – before the conflict escalates and daggers are drawn.

The director drew on his knowledge of Beijing Opera, including the music, and the use of archetypes familiar from Chinese theater (warriors, drunkards, bandits, monks). Most radically, with the help of choreographer Han Ying-chieh, he filmed the fights as though they were dance. "I didn't want to use real martial arts," he said. "I had seen it in tournaments. I didn't find it very beautiful and I didn't understand a thing about it. As a matter of fact, I still don't."²



The action scenes observe a slow-quick-slow rhythm, alternating between periods of still watchfulness, in which the heroine sizes up her circling foes, and flurries of violent movement, conveyed as much through editing as through filmed motion while tension is heightened by the percussion and flute of the soundtrack. And his leading lady, Shaw Brothers starlet Cheng, had trained as a dancer rather than as a martial artist. “I had a zestful body and so he said to me that he thought I could be a very good martial art lady,” she remembered later. “My head was small compared to my legs being so long, so he had me wear a hat and a long gown to balance things out.”³ With unsmiling gravity, unblinking concentration and a sense of pent-up skill to spare, she is the perfect embodiment of the archetypal female *wuxia* warrior.

Golden Swallow easily outclasses her opponents, though unwittingly gets help from Drunken Cat, who at one point pushes her out of harm’s way from a sneak attack while camouflaging his movements as tipsy bumbling. The enemy goons are played for laughs as

they clutch their minor flesh wounds, groaning. But as the film goes on, the clashes grow progressively more serious, with bloodier, more lethal results as the heroine confronts the white-faced Jade-Face Tiger, a less than honorable opponent who throws poison darts, and then, finally, leads a company of skilled female guards in a hostage exchange that goes askew. It’s notable, though, that it isn’t Golden Swallow who has the big showdown with Abbot Liao Kong, but Drunken Cat, who in the meantime has revealed his true identity.

In fact, the story was based on an opera called *The Drunkard Beggar* (*Jiu gai*) by Huanzhulouzhu (Li Shoumin), and it seems to have been Hu and his screenwriter, Ting Shan-hsi, who expanded the female role. Indeed, the film’s Chinese title (*Da zui xia*) translates as *Great Drunken Hero*, while the English title sidesteps gender. Though *Come Drink with Me* was well received, Hu was reluctant to tie himself to one of Shaw Brothers’ punishing contracts (filmographies show that the studio’s top directors, such as Chang Cheh and Lo Wei, would make anything up to six films a year). In search of greater artistic control, he went to Taiwan to make *Dragon Inn*, the second of his “Inn Trilogy”, which set box-office records in many Asian territories and, in Hong Kong, turned out to be the second-highest grossing film of 1968, behind *You Only Live Twice* (1967).

In 1968, Shaw Brothers brought out a sequel to *Come Drink with Me*. Ironically, while the sequel’s title was *Golden Swallow* (*Jin yan zi*), the character herself played second fiddle to an antihero called Silver Roc, played by Shaw Brothers’ biggest male action star, Jimmy Wang Yu, who had shot to prominence in *One Armed Swordsman* (*Du bei dao*, 1967). The director of that film was Chang Cheh, who was also assigned to direct *Golden Swallow*. Cheh’s approach couldn’t have been more different than that of his predecessor. Chang would go on to be one of Shaw Brothers’ star directors of the 1970s, specializing in “heroic bloodshed” – violent, po-faced, somewhat masochistic bromances in which the bruising fight scenes take center stage and female characters, if they exist at all, take a backseat to the brotherhood.

Chang wrote in his autobiography, “King Hu was more of an ‘artist’ than I was, and his choreography and aesthetics were more on the traditional side. The domination of the female lead was the trend of the Chinese cinema at that time.” In a later interview, Cheng expressed her displeasure in the sidelining of her character – “Of course that annoyed me,” (though she worked with Chang again, the following year, on *The Flying Dagger* [*Fei dao shou*]). By the standards of Chang’s later work, Cheng’s role in *Golden Swallow* is still a fairly substantial female role, albeit relegated to a romantic triangle subplot. Lo Lieh plays Golden Whip, whose love for Golden Swallow is unrequited since she pines for Silver Roc, who repeatedly tries to attract her attention by the questionable method of slaughtering everyone in sight. (The fight scenes are inventively staged by Lau Kar-leung, who would

later have a falling out with Chang and go on to become one of Shaw Brothers' other major martial arts directors of the 1970s.)

By the late 1960s, half of Shaw Brothers' output was action. Gradually, the female superstars of Hong Kong cinema were supplanted by manly heroes such as Wang Yu, David Chiang, Ti Lung and, of course, Bruce Lee, whose films for Golden Harvest (founded in 1970 by former Shaw executives Raymond Chow and Leonard Ho) turned kung fu into a global phenomenon. The female warriors were sidelined – though not extinct.

Shaw Brothers got their money's worth from Cheng Pei-pei before she put her career on pause to start a family; among her more noteworthy films is *The Lady Hermit* (*Zhong kui niang zi*, 1971) in which she plays a wounded warrior mentoring a headstrong younger woman. King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* (*Xia nu*, 1971), which flopped on its first release in Hong Kong, but caused a stir at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival, stars Hsu Feng as a female warrior who leaves the leading man literally holding the baby. Hsu also plays a redoubtable villainess in the ensemble cast of the same director's *The Fate of Lee Khan*, which features six strong action roles for women.

In *The 14 Amazons* (*Shi si nu ying hao*, 1972), women avenge the killing of their clan's menfolk. One of that film's stars, Lily Ho, also stars in Chor Yuen's extraordinary *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (*Ai nu*, 1972) which combines sex trafficking and softcore lesbianism with bloody martial arts vengeance. Yuen's 1970s and 1980s Shaw Brothers studio-shot *wuxia*, often adapted from novels by Gu Long and starring the very personable Ti Lung, may lack Hu's high-toned aesthetic, but their stylized blend of historical intrigue, dance-like martial choreography, outlandish weapons (exploding eyeballs or poisoned peacock feathers!) and, crucially, female characters who can wield a sword with the best of them, are like King Hu given a pulp makeover.

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¹ Cheng Pei-pei describing her screen persona in an interview with Frank Bren, *Metro*, 1997

² King Hu interview by Charles Tesson, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 1984

³ Cheng Pei-pei interview by Frank Bren, *Metro*, 1997





KING HU AND RUN RUN SHAW: THE CLASH OF TWO CINEMA LEGENDS

by George Chun Han Wang

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ABSTRACT

*King Hu is revered as one of the most influential film-makers of Chinese cinema. Run Run Shaw is the legendary tycoon behind the renowned media kingdom Shaw Brothers. After Hu joined Shaw Brothers in 1958 as an actor, it was Shaw who offered Hu his first career opportunities to write and direct. But animosity and differences came between them to the extent that they would never collaborate again after making history with their groundbreaking success *Da zui xia/Come Drink with Me* (1966). This article chronicles King Hu's arduous yet invaluable tenure at the flourishing film studio operated by Run Run Shaw. It examines the reasons for their differences and speculates on the possible outcomes to Hu's subsequent career had their contentious relationship never existed.*

To most film scholars, historians, older-generation filmgoers, and young or new fans alike King Hu' was one of the most important film directors working in the martial arts genre. His pioneering film *Da zui xia/Come Drink with Me* (1966) is regarded as the "masterpiece that marked the birth of modern martial arts cinema" (Burdeau 2004: 84). Behind the grandeur of the film's accomplishments, however, lies the intriguing journey of a novice film-maker who struggled to balance artistry and reality under Run Run Shaw's movie factory system. Although Hu and Shaw never collaborated again after *Come Drink with Me*, the momentum of the film's success continued to influence future generations of film-makers. *Come Drink with Me* not only marked a significant milestone that heralded Shaw Brothers' emergence as the last century's action genre powerhouse, but also paved the way for Hu's later career-defining films: *Longmen kezhan/Dragon Inn* (1967) and *Xia nu/A Touch of Zen* (1971). By delving into historical accounts of King Hu's career before, during and immediately after his strenuous yet invaluable tenure at Shaw Brothers, this article examines the irreconcilable differences and the troubled relationship between two cinema legends. It furthermore speculates on the possible outcomes to Hu's subsequent career, had such unfortunate rivalry never existed in the history of Chinese cinema.

GEOPOLITICAL BACKDROP AND EARLY CAREER IN HONG KONG

King Hu was born in Beijing in 1932, and although he grew up in a comfortable upper-class household, he was not shielded from the negative impacts of the era's political turmoil. Soon after the Lugouqiao/Marco Polo Bridge incident² sparked the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), the Hu household fled for safety to several towns in the southern Hebei province before returning to Beijing (Hu et al. 1998: 7–10). A few years after Japan's surrender, Mao Zedong's Communist Party began to win the long-fought civil war against Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist Party. As the Communist People's Liberation Army took over cities and villages across China, some mainlanders fled to more stable areas such as British-ruled Hong Kong or Chiang Kai-Shek's anti-communist bastion, Taiwan. Though travel permits to Hong Kong were "harder to get than the road to heaven" (Huang 1999: 156), Hu was among the lucky few to obtain one. When Hu arrived in Hong Kong by himself in 1949, he was seventeen years old.

Before leaving Beijing, King Hu attended high school at the prestigious Peking Academy.³ His future goal was to pursue a college education in the United States: "I already obtained the application forms⁴ [...] but the civil war made it difficult to go [to the United States]" (Hu et al. 1998: 28–9). Once in Hong Kong, Hu had to quickly adjust to a new life of total independence, away from family and home. After losing all his money in a scam to a mainland (Li 1983: 243; Huang 1999: 157), he desperately needed a way to survive, and soon landed a proofreading position at the Jiahua/Kawah⁵ printing company. This first job was an opportune learning experience that contributed to his constant pursuit of accuracy and meticulous attention to detail (Huang 1999: 267); as he described it: "All listed phone numbers on the yellow pages have to be absolutely correct [...] furthermore, proofreading Buddhist bibles involved reading volumes full of difficult characters with confusing definitions" (Hu et al. 1998: 29–30). However, he also learned a bitter lesson from this entry-level position – that his perfectionist approach was not always appreciated. This arose from a misspelled English word he discovered in one of his assignments. When his boss disagreed, Hu proved himself correct with a dictionary. He was fired immediately (Li 1983: 244).

Thereafter, Hu worked sporadically at a variety of tasks, including illustrating posters, painting giant movie billboards and tutoring English part-time. The impressive artistic skills exhibited on Hu's posters caught the eye of a student's father, Shen Tianyin, producer and executive at the Chang Cheng/Great Wall Motion Pictures Company, who graciously offered Hu a steady job as a set decorator (Hu et al. 1998: 30). This was when Hu established his life-long friendship with rising film-maker Li Hanxiang/Li Han-Hsiang,⁶ who had previously held the same position at Great Wall. Like a big brother and mentor, Li was instrumental in

nurturing Hu's early film career in acting and directing. In his memoir, Li vividly described how Hu lost another job: Hu needed a certain cocktail set for the next day, but the props storage manager did not have it in possession. Since Hu had personally purchased the set for a previous production, he knew it was turned in for storage. Knowing for a fact that the manager was secretly operating a film-props rental business, Hu accused him of clandestinely leasing props to outsiders for extra cash. The confrontation escalated, resulting in both parties being terminated from their positions (Li 1983: 262–5). The unpleasant experience of being fired twice in Hu's early Hong Kong years, though harsh, might have conditioned him to cope better with his future encounters at Shaw Brothers, affording him the necessary humility and endurance to accomplish *Come Drink with Me* before breaking with Run Run Shaw.

BECOMING AN ACTOR

In 1953, actor and director Yan Jun/Yen Chun was looking for a young Mandarin speaker to play a rebellious teenager in his upcoming film for Yong Hua/Yung Hwa Motion Picture Studios Ltd.: *Xiaosheng leiyin/Laughter and Tears*⁷ featuring future megastar Linda Lin Dai. On the recommendation of screenwriter/assistant director Li Hanxiang, Yan offered the part to King Hu. In his acting debut, Hu did surprisingly well playing the unruly adolescent character. The same team soon made another film, *Jin feng/Golden Phoenix* (1955). Hu again performed as a teenager:⁸ unattractive, mentally challenged but helplessly in love with Linda Lin Dai's pretty girl character. *Golden Phoenix* successfully established Hu's reputation in character roles and inaugurated his acting career. As film scholar Stephen Teo remarked, "it was Hu's proficiency at speaking Mandarin, his native language, that probably got him contacts and jobs in other Mandarin language studios in Hong Kong" (2002). While continuing to perform at various film studios on a freelance basis, Hu also found a steady job in broadcast radio, producing Mandarin-language programs for Voice of America (Hu et al. 1998: 40–2).

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong film industry began evolving significantly. Run Run Shaw, the youngest of the four Shaw brothers, left his Singapore base for Hong Kong in 1957 to reinvent the family business. He assumed control of the rather stagnant 'Shaw and Sons' film company operated by second brother Runde Shaw. Under the banner Shaw Brothers (HK) Ltd.,⁹ Run Run Shaw commenced development of an unprecedented 46-acre Movietown studio complex, promising numerous soundstages, state-of-the-art editing, post-production sound and lab facilities all accessible in one location.

In 1958, Hu's life reached a critical juncture. He was offered a coveted permanent position in Washington DC through Voice of America; however, he was eager to embrace the exciting

new opportunities in the flourishing local film industry. Persuaded by Li Hanxiang, Hu joined Shaw in 1958 as a contract actor. He abandoned an American dream, foregoing the stability of a white-collar life as a United States government employee to pursue his aspirations in film-making. His driving ambition was the prospect of eventually becoming a director (Hu et al. 1998: 49).

ACTING CAREER AT SHAW BROTHERS

Many fans of *huangmeidiao* (Yellow Plum opera) films can remember King Hu in Li Hanxiang's momentous success *Jiangshan meiren/The Kingdom and the Beauty* (1959). It was the first Shaw Brothers film to conquer the western market, and the first Chinese movie ever to be released in Australia (Shaw Online 2007b). Hu's performance was honored with the best supporting actor award from the 1959 Asian-Pacific Film Festival. Although Hu had hoped that his accomplishment in acting would be a sure-fire springboard to directing assignments, in this ambition he fell flat. He recalled a conversation with then Shaw Brothers distribution executive Zhou Duwen/Doven Chow: "He said to me, 'Don't give it too much of a hope, just concentrate on being an actor'. That was such a shocking setback for me [...] Originally during contract talks, it was made clear that I would become a director, but once I abandoned my plans to go to Washington DC, no one ever mentioned about my directing position again" (Hu et al. 1998: 49-50).

Apparently, it was not in Run Run Shaw's best interest to move one of his popular actors into the directing chair at that time. Hu was given more acting assignments, appearing in at least ten films released between 1960 and 1961, many of them contemporary *wenyi pian* (melodramas). It was through his own contacts that Hu was offered a few opportunities to venture outside of acting: Li gave Hu an assistant director position in *Qiannu youhun/The Enchanting Shadow* (1960) and Yan Jun hired Hu as a screenwriter for *Huatiancuo/Bride Napping* (1962).

In the early 1960s, Shaw was in fierce competition with rival studio MP&GI (Motion Picture & General Investment Co. Ltd.). They vigorously fought for talent. When both studios tried to secure a deal with Linda Lin Dai, she ended up diplomatically signing a three-picture contract with Shaw, as well as another three-picture deal with MP&GI at the same time (Zhong 2004: 201). The two studios also engaged in dishonest practices, such as producing double versions of the rival's projects. For instance, as MP&GI commenced its plans for an ambitious film based on the classical novel *Hongloumeng/Dream of the Red Chamber* in 1961, Shaw quickly produced a *huangmeidiao* version of the same story, *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Yuan Ciu Xia*, 1962), which featured Hu in a minor role. While MP&GI invested heavily by hiring legendary writer Zhang Ailing/Eileen Chang for the screen adaptation, Shaw

kept his screenplay highly confidential. Not even Le Di/Betty Lou Ti,¹⁰ the lead actress, was allowed to read it. She was only given the lines and plots on the set as necessary (Zhong 2004: 207). Filmed simultaneously on two soundstages, with the cast and crew working long hours day and night, Shaw quickly finished and released his version to the moviegoers first. As a result, MP&GI aborted their unfinished project entirely (Zhong 2004: 201).

Being involved in the controversial process of making a film with the main purpose of overthrowing competition, Hu had an opportunity to witness Shaw's aggressive and often unethical business tactics. Had Hu taken this experience as the reality of the industry environment, he might have foreseen the conflict that lay ahead. More importantly, he perhaps should have sensed that Shaw's ruthless determination was better left unchallenged.

RED BEARD AND THE STORY OF SUE SAN

King Hu's first opportunity to direct emerged in May 1962 when his ex-boss at Voice of America, Raymond Chow, by then the top executive at Shaw Brothers, signed a co-production deal with Taiying/Taiwan Film Company to produce *Hong huzi/Red Beard*. As the screenwriter, Hu was given the opportunity to direct and star in the film. Perhaps in order to assure quality and completion, Shaw assigned Hu's acting mentor Yan Jun as a co-director/lead actor. Unfortunately, after reconnoitring for possible shooting locations in Taiwan, Hu was informed that the project was to be suspended indefinitely (Huang 1999: 158). One of the possible reasons for the suspension was Shaw's concerns over Hu's inexperience as a director.

Later that year, Hu was given approval to adapt and direct a well-known Ming dynasty tale, *Yu tangchun/The Story of Sue San*. This was one of Shaw Brothers' four *huangmeidiao* projects¹¹ to take advantage of their newly acquired Eastman Color and Shawscope technologies. They were all being directed by less experienced film-makers, under the supervision of Li Hanxiang (Chiao 2007: 267). Through this package deal opportunity, Hu officially became a contracted director at Shaw Brothers (Shi 1980: 87). It was comprehensible for Shaw to offer the novice director a film that could be produced entirely in-house at the Movietown facilities. Shaw is known to have been significantly involved in every project. According to director Zhang Che/Chang Cheh, "The first thing [Shaw] did when arriving at work every day, was to screen rushes from all directors shot the day before" (Zhang 1989: 32). As one of four similar productions, *The Story of Sue San's* overall budget could also be greatly reduced after cost sharing. In contrast, *Red Beard* was to be filmed on location in Taiwan, making the project more expensive and difficult for Shaw to monitor Hu's progress closely.

There were several unanticipated circumstances that mired the production as Hu began filming *The Story of Sue San*. According to *Dragon Inn* producer Sha Rong-feng/Shu Yungfong (2006: 133), due to the pregnancy of lead actress Betty Loh Ti, and her month-long post-natal recuperation, the production schedules were postponed. Furthermore, midway into principal photography, lead actor Zhao Lei/Chiu Lui decided he would not renew his contract with Shaw Brothers, halting the project again. Film historian Huang (1999: 159) also described that Hu had to reshoot many scenes repeatedly. Perhaps being too much of a perfectionist, perhaps still inexperienced at directing, whatever the reasons behind the delays and extra expense, Shaw was not pleased. When *The Story of Sue San* was 70 per cent complete, Shaw suspended the entire production.



With two back-to-back project cancellations, it would have been difficult for Hu not to harbor resentment towards Shaw. However, it is doubtful that Shaw cancelled either of Hu's films strictly on personal grounds. Closing down an ongoing production at any given stage would always translate into loss of human resources, time and capital. For someone who was overseeing many other projects,¹² halting a production was more likely to be a loss-stopping measure, consciously made for business reasons. In Hu's case, his inexperience and his inability to adhere to the production schedule and specified budget were negative factors that Shaw had to consider when assessing the profitability of the film. Among the four *huangmeidiao* films made simultaneously, Wang Yueding's *Hong Niang* was also halted and never completed. According to Li, "After viewing the rushes, the boss was very unsatisfied [...] therefore he ordered to suspend the production" (Li 1984b: 19). Nevertheless, Shaw's strict adherence to business concerns aggravated vital relationships in an industry defined by creativity. What Run Run Shaw regrettably failed to notice and appreciate were King Hu's extraordinary gifts in film-making.

LOVE ETERNE AND LI HANXIANG'S DEPARTURE

When Run Run Shaw learned that MP&GI was planning to remake the popular classic *Liangshanbo yǔ Zhuyingtai* *Love Eterne*, he asked Li Hanxiang to create another version for Shaw Brothers within one month. Li quickly assembled the four-writer team of King Hu, Xiao Tung, Song Cunshou and Wang Yueding. The team started working on the screenplay at 10 o'clock one morning. By 5 o'clock that afternoon, a printed copy of *Love Eterne* had been placed on Shaw's desk ready for his review. Two days later, principal photography commenced (Li 1984b: 195). As the primary assistant director, Hu's contribution to *Love Eterne* was significant. He collaborated efficiently with Li and rushed through the production expeditiously. Released in April 1963, Shaw Brothers' *Love Eterne*, starring Betty Loh Ti and unknown actress Ivy Ling Bo, went on to break box office records and rapidly developed, 'particularly in Taiwan, into an unprecedented cultural phenomenon that critics have characterized as a craze and frenzy' (Curry 2008: 177). Precipitously finished in two weeks, *Love Eterne* was a rather effortless success unforeseen by Shaw Brothers (Chiao 2003: 77). Hu stated that "Run Run Shaw was not that creative [...] he rushed to make the film, so MP&GI wouldn't have gotten ahead" (Hu et al. 1998: 58). The release of MP&GI's version, *The Romance of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* (Yan Jun), was therefore postponed until December 1964.

In an apparent act of retaliation, MP&GI managed to entice Li Hanxiang into breaching his contract with Shaw Brothers in late 1963. Buoyed by the lucrative financial backing of MP&GI boss Lu Yuntao/Loke Wan Tho, and Taiwan's Lianbang/Union Film Company founding partner Sha Yungfong, Li established his own production company, Guolian/Grand Motion

Picture Co., Ltd. Being Shaw Brothers' top director after the enormous success of *Love Eterne*, Li's abrupt exit for Taiwan dealt a serious blow to Run Run Shaw. As Li began filming *Qi xiannu/Seven Fairies* (1963), a *huangmeidiao* project he initiated while at Shaw Brothers, Shaw enlisted Yan Jun, He Menghua, Chen Youshin and King Hu to produce Shaw's own version, *Seven Fairies/A Maid from Heaven* (1963) (Li 1984a: 230). Li remembered, "We spent seventeen and one-half days to finish the film. The Shaw Brothers version took longer to complete even with four directors working overnight" (Chiao 2007: 194). Both films were released¹³ in Taipei to equally impressive box office results. In Hong Kong, Shaw sued Li for soundtrack copyright infringement, successfully blocking Guolian's *Seven Fairies* from being distributed (Chiao 2007: 59–60).

Without Li at Shaw Brothers, King Hu lost a faithful ally and mentor who had given him considerable support along the way. Nevertheless, Li's departure exhibited to Hu an alternative career option, which more or less culminated in Hu's own 1966 exodus to Taiwan. Hu, however, did not have Li's clout or a rival studio's strong support at the time. What he had was the opportunity to contemplate his own instinctive strategies against Shaw's machinery, through observations of Shaw's actions and reactions against Li.

MP&GI TRAGEDY AND THE REVIVAL OF *THE STORY OF SUE SAN*

In June 1964, just as the competition between Shaw Brothers and MP&GI escalated to its peak, a tragic airplane crash in Taiwan took the life of Loke Wan Tho and many of his top executives (Sha 2006: 84). In an instant, MP&GI's finest management personnel were lost and the company was never able to regain its competitiveness against Shaw Brothers.

Unexpectedly for King Hu, a favorable consequence arose out of the circumstances of Li's departure and Loke's death: Run Run Shaw decided to allow Hu to resume production of *The Story of Sue San*. Perhaps Shaw recognized that Hu had demonstrated his competence in quick turnaround productions like *Love Eterne* and *Seven Fairies*, or perhaps he simply wanted to monetize the iconic brand name of the film's former supervising director Li Hanxiang. *The Story of Sue San* was released in October 1964 and generated satisfactory earnings for Shaw, but Hu never really considered it his directorial first. In a public lecture, he disparaged it as a film "of which the company took over the editorial control" (Shi 1980: 90). His dismissal of the film was not unfounded, given what he had to go through: "I reluctantly filmed it. And it did quite well in the box office. Although it was the first time I received the credit as a director, it was not my first film. My debut should be *Sons of the Good Earth*" (Hu et al. 1998: 51).

CENSORSHIP, *SONS OF GOOD EARTH* AND HEROES OF THE UNDERGROUND

Now that *The Story of Sue San* had become a hit, King Hu was well disposed to pursue his next film, *Dadi ernu/Sons of the Good Earth*, a war epic portraying Chinese rebellions against the Japanese invasion. Curiously, the sensitive political theme¹⁴ did not deter Run Run Shaw from green-lighting the project. Since 1965 would mark the twentieth anniversary of Japanese surrender, Shaw might have seen the potential in Hu's well-written screenplay to attract an audience from the war-torn generation. At a more personal level, Shaw himself had also experienced the negative impacts of war while he was running the family business with third brother Runme Shaw in Singapore. During the invasion, many of his family properties in Hong Kong and Singapore–Malaysia were destroyed by the Japanese (Fu 2008: 3).

The screenplay for *Sons of the Good Earth* was so promising that spouses Betty Loh Ti and Peter Chen Ho volunteered to be in it together.¹⁵ Hu recalled, "I did not want famous stars [...] but they told me they really wanted to play the roles. They even went to talk to Run Run Shaw" (Hu et al. 1998: 60). Having two of Shaw's biggest stars enthusiastically lobbying for the lead roles, Hu was blessed with an advantageous momentum as he moved forward with the project.

Boasting a stellar cast,¹⁶ a powerful script and the noticeably strong support of Shaw, Hu took full advantage of his unprecedented directorial freedom. For historical accuracy, he spent a significant amount of time researching production design, and then attempted to authentically reproduce costumes, props and set pieces in as much detail as possible. He even had a steel fabrication shop built in order to manufacture the genuine-looking weaponry of Japanese soldiers and Chinese resistant forces in large quantities. Hu proudly claimed, "While most Hong Kong productions borrowed firearms from the [local] British forces, I did not use any British weapons [in my film]" (Hu et al. 1998: 61). As Hu indulgently outspent the budget and fell behind schedule, Shaw, however, permitted him to finish the entire film. In fact, upon completion of *Sons of the Good Earth*, Shaw authorized Hu to immediately proceed with the production of *Ding Yishan/Heroes of the Underground*, another anti-Japanese war epic. The rationale for a similar film, according to Hu, was that all his custom-made set pieces, costumes and prop-weapons for *Sons of the Good Earth* could be reused, thereby reducing the production costs significantly for *Heroes of the Underground* (Hu et al. 1998: 59).

Released in March 1965, *Sons of the Good Earth* faced difficulty in multi-ethnic Singapore and Malaysia due to the controversial patriotic war theme and a local regulation that forbade depictions of racial conflict.¹⁷ According to Hu, "For 'political reasons' it was chopped up



into pieces by the censorship [...] Any glimpse of the rising-sun¹⁸ was eliminated” (Hu et al. 1998: 59). It is said that more than 30 minutes’ worth of footage was cut (Huang 1999: 158). Subsequently, *Sons of the Good Earth* tanked at the box office (Hu et al. 1998: 65), spurring Shaw to draw the line. Two weeks into making *Heroes of the Underground*, Shaw ordered the rushes burned after viewing them and cancelled the entire production (Huang 1999: 158).

This being the third time one of his projects was axed, Hu explained why Shaw aborted *Heroes of the Underground*: “Due to the fact that *Sons of the Good Earth* couldn’t pass censorship and was banned in Singapore, the company realized that this genre was too problematic, therefore they immediately halted the filming. That being said, the main reason [for cancelling *Heroes of the Underground*] was due to the huge amount of money spent on *Sons of the Good Earth*” (Hu et al. 1998: 59).

THE BIRTH OF COME DRINK WITH ME

Although *Sons of the Good Earth* was a box office disappointment and a censorship nightmare for Run Run Shaw, he could not overlook the fact that it was very well made. The film received critical acclaim especially in Taiwan, where it collected the best screenplay and best editing awards and a special ‘patriotic inspiration’ award at the Golden Horse Film Festival. But Shaw was not likely to tolerate another King Hu flop. According to Hu, “the boss said: ‘make me a simple film that costs nothing,’ and I replied: ‘Understood. I will make a film that can be done inexpensively. There will not be a single star in the cast’” (Hu et al. 1998: 65).

Under looming pressure to produce a commercial success, Hu ventured into the distinct territory Shaw was aggressively attempting to reinvent: martial arts. Hu was no stranger to the genre, having played a role in *Yanzi dao/The Swallow Thief* (Yue Feng, 1961), one of the earliest martial arts films Shaw Brothers released, featuring sword-wielding and dart-throwing heroine Linda Lin Dai. Although the film itself did not make a significant impression, it introduced the groundbreaking trampoline technique that later became frequently used in the genre. Martial arts choreographer Han Yingjie remembered the moment well: “I was the double for Linda Lin Dai and experimented with a seven by five feet trampoline. I did a somersault, the camera followed with a vertical pan, and the ‘weightless leap’ was born” (Lau 1981: 214). In its September 1965 issue, the Shaw Brothers-owned monthly movie magazine *Southern Screen* introduced Hu’s next project, *Zui xial/The Hero with a Bottle*,¹⁹ as the new Shaw Brothers “action-packed costume thriller” that had recently begun principal photography. The underlining caption described it as a “great production of new color wuxia genre” (Leung 1965:10). The film was later renamed *Da zui xial/Come Drink with Me*.

From the Shaw Brothers talent pool of contract actors, Hu recruited Cheng Pei Pei,²⁰ Yue Hua and Chen Hung Lih²¹ as the main cast. They all lived in the Shaw dormitory complex and were paid minimal wages.²² It was a win-win situation for Hu, since he preferred directing new actors and the talent cost could be significantly lower and controlled. Nonetheless, Hu was not able to scale back on time. It did not take long for *Come Drink with Me*’s extended schedule and escalating cost to be noticed. Run Run Shaw began to interfere. According to lead actor Yue Hua, “The company set a limit, asking director Hu to complete a very big exterior sequence in ten days [...] Had he gone overtime again, the company would have replaced him with another director to finish the project” (Yue 2002: 60). As Han Yingjie recalled, “Run Run Shaw had given Hu three days to finish a sequence, instead of the ten originally allocated. Hu then asked for a week but Shaw refused and said that if he could not finish the film, another director would – at which Hu snapped back, ‘In that case, I’ll finish the film in two days’” (Tesson 1984, cited in Teo 2007: 8–9). Hu’s close friend Song Cunshou wrote, “The boss saw the rushes and was not satisfied. He thought the shots were too fragmented, and the action sequences suffered from continuity issues. He asked [Hu] to learn from the examples of Mao-mao (Xu Zhenghong/Hsu Tseng hung), but those were precisely the old-fashioned styles that Hu very much loathed” (Huang 2001: 73). Although these cited accounts all come from third-party individuals, they do uniformly illustrate the reality that there was considerable discord and friction between Run Run Shaw and King Hu during the production of *Come Drink with Me*. A notable fact was that around the time Hu was making *Come Drink with Me*, Shaw revived *Red Beard* and handed the Hu-written project to director Pan Lei.²³ It was released in February 1966 as *Down Hill They Ride*.

Despite significant tension and drama both on and off the set, Hu managed to complete *Come Drink with Me* in just over 50 workdays (Law 1998: 83). Although the film opened inopportunely in the midst of the Star Ferry Riot²⁴ on 7 April 1966, avid fans of martial arts cinema flocked to experience Hu’s new *wuxia* masterpiece. Critically acclaimed and commercially successful, *Come Drink with Me* was a triumph in Hong Kong and Taiwan. It ushered in a new era of international distribution for Shaw Brothers’ martial arts titles (Wu 2004: 12), attracting over 200,000 viewers in the non-Chinese-speaking foreign market of South Korea (Law and Bren 2004: 223). The cast of rookie actors became celebrities over night; Cheng Pei Pei was especially popular for her dazzling performance as the heroine ‘Golden Swallow’. She was subsequently cast in many action films, and was later distinguished as the Queen of Martial Arts by Hong Kong journalists (Law and Bren 2004: 265).

Run Run Shaw's dedicated passion for the *wuxia* genre might have started when he was living in the golden era of early martial arts films in 1920s Shanghai, where his eldest brother, Tianyi Film Company founder Runje Shaw, had directed popular hits such as *Nu xia Li Feifei Heroine Li Feifei* (1925). Run Run Shaw had persistently expected Zhang Che and Xu Zenghong, the studio's top-designated *wuxia* protégés, to deliver his long-awaited groundbreaking martial arts masterpiece. Ironically, it was King Hu's *Come Drink with Me*, the film that Shaw seemed to have despised and expected the least from, that first achieved Shaw's goal of pioneering a 'new *wuxia* era'. Even though Hu had finally redeemed himself as Shaw Brothers' best, having long been neglected and mistreated, he had already made up his mind to re-establish his career in Taiwan. Union Film's partner and representative in Hong Kong, Zhang Taoran, had long noticed Hu's potential. Knowing that he was not happy at Shaw Brothers, Zhang approached Hu well before the success of *Come Drink with Me*, and paved the way for the disgruntled director's inevitable departure from Shaw Brothers.

Cinematographer He Lanshan/Tadashi Nishimoto stated that money was also a factor for Hu's departure: "*Come Drink With Me* was a great box office success but after that King Hu quarreled with the studio and left. I sympathized with him. My pay wasn't bad but as a director who made two pictures, Hu was paid only HKD 2,500.25. At the time, directors should have been paid HKD 10,000 or HKD 20,000. Because of that, Hu left the studio".²⁶ King Hu's two-year/four-film²⁷ contract with Union Film in Taiwan commenced on 15 August 1966. He would receive HKD 18,000 per film for his first year, and HKD 20,000 per film in his second contract year (Sha 2006: 134).

After failed attempts to persuade Hu to stay, Shaw subsequently insisted that Hu still owed him six more films contractually. He sent his deputy Raymond Chow to Taiwan to negotiate directly with Union's Sha Yongfung. Chow wanted Union to offer Shaw Brothers the Hong Kong, Macau and Singapore–Malaysia–Burma distribution rights for the next four King Hu films. At first Sha did not agree to it. Subsequently, Chow exploited his connections in the Taiwanese nationalist government, threatening Sha with a thorough investigation of King Hu's background. Fearing that Hu might be blacklisted as a communist and therefore not be allowed to work in Taiwan at all, Sha reluctantly ceded to Chow's demands (Sha 2006: 134–5).

At the time the agreement was achieved between Raymond Chow and Sha Yongfung, King Hu was on location in central Taiwan shooting his next film, *Dragon Inn*.²⁸ Sha maintained his devoted support and allowed Hu considerable artistic freedom, although Hu was behind schedule and over budget. When *Dragon Inn* was completed, its price tag had more than doubled, from TWD 2.2 million to five million (Sha 2006: 136). Fortunately, *Dragon Inn* was an instant hit. Released in October 1967, it became the top-grossing film of the year in Taiwan. It also broke records in Hong Kong and South Korea (Huang 2001: 82).

According to Sha, after factoring in the production cost and overhead expenses, Union did not profit much from *Dragon Inn*. Therefore, Hu was not awarded any extra monetary bonus. The party that took in the big earnings was Run Run Shaw, who owned the distribution rights to almost two-thirds of *Dragon Inn's* overall market. Hu was visibly unhappy with the missing bonus from his blockbuster film. He once remarked, "I didn't know how much money [Sha] made, but he built his studio facilities soon afterwards" (Hu et al. 1998: 68). Perhaps Hu was never made fully aware of Union's agreement with Shaw Brothers, or it could be that Sha indeed concealed *Dragon Inn's* revenue figures and used the profit for the construction of Union's new facilities. The once friendly relationship between Hu and Sha deteriorated rapidly. During their contract renewal in 1968, Sha took the initiative to



raise Hu's per-film salary to HKD 60,000, including 10,000 for screenwriting and another 10,000 for art direction. Nevertheless, it became evident that Hu was adopting a stance of resistance against Union Film. According to Sha, Hu deliberately slowed down the filming of his next film, resulting in the five year²⁹-long, Cold War-like slow birth of *A Touch of Zen* (Sha 2006: 136–9).

Originally released in two parts, *A Touch of Zen* was a box office failure. More than three years later, Hu's fortunes changed drastically when prominent French cinephile Pierre Rissient discovered the film and brought it to the Cannes Film Festival in May 1975 (Scott 2008). As the first martial arts film to receive an award at Cannes,³⁰ *A Touch of Zen* became an international sensation. Never before had a Chinese-language film director enjoyed the level of worldwide fame and acclaim that King Hu had attained.

In a possible attempt to capitalize on Hu's celebrity after his Cannes win, Run Run Shaw released *Heroes of the Underground* in January 1976, almost eleven years after he cancelled the project on Hu. Directed by Bao Xueli/Pao Hsueh-Li, Hu received the screenwriting credit.³¹ This marked the final intersection of the two cinema giants. From then on, the antagonistic entanglement between Hu and Shaw evidently came to an end.

FROM SHAW'S SHADOW: A CINEMATIC LEGEND EMERGED

During his eight-year tenure at Shaw Brothers from 1958 to 1966, King Hu evolved from a character actor into a top-notch film-maker. His greatest contribution to Shaw Brothers was *Come Drink with Me*, the marquee film that inaugurated Shaw's new *wuxia* century. Nevertheless, Run Run Shaw deserved many accolades as well. Without a micro-managing, profit-oriented boss like Shaw to keep Hu's proclivity to go over budget and overtime in check, Hu's career at Shaw Brothers would have been significantly different. In the absence of Shaw, could Hu have made *Come Drink with Me*? It was Shaw's influence that steered Hu in the direction of martial arts. Had Shaw not cancelled the production of *Heroes of the Underground* Hu might not have had the same opportunity to discover his own niche in the martial arts genre. Those years he spent at Shaw Brothers were evidently arduous, yet they were undeniably his golden years of learning and professional growth. Shaw Brothers served as an unparalleled training environment for the novice filmmaker. The state-of-the-art Movietown facilities allowed Hu to translate his artistic visions into celluloid reality. Shaw's excellent roster of established or budding contract actors was at his disposal. Great mentors like Li Hanxiang and Yan Jun were there to provide him guidance and advice. From *The Story of Sue San* to *Sons of the Good Earth* and finally *Come Drink with Me*, Hu took full advantage of what Shaw had to offer. He made three films in completely different genres, under a wide-ranging assortment of creative, budgetary and time limitations, and with each film Hu was able to improve and progress.

On the other hand, Hu's departure from Shaw proved an excellent career move. By leaving Shaw Brothers at the pinnacle of his success with *Come Drink with Me*, Hu benefited from a powerful momentum that allowed him to be treated as an equal by Sha Yungfong. For Shaw, Hu would have remained mired as one of many contracted studio directors whose foremost purpose for the company was to produce profitable films. Had Hu listened to Raymond Chow and stayed at Shaw Brothers in 1966, his pre-eminent status at the company would soon have faced fierce competition, especially upon the release of prolific director Zhang Che's *The One-Armed Swordsman* (1967), the first Chinese film to gross over HKD 1 million (Zhang 1989: 46). Moreover, it would have been highly unlikely for Shaw to tolerate Hu's fastidious and expensive work habits. A Shaw-produced *Dragon Inn* might still have been a possibility, but Shaw would have balked at allowing anything approaching the five-year endeavor of *A Touch of Zen*. In contrast to Shaw's overbearing patriarchal persona, Union's Sha was a caring benefactor who sincerely appreciated Hu's remarkable cinematic aptitude. Sha offered Hu ample respect, patience, time, money and creative freedom – despite opposition from the other Union partners. Hu's success in *Dragon Inn* and *A Touch of Zen* owed much to Sha's faithful support, just as Sha owed much to the two phenomenal films Hu made for Union.

Upon a glimpse of the many anecdotes about Hu and Shaw, it would be easy to conclude that Shaw was the persecutor. Yet most of what Shaw did to Hu can be viewed as business-related decisions motivated by concerns over profitability. As the studio founder running a motion pictures empire, Shaw had to always put the best interests of Shaw Brothers ahead of personal concerns. Even if Shaw disliked Hu personally, it was most likely because of Hu's inexperience and his lack of efficiency and productivity. Hu, on the other hand, worked diligently to perfect his artistic vision, and it was unfortunate that Shaw failed to appreciate his extraordinary talent.

Like King Hu, Run Run Shaw also left home at a young age and faced a difficult and humble start.³² When Hu joined Shaw at the young age of 27, Shaw was an established 51-year-old business mogul with impeccable credentials as the owner and successful operator of a chain of distribution and exhibition networks in south-east Asia. The dissimilarities in age, experience, personality, expectations and professional goals were ultimately the stumbling blocks to good relations between the two. Hu might have benefited significantly while working with Run Run Shaw had his grudges against Shaw been tempered by the knowledge that Shaw consistently treated other employees in a similar fashion. For instance, one of Shaw's personal favorites, Xu Zhenghong, whom Hu was told to learn from, also had his film *Qinjian enchou/The Sword and the Lute* (1967) postponed, and *Honggul Red Maiden* cancelled by Shaw (Law 2003: 132).³³



In his 1976 interview with *Time* magazine, Shaw did not shy away from acknowledging his harsh ways as a boss commanding total control. The article read, “Run Run personally looks at all rushes. ‘Two reels and it’s no good, OUT’ he exclaimed. ‘We’re here to make money’” (Time.com). King Hu was not the only one to have his ongoing projects cancelled, and evidently he was not the only one to turn his back on Shaw. Other notable talents who made their exits included Li Hanxiang (1963), Zhao Lei (1963) and Betty Lo Thi (1964). Even Shaw’s right-hand man, Raymond Chow himself, left Shaw Brothers in 1970 to form his own company, Jia he/Golden Harvest, taking a number of Shaw’s studio talent with him. Run Run Shaw engaged in rigorous lawsuits with some of his former greatest assets: Li Hanxiang, Raymond Chow, *The One-Armed Swordsman* star Jimmy Wang Yu, and Chen Kuan-Tai, star of *Xie di zi/The Flying Guillotine* (He Monghua, 1975), to name a few. Hu never had to face Shaw in court.

As merciless as Shaw appeared to be, he was also able to forget the past and focus on the future. The best example was Li Hanxiang’s 1972 reunion with Shaw Brothers. As Li dissolved his company in Taiwan and endured a career low, Shaw extended his welcome and assistance to re-establish Li’s career in Hong Kong. Given that Shaw had helped Li despite their past conflicts, had Hu approached Shaw for capital or collaborations during any stage after his departure, Shaw would most likely have agreed to do the same for Hu.

AFTERMATH

King Hu left Union after *A Touch of Zen*. He established his own production company and made two brilliant films with Raymond Chow’s Golden Harvest: *Yingchunze zhi fengpo/The Fate of Lee Khan* (1973) and *Zhonglie tu/The Valiant Ones* (1975). A few years after his Cannes victory, Hu began filming his critically acclaimed *Kongshan lingyü/Raining in the Mountain* (1979) and *Shanzhong chuanqil/Legend of the Mountain* (1979) simultaneously. Having spent more than an entire year on location all over Korea, Hu more or less stranded his entire cast and crew, forcing them to forego other commitments. *Raining in the Mountain* co-producer Hu Shuru/Wu Sau-yea reminisced: “At one point, he locked himself up in a house while more than twenty crew members waited for him, not knowing when the film would continue shooting again” (Law 1998: 89). Having failed to cultivate interpersonal relationships with those who had supported him out of admiration and respect, Hu found it increasingly difficult to attract collaborators to finance his later projects.³⁴ As Hu Shuru remarked, “If producers were not psychologically prepared and if they didn’t have enough financial resources, they would not dare work with King” (Law 1998: 89).

Hu’s decline started with a contemporary comedy flop *Zhongshen dashi/The Juvenizer* (1981). His historical piece *Tianxia diyil/All the King’s Men* (1983) further disappointed many of his loyal fans. During the early stage of the production of *Xiaobao jianghul/Swordsman*

(1990), Hu walked out of the project due to irreconcilable differences with producer Tsui Hark. As tensions eased between Taiwan and China, Hu returned to the mainland to make *Huapi zhi yinyang fawang/Painted Skin* (1993). As Teo stated, it “is a ghost story adapted from the same classical source as *A Touch of Zen*, but containing none of the earlier film’s subtleties and complexities” (Teo 2002).

Hu spent his last years living in Pasadena, California. Other than developing *Poison*, a contemporary action/crime drama with a female heroine as a low-budget alternative, his main focus was on *The Battle of Ono*, a larger scale English-language epic about late nineteenth-century Chinese railroad workers in the American Sierra Nevada. Conceived in the mid-1970s, after two decades of persistent but futile efforts to secure financing, Hu was finally able to obtain commitments from Goldcrest Films of the United Kingdom. *The Battle of Ono* was slated for production in early 1997; John Woo³⁵ and Terence Chang were attached as executive producers, and Chow Yun Fat and Kevin Kline signed on to play the lead roles. In December 1996, there was sad news came from Beijing: Li Hanxiang had died of a heart attack in the midst of filming *Huoshao Efangong/Fire Burns the Efang Palace*, a historical television drama. While attending Li’s memorial services in Taiwan, Hu became concerned about the physical demands of his upcoming production, and decided to get his own heart examined.³⁶ His doctor recommended an angioplasty. As a result of the procedure, a blood clot travelled to his brain and he suffered a stroke. He never made it out of the hospital (Law 1998: 109). Within a month, two of the most important Chinese language film-makers of the post World War II era had passed away. *The Battle of Ono* producing partner Sarah Pillsbury reminisced: “Before King Hu left Los Angeles to pay tribute to Li Hanxiang, he was lamenting the loss of the old generation of craftsman. Still, he believed he would have the opportunity to direct more films himself” (Law 1998: 112). Hu was laid to rest in Southern California. He was 65 years old.

Although the glory days of Shaw Brothers film production have since faded, Run Run Shaw’s empire still stands strong with TVB (Television Broadcast Limited), a Hong Kong-based television network that reaches out globally to the Chinese diaspora, providing news, sports and entertainment programming. Throughout the years, Shaw has been tremendously generous in philanthropy. His Shaw Foundations, based in Singapore and Hong Kong, have donated hundreds of millions of dollars to charities worldwide. Recent donations include the HKD 100 million gift for disaster relief after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake in China (Shaw Online 2007a). In 2004, he inaugurated the Shaw Prize. The USD 1 million award was dubbed the ‘Nobel Prize of the East’. To date, thirty-one individuals from around the world have become Shaw Laureates in the three prize categories of astronomy, life science and medicine, and mathematical sciences (ShawPrize.org 2009). Still making public appearances, Sir Run Run Shaw³⁷ officially retired from his position as TVB’s Chairman³⁸ of the Executive Committee on 1 January 2010 (TVB.com 2009).

POSTSCRIPT

A natural-born storyteller with great enthusiasm and a wide array of knowledge, in his final years King Hu was down to earth, pleasant to work for, and undeniably passionate about his upcoming projects.³⁹ Had he stayed in the United States instead of returning to Taiwan for Li Hanxiang's memorial, he would never have gone for the failed heart surgery that was intended to be preventative. He was about to return to the director's chair for a grand comeback, when death touched him unexpectedly. Cinema history would possibly have been very different had King Hu lived to tell his stories of *Poison* and *The Battle of Ono*. They were his ultimate American dreams.

It was the sudden departure of King Hu that reminded the world of the great impact he had on martial arts cinema. Two years after King Hu's death, Ang Lee began principal photography of his first martial arts film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), in which

he paid ultimate tribute to Hu, the authentic martial arts master. The showdown in the tavern, the rooftop chase, the ambush of the convoy, the flying poison needles, the quest for the Green Destiny Sword⁴⁰ and the bamboo forest fights⁴¹ can all be attributed to the iconographic influences of King Hu. In her captivating performance as villainous Jade Fox, Cheng Pei Pei, the first modern martial arts heroine and top disciple of King Hu, symbolically handed off her reign to the next generation of film-makers. Martial arts cinema leaped into the twenty-first century to new heights, owing much to the legacy of King Hu, his groundbreaking *Come Drink with Me*, and its producer Run Run Shaw, who celebrated his 102nd birthday in late 2009.

¹ King Hu is also known as King Chuan, Chin Chuan, Hu Jin-Chuan and Hu Chin-chuan. His full name in Pinyin, the romanization system for Standard Mandarin, is Hu Jinquan.

² Also known as Qiqi shibian/Incident of July 7, this was the battle between the Imperial Japanese Army and China's National Revolutionary Army near Beijing. It is considered the marker for the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937.

³ Peking Academy, currently Beijing Huiwen Middle School, was established by the American Methodist Episcopal Church in 1871.

⁴ In the Yamada/Udagawa interview, Hu specified that he was applying for admission at 'Dayton College' in Colorado. This college cannot be identified and the author speculates that Hu might have meant to say 'University of Dayton' in Ohio.

⁵ Jiahua is hereby spelled in Pinyin. However, same words may be pronounced differently among Chinese dialects. Kawah, hereby spelled in Jyutpin, a romanization system for Standard Cantonese, corresponds to how locals in Hong Kong commonly pronounce the name.

⁶ Many Chinese names were translated using the Wade-Giles system before Pinyin became the dominant Romanization system for Standard Mandarin from the late twentieth century. Both versions are included here in order to clarify that Li Hanxiang (Pinyin) also has long been commonly known as Li Han-Hsiang or Lee Han-Hsiang (Wade-Giles).

⁷ Also known as *Chi erguang de ren/The Man Who Gets Slapped*, the film was released in 1958.

⁸ Many have considered this impressive performance as Hu's screen debut, since *Jin feng* was released first in 1955, before *Laughter and Tears*.

⁹ The 'Shaw Brothers' name came from Shaw Brothers Private Limited, which was Run Run and third brother Runme Shaw's organization in Singapore. In 1969, the Singapore company was renamed Shaw and Shaw Private Limited.

¹⁰ The on-screen collaborations between King Hu and Betty Loh Ti can be traced back to the Li Hanxiang-helmed contemporary comedy *Miaoshou huichun/The Magic Touch* (1958), in which both had lead roles.

¹¹ The other three films were *Hong Niang* (Wang Yueding/Wong Yuet-tin), *Yang Naiwu yu xiao baicai/The Adulteress* (He Menghua/Hoh Muhg-wa, 1963) and *Feng huan chao/Return of the Phoenix* (Gao Li/Gao Lap, 1963).

¹² Shaw Brothers released thirteen films in 1962, and nineteen in 1963 (Yu et al. 2003: 367).

¹³ Shaw's version premiered on 14 December 1963. Guolian's version premiered five days later on 19 December (Sha 2006: 93-4).

¹⁴ A film with a similar theme was MP&GI's war epic *Diehai si zhuangshih/Four Brave Ones* (Tang Huang and Wang Liuzhao), released in October 1963. It was well received in Taiwan, and collected a best screenplay award and a special 'patriotic inspiration' award at Taiwan's Golden Horse Film Festival.

¹⁵ Betty and Peter were married in 1962, but their marriage only lasted for five years.

¹⁶ With one more film left in his acting contract, Hu also had a role in *Sons of Good Earth*, playing the resistance leader who died heroically. Hu's patriotic death in the film was his last screen performance for Shaw Brothers. Although many have thought *Sons of Good Earth* marked the end of Hu's acting career, he did appear in the English-language film *The Yin and the Yang of Mr. Go* (Burgess Meredith, 1970), starring James Mason and Jeff Bridges.

¹⁷ 'Being multiracial societies composed of different ethnic communities (Chinese, Indians, Malays), Malaysia and Singapore were acutely sensitive to depictions of racial conflict' (Teo 2002).

¹⁸ The 'Rising Sun Flag' (kyokujitsu-ki) was used as the war flag of the Imperial Japanese Army. A symbol of Japanese Imperialism, it is considered offensive in nations that were victimized by Japanese aggression.



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- ¹⁹ The story 'was based on an opera *Zui gai/The Drunkard Beggar* that Hu had remembered watching from his childhood days' (Teo 2009: 120).
- ²⁰ Prior to *Come Drink with Me*, 19-year-old Cheng Pei Pei played lead roles in *Qingren shi/Lover's Rock* (Pan Lei/Poon Lui, 1964), *Lanyu zhi ge/Songs of Orchid Island* (Pan Lei, 1965) and *Baolian deng/The Lotus Lamp* (Yue Feng, 1965).
- ²¹ Chen Hung Lieh suffered a heart attack while taping an episode of TVB television drama *Bida zijiren/Off Pedder*. The veteran actor was 66 years old when he passed away in Hong Kong on 24 November 2009.
- ²² Cheng Pei Pei recalled being paid HKD 400 a month, in the commentary/interview of the 2002 Celestial Pictures remastered DVD release of *Come Drink with Me* (Hu, 1966).
- ²³ Taiwan-based film-maker Pan Lei had previously directed two films for Shaw Brothers in Taiwan, *Qingren shi/Lover's Rock* (1964) and *Lanyu zhi ge/Songs of Orchid Island* (1965), both starring Cheng Pei Pei.
- ²⁴ 'On April 4, a young Chinese man named So Sau-chung protested an increase in fares on the Star Ferry by declaring a hunger strike in front of the Star Ferry piers [...] when the police arrested him the next day, other youths rioted and stoned the police [...] one rioter was killed, and by April 8 more than fourteen hundred youths had been arrested' (Carroll 2007: 149–50).
- ²⁵ In comparison, Li Hanxiang was making HKD 25,000 per film at Shaw Brothers before he accepted Loke Wan Tho's HKD 40,000 offer in 1963 (Sha 2006: 91).
- ²⁶ Extracted from an interview published in 1987 by Japan's *Lumière Magazine*, Spring Issue; translated by Stephen Teo from Chinese (Cited in Law 1998: 81).
- ²⁷ Eventually, Hu only made *Dragon Inn* and the two parts of *A Touch of Zen* during his tenure at Union Film.
- ²⁸ *Dragon Gate Inn* is King Hu's preferred English title of the film. He was displeased that the English translator omitted the word 'Gate' in the title, and made numerous mistakes in the subtitles (Hu et al. 1998: 81).
- ²⁹ '*A Touch of Zen* began filming in 1967, the second part was not completed until 1971, it spanned five years to make both parts of the film' (Sha 2006: 138).
- ³⁰ '*A Touch of Zen* was awarded the Grand Prix de la Commission Supérieure Technique. Li Hanxiang had previously won an unprecedented technical grand prize at the Cannes International Film Festival, for his 1962 historic epic *Yang Kwei Fei/The Magnificent Concubine*.
- ³¹ Similarly, not long after Hu's 1966 departure, Run Run Shaw released *Jin yan zi/Golden Swallow* (Zhang Che, 1968). Somewhat billed as a sequel to *Come Drink with Me*, starring Cheng Pei Pei and Jimmy Wang Yu, it was a hit, and became one of Zhang's personal favourites (Zhang 1989: 48).
- ³² Sent by Runje Shaw, Run Run Shaw left Shanghai for Singapore when he was 19 to help third brother Runme in building up an overseas distribution and exhibition circuit for Tianyi. It was difficult for the Shanghainese brothers to break into the established local market run by Cantonese, Hokkien and Teochew businessmen. Furthermore, as a result of the historical 'Lihue Encirclement' where six competitors in Shanghai formed a theatre circuit to bar Tianyi's popular and commercially successful productions, few local theatres in the Singapore and Malaysia region would play their films. Runme and Run Run ended up taking film reels on the road. They operated outdoor screenings throughout Singapore and Malaysia, struggling to establish their own market share for Tianyi (Chung 2003: 4).
- ³³ Shaw made these decisions soon after Xu's first two films of a series, *Jianghu qixia/Temple of the Red Lotus* (1965) and *Yanyang jianxia/The Twin Swords* (1965), achieved less than satisfactory results.
- ³⁴ *Raining in the Mountain* was financed by newcomers Hu Shuru/Wu Sau-ye and Luo Kaimu/Law Hoi-muk; *Legends of the Mountain* was co-produced with Huang Zhuohan/Wong Cheuk-Hon's Diyi/First Films Company.
- ³⁵ John Woo worked as an extra on Hu's *Sons of Good Earth*, playing the role of a Japanese soldier.
- ³⁶ Hu underwent bypass surgery in 1986, also at Veteran's General Hospital in Taipei (Huang 1999: 339).
- ³⁷ Run Run Shaw received his knighthood in 1977, conferred by Great Britain. (Shaw Online 2007a)
- ³⁸ The position was succeeded by former TVB Deputy Chairman and General Manager Mona Fong, the second spouse of Run Run Shaw.
- ³⁹ For several months in 1996, the author worked with King Hu, developing the story and writing the treatment for *Poison*.
- ⁴⁰ Reminiscent of Liao Kong's quest for the Green Bamboo Stick in *Come Drink with Me*.
- ⁴¹ Although Zhang Cheh's memorable bamboo grove combat in *Return of the One-Armed Swordsman* (1969) predates King Hu's famous bamboo forest sequence in *A Touch of Zen* (1972), it was Hu's version that became one of the most memorable scenes in martial arts cinema history.
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ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Come Drink with Me is presented in its original 2.35:1 aspect ratio with its original Mandarin and English monoaural soundtracks. The High Definition master was supplied to Arrow Films by Celestial Pictures.

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AV324