A Fantasy China:
An Investigation of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre
through the Documentary Film Medium

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by
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Declaration

I declare that this doctoral research project contains no material previously submitted for a degree at any university or other educational institution. To the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the project.

Yeong-Rury Chen
This doctoral research project intends to institute the study of the unique and significant Huangmei Opera film genre by pioneering in making a series of documentaries and writing an academic text. The combination of a documentary series and academic writing not only explores the relationship between the distinctive characteristics of the Huangmei Opera film genre and its enduring popularity for its fans, but also advances a film research mode grounded in practitioner research, where the activity of filmmaking and the study of film theory support and reflect on each other.

The documentary series, which incorporates three interrelated subjects – Classic Beauty: Le Di, Scenic Writing Director: Li Han Hsiang and Brother Lian: Ling Po – explores the remarkable film careers of each figure while discussing the social and cultural context in which they worked. The section on Le Di introduces the subject of melodrama as a Chinese tradition. The section on Li Han Hsiang discusses Li’s film aesthetics and his representation of a utopian Chinese world of the imagination. The final section focuses on the popularity actor Ling Po gained through her roles of male impersonation. All three topics provide an opportunity to rethink our understanding of the social, political and cultural forces that contribute to the genre, and to build an emotional connection between past and present for the viewers. Meanwhile, by interviewing those surviving key figures and assembling materials that have been lost, the documentary series not only fulfils the needs of many fans, but also serves field studies in the area by setting a direction in research and providing a valuable resource for scholars involved in Chinese film and cultural studies. It is both accessible
to mainstream audiences and academically warranted.

As an adjunct to the documentary series, the written text explores aspects of the same material in more depth through the use of structuralist methodology, and psychoanalytic, auteur and genre theories. The text combines these Western approaches with aspects of Chinese culture, philosophy and aesthetic traditions, proposing links between Chinese aesthetics and Western film theories that contribute new understandings to both Chinese and Western film studies. On the other hand, because these film theories were originally developed to study Western films, the Chinese origins of the Huangmei Opera film genre may challenge existing theoretical paradigms and so provide new interpretations. This doctoral project also includes a complete report of all phases of the documentary production and design process, and a unique, comprehensive filmography of Huangmei Opera films, and as such supplies a research foundation for both documentary filmmakers and academics who are interested in studying the Huangmei Opera film genre further.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in and passion for the Huangmei Opera film genre are derived from my mother, Chen Lin Lan. She used to take me to the theatre to see the movie The Love Eterne, which was re-screened in the 1970s. Although I didn’t understand why she always wept during the movies, I was fascinated by the cinematic spectacles, lyrical music and the charming characters of Huangmei Opera films. For years, I wondered why these movies were so popular among Chinese in the 1960s and why a male impersonator, Ling Po, attracted so many fans, especially women. When I started my doctoral project I chose to study the Huangmei Opera film genre and saw it as an opportunity to make a series of documentaries.

For their cooperation during the process of making An Investigation of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre, my heartfelt thanks go to my interviewees, Chiao Hsiung Pieng, Cheng Yu Ching, Ha E. Peng, Iv Bei Bei, Kao Chung Chi, Lau Shang Cheng, Li Kuwn, Lin Lang Shing, Ling Po, Sung Chuen Sau, Wang An Gi, Wu Melon, Zhang Ai Zhu and fans of Huangmei Opera films. Without their enthusiastic responses during my interviews, I couldn’t have completed the documentary series. My thanks also go to my production crew, most of whom are my students in the Department of Communication Arts at Chaoyang University of Technology (CYUT) in Taiwan. Meanwhile, my appreciation goes to the research grants from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at CYUT for supporting my production and travelling expenses in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and China.
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1. A Unique and Popular Chinese Film Genre
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This doctoral research project incorporates a set of three documentary films and complementary text that explore the relationship between the distinctive characteristics of the Huangmei Opera film genre and its enduring popularity for its fans.\(^1\) The combination of a documentary series and academic writing advances a film research mode grounded in practitioner research, where the activity of filmmaking and the study of film theory support and reflect on each other. By pioneering in making a series of documentaries and writing an academic text about Huangmei Opera films, this doctoral project intends to institute the study of this significant and unique Chinese film genre.

Huangmei Opera was originally a body of tea-collecting songs that developed in the Chinese region of Huangmei around 200 years ago.\(^2\) In the 1960s a number of these songs were incorporated into many movies that were extremely popular in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Numerous people went to see these movies, and the contemporary press

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\(^1\) In mainland China this genre is called ‘Huangmei Opera’ (Huangmei Xi), while people in Taiwan call it ‘Huangmei Melody’ (Huangmei Diao). This text uses the term ‘Huangmei Opera’ because it was originally derived from China and accepted widely.

\(^2\) There are two types of romanized spelling for Chinese personal and place names, Hanyipinyin and Wade-Giles. In mainland China, Hanyipinyin is used while in Taiwan people use Wade-Giles phonetics spelling. The text mainly uses Wade-Giles for personal names with Hanyipinyin used for place names, since most of the places mentioned in this text are located in mainland China.
called Taipei “a crazy city” because of the fervour generated by this film genre (Huang 1997, p. 15). The most popular Huangmei Opera film, *The Love Eterne* (1963), held the box office record for two decades until the record was broken by Jackie Chan’s *Project A* in the 1980s (Lau 1994, p. 69). About 50 films, based on a combination of ancient stories and Huangmei folk music, established a film genre that enjoyed strong cult popularity and lasted into the 1970s. However, because of its lyrical music and Chinese literary traditions, the Huangmei Opera film genre was considered slow-paced by the next generation and was finally replaced by *wuxia* (swordfighting) and *kung fu* movies, which were full of rapid action scenes and poeticised violence. The Huangmei Opera film genre faded from the audience’s memory.

Recently, following the international box office success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), the *wuxia* and *kung fu* movies drew the attention of international audiences, and Chinese popular cinema of the 1970s became a topic of interest for Western film scholars. Yet before martial arts movies appeared, the Huangmei Opera film genre played a significant role in the development of Chinese cinema. Many renowned martial arts film directors, such as King Wu and Zhang Che, began their directorial debut with Huangmei Opera films, and two major Hong Kong studios, Shaw Brothers and Cathy Studio, consolidated their empires by producing Huangmei Opera films in the genre. However, because neither major film studio released Huangmei Opera films since the 1970s, Western audiences have had no opportunity to see these films through the mass media, and the Huangmei Opera film genre has not been studied by either Chinese or Western film scholars despite its popularity and significance among Chinese communities in the 1960s. It was not until 2002, when Celestial Pictures bought the Huangmei Opera films of Shaw Brothers and started to redistribute them through DVD outlets, that audiences began to recall the heyday of the Huangmei Opera film genre. The Huangmei Opera film genre remained neglected and unknown by younger Chinese people and the Western world for a long time.
2. The Values of Nostalgia

The redistribution of Huangmei Opera films through DVD outlets reflects one of the contemporary fashions in both academic studies and consumer commodities — nostalgia. Academically, nostalgia is perceived as a reassessment of the past that stands in the way of historical analysis (Cook 2005, p. xii). The documentary series comprises three nostalgic topics, Classic Beauty: Le Di, Scenic Writing Director: Li Han Hsiang, and Brother Lian: Ling Po. The section on Le Di introduces the subject of melodrama as a tradition in the Huangmei Opera films, and the representation of the actor as celebrity. The documentary about Li Han Hsiang examines his film aesthetics, the production system and the representation of a utopian Chinese world of the imagination. The section on Ling Po discusses the popularity of the Huangmei Opera film genre, the role of the male impersonator and the issue of gender identification. All three topics provide an opportunity to rethink our understanding of social, political and cultural forces in the past and take stock of our circumstances in the present. Since many Huangmei Opera filmmakers are very old and much property has been lost, the documentary series provides a service for fans by interviewing those surviving key figures who worked in this genre, and assembling materials that have been lost. Furthermore, through interviews with filmmakers, experts and fans, the documentary series can not only vividly convey human behaviour in a way that no written thesis can do, but may also serve field studies in the area by setting a direction in research and providing a valuable resource for scholars involved in Chinese film and cultural studies. It is both accessible to mainstream audiences and academically warranted.

Nostalgia also refers to a state of yearning for something idealised that has disappeared from the present. This could be seen when the most famous Huangmei Opera film actress, Ling Po, held her concerts in 2003 and the audience began to collect items and paraphernalia from the past. An emotional renaissance of memories from the Huangmei Opera film genre has been widespread. The internationally renowned Taiwanese director, Ang Lee, attested that the Huangmei Opera film genre reminded him of the feelings of purity and innocence that he experienced when he
saw the Huangmei Opera movie *The Love Eterne* at the age of nine (Lyman 2001). Nostalgia can function as an evocation of something idealised that has been lost. Thus, by making a series of documentaries which quotes movie footage, posters and photos, and simulates the lyrical styles of Huangmei Opera films, one of the purposes of this doctoral project is to offer a site of pleasurable contemplation and yearning by reconstructing an idealised past derived from the Huangmei Opera film genre. Especially in the electronic era, with the advantages of new digital technologies, the nostalgic celebration of the Huangmei Opera film genre and its materials enables the Chinese audience to view the documentary series as a reflection of memories, like family photos, through an accessible media form. This encourages the audience to become more involved in this representation of the past, and builds an emotional connection between past and present for the viewers.

3. Cross-cultural Readings

The spirit and value behind this doctoral project are to look back at the unique and popular Huangmei Opera film genre from the perspective of cross-cultural readings that contribute new understandings for both Chinese and Western film studies. In analysing the social and cultural background – the community, aesthetics, gender identity and other issues within the Huangmei Opera film genre – the written text employs Western film theories, such as structuralist methodology, and psychoanalytic, auteur and genre theories, to examine issues presented in the documentary series and discuss the influence of gender on spectatorship in relation to the Huangmei Opera film genre. Taking its perspectives from Chinese philosophies, cultural milieu and aesthetic traditions, this doctoral project intends to propose links between Chinese aesthetics and Western film theories to present new ideas and new findings.

Furthermore, given a series of connections with film theories that were originally developed to study Western movies, the Huangmei Opera film genre is interesting to work with because its Chinese origins may challenge existing theoretical paradigms. The Huangmei Opera film genre
is a kind of musical film that is full of Chinese lyrical music, folk culture and literary traditions which have their own cultural milieu and ideological system. In Western film studies, most useful theories were developed to examine their original films by referring to their own culture and society. Other film genres developed outside the West have seldom been examined. Hence, comparing the differences in drama, visual aesthetics, gender identity and sexuality between Western and Chinese can help us not only to understand the two textual ideologies, but also to participate in broader debates that cut across individual cultures. The understanding of cultural differences leads us to an ability to communicate across differences, to become better informed and more experienced in interpreting differences, and to keep adjusting film theories as we learn more and more from those differences.

4. A Summary of the Text

This doctoral project involves producing a documentary series that explores the social, cultural, aesthetic and spectatorship issues in the Huangmei Opera film genre of the 1960s. In addition, because some issues could not be discussed in detail in the documentary format, a complementary text is provided, in which these issues are covered in greater depth and thoroughness.

The work of Chapter 1 in this text focuses on the history and social background of Huangmei Opera films from the 1950s to 1960s. It was a period when Taiwan, Hong Kong and China were in a volatile state in terms of their political and social environment, as well as in economic and demographic structure. The Huangmei Opera film genre appeared at this time and reflected the state of mind and experience of Chinese communities in this period.

Chapter 2 employs Thomas Schatz’s genre theory to examine the Huangmei Opera film genre. Schatz places the main responsibility for genre success on production practices of the Hollywood studio system. The Huangmei Opera film genre had a similar relationship with Hong Kong’s studio system. However, arguing with Schatz’s generic theory
about repetition on viewing cinema to help the audience to generate knowledge of generic patterns, the essay considers that the Chinese audience’s identification to certain plots and characters of the Huangmei Opera film genre was based on their prior experiences in Chinese traditional folk drama and other cultural sources. Meanwhile, within this genre and according to its tropes, Le Di’s public image as the “Classic Beauty” constituted an archetype of the ancient female role, representing a young woman who suffers for love or because of an oppressive situation. This essay uses Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structuralist methodology to analyse the mythical dimensions of the Huangmei Opera film genre as a means of understanding the cultural and ideological context that produced these films.

Chapter 3 applies the auteur approach to analyse the cinematic aesthetics of Huangmei Opera films of Li Han Hsiang, the most important director of the Huangmei Opera film genre. Li’s cinematic spectacles simulate the visual spirit of Chinese landscape painting, which is derived from Taoist ideology about space and time. The philosophy of Taoism has not only influenced the visual representation of Chinese landscape painting but also reflects the Chinese people’s way of life that embodies their yearning to be in harmony with nature. Li adapted these visual concepts and ideology to create a utopian ancient Chinese world in his Huangmei Opera films.

The work of Chapter 4 focuses on the spectatorship in Huangmei Opera films, especially on the issues related to audience perception of Ling Po’s practice of male impersonation. The essay employs Laura Mulvey’s psychoanalytic theory from her famous essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” to discuss the unconscious pleasure experience of the spectators of Huangmei Opera films. However, it challenges Mulvey’s theory about male gaze and identification in cinematic apparatus with the case of Ling Po’s male impersonation, while men perceive him as a woman and women perceive her as a man. The essay considers that the spectator’s identifications of Ling Po’s impersonation rely on the fantasy proposing links among cultural, societal and psychological modes. It suggests that Ling Po’s images on and off screen represent a sexual ambivalence and enable polymorphous identification.
Chapter 5 comprises a project report, which describes the Griersonian production strategy, the production process and the concept of editing design, to supply a research foundation for the documentary filmmaker. The advantages of the new digital video technology and the sophistication of the nonlinear editing system that benefited the documentary series are also covered in this chapter. At the end of this text is an appendix of the filmography of Huangmei Opera films, to provide information for anyone
Chapters

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

1. A History of Huangmei Opera

Chronologically, the development of Huangmei Opera can be divided into three stages. The first stage was from 1795 to 1911 (Ling, M 1997, p. 213). Originally, Huangmei Opera was a body of tea-collecting songs that developed in the Chinese region of Huangmei county in Hubei province (Figure 1.1). Diverse in rhyme, these tea-collecting songs were often presented in the form of singing and dancing with local dialects (Gao 2005, p. 128). In the early nineteenth century, natural disasters repeatedly devastated Huangmei areas, driving people from their homes. Some of the fugitives fled to Jiangxi Province and others to Anhui Province. A group of them drifted east to the Anging county of Anhui province. Finally they settled down at Huaining in Anging County. These tea-collecting songs became more widely popular by absorbing the best part of the region’s other operas, such as local accents, acting skills, and cultural and folk stories. People called it “Huai Tone” or “Huai Melody” (Chen 2005). This was the early stage of today’s Huangmei Opera.

At first this style of opera was noted for two- and three-role dramas, but then under the influence of Huai styles “Huai Melody”
gradually became a theatrical form in which to present full-length works (Ling, M 1997, p. 213). In this phase, most of the dramas still kept the true flavour of folk songs with simple percussion instruments. Singing while dancing was also a feature of performances. With Anqing Mandarin spoken in its dialogue, it was a folk music characterised by a strong sense of everyday life.

The second stage was from 1911 to 1949 (Gao 2005, p. 128). In this phase, Huangmei Opera started its professional performances in cities and gained popularity. In the early 1930s, there were two major professional Huangmei Opera theatres in Anqing City: New Stage Theatre and Ai-Ren Theatre. In 1934, the famous Huangmei Opera actor, Ding Yong Quan, was invited to Shanghai with his theatre company to perform Huangmei Opera. This continued until the war between Japan and China broke out and the performers were forced to return to Anhui. After its performance in cities, Huangmei Opera was influenced by Peking Opera and other opera styles. Ding Yong Quan adapted a Peking Opera instrument, Jing-Hu, into Huangmei Opera and made some changes in Huangmei Opera arias. Huangmei Opera was made richer by absorbing Peking Opera’s orchestra into its performance and adapting new stories into its repertoire.

The development of Huangmei Opera began its third stage when the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949 (Gao 2005, p. 128). The Chinese government encouraged folk culture heritage and “Huangmei Opera” received its official name and became a formal opera. Since then Huangmei Opera has experienced unprecedented development. In 1953, after the establishment of the Anhui Huangmei Opera Troupe, the group successfully staged operatic re-workings of traditional classics such as Female Son-in-law, The Heavenly Match and The Cowboy and Spinning Maid.

There were two main kinds of arias, Coloratura (Hua Qiang) and Flat Tune (Ping Ci), in Huangmei Opera at this stage (Ling, M 1997, p. 214). Coloraturas made up the playlets that were based mostly on short stories, and compromised folk songs with a taste of real life. Flat Tunes were made up of the major arias of script plays, which were long plays of multiple and complex plots. Various arias were presented, mainly with Jing-Hu and other folk musical instruments including gongs and
drums. Even Western instruments were used in this phase. Famous performers such as Yan Feng Ying, Wang Shao Feng and Pan Jing Li made contributions to the acting of Huangmei Opera (Figure 1.2). For example, Wang Shao Feng was a Peking Opera actor before he started his career as a Huangmei Opera performer. He introduced some gestures from Peking Opera into Huangmei Opera.

The Cultural Revolution began in 1966 with a denunciation of certain dramas based on historical and fairytale themes. During the Cultural Revolution, the professional Huangmei Opera theatres in China almost ceased to function and most performers who had been previously influential in artistic matters came under sharp criticism. The famous actress Yan Feng Ying committed suicide in 1968 because of condemnation as “a black figure in artistic matters” (Tong 2004). Although Huangmei Opera experienced a rigorous trial during the Cultural Revolution in mainland China, Huangmei Opera performances and films swept over Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities in the 1960s due to its soft songs and graceful music.

It was not until the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 that performances of Huangmei Opera were held in public again. Since the 1980s China has launched a project aimed at saving its folk culture heritage, with the result that the Huangmei Opera troupes returned to the stage. With its numerous performances across China, Hong Kong and even Taiwan, Huangmei Opera has received a warm welcome from audiences everywhere. Recently, by absorbing a new generation of performers, Huangmei Opera has built a reputation as one of the most contemporary of China's classical operas.

2. The Emergence of Huangmei Opera Films

Although Huangmei Opera has a relatively short history among its
counterparts in China, it has become one of the prominent major regional operas of China because of its natural and lyrical melody, plain and simple language, and its explicit expression of emotions. Due to these popular elements, Huangmei Opera also became one of the most commonly filmed operas in Chinese communities.

In 1955, Shanghai Film Studio worked with Anhui Huangmei Opera Troupe to adapt the famous classic *The Heavenly Match* into a movie (Figure 1.2). This is the very first Huangmei Opera that was made into a film. Because of the success of *The Heavenly Match*, in which the famous performers Yan Feng Ying and Wang Shao Feng played, both performers went on to co-star in many other Huangmei Opera films that were also adapted from the famous classics on stage, such as *Female Son-in-law* (1959) and *The Cowboy and Spinning Maid* (1963). Huangmei Opera films were gaining wider popularity because of the repeatable and convenient form of cinema.

Although these Huangmei Opera films were adapted directly from Huangmei Opera on stage with the same cast, music and costumes, they influenced the Hong Kong movie industry and initiated the subsequent period of Huangmei Opera films in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In 1958, director Li Han Hsiang saw the movie *The Heavenly Match*, which was very popular in Hong Kong with its melodious and graceful Huangmei Opera songs. It inspired him to adapt Huangmei Opera music into his new film *Diao Chan* for Shaw Brothers (Huang 1997, p. 10). The movie *Diao Chan* was very successful at the box office, with its combination of Huangmei Opera music and a famous historical epic (Figure 1.3). Director Li thought he had only adapted the music from Huangmei Opera, so he used the name “Huangmei Melody” (Huangmei Diao) to replace “Huangmei Opera” (Chen 2005).

Compared to the Huangmei Opera films made in China, the Hong Kong-made Huangmei Opera films were less “opera style”, and incorporated more cinematic aspects into their aesthetics. Director Li
adapted the Huangmei Opera music into a more modern and pop music influenced style. Meanwhile, Li used artificial studio effects to create an ancient Chinese world where his historical costume films were set. This would quickly become his trademark, and these Huangmei Opera films became a film genre that was very popular in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1960s (Figure 1.4).

3. The Popularity of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre

Most of the Huangmei Opera films were made by two Hong Kong major film studios, Shaw Brothers and Cathay Studio (Figure 1.4). The entrepreneur behind Shaw Brothers was Run Run Shaw. He started Shaw Brothers in Hong Kong in 1957 to compete with its rival, Motion Picture and General Investment (MP and GI), later renamed Cathay Studio.¹ Both rival studios played key roles in the flourishing production of Huangmei Opera films but at the same time they were competing ferociously for film markets in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia in the 1960s.

¹ The founder of MP and GI was Lu Yun Tao. He set up the film company in Hong Kong in 1956. In 1964 Lu died in a plane crash in Taiwan. After his death, the MP and GI was renamed Cathay Studio.
Shaw Brothers secured its empire with the Huangmei Opera film genre. After the box office success of *Diao Chan*, Shaw’s most prominent director, Li Han Hsiang, made another breakthrough Huangmei Opera film, *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (1960), which combined an epic and romantic story with graceful and sweet-sounding Huangmei melody. Because of the popularity of this new genre, Shaw Brothers ordered Li to adapt Huangmei melody into two historic films, *Yang Kwei Fei* (1962) and *Beyond the Great Wall* (1962). Besides Li, there were other directors who also made Huangmei Opera films for Shaw Brothers, such as Yuan Qiu Feng’s *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (1962), Yue Feng’s *Madam White Snake* (1962), King Hu’s *The Story of Sue San* (1963) and Ho Meng Hua’s *Adulteress* (1963). All these Huangmei Opera films were stories about popular myths and legends, and featured romances between young scholars and young women (Figure 1.5).

The Huangmei Opera film genre came to its climax in 1963 when director Li adapted the famous folktale “Lian and Zhu”, a tragic story of love between Lian Shan Bo and Zhu Ying Tai, into the movie *The
Love Eterne (Figure 1.6). The Love Eterne screened for 186 days in Taiwan and swept over Southeast Asian markets in 1963 (Huang 1997, p. 15). It was the biggest box office hit for Shaw Brothers at the time and held the box office record for both Hong Kong and Taiwan for two decades (Lau 1994, p. 69). Singing Huangmei melody became a fashion in Taiwan, and Ling Po, who starred as the character Lian Shan Bo in The Love Eterne, became the most popular star of this film genre.

After the huge success of The Love Eterne, Li left Shaw Brothers and went to Taiwan to establish his own production studio, Guolian Studio. Although Li only made two Huangmei Opera films, Seven Fairies (1963) and The Imperial Scholar (1964), in the Guolian Studio period and ultimately went bankrupt, he brought the studio system to Taiwan and established the Taiwanese film industry. After Li left Shaw Brothers, the Shaw studio continued making Huangmei Opera films because of its sophisticated studio system, with many other filmmakers and movie stars. Ling Po, the biggest star after The Love Eterne, became famous for her male impersonations of the Huangmei Opera film genre. She starred in most of Shaw’s Huangmei Opera films such as A Maid from Heaven (1963), The Crimson Palm (1964), Lady General Hua Mulan (1964), The Female Prince (1964), West Chamber (1965), The Mermaid (1965) and Three Smiles (1968). Most of her roles required her to be dressed like a man, and she became the foremost representative of this kind of movie (Figure 1.7). There were other famous movie stars who appeared in Shaw’s Huangmei Opera films, such as Lin Dai’s The Kingdom and the Beauty and Beyond the Great Wall, Li Li Hua’s Yang Kwei Fei and The Grand Substitution (1965), and Li Ching’s Three Smiles. These Huangmei Opera movies and stars enjoyed popularity among the fans.
Shaw Brother’s rival, Cathay Studio, enticed Le Di, who co-starred with Ling Po in *The Love Eterne*, to join them to star in Huangmei Opera films such as *A Beggar’s Daughter* (1965), *The Lucky Purse* (1966), *Lady in the Moon* (1966), *The Magic Fan* (1967) and *Red Plum Pavilion* (1968). Most of her roles in this film genre portrayed sad figures prone to sacrificing themselves for the sake of their lovers (Figure 1.8). Tragically, Le Di committed suicide in 1968, a year after her divorce from the famous actor Chen Hou. Compared to Shaw’s Huangmei Opera films, Cathay’s films were more operatic and focused on Chinese classic folk stories. On the other hand, most of Shaw’s films were historic and epic stories with grand studio effects and fine costume design which appealed to many fans. These features ensured that Shaw Brothers led at the box office and in the production of Huangmei Opera films in the 1960s (Figure 1.4).

Although in 1968 Shaw Brothers made another commercially successful Huangmei Opera film, *Three Smiles*, in which Ling Po co-starred with Li Ching (Figure 1.9), by the late 1960s the Huangmei Opera film genre was fading away. It was because another film genre, that of martial arts films, appeared on the market and attracted the new generation
audience. These new audiences had been born after 1949 and were estranged from the oppression of their parents and the cultural values of China. They enjoyed better economic status, were more Westernised and more rebellious than the older generation who identified more strongly with Chinese traditions. Even though a few Huangmei Opera films were made after the 1970s, such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* (1978) and *Imperious Princess* (1980), the Huangmei Opera film genre went out of fashion and most of its fans retreated to their living rooms to watch the new entertainment, television.

4. The Historical Background of Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1960s

The Political Background

In the early 1960s the Huangmei Opera film genre enabled Shaw Brothers and Cathay Studio to consolidate their empires, and it stimulated the making of Mandarin cinema as well (Figure 1.10). This was quite extraordinary for both Hong Kong and Taiwan because neither local language was Mandarin: Hong Kong was Cantonese speaking and Taiwan

![Graph showing the number of Mandarin Films and Huangmei Opera Films in Taiwan in the 1960s](image)

**FIGURE 1.10**
was Fukienese speaking. Why was a Mandarin speaking film genre so popular in the 1960s? What was the social background for both Chinese communities in the 1960s? For the answer to these questions, we have to examine the change of demographics from 1949.

In 1949 after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, tens of thousands of Chinese streamed across the border to Hong Kong to escape Communism. In less than a year, the colony’s population increased 20 percent (Fu & Desser 2000, p. 72). Many of Shanghai’s entrepreneurs and filmmakers brought the business and film industry to Hong Kong when the Communist regime in China was intent on closing down the capitalist system under which they had flourished. Hong Kong became the major film production centre because of the growth in the economy and film industry there. By the middle of the 1950s, the Hong Kong film industry seemed to be controlled by those Shanghai filmmakers who spoke Mandarin and had a cultural identification with China.

In 1949 the Kuomintang (KMT) retreated to Taiwan and brought about 1.5 million Chinese refugees, most of whom were military servicemen, government and party officials, and their families, to a small island with an indigenous population of seven million (Cheng & Haggard 1992, p. 4). These refugees were educated, and expected to go back to China soon. However after a decade had passed, it was clear that going home was an impossible dream. Homesickness and nostalgia proliferated for the China that was lost to them. Seeing Huangmei Opera films with Chinese landscape, domestic language and music became an outlet for the homesickness of the refugees (Figure 1.11).

From 1949, martial law was tightly executed by the authorities in Taiwan and the President, Chiang Kai Shek, was the political leader who had supreme power in all respects. In general, there was no representative democracy and no guaranteed political rights in Taiwan. Meanwhile, because the British government was trying to maintain the status quo in the politics of its colonial city, Hong Kong’s political
structure remained a top-down, authoritarian system in which there was practically no connection between the colonial state and society (Fu & Desser 2000, p. 73). This lack of representative democracy in Hong Kong and Taiwan created a political climate in the 1960s that was oppressive.

In 1955, Taiwan’s Government Information Office (GIO) established the Department of Motion Picture Censor to take charge of the censorship of films both produced in Taiwan and imported from abroad (Lu, F 1998, p. 71). As a result, censorship of films by the authorities was extremely strict, and any provocative content could be suspended and suffer penalties. Most of the Huangmei Opera films were ancient romance stories that were considered harmless by the authorities. Most of Hong Kong and Taiwan’s film studios wanted to make films that would not affront the authorities and lose studio profits. With its escapist ancient Chinese world and romantic stories, the Huangmei Opera film genre thereby became one of the most strategic film genres to invest in.

In the 1960s, Taiwan’s government implemented a policy package of encouraging Mandarin speaking for the Taiwanese population. This package included Mandarin education in school, Mandarin newspaper publishing, Mandarin film production, and so on (Lu, F 1998, p. 163). Most of the Huangmei Opera films corresponded with this Mandarin speaking policy so were encouraged by the government’s loan plan. In addition, because of the success of the Huangmei Opera film The Love Eterne and the limitation policy on foreign language films in Taiwan, many theatres originally screening foreign language films changed to screening Mandarin films instead. At the same time, Hong Kong film industry was actively anti-communist because of rioting by leftists supported by the Beijing government in the 1960s (Fu & Desser 2000, p. 75). Meanwhile, because China had cut itself off from the rest of the world during the Cultural Revolution, the Hong Kong film industry embraced the Taiwan film market with its more friendly government and mass market of Mandarin speakers. Consequently, Huangmei Opera films became virtually synonymous with Mandarin cinema for Hong Kong and Taiwan in the early 1960s (Figure 1.10).
The Economic Background

After retreating to Taiwan in 1949, the KMT initiated a series of successful agricultural reform policies, such as land reform, investment and intensive extension work, and brought increased productivity and production (Clark, C 1989, p. 166). These agricultural reform policies produced a significantly increased income for the general population. In the 1950s, Taiwan came through the Korean War and benefited from the massive infusion of American aid that it brought. Taiwan began to transform itself from an agricultural to an industrial economy in the late 1950s. This export-oriented economy was mainly supported by labour-intensive industries such as textiles, plastics, and so on. Taiwan’s export economy was phenomenally successful because of economic policies that encouraged the expansion of private enterprise and foreign investment. Similarly, Hong Kong’s economic development also rested on an export-led manufacturing economy in the 1950s because of the huge increase in population created by the influx of refugees. They provided a supply of cheap labour for industry.

The growth of Taiwan and Hong Kong’s economies from the 1950s to 1960s brought substantial gains in income and a better standard of living for the general population. For example, Taiwan’s per capita income increased 2.26 times from 1961 to 1969 (Table 1.1). The growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Per Capita Income (U.S. Dollars)</th>
<th>Consuming and Entertaining / Income (%)</th>
<th>Annual Average of Movie Attendance Per Capita</th>
<th>Number of Theatres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
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<td>5.83</td>
<td>8.2</td>
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<td>189</td>
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<td>209</td>
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<td>1965</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>237</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>9.9</td>
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<td>249</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1.1
of personal income increased people’s abilities of consuming and entertaining. The annual average of movie attendance per capita increased from 8.6 times per year in 1961 to 11.7 times in 1969. The number of theatres in Taiwan simultaneously increased from 134 to 253 (Lu, F 1998, pp. 429–432). This rapid growth of the film market demanded more film supplies. The unprecedented growth in the number of Huangmei Opera films in the early 1960s evidenced this phenomenon (Figure 1.4).

Although Taiwan’s industrialisation began in the 1950s, the middle-aged agricultural population was still the largest demographic group, and the cinema was still the main entertainment in the early 1960s (Lu, F 1998, pp.143–4). Seeing Huangmei Opera films with popular myths and legends became the main leisure activity for middle-aged agricultural audiences, since they were familiar with these folk stories. Meanwhile, the Huangmei Opera film genre also appealed to many manufacturing labourers, mostly young women, with its emotional, nostalgic and escapist romantic fantasies. These two groups of population became the main part of the audience for the Huangmei Opera film genre.

The Social Background

By the middle of the 1960s, under the rigorous political atmosphere and agricultural economic circumstances, Taiwan was a patriarchal society in which the traditional codes of behaviour were filial piety and discipline. A majority of people in this society were fettered by different economic and class barriers. These differences produced conflict, misunderstanding and psychological stress, which underpinned the formula of the Huangmei Opera film genre. The resulting figures were autocratic fathers, effete young scholars and modelled female roles given special emphasis as carriers of misery, oppression and sacrifice. However, most of the Huangmei Opera films were romantic stories which suggested that love could cross the differences of those barriers. These escapist romantic fantasies not only won working-class female audiences in the early 1960s but also secured that society because of their catharsis of audiences’ anxiety and repression.
Also, as mentioned earlier, most of the Huangmei Opera films were ancient stories with Chinese landscape scenes. These ancient stories had few connections to everyday life and rarely provoked contemporary political issues. The Chinese landscape scenes could provide comfort to the homesick fans without creating conflict with the government’s political doctrines. As a result, these Huangmei Opera films consolidated the order of this patriarchal society without destroying its traditional values, eventually leading to escapist romantic fantasies which continued to be popular in the female-dominated film market and were accepted by the authorities in the 1960s.

5. Conclusion

The Huangmei Opera film genre appeared at a time when China was in a volatile and rapidly changing state in the middle of last century. The communists took over China and established a Marxist and proletarian country in 1949. Millions of refugees crowded into Taiwan and Hong Kong, changing the demographics and political structure for both Chinese societies. Even when the Huangmei Opera film genre was prominent in the 1960s, this political and social situation was still in a rigorous and even turbulent state. China was engaged in the Cultural Revolution, cutting itself off from the rest of world and turning the whole country upside down. Taiwan and Hong Kong transformed themselves from agricultural to industrial economies and their populations drifted from village to city. In examining the historical context it is possible to show how the Huangmei Opera film genre can be used like a microscope to analyse the state of mind and experience of Chinese communities in the 1960s. From this perspective, the Huangmei Opera film genre was not only a unique and new film genre but also an embodiment of healing for the Chinese in a historical era.
1. The Definition of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre

Film scholars Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack (1989, p. 80) define film genre as “a number of popular film types similar in form, style, imagery and subject matter”. About 50 films, based on the combination of Chinese folk stories and Huangmei folk music, were very popular with audiences in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia from the 1950s to 1960s. Huangmei Opera films can thereby be described as a typical film genre. Yet in order to distinguish the Huangmei Opera film genre from others, it is necessary first to examine its formal characteristics. These include not only the films’ visual qualities but also aural aspects, such as dialogue and music.

The most distinctive characteristic of the Huangmei Opera film genre is its aural component, the Huangmei music with its characteristic melody. As music is the most important governing principle in the style of the Hollywood musical, so the definition of a Huangmei Opera film is Huangmei music itself. We can distinguish a Huangmei Opera film from others by the fact that it contains Huangmei music. For example, Li Han Hsiang directed two films in 1962, *Beyond the Great Wall* and *The Beauty of Beauties*. Both movies were historic musical epics about Chinese beauties, however, while *Beyond the Great Wall* was a Huangmei Opera film because Huangmei music was used in part of the movie, *The Beauty of Beauties* was not a Huangmei Opera film because no Huangmei music
was used in the movie. Accordingly, the Huangmei music is the most distinguishing element of the Huangmei Opera film genre.

Just as the Hollywood musical is predicated on the concept that singing and dancing are used to tell part of the story, the incorporation by Huangmei music of the traditions of narrative song and gesture mean that singing and gesture are used in the same manner in the Huangmei Opera film genre. There is a traditional Chinese phrase, “Singing is better than saying”. The long history of the development of Huangmei Opera means that there are many ways in which the music itself had already become part of storytelling. A good example is contained in the farewell scene of the movie *The Love Eterne*. It is a sequence in which Lian Shan Bo sees off Zhu Ying Tai, who is wanting to reveal the secret that she is a woman. Zhu is singing during the trip, comparing a pair of mandarin ducks to a husband and wife to drop the hint about her gender. With Huangmei music and lyrics, this singing sequence coordinates with the visual environments, provides the character’s inner feeling and intentions, and carries the story line forward (Figure 2.1).
2. Genre Analysis Approaches to Huangmei Opera Films

Its musical elements aside, the Huangmei Opera film genre, with its other distinguishing characteristics, can be fruitfully examined in terms of narrative conventions and subject matter by applying genre theories and studies. The genre theorist Thomas Schatz has investigated the relationship between the Hollywood film industry and genres in his book, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*. His analytical method for exploring genres may be useful for examining the Huangmei Opera film genre, which had a similar relationship with the Hong Kong studio system. Furthermore, his theory not only places the main responsibility for genre success on the studio system but also emphasises the interrelationships between the studio system, film artists and audiences. He argues that this reflexive relationship, which is a process of production, feedback and conventionalisation, contributes to the development of a film genre. Finally he develops methods of analysis that incorporate the sociological and mythical dimensions of genre to examine the cultural and ideological milieu that produced these films. From the above, it can be seen that Schatz’s methods are useful and trenchant as a means of analysing the Huangmei Opera film genre, and so have been used to understand these films.

In analysing Hollywood film genres, Schatz places the main responsibility for genre success on production practices of the studio system. He notes, “Hollywood had read the pulse of its popular audience in developing an engaging and profitable means of narrative cinematic expression – the conventions of feature filmmaking were firmly established” (Schatz 1981, p. 5). The Huangmei Opera film genre had a similar relationship with Hong Kong’s studio system, which contributed to the success of many Chinese film genres from the 1950s to 1970s. From the 1950s, Hong Kong became the biggest source of Chinese films supplied to Chinese communities outside mainland China. They were mostly produced by two major studios, Shaw Brothers and Cathay Studio. Before these two major studios appeared, the Hong Kong film industry was undeveloped and less cosmopolitan in this tiny colonial film market.
Both major studios played key roles in establishing the Hong Kong film industry but at the same time competed ferociously with one another for the film markets in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia in the 1960s.

Both rivals established their entertainment empire by a supply and demand relationship between overseas Chinese communities and Hong Kong. Economic investments from overseas Chinese communities became a source of supply for film making in Hong Kong. Then, Hong Kong-made films catered to all overseas Chinese communities, including Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan. They managed their enterprise by a strategy that combined the strong relationship between family members with the flexible modern management methods of the studio system.

When we examine the success of these two major studios, we can find that both of them followed the model of the sophisticated Hollywood studio system that had developed during the classic era of Hollywood.¹ Both Shaw Brothers and Cathay Studio adapted most aspects of the Hollywood studio system, requiring effective production methods and invoking the fantasy of the movie star. This studio system helped both studios and contributed to the popularity of the Huangmei Opera film genre. The sophistication of Huangmei Opera films during this period was due to the excellent technical standard and the professionalism of filmmakers, such as Li Han Hsiang, King Hu, Wang Tian Lin, and others who were in turn supported by the studio system. Moreover, many fans of the Huangmei Opera film genre were attracted by the glamorous movie stars such as Lin Dai, Le Di, Li Li Hua and Ling Po. The fans’ enthusiasm for these movie stars was phenomenal. For example, Ling Po, who played male roles in Huangmei Opera films, was widely popular among this genre’s fans, especially women. Filmmakers and stars who were under contract to either of the two studios were largely responsible for the glossy look and polished styles that became associated in the public mind with films produced by the two majors (Teo 1997, p. 74). Huangmei Opera films which featured these popular stars attracted many loyal fans who provided the bulk of revenue for the studios.

¹ The classic era of Hollywood was from the 1930s to the 1960s (Schatz 1981, p. 4).
The studio system functions to mass produce and mass distribute movies. Shaw Brothers and Cathay Studio engaged in fierce competition not only by making Huangmei Opera movies for a mass market but also by leasing them through their own distribution system to theatres that they controlled themselves. For example, Shaw Brothers owned about 130 theatres across Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia in the late 1950s (Figure 2.2), and Cathay Studio at its peak operated 75 cinema theatres throughout Singapore and Malaysia (Liao et al. 2003, p. 116).

This “vertical structure”, according to which the two major studios owned both their production studio and distribution system, made it extremely difficult for the other production companies to compete with them. For example, in 1964 Li Han Hsiang established his own production studio, Guolian Studio, in Taiwan but went bankrupt only a few years later. One of the reasons Li failed was that Guolian Studio lacked its own distribution system and could not lease its own motion pictures in theatres that were mostly controlled by Shaw Brothers and Cathay Studio. As a result, both major studios provided most of the Chinese films for Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia in the 1960s. Shaw Brothers, for example, provided about 40 films for the Taiwanese film market, with a total of 120 films in 1968 (Liao et al. 2003, p. 132).

Because of the mass production and mass distribution of the studio system, these two major studios endeavoured to reach the largest audiences possible. To achieve this purpose, they had to read the pulse and taste of the popular audience. As Schatz (1981, p. 5) describes in relation to the Hollywood studio system, “They must protect their initial investment by relying to some extent upon established conventions that have been proven through previous exposure and repetition.” He adds, “Obviously, costs could be minimised by repeating successful formulas” (Schatz 1981, p. 9). From this perspective, Shaw Brothers and Cathay Studio, for the
purpose of protecting their investment and reaching the mass audience, had to keep making the kinds of movies that had been proven successful and popular in the film market. That was why many Chinese film genres would be developed and many genre films would be produced in the studio era of Hong Kong and Taiwan from the 1950s to 1970s. Huangmei Opera, which had been proven popular among its masses, was the first one to develop into a film genre for both major studios.

3. The Narrative Conventions of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre

The Huangmei Opera film genre is a kind of musical film that is full of Chinese lyrical music, folk culture and literary traditions. These Chinese opera music, folk cultural and literary traditions have their own cultural milieu and ideological system. However, most useful genre studies and theories were developed to examine American film genres, and even more specifically, Hollywood film genres. These genre studies and theories analysed film genres by referring to American culture and its society, and seldom examined the other film genres that were developed outside America. Schatz (1981, p. 6) even argues that, “Italy’s spaghetti Westerns, Japan’s samurai films, or the French New Wave’s hardboiled detective films owe to genres developed by the Hollywood studio system.” While it is true that some film genres outside America were inspired by the Hollywood studio system and Hollywood films, if we apply these genre studies and theories to examine many other film genres all over the world, it is necessary to refer to their particular cultural and social context in order to avoid misinterpretation and inaccuracy.

For example, in examining Hollywood film genres, Schatz argues that the audience’s familiarity with the film’s generic pattern is based on repeated viewing. He notes:

Any viewer’s familiarity with a genre is the result of a cumulative process, of course. The first viewing of a Western or musical actually might be more difficult and demanding than the viewing
of a non-genre film, due to the peculiar logic and narrative conventions of the genre. With repeated viewings, however, the genre’s narrative pattern comes into focus and the viewer’s expectations take shape (Schatz 1981, p. 11).

Based on his assumption, generic elements are repeated and help audiences to generate knowledge of generic patterns. The generic formula is thus established by repetition on viewing cinema. However, the Chinese audience’s generic knowledge regarding Huangmei Opera films was different from Schatz’s assumption. Although the Huangmei Opera film genre’s audience in the 1960s was familiar with its conventions as the result of prior experiences, most of these prior experiences were not based on repeated viewing in the cinema but were due to knowledge from other sources, such as religious, literary, theatrical and popular stories. As mentioned earlier, most of the Huangmei Opera films were adapted from Chinese folktales about popular myths and legends. Chinese of all classes were familiar with these stories, and the music and conventions of the dramas, from their earliest childhood. Before they stepped into the cinema, they were all familiar with the plot, characters and music. The idea of going into the theatre for a new story that was full of suspense was quite foreign to the Huangmei Opera film audience. The Huangmei Opera film genre audience’s identification with certain plots and characters was based on their prior experiences with Chinese traditional folk drama and other cultural sources.

Of course, the cinematic experience was still important in audience understanding and reception. The novel techniques of cinema, such as Cinemascope and studio effects, involved these audiences more directly than any traditional art form had ever done before. However, the fundamental element that attracted and impressed the audience of Huangmei Opera films was the story. The film semiotic theorist Christian Metz (1974, p. 45) notes, “The rule of the ‘story’ is so powerful that the image, which is said to be the major constituent of film, vanished behind the plot it has woven.” In other words, seeing the movie is not seeing the shots but the story.
Although the Chinese audience’s knowledge about the Huangmei Opera film genre pattern was not mainly based on repeated viewing in the cinema but on knowledge from popular myths and legends, formulas still exist in Chinese folktales or dramas. In the long history of development, many legends and historic epics kept evolving into Chinese folktales and resulted in Chinese drama that is bountiful and various. In the process of development, the artists and creators selected and polished these dramas based on the tastes and interests of the popular audience. Gradually, elements of Chinese drama became formularised and systemised through the process of selection and polishing. Thus, before it was adapted into the Huangmei Opera films, Chinese drama was an independent and complete system with its own narrative conventions.

4. The Themes of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre

Conceptually, the story of Chinese drama includes two interrelated elements, plot and character. If we analyse the plots of most Huangmei Opera films, there are three main themes represented in them: heroism, moralism and the love-match.

**Heroism**

Stories of heroism are stories about patriotic heroes and heroines who either resist foreign aggression or sacrifice themselves in some way for the sake of their nation. Many Chinese people were in long-term exile and suffering as a result of foreign aggression or political coups. Therefore, heroic stories about expelling foreign aggression or quelling coups were embraced by Chinese audiences. The best-known heroic story was probably the movie *Lady General Hua Mulan* (1964). It tells how the heroine, Mulan, replaced her father to resist a foreign invasion and save the nation (Figure 2.3). However, due to the fact that battle scenes didn’t really fit well with the lyrical style of the Huangmei Opera film genre, there were only a few
subsequent Huangmei Opera films that represented a similar theme, such as *Diao Chan* (1958) and *Beyond the Great Wall* (1962).

**Moralism**

Chinese people tended to view the opera stage as a courtroom of morality. Most of the Chinese folktales, which depict sympathetic virtuous characters and unsympathetic villains and wrongdoers, became the projection of people’s sense of justice. Interestingly, in these stories most of the characters with lower social status are virtuous, while wealthy bigwigs, senior officials or governors are villainous. At the end, virtuous characters will be rewarded and villains penalised (Figure 2.4). Since most Chinese people had suffered from financial hardship or poverty and had been ruled by corrupt bureaucracies, they enjoyed stories that reflected the triumph of the humble and good over the proud and evil. Such themes are evident in many Huangmei Opera films, such as *Female Son-in-law* (1959), *The Story of Sue San* (1963), *Adulteress* (1963), *The Crimson Palm* (1964), *The Female Prince* (1964), *Inside the Forbidden City* (1965), *The Great Substitution* (1965), *The Lotus Lamp* (1965), *A Beggar’s Daughter* (1965), *The Lucky Purse* (1966), *The Dawn Will Come* (1966), *The Midnight Murder* (1967), *The Pearl Phoenix* (1967) and *Red Plum Pavilion* (1968).

**The Love-match**

The most famous and treasured of Chinese folktales are about love. As mentioned in Chapter 1, China was a patriarchal society in which most people were fettered by different economic and class barriers. However,
many folktales suggested that love could cross the differences of those barriers. Famous stories, such as *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (1960), *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (1962), *The Love Eterne* (1963), *West Chamber* (1965), *The Perfumed Arrow* (1966), *Forever and Ever* (1967) and *Three Smiles* (1968), suggest love that has a transcendental power. They even imply that the barriers between heaven and earth can be broken because of the power of love (Figure 2.5). Thus there are many legends about the love between a heavenly being and a mortal, such as *The Heavenly Match* (1955), *The Cowboy and Spinning Maid* (1963), *Madam White Snake* (1962), *A Maid from Heaven* (1963) and *The Mermaid* (1965).

5. The Role Types of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre

Many Chinese operas, including Huangmei Opera, represent not only similar themes but also formularised characters such as autocratic parents or authorities, effete young scholars and young women who are suffering through love or oppression. Traditionally, there are four role categories in Chinese opera: Sheng, Dan, Jing, Chou (Dolby 1976, pp. 180–181).
Each one has its own sub-categories. Basically, Sheng (Xiaosheng) refers to young scholars, Dan refers to young women, Jing refers to vigorous, powerful men and Chou is the clown character. As a genre’s iconography involves visual coding and allows us to identify characters, these role prototypes characterise roles by their props, costumes, gestures and movements (Figure 2.6).

The Huangmei Opera film genre simplified these concepts of role prototypes and adapted them into films. For example, in the most popular Huangmei Opera film, *The Love Eterne*, when Lian Shan Bo appears in the “pleasant hill” scene, the character indicates that he is a Sheng or young scholar by manipulating the fan, and wearing a gown and a hat that has two strands attached to the back. This character’s servant, acting comically by carrying a shoulder pole with a small bookcase, indicates that he is a Chou, or the clown in the story. Zhu Ying Tai appears as a Dan, a young, refined and unmarried woman who has graceful and delicate movements and wears an elaborate coiffure, adorned with a jewelled hairpiece. Zhu’s autocratic father suggests a Jing, a vigorous and powerful character, who struts and wears a long black beard and an imposing robe.

By these symbolised visual appearances of the roles, the audience can not only identify these character types instantly but also grasp the characters’ attitudes and values, and anticipate their actions. These familiar features in the Huangmei Opera film genre help audiences to become oriented, and guide their experience of the film.
6. Classic Beauty: Le Di and the Subject of Melodrama

One supremely popular actress who performed Dan characters in Huangmei opera films was Le Di (Figure 2.4). She was awarded the title of “Classic Beauty” because of her incomparable beauty in ancient costume when she starred in The Dream of the Red Chamber (1962). In this film she played the character Lin Dai Yu, a famous ancient beauty who suffered an arranged marriage and died in this tragic love story. After playing that role, Le Di’s public image as the “Classic Beauty” constituted an archetype of the ancient female role, representing a young woman who suffers for love or because of an oppressive situation.

Unlike western tragedies, such as Hamlet and Othello, in which the main male protagonists are the tragic heroes, many of the Chinese folktales that provided the stories for Chinese Opera and Huangmei Opera films are tragic stories about women. Traditional female roles in Chinese folktales are often depicted as tender, vulnerable and enduring sacrifice for the sake of love. They are often persecuted by villains or suffer the injustice of arranged marriages and ungrateful husbands.

Socially and economically, most Chinese women have had a lower status than men and yet they make up the larger proportion of the popular audience. As mentioned earlier, Chinese dramas are based on the tastes and interests of the popular audience. Hence, many Chinese dramas are woman-centered. In addition, most artists and creators of Chinese dramas were scholars who often suffered as a result of protracted wars or political coups. They were often exiled and frustrated in their ambitions which is likely to have led them to experience compassion for women who were marginalized as they were. Therefore, many Chinese folktales that scholars developed into theatrical and cinema forms are melodramas related to women.

This kind of melodrama in Huangmei Opera films are popularly referred to as “weepies” or “tearjerkers” since they engender sympathy with the protagonists and are intended to make the audience cry. Tears can release emotional pain, thus watching sad Huangmei Opera movies in which the protagonists suffer hardship and calamities and being able to cry in the
public space of the movie theater were cathartic for Chinese audiences. They could quarantine their real feelings of sadness and not ‘take them home’. These melodramas became a significant emotional outlet for Chinese audiences who were suffering oppressive situations in the 1960s. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, in Huangmei Opera films, although the protagonists endure many hardships, at the end virtuous characters were rewarded and villains penalized. This kind of drama structure also represents a mythic ideology that the Chinese community subscribed to in the period.

7. Huangmei Opera Films and Mythology

Huangmei Opera films were often set in ancient dynasties within a world of myth and legend. This world, as Schatz (1981, p. 21) mentions in relation to Hollywood genres, is “a familiar social community that is a cultural milieu where inherent thematic conflicts are animated, intensified and resolved by familiar characters and patterns of action.” Schatz (1981, p. 21) assumes that genre films are like myths in that they embody important and conflicting attitudes about culture and how individual relationships to it are rehearsed and repeated in a familiar social community. Schatz’s analysis of Hollywood genres is informed by Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structuralist methodology which refers to myths as a “binary structure”. Lévi-Strauss (1972, pp.16–17) notes, “When two characters are opposed in a binary structure, their symbolic meaning is virtually forced to be both general and easily accessible because of the simplicity of differences between them.” From this perspective, we can use Lévi-Strauss’s “binary structure” method to analyse the Huangmei Opera film genre and to find out the social and cultural values embedded in Chinese society (Table 2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Social Status Quo</th>
<th>Characters (Role Types)</th>
<th>Conflicting</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heroism</td>
<td>Wars and Coups</td>
<td>Invaders / Heroes</td>
<td>Alien / National</td>
<td>Expelled / Glory or sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moralism</td>
<td>Poverty and Bureaucracy</td>
<td>Officials / Citizens</td>
<td>Villainous / Virtuous</td>
<td>Punished / Good rewarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love-match</td>
<td>Feudalism and Patriarchy</td>
<td>Patriarch / Lovers</td>
<td>Hierarchy / Free</td>
<td>1. Strengthen / Death or separation</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Compromising / Union</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2.1
A Binary Structure of Themes for the Huangmei Opera Film Genre
In examining the structure of the Huangmei Opera film genre, various themes are represented and employ different means of resolution. For example, in films with heroic themes, the resolutions of the conflict are that the invaders are expelled and the heroes (or heroines) return home in glory or are sacrificed for the sake of their nation. In films with moral themes, the result is that villains are punished and the virtuous are well rewarded. In films with love-match themes, the lovers end in death or separation and the patriarchy is strengthened. Sometimes, the patriarch compromises, accepting a change in the class status of a character. As Schatz (1981, p. 29) notes, “In its animation and resolution of basic cultural conflicts, the genre film celebrates our collective sensibilities, providing an array of ideological strategies for negotiating social conflicts.” Most of these themes, conflicts and resolutions in Huangmei Opera films represent the emotional life and naturalised ideologies held by the Chinese community.

The source of the emotional life and naturalised ideologies of the Chinese community can be traced back to the time of Confucius. Most Chinese attitudes and acts accorded with the compulsory morality of legalised Confucianism that stringently upholds loyalty and nationalism, justice and morality, and filial piety and propriety. Resisting foreign invasion, condemning villainy and praising virtue, and complying with familism and decorum were the governing principles for Chinese communities. This was particularly strong among the masses of ordinary Chinese people. In addition, for centuries China had also been a feudal country in which the ruling classes classified people according to their different economic and social status. Hierarchical ideology deeply penetrated all classes of Chinese society for centuries. Combined with the familism of Confucianism, China became a patriarchal society that valued arranged marriage between families of equal standing. Conflicts were often generated when a pair of lovers crossed class boundaries.

Many Huangmei Opera films involve a romantic couple and the conflicts they experience in their struggle to bring their views in line with the values of the patriarchal society. However, unlike the Hollywood musical in which the kiss or embrace signals the integration of the couple into the larger cultural community, many of the Huangmei Opera films end with the death or separation of the lovers, to strengthen the values of
the patriarchal society. Even in the later period of the Huangmei Opera film genre, the union of the couple is not effected because the values of the patriarchal society have changed, but because the class status of the couple has somehow equalised. The intention of the Huangmei Opera film genre is responsive rather than revolutionary to the patriarchal society. The process possibly constitutes resistance to the traditional ideology, but eventually it still results in compromise and reinforcement of the status quo.

However, this compromise sometimes becomes another abstract form to sublimate audiences’ anxiety and repression. For example, in *The Love Eterne*, after the death of Lian Sheng Bo and Zhu Ying Tai, the couple transforms into a pair of butterflies that fly together in heaven. And in *The Cowboy and Spinning Maid*, the romance between the fairy maiden and the mortal is forbidden, and they are forced to separate by the two banks of a heavenly river. Their loyal love moves the cranes and they fly together to build a crane bridge which permits the couple to see each other once a year. This kind of compromise ending was also influenced by the Confucianist doctrine of the Golden Mean.

The Golden Mean of Confucianism teaches the Chinese that the “middle way” is beauty and that balance generates perspective. According to Confucius, excess and deficiency are equally at fault (Ware 1955, p. 72). The Golden Mean values harmony between ritual and desire, avoiding the deficiency of indulgence and mortification. It is similar to the Greek philosopher Aristotle’s idea of moderation. Aristotle (1975, p. 28) thought, “Now an ethical virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, in which excess and deficiency are errors and are blamed, while moderation is a success and is praised; and both success and praise belong to virtue.” The Golden Mean of the Confucian values balance and well-roundedness to achieve harmony. For example, in the theme of heroism and moralism, most of the time the invaders and villains are either expelled or punished, rarely resulting in death if they show their regrets. Mercy and forgiveness are considered well-rounded virtues derived from the doctrine of the Golden Mean. In the earlier example of *The Love Eterne*, where the lovers transform into a pair of butterflies flying in the heavens, it’s no surprise to see fans stepping out from the theatre in tears yet with a gratified feeling. This kind of well-rounded ending transforms the defeat into another form of victory, provides hope for the audience, and secures the traditional values of the patriarchal society they are part of.
8. Conclusion

The Huangmei Opera film genre is a unique film genre not only because of its special music, style and form but also because of the ideology and cultural context that underpin it. Its unique style developed from Chinese cultural traditions that were adapted into a popular film genre by Hong Kong’s emerging studio system. This studio system established the Hong Kong film industry and, at the same time, provided mass Huangmei Opera films for Chinese communities in the 1960s. Meanwhile, the ideology of the Confucian permeates every aspect of the Huangmei Opera film genre. The doctrine of patriarchal society also influences this genre’s elements of narration. By analysing the genre elements of Huangmei Opera films, we can reveal its distinguishing characteristics as well as the way it has been formed by its cultural context. Thus, genre study is a useful methodology for understanding Huangmei Opera films and the continued influence of Confucianism in Chinese society.
1. The Stage Production of *The Love Eterne* in 2003

In 2003, 40 years after the initial success of the legendary Huangmei Opera movie *The Love Eterne*, it was commemoratively re-performed on stage and embraced widely again in Taiwan (Figure 4.1). This stage production of *The Love Eterne* featured surviving members of the cast, including Li Kuwn and Ren Jie, who starred as a servant and maid in the original movie. The most important actress, Ling Po, who starred as Brother Lian in the movie, enjoyed continuing adoration by her fans of 40 years’ standing. Thousands of fans, most of them around 70 years of age and accompanied by their children and grandchildren, crowded into the theatre. They sang and wept at the story and the performance of it. And, at the end, they cheered for Ling Po and presented her with flowers. Ling Po won a round of applause, just as she had 40 years ago.

Like many other Chinese people who suffered family separation through social upheaval, Ling Po had a miserable childhood, which won many people’s sympathy and became one of the reasons for her popularity. Ling Po’s parents gave her away for adoption due to poverty when she was only four years old. After the communists established the People’s
Republic of China, Ling Po escaped with her adoptive parents to Hong Kong. In the 1950s, Ling Po started off her singing and acting career in Fukienese movies as a child character, Xiao Juan. When Ling Po was singing for a movie in the Daguan Studio, the director Li Han Hsiang happened to be making the movie *Diao Chan* in the same studio and was impressed by her singing (Chen 2005). She was quickly offered a contract with Shaw Brothers and took the new stage name of “Ling Po”. In 1963, Ling Po was cast in Li’s Huangmei Opera movie *The Love Eterne* as a young male scholar due to her excellent vocals.

*The Love Eterne* was a legendary success and catapulted Ling Po to stardom overnight because of her accomplished impersonation of the male protagonist, Brother Lian (Figure 4.2). In Hong Kong and Taiwan, thousands of fans crowded into theatres to see *The Love Eterne* repeatedly. Some of them even saw the movie more than a hundred times (*Taiwan Shin Sheng Daily News* 1963, 31 October, p. 6). According to news reports from 1963, when Ling Po visited Taipei for the first time, around 200,000 fans crowded onto the street to welcome her (*United Daily News* 1963, 31 October, p. 3). Ling Po recalled the scene in an interview: “There were many fans climbing on windows, wire poles and cars. Everyone called me Brother Lian, Clumsy Gander and Ling Po. They held my hands so tightly” (Chen 2005). Hong Kong media called Taipei “a crazy city” because of the exhibition of enthusiasm by a mass of fans for Ling Po and the movie (Huang 1997, p. 15).

Since she was dressed as a man and played a male role, the authorities of the Golden Horse Film Awards of Taiwan didn’t think it proper for her to receive a best actor or actress award. They established a “Best Acting Award” exclusively for Ling Po in 1963. The following year she won the best actress award for her role in *Lady General Hua Mulan* and became the most popular star of Huangmei Opera films. Most of Ling Po’s roles required her to be dressed like a man, and she became the foremost representative of the Huangmei Opera film genre. She starred...
in most of Shaw Studio’s Huangmei Opera films such as *A Maid from Heaven* (1963), *The Crimson Palm* (1964), *The Female Prince* (1964), *West Chamber* (1965), *The Mermaid* (1965), and *Three Smiles* (1968), and enjoyed her adoration by a mass of fans in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia for a decade. Ling Po left Shaw Brothers in 1975 and went to Taiwan to star in her husband’s Huangmei Opera films *Dream of the Red Chamber* (1978) and *Imperious Princess* (1980). *Imperious Princess* was Ling Po’s last Huangmei Opera film, and after that she spent time doing Huangmei Opera television drama in Taiwan and continued to enjoy her popularity. In the early 1980s, Ling Po retired and moved to Canada with her husband and children.

In *The Love Eterne*, Ling Po starred in a male role that elevated her to be one of the most popular stars in the 1960s. It paved her way to success, as well as providing a nickname that accompanied her throughout the years. Today most fans still see Ling Po and Brother Lian as one, and continue to love her through the image of a male scholar. Interviews with Huangmei Opera film fans revealed their fascination with her handsome appearance as a male scholar. Other fans were attracted by her glamorous appearance as a female movie star. Her images on and off screen attracted different genders, classes and ages. While male fans perceived Ling Po/Brother Lian as a woman, many women perceived Ling Po/Brother Lian as a man (Liu, X 1963). During my interviews, one of her female fans answers, “I don’t know. I was insanely crazy about her.” Some fans reply, “I adored her no matter what roles she played” (Chen 2005). From these interviews we would observe two things. Firstly, watching Ling Po is a highly pleasurable experience for them. Secondly, it appears to be an unconscious psychological attraction that frequently borders on obsession.

2. Psychoanalytic Theory Applied to Huangmei Opera Films

In her influential essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, film theorist Laura Mulvey employs psychoanalytic theory to discuss the
unconscious structural ways of seeing, and pleasure in looking, between viewers and the cinema. This can be useful to analyse the unconscious pleasure experience of Ling Po’s fans and the spectatorship of Huangmei Opera films. Mulvey adapts Freud’s theory of scopophilia to claim that the cinema offers a source of pleasure in voyeurism. In psychoanalytic terms, scopophilia is one of the component instincts of sexuality, and is associated with taking other people as objects and subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze (Mulvey 1989, p. 16). Film theorist Christian Metz agrees that scopophilia is the invocatory drive, one of the main sexual drivers and always part of what constitutes the pleasure of film-going. Metz (1982, p. 58) notes, “The practice of the cinema is only possible through the perceptual passions: the desire to see, scopophilia.”

A scene of *The Love Eterne* that serves as an example of scopophilia theory is when Lian Shan Bo (Brother Lian) visits the sick Zhu Ying Tai, who is a woman masquerading as a man by cross-dressing. Lian visits Zhu’s room just as she is changing her clothes (Figure 4.3. 1 and 2). When Lian exhibits concern about her illness and wants to touch her head, Zhu grabs her clothes tightly and rejects him because she is afraid that he will reveal she is a woman (Figure 4.3. 3 and 4).

Based on psychoanalytic theory, voyeurism refers to the satisfaction of watching someone without being seen oneself (Kaplan 1983, p. 14). And conditions of screening and narrative conventions in the cinema give the audience an illusion of looking in on a private world (Mulvey 1989, p. 17). Sitting in the darkened room, the audience’s voyeuristic sense of pleasure is derived from a position of control over Ling Po and Le Di, who are presented as the spectacle. Meanwhile, the cinema’s mechanism separates the audience and stars in both time and space, reinforcing the possibility of voyeurism; of catching Ling Po and Le Di unawares by their absence. Thus, watching Lian and Zhu’s embarrassing situation, and seeing Zhu trying to conceal her secret, provide the audience with a voyeuristic pleasure, as if it is spying on someone who is unaware of being watched.

Psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan’s concept of suture is useful here also. This concerns the way in which the process of viewing involves the stitching together not only of different shots, but also of the conflicting
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tendencies of the imaginary and the symbolic (Hollows & Jancovich 1995, p. 138). Because the mainstream narrative conventions such as camera technology, camera movement and invisible editing are intended to conceal the constructed nature of the image, they reinforce illusion and forgetting, and allow the pleasure mechanisms of voyeurism to flow freely. Mulvey (1989, p. 14) adds, “In the patriarchal society, men dominate these cinema mechanisms and women are represented by an erotic way of looking with a male gaze.” When we examine the society of the 1960s in Hong Kong and Taiwan, where patriarchal cultural dominated, it is clear that both societal and cinematic mechanisms were mostly controlled by men. As a result, most of the female images on screen were certainly displayed as sexual object and erotic spectacle. The example on Figure 4.3.2, with a camera setting to represent a semi-dressed female image on screen, establishes an erotic way of looking with a male gaze. Again, the erotic spectacle combines the narrative conventions neatly without disturbing the pleasure of voyeurism.

Mulvey argues that this representation of the female figure as an erotic spectacle stems from a threat of castration. In psychoanalytic terms, the woman is displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men. However, her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration, always evokes the anxiety it originally signified (Mulvey 1989, p. 21). She suggests that the male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety, “preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma, counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment, or saving of the guilty object; or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous” (Mulvey 1989, p. 21). The first avenue can be demonstrated in the character Zhu Ying Tai, who is young, beautiful and intelligent, ambitiously surpassing men in learning and intellect. This character struggles against the patriarchal world and evokes a threat of castration. Finally, her punishment for this attempt to reject patriarchal order is death. The second avenue explains why men accept Ling Po’s male impersonation and perceive her as a woman. Fetishism refers to the latent perversion whereby men strive to discover the penis in the woman in order to grant themselves erotic satisfaction (Kaplan 1983,
Ling Po, as an actress, impersonates a male scholar who wears a hat and manipulates the fan. Both hat and fan are the substitution of fetish objects to disavow castration and cancel male anxiety (Figure 4.2).

3. Ling Po/Brother Lian: Perfect Woman or Perfect Man?

Mulvey (1989, p. 18) claims that the pleasure in looking has another primary form – narcissism, which is connected to the presence of an object as a source of identification. She employs Lacan’s Mirror Phase theory, which describes “the long love affair/despair between image and self-image”, and suggests that “such intensity of expression” can be found in cinema and “such joyfulness” can be recognised briefly by the cinema audience (Mulvey 1989, p. 18). Narcissism refers to the pleasure in looking when the spectator projects himself onto the screen and fuses with the protagonist through identification.

However, Mulvey (1989, p. 19) argues, “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.” Because mainstream films are controlled by men and dominated by patriarchal ideology, the male protagonist is identified as the active one controlling the events and making things happen, while the female protagonist is a passive presence, a sexual object and an icon. She adds, “As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence” (Mulvey 1989, p. 20). Finally, the cinematic mechanism causes the spectator to choose the male protagonist as the object of identification, and the female protagonist as the object of desire. Hence, the man gazes while the woman is the object of the gaze.

Mulvey’s male gaze and identification theory raises questions about how women watch films and obtain pleasure from them. She suggests that the woman either places herself as a passive recipient of male desire, or identifies with the male protagonist who watches the woman as a desire
object (Hollows & Jancovich 1995, p. 144). However, when we examine Ling Po’s male impersonation of Brother Lian, Mulvey’s assumption creates many problems. During my interviews, male and female fans perceive Brother Lian differently. Most male fans perceive Brother Lian as a woman. They reply, “Of course, Brother Lian is a fiction character played by a woman” (Chen 2005). It seems that they perceive Brother Lian, the male protagonist, as the object of gaze, not the object of identification. On the other hand, most female fans perceive Brother Lian as a man, an object of identification as well as an object of desire. One of the female fans answers, “I like her male impersonation. I thought he is good looking and his gestures are so subtle and tender.” Another female fan replies, “I am attracted by him. The way he expressed things with his eyes is especially fascinating” (Chen 2005). From these interviews, it appears that most female fans take Brother Lian as their prince, their ideal lover, and an object of pleasure and desire. In other words, the female gaze seems to exist when they project their desire onto Brother Lian. These phenomena relating to Ling Po’s male impersonation of Brother Lian reverse Mulvey’s assumption.

Mulvey’s psychoanalytic theory results in the problem of “over assumption”, in that it simply deduces a text’s effect upon the audience from an analysis of the ways in which the text constructs the position of the spectator. It fails to account for the fact that the meaning-making between the text and the spectator is a highly complex and negotiated process. The difference of gender, sexuality, class, race, nation and age in spectators will differentiate the meaning and position of identification and gaze. Especially when we examine the case of Ling Po’s male impersonation without referring to this particular Chinese tradition in the performing arts and its particular social status, we risk producing inaccuracy.
4. The History of Male Impersonation in China

The tradition of the male impersonation on stage goes back a very long way in China. In the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618–907), women played male parts and performed for the emperor (Wu, G 1980, p. 300). Historical studies of this culture explain that one of the reasons why male impersonation appeared in this period is that the society of the Tang dynasty was more open and didn’t discriminate against women (Rong 2005). Another reason is that the first female emperor, Wu Ze Tian, appeared in the Tang dynasty, and society accepted women dressed in male clothing in public (Figure 4.4).

During the Sung dynasty (A.D. 960–1279), there was a development in performing arts called “variety drama” which included dance, music, teases and acrobatics (Figure 4.5). This picture illustrates that female performers of that time not only played instruments but also danced wearing male clothing (Liu, Y 2003, p. 43). In the late Sung dynasty, Chinese drama’s characters were developed into different role types that were identified by their costumes. Female performers usually played different roles types by dressing in corresponding costumes (Figure 4.6). This picture shows two cross-dressing female performers playing two male roles on stage (Liu, Y 2003, p. 60).
In the Yuan dynasty (A.D. 1280–1369), Chinese drama developed into a complex and sophisticated cultural practice. Bands of performers were officially attached to the court and a set of rules was formulated to provide a guide for performance and drama. An author of the Yuan period, Xia Ting Zhi, wrote in his book, Qing Lou Ji, about how professional female performers played both female and male parts and enjoyed popularity, as shown in Figure 4.7 (Wu, G 1980, p. 300). In this period, performing was codified by a series of postures and gestures by which actors engaged in different role types. Costumes and make-up were stylised to distinguish different characters. Meanwhile, stage properties and sets were simplified and symbolised to delineate the world conjured up by the actor’s gestures and movements.

In the Qing dynasty, because the emperor Qian Long (18th century) forbade women to perform in public, female performers disappeared from the stage (Chou 2004, p.
The theatre could only employ men for female impersonation on stage, and this formed the tradition of male-only troupes in the Peking Opera. It was not until the late Qing dynasty (1894–1911) that women were allowed to perform on stage again (Chou 2004, p. 253). After the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the Shaoxing Opera formed a tradition of the female troupe in Shanghai, because of its popularity (Chou 2004, p. 257). Later, the phenomenon of male impersonation existed not only in the Shaoxing Opera but also in the other Chinese operas, such as Cantonese Opera, Huangmei Opera and Taiwanese Opera, and the tradition continues in the present day.

5. The Aesthetics of Chinese Male Impersonation

In its long history of development, Chinese drama has developed a “virtual” aesthetic that permeates into its forms, plays and acting. Unlike Western drama, which is realism-oriented, Chinese drama simplifies and symbolises its scenery, such as stage properties, props and sets, to delineate the world conjured up by the actor’s gestures and movements. For example, when an actor manipulates a riding whip with heavy silk tassels, it indicates that he is riding a horse. Sometimes, without any scenery, a movement imitating the action of opening a door indicates that he is entering a house. Like Chinese landscape painting, Chinese drama requires the viewer’s imagination to enter a realm beyond everyday reality and likeness.

Because of its highly symbolic and stylised forms, Chinese drama needs to codify actors’ costumes, make-up, gestures and movements to register different role types for the audience. For example, Sheng, the role of a young male scholar, is codified by a costume that has a loose and flowing gown, and a hat with two strands attached to the back of it (Figure 4.8). Sheng’s gestures and movements are codified by manipulating a fan and imitating the scholar’s walk with exuberant masculinity. In another example, Dan, a young female
role, is codified by the wearing of a “water sleeve”, which has a long white silk cuff left open at the seam and attached to the end of the sleeve, and adornment with a bejewelled hairpiece on combed hair. Dan’s gestures and movements are graceful, and mimic femininity with a shuffling walk (Figure 4.8).

We can observe that, in Chinese drama, a gender representation on stage depends on the codification of the character’s costumes, make-up, gestures and movements, not the original sexuality of the performer. It means that “gender” becomes a kind of performance that relates to the appearance of masculine or feminine, regardless of biology. This performance aesthetic is based on the principle of depersonalisation, which denaturalises the individual’s original sexuality through a series of codified gestures and poses. Hence, most Chinese male/female impersonators spend years practising a series of formulated masculine/feminine gestures and movements to discursively mask their gender identity.

One might ask the question: if performing a male role depends on the appearance of masculinity, why not find a real man, an actor, to play Brother Lian? During my interviews, most of the fans, especially women, say that for them this would destroy the beauty of this character. They feel that a real man could never be as tender as a woman playing a male role, nor could an actor can be as good looking as Ling Po playing Brother Lian. Ling Po’s male impersonation articulates an ideal lover by infusing femininity – in another word, tenderness – into Sheng, a traditional male scholar role characterised by gentleness, effeminacy and book reading. In addition, Ling Po’s singing and vocals are beautiful, surpassing those of some actors in suiting the Huangmei Opera’s lyrical melody. Thus, for most of her fans, no real man is tender enough, talented or beautiful enough to compete with Ling Po’s impersonation in a male role.

Some viewers might feel that Ling Po’s male impersonation is camp and artificial. However, for Ling Po’s fans, camp equates with tenderness, and precisely because it is the concept that Ling Po’s male impersonation is to play a “make-believe” man, a “virtual” male role, thus it is more artificial – in other words, more skilful and beautiful. In fact, as discussed earlier, Chinese drama is not a realistic performing art; rather
than presenting a purely physical likeness of the real world, it expresses virtually every element through its fictive world, such as stage properties, sets and even characters. Although Western audiences might find this confusing, Chinese audiences have been familiar with these meanings since their childhood.\(^1\) Hence, when Ling Po, an actress, impersonates a young male role by cross-dressing and miming the masculinity, Chinese audiences willingly suspend their disbelief during the performance.

6. Ling Po/Brother Lian: Sexual Ambivalence and Polymorphous Identification

When Ling Po’s male impersonation of Brother Lian encapsulates the beauty of the femininity in the male character, it represents a sexual ambivalence. Brother Lian, a virtual male role, becomes androgynous and enables multiple points of identification. Since Chinese drama requires the viewer’s imagination to enter its virtual world and identify its virtual nature, the audience makes its entry as an active spectator that would read this virtual world by connecting different layers of meaning related to Ling Po’s male impersonation of Brother Lian. On another level, the spectator’s identifications of Brother Lian rely on the fantasy proposing links between societal and psychological modes.

For most audience members in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1960s, a trip to the cinema might give them the opportunity to escape constraints and demands of everyday life. Especially under the atmosphere of the rigorous repression in politics and sexuality in the 1960s, men were

\(^1\) In Western tradition, there is an entertaining drama for Christmas or New Year called “pantomime”, in which an actress plays the part of principal boy and an actor plays the dame. However, unlike pantomime, a slapstick comedy for Western children, male/female impersonation in China is a serious performing art integral to a highly artistic drama for adult audiences.
fettered by different economic and class barriers as well as suffering homesickness. Women were constantly reminded of their gender and expected to behave accordingly. Women played a subservient role in life, and were mostly responsible for the perpetuation of the family and household duties. The dream of the Chinese audience in the 1960s was sexually and emotionally to go as far away as possible from everyday reality.

The cinema offers the pleasure of fantasy, which generally signifies the world of imagination – the inner world of idealised scenarios and wish-fulfilment – and is opposed to the so-called world of “reality” (Stacey 1994, p. 30). Film theorist Elizabeth Cowie (1997, p. 133) claims that fantasy is an imagined scene and refers to it as the ‘mise-en-scène’ of desire, or staging of desire, which is a setting-out of lack; of what is absent. Fantasy depicts what isn’t there, such as repressed and unconscious desires and wishes that are thereby rendered visible through their absence. For example, in The Love Eterne, Brother Lian is a setting-out of the lack of an ideal lover, who is absent in Chinese women’s lives in the real world.

Interestingly, men and women project different desires and make multiple identifications with Brother Lian across gender boundaries in the movie The Love Eterne. It is not only because Ling Po’s male impersonation of Brother Lian represents a sexual ambivalence but also because sexual ambivalence exists in every individual spectator, both male and female. Freud observes that in human beings pure masculinity or femininity does not exist in a psychological sense, and that every individual shows masculine and feminine character traits (Appignanesi & Zarate 1979, p. 89). Cowie adds that the innate bisexual disposition of the human is the juxtaposition, side by side, of both the feminine and masculine as distinct positions of desire (Cowie 1997, p. 137).

Hence, for most Chinese women in the 1960s, there were two unconscious sexual fantasies for Brother Lian, who was the setting-up of what was absent in their real lives. Firstly, on their feminine side, Brother Lian was their desire of an ideal lover, who is tender and thoughtful – however, absent from their life. They perceived Brother Lian as a man, a “prince charming” and an object of desire. On the other hand, on their masculine side, they were yearning for the freedom of self-fulfilment and
self-determination that are exemplified by the male protagonist, Brother Lian, who is impersonated by an actress. This freedom was also absent in their real life. They felt that reality and dreams could be reversed simply by changing those appearances. Thus, they also perceived Brother Lian as a man, however as an object of identification at the same time. We can observe that although women oscillated between masculine and feminine unconscious fantasies, they all perceived Brother Lian as a man, an object of desire as well as identification.

According to psychoanalytic theory, men, like women, are also innately bisexual. However, because of the threat of the castration complex and the dissolution of the Oedipus complex, they would consolidate the masculinity in their character. In psychoanalytic terms, the little boy and little girl initially share the same sexual history, which Freud terms the “phallic stage”, and start by desiring their object: the mother (Hall 1978, p. 109). The castration complex ends the boy’s Oedipus complex, since he fears that by identifying with the mother who lacks the penis, he will endanger his own organ. He starts to identify with his father, who seems to have the phallus and whom he longs to be like (Kaplan 1983, p. 13). Hence the boy will struggle to represent masculinity. Meanwhile, this process involves the boy in both knowing and denying what the female represents. As film theorist Mary Ann Doane (1991, p. 23) suggests:

The boy, unlike the girl in Freud’s description, is capable of a revision of an earlier event, a retrospective understanding which invests the events with a significance which is in no way linked to an immediacy of sight. The gap between the visible and the knowable, the very possibility of disowning what is seen, prepares the ground for fetishism. In a sense, the male spectator is destined to be a fetishist, balancing knowledge and belief.

Hence, most Chinese male spectators in the 1960s chose to perceive Ling Po’s male impersonation of Brother Lian as a woman, even though this character is represented as a male protagonist on screen. They were thus searching for the substitution of fetish objects for Brother Lian on
screen. However, while the male spectators chose to suspend their belief of Brother Lian as a man, it doesn’t mean that they suspended their belief of the fantasy that the cinema offered. Because *The Love Eterne* represented a fantasy Chinese world which was absent in their real lives, instead of believing in Brother Lian as a man, they were more fascinated by this virtual world and its story. Of course, since some male spectators disbelieved Brother Lian’s masculinity, they had difficulties becoming involved in the story and were not drawn into its fantasy. This explains why men represented a far smaller proportion of the fan base for Ling Po and the Huangmei Opera film genre.²

Although in the 1960s women and men identified with Brother Lian differently, and projected varying desires in the cinema, they all enjoyed the pleasure of fantasy that the cinema offered. However, these desires and pleasures still occurred under the supervision of a patriarchal society. Under the conservative patriarchal ideology of sexuality in the 1960s, Chinese women were educated to be well-behaved, and hence they were not encouraged to express their passion or to woo a real man in public. However, in *The Love Eterne*, Brother Lian is a virtual male role impersonated by an actress. The theatre became an outlet in which women could project their virtual love onto a virtual male role in a virtual world. All this was allowed by men, who were safe in the perception that Brother Lian was not a real man, and who felt comfortable with women idolising a virtual male role in the movie. They sardonically called Huangmei Opera films “weepies” or “women’s films”. For men, all these qualities were virtual – in a word, fake – and would not jeopardise their authority.

The rapprochement of perceptions in both men and women regarding Brother Lian in the cinematic experience continued to extend to the extra-cinematic; the real world. In the 1960s, Ling Po’s publicity images displayed her as a girlish figure with an association of glamour

² According to the news reports in 1963, most men went to see Ling Po because their wives had demanded companionship. Also many Ling Po societies and associations were established by female fans (Liu, X 1963).
and charisma (Figure 4.9). The policy of Shaw Brothers was to try to create allure for both male and female audiences with her gender malleability. It enhanced Ling Po’s polymorphous appeal.

Male fans were attracted by the fetishised sexiness of a female star and continued to recognise Ling Po as a woman. On the other hand, when female fans recognised the fact that Ling Po was a young feminine woman in the real world, they were able to transfer their perception of her as a woman from cinematic to extra-cinematic. Women have the ability of seeing and knowing simultaneously. Based on psychoanalytic theory, in the phallic stage when the little girl discovers that she does not possess the external genitals of the male, she will transfer her object love to her father, who seems to have the phallus (Hall 1978, p. 111). Freud claims that the little girl, upon seeing the penis for the first time, “makes her judgment and her decision in a flash” (Doane 1991, p. 23). There is no temporal gap between seeing and knowing for women. Hence, as soon as the female fans saw Ling Po’s female figure, they would transfer their identification with Ling Po from a man to a woman instantly.

Interestingly, female fans transformed their object love from Brother Lian to Ling Po with a culturally sanctioned sisterhood which they called “a pure female friendship”. Most of the female fans called Ling Po “sister” or “daughter” (Chen 2005). This sisterhood friendship between female fans and female star was recognised as safe and acceptable by the patriarchal society of the time. In the 1960s, female homosexuality, barely admitted to Chinese people’s consciousness in Taiwan and Hong Kong, was an impossible issue. Friendship between women was actually regarded as a pure and innocent form. It was permissible if the rules of social propriety, such as getting married and having children, were observed. Thus, again, the perceptions towards the relationship with Ling
Po between men and women outside of the cinema were well-balanced and accepted. This cross-sex acceptance by the patriarchal society demonstrated a phenomenon by which, no matter where Ling Po went, she always attracted many fans, men and women. As a result, welcoming Ling Po and adoring her became a social fever and had the appearance of a religious event.

7. Conclusion

Ling Po’s images in the cinema and publicity represent a sexual ambivalence and enable polymorphous appeal. This bisexual representation on and off screen produces a polymorphous identification depending on how the relationship is negotiated among desire object, gender and gender identification. This relationship among them does not necessarily maintain the same internal correspondence: it can be moved, simulated and rearranged (Zhang, A 2000, vol. 29, pp. 139–57). With respect to this relationship, anyone can indulge in polymorphous desires and identification during the negotiating process. This relationship is slack and ambiguous. And maybe the ambiguity of this relationship enhances Ling Po’s polymorphous attraction and makes her popularity continue in the present day.
1. The Production Strategy for *An Investigation of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre*

1.1 Why Documentary?

Considering the subject of the Huangmei Opera film genre with its distinctive filmic characteristics and interesting social and cultural issues, especially from the perspective of its enduring popularity among fans, *An Investigation of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre* (henceforth AIHOFG) chose the documentary as its medium, as it could address the material and make it accessible to as wide a range of viewers as possible. The documentary is a medium that can easily incorporate film footage of the extant Huangmei Opera films. Hence, through the documentary form, AIHOFG could be a valuable resource not only for fans but also for film students and scholars with its ease of use and access.

Furthermore, making a documentary is similar to a written thesis. It includes planning, researching, interviewing, collecting and ordering materials, then assembling them into a meaningful sequence in a similar manner. A documentary can articulate its meaning through words, images and sound. And, most importantly, it can vividly convey human behaviour in a way that no written thesis can do. Thus, making a series of documentaries about the Huangmei Opera film genre became the logical choice for this doctoral project.
1.2 Half Entertaining, Half Academic

The Huangmei Opera film genre, with its lyrical music and Chinese literary tradition, is full of Chinese aesthetic and characteristic visual qualities. Furthermore, there are many interesting social and cultural issues in this film genre that need to be discussed and studied. AIHOFG selects three of the most important figures – Ling Po, Li Han Hsiang and Le Di – for the three topics of the documentary’s sections. The reason these individuals were chosen is not only that they were the most popular and impressive figures for most of the fans, but also that each of them exemplifies different subjects and issues. For example, the section on Le Di introduces the subject of sad stories or melodramas as the tradition for the Huangmei Opera films and the representation of the actor as celebrity. The section on Li Han Hsiang examines his film aesthetics, the production system and the representation of a utopian Chinese world of the imagination. The section on Ling Po discusses the popularity of the Huangmei Opera film genre, the role of the male impersonator and the issue of gender identification. All three topics not only explore the remarkable film careers of individuals, but also discuss the related social and cultural issues. They are entertaining as well as academic in focus.

1.3 Less Narration

From a perspective that a documentary should present its interpretation of the subject to the audience for consideration, like evidence for a jury, and endeavour to make the audience more involved in what it presents, just as an attorney does in the courtroom, AIHOFG adopts the method of dispensing with narration and lets the witnesses and interviewees talk. Many documentaries use narration to direct the audience in the reception of information and argument. However, sometimes this becomes a mediating presence between the audience and interview subject. An invisible narrator distances the audience from the documentary. Their relationship with a documentary of this kind is essentially passive. Also, the narrator’s voice is considered by the audience to be the voice of
the director or filmmaker. Sometimes the audience is suspicious of the information, since they think it is merely opinion or information coloured by the filmmaker. Most of the audience would more appreciate or trust interview subjects, either witnesses or experts, who are speaking as a kind of testimony in front of the camera, because the audience can not only see their figures and facial expressions but also hear their voice. Thus, by this method, the audience would become more involved with the documentary and engage with the content that it presents.

### 1.4 Subjectively and Creatively Constructed

Since its emergence, it has been argued that the documentary should be objective. It is important to determine what “objectivity” is. When a filmmaker decides to put the camera in position, he/she is facing the “objectivity” problem, since the camera could be placed somewhere else. How does one “objectively” decide what footage will be used in the cutting room? And what length of footage should be used to present “objective” truth? A documentary filmmaker makes countless choices during the documentary’s making, such as selecting found archival material, choosing which experts to interview, and deciding how to reshape those materials into a logical and dramatic sequence. And whether a filmmaker adopts the stance of observer, he/she cannot escape his/her subjectivity. Of course, a documentary may still aim for a truthful account, but it will necessarily be subjectively constructed.

Film critic Andrew Britton (1992, vol. 1, p. 29) notes, “Documentaries are engaged, in a sense that they lay no claim to objectivity, but actively present a case through their structure and organisation of point of view.” Indeed, a documentary is identified as a kind of representation of reality, and the filmmaker represents the truth or reality by his/her interpretation. For example, during the making of AIHOFG, because of a strong faith that the Huangmei Opera film genre is a unique film genre that appeared in a particular era with relationship to political and social background in Chinese communities, important considerations were an appropriate logical order for the footage and the shaping of the interviews.
to consolidate this understanding. A documentary is an expression of a documentary filmmaker’s point of view. It presents one’s vision of the subject.

Making a documentary is similar to creating an artwork, since it requires the filmmaker not only to select but also to manipulate images and sound materials. John Grierson, the pioneer of the British documentary movement, describes the documentary form as the creative interpretation of actuality (Barsam 1976, p. 15). He refers to the documentary as an opportunity to perform creative work (Winston 1995, p.51). From this perspective, a documentary can be identified as a branch of expressive art that integrates with the true events and the distinguishing creativity of individual filmmakers. As mentioned earlier, making a documentary is about how to shape materials into a logical and dramatic sequence. Identifying with the thought that a documentary should be treated as an organised story and the documentary filmmaker should be the storyteller, AIHOFG endeavours to tell a good story with fascinating characters, legend, interesting issues and an integrated point of view. Only through this can AIHOFG be creative and unique.

2. The Process of Making the Documentary

2.1 Overall

Understanding the concept that making a documentary is not about “point-and-shoot” and that the bottom line in producing a really good project is good planning, AIHOFG, like other film productions, involved three stages – pre-production, production and postproduction (Figure 5.1).

2.2 Pre-Production

Proposal and Treatment
In pre-production the basic ideas and approaches of the production were developed and set into motion. It is in this stage that the production can be set on a course. Pre-production for AIHOFG actually started the day
FIGURE 5.1
The Process of Making the Documentary

- Pre-Production:
  - Proposal & Treatment
  - Subject Research
  - Finding People
  - Scripting
  - A List of Questions

- Production:
  - Selecting Equipment
  - Camera Set-up
  - Lighting Set-up
  - Microphone Set-up

- Postproduction:
  - Reviewing Materials
  - Constructing the Story
  - Selecting Editing Software
  - Editing Practice
The Proposal

An Investigation of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre

Object

Huangmei Opera was originally a body of tea-collecting songs that developed in the Chinese region of Huangmei, around 200 years ago. In the 1960s a number of these songs were incorporated into a movie called ‘The Love Eterne’, that was extremely popular in both Hong Kong and Taiwan. Countless people went to see the movie, and the foreign press called Taipei a ‘crazy city’ because of the fervour around the film. About 50 films, based on the combination of historic love story and Huangmei folk tunes established in ‘The Love Eterne’, were subsequently made after its success, creating a genre that lasted into the 1970s. These films, however, still enjoy strong cult popularity, especially among women.

The aim of this project is to harness the capacities of new digital video technology and advanced design to create a documentary for the exploration of the Huangmei Opera film genre, developed from the particular perspective of the fan. Over the course of three, interrelated sections, I aim to explore the relationship between the distinctive filmic characteristics of the genre and their enduring popularity for their fans. A challenge will be the need to respect and reflect the distinctive filmic style of the Huangmei Opera genre, with its emphasis on lyrical tunes, simple words and Chinese literary traditions. Furthermore, these films depended on artificial studio effects to create the fantasy Chinese landscapes and characteristic visual qualities that made them so popular with their audiences. I aim to design something that embraces the viewers in this fantasy, recreating the nostalgic atmosphere around these movies.

The documentary will thus use the technological capacities of digital video technology to recreate the bygone graphic style of the genre's promotional posters, and also the Chinese landscape painting on which they drew. It will also incorporate film clips, photos and sound bites to recreate the experience of these films. Furthermore, the images will be transformed differently in chroma, shapes, lineation and composition. The sound will be manipulated with tune, pace and rhyme in a creative way.
in the form of their participation. Meanwhile, the information worked up in the proposal can structure the presentation into a treatment form that describes what would be seen and heard from the screen (Figure 5.3).

**FIGURE 5.3**

The Treatment

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**Project Three: Brother Lian - Ling Po**

**Content**

This topic will explore the social and cultural aspect around this film genre and the phenomena.

1. Ling Po was the famous actress in the ‘Huangmei Opera’ films of the 1960s. Most of her roles needed her to be dressed like a man, and she was the representation of this kind of movie.

2. Probably her most famous movie is *The Love Eterne* in which she stared the role Brother Lian who attracted most of the fans, especially among women.

3. Because she was dressed as a man and played a male role, the authority didn’t think it proper for her to receive a Best Actor Award, they set a Best Acting Award for her.

4. Until now, Taiwan media still call her ‘Brother Lian’. Further discussion of the social and cultural issues will be in this session.

**Form**

This project will focus on the phenomenon of female fans’ fervour around Ling Po.

1. Visual design:
   (1) Using her photos, posters, film clips, shooting footages and moving types interrelate to each other. Furthermore, the images will be transformed differently in chroma, shapes, lineation and composition.
   (2) An animation will add to this level make it more interesting.
   (3) This session will use red colour to express the passion of the joy.

2. Sound design
   (1) Using some joyful ‘Huangmei Opera’ music
   (2) Voice over from the interview of Ling Po will go underneath at the sound part.
   (3) The sound will be manipulated with tune, pace and rhyme in a creative way.
Subject Research

When the proposal and treatment had been agreed and approved, the pre-production of AIHOFG started to proceed with more detailed research into the subject matter. At the detailed research stage, the aim is to learn about the topic and material and to pull together ideas about them. There is also the mission of finding out who knows about the topic and has ideas or information relevant to the subject. In this phase the real investigation is ready to begin, and all the information and material that the film is to present is systematically gathered together and checked for accuracy. Identifying with the thought that broader research can make a good documentary, AIHOFG researched as much as possible. Books, magazines and the internet were helpful in researching the subject. Film archives and tape libraries were accessed often. Private collections of films, papers, still photographs and sound recordings were also useful.

Finding People

Finding relevant experts and subjects to interview was another tough job in research for AIHOFG. It started by researching contact information from books, websites and personal contact. Then a contact list of those interviewees who are related to the subject would be established (Figure 5.4).

After creating a contact list, the next step for finding people was to carry out the phone calls, faxes and emails to the interviewees. It took time and went through many connections to obtain the interviews for the making of AIHOFG. A good example was finding the most important key person, Ling Po, who was the most famous Huangmei Opera film actress and who has been living in Canada since the early 1980s. The first contact was through her agent but this didn’t receive any response. Then a connection was made with Li Kuwn, who co-starred with Ling Po in many movies. Through Mr Li, a letter introducing the project as well as a copy of the first documentary project were given to Ling Po. As a result, she finally agreed to be interviewed for the documentary. This occurred almost a year after the first attempt to contact her had started. Many people declined to be interviewed as they were either nervous or unwilling to appear in front of camera for various other reasons. In this
case, a back-up plan was to interview others who were lesser known but had comparable knowledge of the subject. This approach actually worked far better than originally thought, although it did require the production to be much more flexible.

### An Investigation of the Huangmei Opera Film Genre

#### A Contact List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ling Po: Actress</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ling Po was the most famous actress of Huangmei Opera films in the 1960s. She has been living in Canada since the 1980s. Every year, she visits Asia for her show business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Li Kuwn: Actor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Li Kuwn was a famous actor in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1960s. His most impressive performance was as a servant in the Huangmei Opera movie <em>The Love Eterne</em>. Li is living in Taiwan and still performs in movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chiao Hsiung Pieng: Film Critic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chiao Hsiung Pieng is also known as Peggy Chiao. She is an internationally renowned Chinese film critic, and wrote several books about Li Han Hsiang. In recent years, Chiao has also been the producer of many Chinese movies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Scripting**

In feature films, the most important part of the pre-production process is scripting. By contrast, in many cases the documentary is unpredictable and cannot be scripted in detail in advance. Yet scripting the beginning and ending sequences had been done in the pre-production stage of AIHOFG. The purpose of this was to ensure that the thinking in visuals and effects terms began to take shape from the start. Basically, the script describes the visuals, sequence by sequence, and provides information of transitions and effects for the scenes (Figure 5.5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice over: (Reading Le Di’s notes by a female voice)</td>
<td>◆ Clips from the movie <em>The Love Eterne</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about her early childhood relationship with her grandmother.</td>
<td>◆ Le Di’s childhood photos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◆ The photos of the young Le Di with her mother and grandmother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice over: (Reading Le Di’s notes by a female voice)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about how she started her career as an actress.</td>
<td>◆ Some movie clips and photos of Le Di</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◆ The movie clips from <em>The Love Eterne</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee (Fans of Le Di): Talking about the story of the movie and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>why Le Di attracted fans.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee (A Film Scholar): Talking about why Chinese people love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sad stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 5.5**

The Script
A List of Questions

In many ways preparing a list of questions is a documentary filmmaker’s most valuable aid in shooting on location. It is a detailed list of the questions that are to be asked during the interview (Figure 5.6). Those questions are formed in doing the research for both subject and interviewee. A list of questions would keep in mind what was necessary and what important elements shouldn’t be missed during the interview. This is very useful for controlling the schedule, especially when the production has a tight schedule. On many occasions during the making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions for Lau Sheng Cheng:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Why most of Huangmei Opera films were made in Hong Kong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Could you describe Hong Kong film industry and studio system at that time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Why Huangmei Opera films were so popular in both Taiwan and Hong Kong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Some people said that movies could reflect a society. What kind of a society did Huangmei Opera films reflect at that time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Why most of fans were female?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ling Po is an actress. Most of her roles were male, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Why female fans were so crazed about Ling Po?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Why Huangmei Opera films were no more popular in the 1970s?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Could Huangmei Opera films be popular again?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions for Lin Ming Hang:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What did Huangmei Opera come from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is the beauty of Huangmei Opera music? Could you demonstrate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What are the differences between Huangmei Opera music and other Chinese music? Could you demonstrate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Why Huangmei Opera music was so popular in both Taiwan and Hong Kong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is the beauty of Huangmei Opera films?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of AIHOFG, the interviewees didn’t give much time for the interview. In this case, the decision of skipping the less important questions and going directly to the core of the interview had to be made in order to squeeze in relevant material in the time given.

### 2.3 Production

**Digital Video Technology**

Before going on the road to shoot, an important decision needs to be made as to what camera equipment should be used. Especially when there was limited financial support and only a small production team worked for AIHOFG, the best choice was gear that is inexpensive and easily accessed. The solution was the new Digital Video (DV) technology. Ever since the mini DV and DVCam formats came out, it has been a tremendous stimulus to filmmaking both in the professional and non-professional fields.1 And, because of its sophisticated technology and inexpensive price, it made AIHOFG possible.

Because DV is lighter, cheaper and more portable than traditional video cameras (Figure 5.7), it allows an increasingly wide range of

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1 The difference between mini DV and DVCam is that DVCam offers more professional controls and features. Additionally, the width of the data track recorded on DVCam is nearly 50 percent wider than mini DV and consumes nearly twice as much tape. According to Sony, this design makes the format deliver better image quality but recording time will be cut in half (CCD and Effective Pixel Count 2004).
people to make films, documentaries, music videos and family memories. Meanwhile, due to its lightweight and compact size, DV is less intrusive during the shooting. Unlike earlier bulky traditional video cameras that would intimidate many interviewees, DV’s smaller size makes it easier to capture the nature of the scenes, which is important for documentary filmmaking.

In addition, DV doesn’t need as much light to shoot as traditional cameras; it is easy to set up and work with. Sometimes when the shooting requires a quick set-up and there is no time for elaborate lighting, DV can still reproduce good image quality under the low light conditions (Figure 5.8). With its ease of use, the filmmaker can keep the crew as small as possible. DV also records sound with CD quality, as is commonly used in professional recording. Furthermore, both image and sound information are stored digitally and can be copied and edited without any loss of quality. With its ability of delivering such good image as well as sound quality, many professional filmmakers have begun using DV.

2 DV uses a computer chip, CCD (Charge Coupled Device), to scan images and convert them into electronic signals. According to Sony, the effectiveness of a CCD is determined by its size and the number of active pixel elements it contains. The higher the number of pixels a CCD contains, the higher the picture quality the camera can achieve. Typically, a larger size CCD results in better images because it contains more pixels. Furthermore, the number of CCD being utilised in a camera can also affect the amount of colour detail being reproduced. Normally, three CCD cameras reproduce colours much better and more accurately than single CCD cameras (CCD and Effective Pixel Count 2004).
The inexpensive DV tape was also beneficial for the making of AIHOFG. Traditionally, shooting film stock for documentary making was highly expensive due to its high shooting ratio, and intimidated filmmakers without very significant financial support. Especially with the short-term recording ability of traditional film stock, many filmmakers were bothered by having to change and load film stock on location. However, with DV tape’s cheapness and long-term recording ability, it gives more freedom to shoot interviews for as long as the tape is running in the camera. During the making of AIHOFG, there was a result of approximately 60 hours of interviews yet with a minimum expense. This is far more than would have been possible in the past.

**Shooting Practice**

As mentioned earlier, the documentary is something presented to the audience for consideration, like evidence to a jury, and the director, like an attorney for the defence, should decide on how best to present the evidence and under what conditions. Deriving from this concept, AIHOFG adopts a shooting skill in which the filmmaker sits to one side of the camera during the interview and the interviewee talks to him/her off-screen. This technique is more honest in acknowledging the film’s process and the interviewees are presented like witnesses who are testifying in front of the camera (Figure 5.9). Meanwhile, with this camera set-up, the audience, like a jury, experiences its role in observing and freely judging what the filmmaker is showing to them because they are aware of the way in which the interviewee’s responses are elicited.

![Figure 5.9 A Camera Set-up](image)
2.4 Postproduction

Constructing the Story

The interviews of AIHOFG resulted in 60 hours of footage, but only around two hours of finished documentary were required from the DV tapes. It would be a huge task to edit the documentary. The first thing was to review the material that had been captured and to think about the structure of the documentary. This structure could be somewhat different to the original script from the beginning, in the pre-production phase. This was because sometimes we didn’t receive what we expected to get during the production phase, as interviewees had been changed or material missed, and some material obtained was just not what had been imagined. As a result, it was necessary to reconstruct the documentary during the postproduction.

When viewing the interviews and shooting materials, it was preferable to take notes and transcribe every word of the interviewees. It was a tedious job but this helped the editing work later and ensured no creative opportunities were missed. After transcribing the interviews and viewing the materials, the next step was to select sections and structure them into sequences. This provided a sketch of the structure for the documentary’s final form (Figure 5.10). Usually, constructing a documentary is either by a chronology of events or by order of cause and effect. As mentioned before, a documentary is treated as an organised story and the documentary filmmaker is the storyteller. And the postproduction is the phase in which to really shape the documentary into

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**Figure 5.10**

A Structure Flowchart

**The Structure of “Scenic Writing Director: Li Han Hsiang”**

1. Li Han Hsiang's background
   - Li Kun and Sung Chuen Sau talk about how they met with Li Han Hsiang
   - How Li Han Hsiang emigrated towards Hong Kong and began his director career in Shaw Brothers

2. The history of Shaw Brothers
   - How Run Run Shaw established Shaw Brothers
   - How Li Han Hsiang carried out Huangmei Opera films and made the most popular movie ‘The Love Eterne’

3. The unique film style of Li Han Hsiang
   - Li Han Hsiang used artificial studio effects to recreate a fantasy ancient Chinese world with lyrical and poetic feeling.
   - Li Han Hsiang developed his cinematic aesthetics to guide audience to reveal this fantasy world.
   - Li Han Hsiang studied Chinese landscape painting, garden design and ancient costume carefully and adapted them into his films.
   - Li Han Hsiang coordinated Chinese historic story, literary, poetry and music to create a cinematic world that was filled with Chinese humanism and aesthetics.
a good story. In this phase, what was really filmed needs to be thought through and organised so that the documentary can be more logical and thematic for viewers.

**The Advantage of the Digital Nonlinear Editing System**

Since the digital nonlinear editing systems were introduced in 1988 (Ohanian 1998, p. 45), this new technology has developed enormously, especially over the past few years. In particular, the convergence of emerging DV technology and maturing PC technology created the digital nonlinear editing system with better hardware and cheaper software, and brought professional quality video editing onto our desktop.

Traditional analogue video editing is the copy editing process where shots are selected and copied from the source tape to the edited tape. Typically the principle of editing on tape is called “linear editing” because it has to start with shot one of a sequence and then add shot two, then shot three and so on until the program is complete. Problems arise in this linear system when changes are made. To change the order of a sequence or add a new shot to the original edited tape, all sequence shots need to be re-edited to complete the program. Unfortunately, this process imposes a major time penalty and results in a loss of image quality.

However, the digital nonlinear editing system is the new recording medium such that the source materials are converted to a digital format and recorded onto a hard disk drive. Then the entire editing work is processed in the computer. The process of nonlinear editing is more like the typing process in the computerised word processor. Sound and images can be manipulated in the computer just as text can be easily copied, pasted and moved in a word processor. And, most importantly, since all materials are digitalised there is no compromise or loss of the sound and image quality during the editing process. Because of its tremendous flexibility and speed, the digital nonlinear editing system is expanding the creativity and communication possibilities for many filmmakers.

The digital nonlinear editing system is also cheaper and occupies less room than traditional video linear editing equipment. For a traditional linear video editing system to be capable of performing simple effects
and titles, it requires at least two playback videotape machines and one recorder. A special video effects mixer, a sound mixer, a title computer and an editing control unit are also required. Not to mention the need for plenty of TV monitors for viewing the playback and recorded image and sound. All of these cost a lot and require considerable space to set up (Figure 5.11). However, thanks to the DV technology and sophisticated computer technology, a laptop digital nonlinear editing system can now produce professional video output with complicated video effects and titles at relatively low cost. For example, AIHOFG was edited entirely in an inexpensive laptop computer on a tiny desk (Figure 5.12).
3. Editing and Design Practice

Because AIHOFG intends to explore a particular kind of Chinese film, an opening montage sequence showing a film reel being loaded onto a projector is designed to bring the audience into a film atmosphere similar to the experience of viewing a movie (Figure 5.13.1–6). When the opening montage sequence ends with a shot which focuses on the beam from the film projector (Figure 5.13.6), it implies a looking back on the Huangmei Opera film genre itself, as well as suggesting that it is “a movie about movies”. 

FIGURE 5.13
An Opening Montage Sequence
The opening sequence is succeeded by melody footage from a Huangmei Opera film with the Chinese title which copies the typographic style of the Huangmei Opera films in the 1960s and gives the audience a nostalgic feeling (Figure 5.14). Each Huangmei melody footage is related to the topic and mood of each section. For example, the melody of the section “Brother Lian: Ling Po” is more pleasant and suggests that it is about the joy of the Huangmei Opera film genre and the fans’ enthusiasm for Ling Po. The opening melody in “Classic Beauty: Le Di” is more sorrowful and relates the sad theme of this section. The lyrical tone for the opening in “Scenic Writing Director: Li Han Hsiang” gives the audience a hint that it is about the aesthetics of the Huangmei Opera film genre.

The opening sequence splits into two screens between film sprockets, suggesting a traditional filmstrip (Figure 5.15). On one screen is the original clip with the melody underneath, while on the other, several interviewees highlight the content of the section. This design is not only consistent with the relationship with film and the nostalgic feeling given, but also stresses the issues that will be explored later in the documentary.
A rolling short introduction gives information to those who are not familiar with the subject and the Huangmei Opera film genre (Figure 5.16). The opening sequence ends with a freeze frame of the subject and a title that gives a footnote to the subject (Figure 5.17). The black and white colours lend the documentary a nostalgic identity.
A graphic card at the beginning of every section is inserted to provide clues for the audience (Figure 5.18). This graphic card, copying the style of “insert title” from early silent films, would not only create a rhythm for the documentary but also lend a nostalgic identity with a Chinese classic frame and white title on a black background.

![An Insert Title](image)

For AIHOFG, most of the time a “dissolve” effect is used to make the transition from scene to scene. “Dissolve” is a less noticeable visual effect that creates changes of scene without interrupting the attention of the audience. This effect suits the mood of AIHOFG perfectly since the Huangmei Opera film genre is lyrical and literary. In many sequences, there are lots of interviews being used either to testify to the events or discuss the issues of Huangmei Opera films. Usually, film clips, shooting footage and still photos are inserted to illustrate aspects of the interviews. When the viewers hear an interviewee talking in front of camera, instead of only seeing the interviewee’s “talking head”, they appreciate seeing some images related to what the interviewee is saying. This technique brings together the voice from the interviewee with the image from another source, making it more persuasive.
Most of the movie clips in AIHOFG are song sequences quoted from Huangmei Opera films. These song clips not only relate to the interviews but also create a rhythm and tempo for the documentary with their beautiful and harmonic music. Meanwhile, an “overlap” editing method between interviews and song clips is employed for the documentary (Figure 5.19.1 and 2). For example, when Ling Po is talking about how she started her career as a singer, without waiting for the end of her voice, a vocal piece will go underneath. As soon as her voice is done, the singing is brought up and transits her image to the song clip. This editing device keeps the sound track alive and makes the transition between sequences more natural and rhythmic.

A rolling credit and a song clip are assembled for the ending sequence (Figure 5.20). Again, the song clip is related to the topic of each section. For example, the ending sequence for “Brother Lian: Ling Po” is that she plays a young scholar surrounded by women. It not only corresponds with the gender theme of the topic but also remains consistent with the pleasant mood of this section.
4. Conclusion

The project of AIHOFG began in 2001, and it took three years to complete the documentary making process, which involved researching, interviewing, location shooting and editing. Each section of the documentary depicts one key figure and relates to different social, cultural and aesthetic issues. Most of the time, the documentary adopts a Griersonian approach for the production strategy, dispensing with narration, subjectively and creatively constructing the film. At the same time, the shooting, editing and design practice endeavour to make the audience more involved in the content as well as have them identify as witnesses to the story.

Innovations in DV technology lowered the cost of the production and made AIHOFG possible. The capable and affordable nonlinear editing applications expanded the flexibility and creativity in postproduction. This new technology will continue to improve and become better and even cheaper. The line between professional and consumer is getting blurred, and the financial threshold for sophisticated documentary production is lowered. The sophistication and low cost of new digital technologies benefited AIHOFG, and will continue to aid those people who have the ideas and inclination to create a documentary but are without supporting finances.
This filmography includes information for each film, English and Chinese titles, year of release, director, principle actors, and a brief synopsis. Listings are arranged by the studio and the year of release.

1. Shanghai Film Studio

*The Heavenly Match* 天仙配 (1955)

Director           Shi Hui

Principal Cast      Yan Feng Ying, Wang Shao Feng

This is the very first Huangmei Opera that was made into a film and is an adaptation from a popular Huangmei Opera called *The Heavenly Match*, in which the famous stage performers Yan Feng Ying and Wang Shao Feng play a fairy and a poor mortal. It is a story about a fairy who sympathises with Dong Young, who is poor and has to sell himself into servitude to bury his perished farther. She helps him and then becomes his wife. However, the Jade Emperor decrees the fairy must instantly return to the Heaven Palace, otherwise a calamity will befall Dong Yong. The heartbroken fairy suffers and leaves her husband.
Female Son-in-law 女駙馬 (1959)
Director Liu Liang
Principal Cast Yan Feng Ying, Wang Shao Feng
This is another Huangmei Opera film which was adapted from a famous classic of the stage. Feng Suz Hen is engaged to Li Zhao Ting, but misfortune befalls Li's family: Feng's father doesn't want his daughter to marry Li and puts him in prison. The father wants to marry Feng off to a rich and powerful family, but Feng doesn't agree. Feng disguises herself as a man and goes to the capital to take the imperial examinations. She wins the title of “Number One Scholar” and is made the emperor's son-in-law. In the bridal chamber, Feng tells the truth to the princess, who shows a deep sympathy for her. They go to see the emperor and the emperor absolves Feng from guilt. Later, Feng marries Li and the princess marries Feng's brother, a former “Number One Scholar”.

The Cowboy and Spinning Maid 牛郎織女 (1963)
Director Cen Fan
Principal Cast Yan Feng Ying, Wang Shao Feng
The cowboy, whose parents have died young, has to stay with his elder brother and his sister-in-law, who frequently maltreats him. One day, the cowboy, with the old cow's help, meets a fairy, the spinning maid, and they become husband and wife. After their marriage, the whole family lives very happily. However, their prosperity doesn’t last. The Heavenly Queen learns of the marriage, and she forces the couple to be separated by the two banks of a heavenly river. Their loyal love moves the cranes and they fly together to build a crane bridge which permits the couple to see each other once a year.
2. Shaw Brothers

Diao Chan 負嬋 (1958)
Director          Li Han Hsiang
Principal Cast    Lin Dai, Zhao Lei
This is the first Hong Kong-made Huangmei Opera film which was adopted from an epic story, Romance of the Three Kingdoms. Dong Zhuon is a powerful warlord who kidnaps the emperor. Diao Chan, whose parents died during a war, is adopted by a loyal official, Wang. Wang asks Diao Chan to sacrifice herself by seducing Dong and his adopted son, Lu Bu, for the sake of the empire. Generously, Diao Chan promises to do this. Later, Lu kills Dong out of jealousy. After Dong’s death, Wang warns Diao Chan that Lu is an opportunist who will do anything for power and she should also kill him before he becomes a threat to the empire. At the celebratory banquet Diao Chan performs a sword dance, but she can hardly point the sword at her lover. Knowing that Diao Chan is deeply in love with Lu, Wang no longer opposes their marriage.

The Kingdom and the Beauty 江山美人 (1960)
Director          Li Han Hsiang
Principal Cast    Lin Dai, Zhao Lei
The emperor Zhengde decides to disguise himself as a civilian and travels to the south, where he has heard that beautiful scenes are plentiful. When he arrives in the town of Meilong, he is attracted to a young girl, Li Feng, and they fall in love with each other. Zhengde has to leave for the capital just when Li recognises that her lover is the emperor. Three years have passed and still Li has heard nothing from Zhengde. She soon falls into a depression. Zhengde sends an envoy to receive Li, but meanwhile Li has travelled to the capital. When he finds Li has died on the journey, Zhengde is filled with grief and regrets.
Yang Kwei Fei 楊貴妃 (1962)
Director Li Han Hsiang
Principal Cast Li Li Hua
This Huangmei Opera film won the “Grand Prix de la Commission Supérieure Technique du Cinéma Français” at the Cannes Film Festival in 1962. The Emperor is grieving over the death of his Queen. The Yang family presents the Emperor with a consort, Yang Kwei Fei, so that they may consolidate their influence over the court. The Emperor falls in love with her and she becomes the Princess. The Yangs are then appointed important ministers but misuse their power so much that there is a popular revolt against all the Yangs. Yang Kwei Fei finally commits suicide in front of the Emperor’s troops.

Beyond the Great Wall 王昭君 (1962)
Director Li Han Hsiang
Principal Cast Lin Dai, Zhao Lei
Beautiful lady Wang Qiang is selected into the Han palace but refuses to bribe an official painter, and thus her portrait is distorted. One day, when the emperor Yuan is attracted to the music Wang is performing, he is astonished at her beauty. Yuan keeps Wang by him night and day. Meanwhile a Han enemy, Khan Huhanxie, hears of Wang’s beauty and sends his envoy to Han to propose a marriage. Yuan refuses his offer and the outraged Khan sends his troops to invade. Wang doesn’t want to risk the lives of thousands for her own sake and agrees to marry Khan. Yuan has no better alternative but see her off in tears. After the wedding Wang prays for her motherland at the shore and then drowns herself in the river. Khan can do nothing to save her but mourns for her patriotism.

The Dream of the Red Chamber 紅樓夢 (1962)
Director Yuan Qiu Feng
Principal Cast Le Di, Ren Jie
This is an adaptation of the novel by Cao Xue Qin of the Qing period. Lin Dai Yu is sent to live with her grandmother in the Jia family. There she meets her cousin Jia Bao Yu and they fall in love. However, Jia’s parents have arranged another marriage for Jia. Shocked and grief-stricken, Lin
dies on the evening of Jia's wedding. Jia rushes to Lin's funeral hall to farewell his beloved. Soon he leaves home to become a monk.

*Madam White Snake* (1962)
Director: Yue Feng  
Principal Cast: Lin Dai, Zhao Lei  
Two snakes, Bai and Qing, transform into women after 1,000 years of magic practice. One day they come across Xu Xian, a herbal medicine shopkeeper. Bai is pleased with his integrity and determines to reciprocate by becoming his wife. After the wedding, they live a happy life. Later, a monk comes to visit Xu and tells him that Bai and Qing are not humans but snakes. Xu refuses to believe him and evicts him. One day when Xu is collecting herbs outside he is kidnapped by the monk. Bai and Qing have no choice but to use their magic to flood the monk’s temple. However, Bai loses control of her magic and the waters overflow the villages nearby, killing countless people. Although she rescues Xu, the Jade Emperor states that Bai must be jailed for her mistake in killing innocent people. Bai endures suffering and leaves.

*Return of the Phoenix* (1962)
Director: Gao Li  
Principal Cast: Li Xiang Jun, Jin Feng  
This is a light comedy about mismatched marriage. Lang is retired and lives with two daughters. The elder daughter, Xue E, is ugly and stupid; the younger daughter, Xue Yan, beautiful and bright. Zhu, a rich man, admires the beauty of Xue Yan and forces her to marry him. However, Xue Yan likes Mu, a young scholar. On the wedding night, Lang replaces the bride, Xue Yan, with his elder daughter Xue E. At the end, Mu and Xue Yan reunite.

*The Story of Su San* (1963)
Director: King Hu  
Principal Cast: Le Di  
Su San, a famous singer, helps a poor scholar, Wang Jin Long, to go to the capital to take the imperial examinations. After Wang's departure, a rich
merchant, Shen Yan Lin, forces her to be his concubine. Shen's jealous wife tries to kill Su by putting poison in her food. By accident, Shen eats the food and dies. Shen’s wife then bribes the magistrate to sentence Su to death. Su is escorted to the capital to have her sentence endorsed. The imperial ambassador is Wang, who reviews the case. He pledges to save his lover's life and tries hard to unearth new evidence to overthrow the verdict. The maid of Shen's wife finally confesses that it was her mistress who ordered her to put poison in Su’s food, and Su is acquitted. Su and Wang then live happily ever after.

Adulteress 杨乃武与小白菜 (1963)
Director Ho Meng Hua
Principal Cast Li Li Hua, Guan Shan
This is an adaptation of a folk story of the late Qing period. It is a story about Pai, a beautiful woman who respects her husband’s friend, the scholar Yang, and they help one another. However, the Mayor’s son, Liu, admires Pai’s beauty and poisons her husband. He forces Pai to accuse Yang for her husband’s death. At the end, the injustice is reversed and Liu is penalised.

The Love Eterne 梁山伯与祝英台 (1963)
Director Li Han Hsiang
Principal Cast Ling Po, Le Di
This is the most popular Huangmei Opera film of the 1960s. Zhu Ying Tai, a beautiful, strong-willed and clever girl, disguises herself as a man in order to study. On her way to school, Zhu meets Lian Shan Bo and they become good friends. Three years pass. While Zhu is secretly in love with Lian, Lian doesn’t know Zhu is a girl. Zhu's father has been sending her letters forcing her to return home. Zhu has no choice but to quit. On their way home Zhu tries to hint at her true identity to Lian, but Lian doesn’t get the message at all. Lian is told the truth when he returns to the school. He then rushes off to visit Zhu. However, Zhu's father has already accepted another proposal from a rich man and refuses to change his mind. Lian has missed his chance and leaves with great disappointment and frustration. He soon dies of sorrow and illness. Grief-stricken, Zhu insists on visiting
his graveyard before going to her wedding. When she cries in front of Lian’s tomb, the tomb suddenly opens and Zhu jumps inside. Lian and Zhu are transformed into a pair of butterflies and stay together.

A Maid from Heaven 七仙女 (1963)
Director               Ho Meng Hua
Principal Cast         Ling Po, Fang Ying
This Huangmei Opera film is the remake of The Heavenly Match. In the same year there was another Huangmei Opera film called Seven Fairies, which had the same story and was directed by Li Han Hsiang. This duplication shows the ferocious competition between each studio for market share at that time.

The Amorous Lotus Pan 潘金蓮 (1963)
Director               Chow Sze Loke
Principal Cast         Zhang Zhong Wen, Zhang Chong
This film tells the story of a poor but beautiful girl who starts her eventful and erotic road to doom as a maid of a rich man. She becomes the wife of a midget, the mistress of a playboy, a husband-murderer, the seductress of her brother-in-law, and, ultimately, his victim as well.

The Crimson Palm 血手印 (1964)
Director               Chen Yi Xin
Principal Cast         Ling Po, Qin Ping
Lin, a young scholar, is engaged to Wang, but misfortune befalls Lin's family. Wang helps him with money, but he is accused of committing a murder. Wang’s father dislikes Lin and bribes a greedy judge to sentence him to the death penalty. Fortunately, the renowned Justice Pao saves him from being executed and reveals the truth.
The Female Prince 雙鳳奇緣 (1964)
Director Chow Sze Loke
Principal Cast Ling Po, Jin Han
This is a remade version of the Huangmei Opera film Female Son-in-law (1954). It is interesting to see that Ling Po and Jin Han, who later became Ling Po’s husband in the real world, co-starred in this movie and another Huangmei Opera movie, Lady General Hua Mulan.

Lady General Hua Mulan 花木蘭 (1964)
Director Yueh Feng
Principal Cast Ling Po, Jin Han
Ling Po won the best actress award of the Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan for her role in this film. A brave girl, Hua Mulan, disguises herself as a man to take her aged father’s place in the army and becomes a great general.

The Lotus Lamp 寶蓮燈 (1965)
Director Yueh Feng
Principal Cast Lin Dai, Li Ching, Cheng Pei Pei
A young scholar, Liu Yan Chang, loses his way and is saved by a beautiful fairy. Liu is so grateful that he marries the fairy. Soon the fairy has her first child, but her brother, a god called Erlang, is mad with anger when he finds out she has had a child with a mortal. He puts the fairy in custody beneath some mountains. Liu can do nothing to help her, but brings the child home. When the child grows up he learns magic powers. He defeats Erlang’s troops and saves his mother from captivity.

Inside the Forbidden City 宋宮祕史 (1965)
Director Gao Li
Principal Cast Ling Po, Jin Feng
Madame Li and Madame Liu are concubines to the Emperor who both long for his undivided favour. When Li gives birth to a baby boy, who would ultimately become the prince, Liu swaps the baby with a cat and orders housemaid Kou Zhu to drown the child. Secretly, Kou Zhu and Chen Li hide the baby with the emperor’s brother. He is raised and
ultimately adopted by the emperor and his now empress, Madame Liu. Meanwhile, former concubine Li Zhenfei had been condemned to live in the Forbidden Palace, where she is not allowed to see the prince, who is in fact her son. Coincidence brings the young prince before her, and a sea of deceit and conspiracy is revealed.

*The Mermaid* 魚美人 (1965)
Director  Gao Li
Principal Cast  Ling Po, Li Ching
In this fairytale, a young peasant scholar endeavours to become an officer so that he can become worthy of the woman he wants to wed. He is aided by a fairy with whom he eventually falls in love. Unfortunately, she is in the form of a 1,000-year-old carp. Fortunately, the goddess of Mercy comes to her aid and they end up living happily ever after.

*West Chamber* 西廂記 (1965)
Director  Yueh Feng
Principal Cast  Ling Po, Fang Ying, Li Ching
While visiting a temple, a young scholar is enchanted by the daughter of an important family. When rebels threaten to abduct the girl, the scholar tries to save her with the assistance of a clever maid. In addition, the young maid helps bring the young couple together in spite of her family's objections.

*The Grand Substitution* 萬古流芳 (1965)
Director  Yan Jun
Principal Cast  Ling Po, Li Li Hua
The Grand Substitution is a classic of the Huangmei Opera film genre and won the best picture award at the 12th Asian Film Festival. In order to save her son from a scheming minister, the princess substitutes her son for another. Many years later, the princess finds out that her real son has actually been adopted by the evil minister himself. At the end, the princess reunites with her son and the evil minister is punished.
The Butterfly Chalice 蝴蝶盃 (1965)
Director                   Zhang Che
Principal Cast   Ding Hong, Jin Feng
This is the debut movie of Zhang Che, who later became one of the great martial arts film directors of the 1970s. It is an adaptation of a famous opera *The Butterfly Chalice*, which describes a love story between a young man and a beautiful girl, and the role of their engagement gift, the butterfly chalice. A young man, Ten, seeks revenge for the murder of his lover’s father and escapes. He joins the military and marries the general’s daughter. At the end, Ten also reunites with his lover, who becomes his second wife.

The Dawn will Come 魂斷奈何天 (1966)
Director                   Gao Li
Principal Cast         Ling Po, Li Shen Chen, Re Mein
This is a tragedy about a virtuous woman who has to testify regarding a murder which her immoral husband has committed. Her father-in-law is the judge, who finally executes his own son for justice.

The Perfumed Arrow 女秀才 (1966)
Director                   Gao Li
Principal Cast       Ling Po, Jin Han
E, a bright and beautiful girl, disguises herself as a boy for studying and learning martial arts. She has two good friends, Du and Wei, who don’t know her true identity. E uses a perfumed arrow to decide whom she is going to marry.

The Pearl Phoenix 女巡按 (1967)
Director                   Yeung Fan
Principal Cast   Hsiao Hsian, Chu Jing, Li Ching
Li Ching stars in this romantic story which revolves around a young scholar and a wealthy maiden brought together by the mysterious Pearl Phoenix hairpin. They overcome a number of obstacles and are finally reunited with the help of the kindly Lord Liu.
The Mirror and the Lychee 新陳三五娘 (1967)
Director Gao Li
Principal Cast Ling Po, Fang Ying
Young scholar Chen San falls in love with Wu Niang, a cherished daughter of the Huang family. Chen voluntarily enters the Huang household as a mirror polisher for three years. Little did he know that Wu Niang has already been betrothed to the Lin family. The lovers yearn for each other in secret. On the eve before the Lin family is to come and fetch Wu Niang, they make an escape by night. After much frustration and many setbacks, the lovers are eventually happily united as husband and wife.

Forever and Ever 金石情 (1968)
Director Luo Wei
Principal Cast Ling Po, Lin Yu
A poor scholar, Li, is engaged to Liu’s daughter, Lan. Little does he know that Lan has leprosy. Lan asks Li to leave because of her disease. Li promises her to find a doctor to cure her disease. One day, Lan tries to kill herself by drinking a poisoned wine but, magically, it heals her disease. Li and Lan reunite and live happily ever after.

Three Smiles 三笑 (1968)
Director Yueh Feng
Principal Cast Ling Po, Li Ching
A beautiful maid, Chiu Hsiang, smiles at a renowned scholar, Tan Bo Hu, and instantly captures his heart. In order to be closer to the girl he loves, Tang masquerades as a poor man and enters the Chiu’s household as a servant. He charms most of the maids and impresses the minister and his wife. Finally, Tang wins over his ladylove.

The Dream of the Red Chamber 金玉良緣紅樓夢 (1978)
Director Li Han Hsiang
Principal Cast Lin Qing Xia, Zhang Ai Jia
This is Li Han Hsiang's last Huangmei Opera film, which was a remade version of The Dream of the Red Chamber. In that same year there was
another “twins” Huangmei Opera film which had the same title but was directed by Ling Po’s husband, Jin Han.

3. Cathay Studio

A Beggar’s Daughter 金玉奴 (1965)
Director            Wang Tianlin
Principal Cast       Le Di, Zhao Lei
This is an adaptation of the folk story, “Jin Yu Nu beats her heartless groom with a cane”. Jin Yu Nu, a beggar’s daughter, is a beautiful and kind girl. On a snowy day she saves the life of a poor scholar, Mo Ji. When Mo recovers, he marries Jin with love and gratitude. Mo wins the third place in the imperial examinations, but now he is looked down upon because his wife is a beggar's daughter. Extremely embarrassed and ashamed, Mo wants to divorce but has no excuse. Jin then jumps into the river and Mo has deep regrets but it is too late. Later, Mo’s senior Ambassador Lin appreciates his talents and wants to marry him his daughter. On the wedding night, the bride orders Mo to kneel in her room and beats him hard with a cane. Not until then does Mo know his bride is actually Jin, who has been saved by Lin. At the end, Lin knows Jin still loves Mo and helps the couple reunite.

The Lucky Purse 鎖麟囊 (1966)
Director            Wang Tianlin
Principal Cast       Le Di, Zhang Yang, Tian Qing
Xue is engaged to a scholar Zhou but the mayor's son Liu has been attracted by Xue’s beauty for quite some time. Later, Xue is arrested and accused of the murder of Liu. Xue hides herself in a tower where there is a purse that she gave to a poor girl a few years earlier. A minister’s wife thanks her with respect and gratitude because she was the girl Xue helped. She pledges to help Xue find her husband and overthrow the verdict. Xue finds that her husband has become the imperial ambassador who reviews the case and reverses the verdict for his beloved wife.
**Lady in the Moon 嫦娥奔月 (1966)**  
Director: Yuan Qiufeng  
Principal Cast: Le Di, Zhao Lei  

Chang E is a fairy in the moon. One day she sneaks to the earth where she meets a talented archer, Hou Yi, and falls in love with him. At that time, there are nine suns in the sky and they cause serious droughts on earth. Chang then pleads with the Heavenly Empress for some magic arrows so that Hou can shoot down the spare suns. After that Hou becomes a king with overwhelming support from the people. Later, Hou becomes increasingly cruel and corrupt after ascending to the throne. He wages wars on neighbouring kingdoms and drives his people to extreme misery and hardships. Chang has tried to stop him but fails. At the end, she takes Hou’s magic arrows and returns to the moon.

**The Magic Fan 扇中人 (1967)**  
Director: Tang Huang  
Principal Cast: Le Di, Zhao Lei  

This was an adaptation of a ghost story, “A Xiu”. Liu Zigu is on his way to visit his uncle and is attracted by a beautiful girl, A Xiu. Liu meets A Xiu again in a paper fan shop owned by A Xiu's father. Liu goes to the shop every day to buy a fan and see A Xiu. One day, Liu follows his uncle to a matchmaker, who arranges for A Xiu to become his bride. The following day, Liu and A Xiu visit a temple where they meet a ghost who looks very similar to A Xiu. On the wedding day, the ghost disguises itself as A Xiu to spoil her marriage with Liu. Finally, the ghost is in the custody of a magic fan, and Liu and Xiu complete their wedding.

**Red Plum Pavilion 红梅阁 (1968)**  
Director: Wang Tianlin  
Principal Cast: Le Di, Zhao Lei  

Li is a beautiful young woman who is engaged to a handsome scholar, Pei Shunqing. However, a rich evil man, Jia Sidao, is attracted by Li’s beauty and wants to take Li as his concubine. Pei and Li then come to discuss the matter and decide to flee, but they are kidnapped by Jia's men before they
can escape. Jia threatens to kill Pei, and Li finally yields but requests to see Pei for the last time. During their short conversation Li tries to persuade Pei to leave, but he insists that he will not leave without her. Li tells him that she has promised to be Jia’s concubine. Pei has to depart, angry and disappointed. Later, Li tries to kill Jia with his sword before their wedding but she is stabbed to death instead. Li’s ghost then returns to avenge Jia and his men by burning them until only ashes remain.

4. Gaolin Studio

*Seven Fairies 七仙女 (1963)*
Director Li Han Hsiang
Principal Cast Jing Qing
This is the first Huangmei Opera film of Gaolin Studio which was established by Li Han Hsiang. The same year, there was another Huangmei Opera film, *A Maid from Heaven*, which was made by Shaw Brothers with the same story.

*The Imperial Scholar 状元及弟 (1964)*
Director Li Han Hsiang
Principal Cast Jing Qing, Niu Fabng Yu
The story is about how Li arranges for his daughter Xiu Yin to be engaged to Yu Lin. However, Xue Tin’s cousin admires the beauty of Xiu Yin and tries to spoil their marriage. On the wedding night, Yu Lin suspects that Xiu Yin is not loyal and treats her coldly afterwards. Xiu Yin’s father, Li, is also angry about her disloyalty. Fortunately, Xiu Yin’s mother-in-law reveals the truth to her. Yu Lin regrets his misunderstanding and sets off to the capital for the imperial examinations.
5. Others

*Lady with the Lute* (趙五娘 1963)
Director Bu Wan Cang
Principal Cast Zhao Lei, Li Mei
Zhao’s husband goes to the capital to take the imperial examination but doesn’t come back. Due to famine, Zhao has to leave her hometown and find her husband, playing her lute for a living.

*How the Oil Vendor Won the Beauty Queen* (賣油郎獨占花魁女 1964)
Director Tu Guang Gi
Principal Cast Zhao Lei, Bai Lu Ming
A poor and homely oil vendor admires a beauty queen, Hua Kui. One day the oil vendor becomes rich and wants to propose to Hua. At first she disparages him but ends by falling in love with him.

*The Story Of Pinggui* (王寶釧 1967)
Director Yang Suxing
Principal Cast Yang Qun, Wang Fu Rong
There are two parts to this Taiwan-made Huangmei Opera film. Part one is the story about how the minister’s daughter, Wang Bu Chun, marries Xue Pinggui, a missing son of the emperor. Part two tells how Xue joins the military and becomes a great general. At the end, he becomes an emperor and reunites with his beloved wife, Wang Bu Chun.

*Dream of the Red Chamber* (新紅樓夢 1978)
Director Jin Han
Principal Cast Ling Po, Zhou Zhi Ming, Li Ching, Li Li Hua
Ling Po left Shaw Brothers and went to Taiwan to star in this Huangmei Opera film, which was a remake directed by her husband Jin Han. The same year, Shaw Brothers made another version of the same Huangmei Opera film which was directed by Li Han Hsiang to compete with this film starring Ling Po.
Imperious Princess 金枝玉葉 (1980)
Director          Jin Han
Principal Cast    Ling Po, Zhang Ai Jia

This was the last of Ling Po’s Huangmei Opera films. After that, she worked in Huangmei Opera television drama in Taiwan. The story is about Guo, a general’s son who is engaged to the princess, Sheng Ping. However, Guo has never seen Sheng Ping. Curious Guo goes to peer at Sheng Ping and this creates discord between the protagonists, to great comic effect.
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