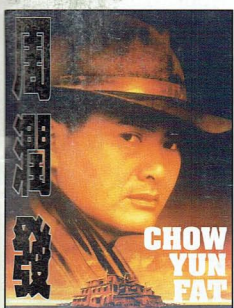


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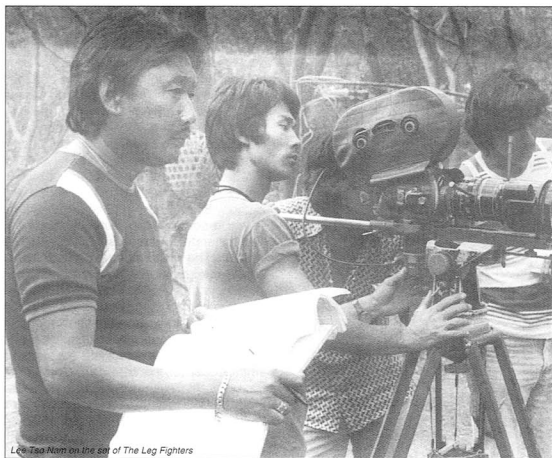
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The Hot, the Cool and Lee Tso Nam 李作楠



Lee Tso Nam on the set of *The Leg Fighters*

Toby Russell examines the career of the director of *THE HOT, THE COOL AND THE VICIOUS*



Hein Kwan Lee vs Pang Gung in *Woman Avenger*

Born in Northern China in 1943, Lee Tso Nam and his family fled with the Nationalists to Taiwan in 1949. There he grew up in Taipei. After graduating from college he worked doing odd jobs but then settled down when he found work as a continuity and then assistant director for the David Lean of Hong Kong cinema, Ting Shan Si, working on such classics as *Whiplash* and *Furious Slaughter*.

After working as assistant director for several years, Lee directed his first film in 1974. It was a low budget movie and I've been unable to find out the title, but the star was not an actor but a real martial artist. Lee did a second picture with him called *10th Dan*



Fist of Fury 2

Master. Following this was a medium budget picture entitled *Man Beyond the Horizon*, an action packed fight fest that did fairly well at the box office.

But it wasn't until 1975 that Lee found his true flair for the action genre when he was approached by Jimmy Shaw and R.P. Shah (boss of VPD) to direct the Bruce Li classic *Fist of Fury 2*. Although not credited in some territories (and even indeed our own *Essential Guide to Hong Kong Movies* which will be amended) it still remains one of the best Bruce Lee cash in movies to this day. Not only Li but Lo Lieh and Tien Fong were tremendous in their roles and the fight scenes were superbly shot for a film of that day. Lee had worked with Li earlier that year on *Exit the Dragon, Enter the Tiger*, co-starring Chang Yi, a man who would later appear in a number of Lee's films.

Towards the end of 1976 Lee made an important career move. He teamed up with a highly renowned choreo-



Now we know where road cones go when they die! Challenge of Death — The Hot, the Cool and the Vicious part 2



grapher named Lee Ming Man, otherwise known as Tommy Lee or Ming Tsai. Together they decided to carry on the then popular trend of northern kicks and southern fists. The film was entitled *The Hot, the Cool and the Vicious*.

The lead southern fist was played by Taiwanese actor Wong Tao, who had a quirky start with Golden Harvest with the disastrous *Yellow Faced Tiger* and was now finding some recognition since the release of Ng See Yuen's shelved classic *Secret Rivals*. To play opposite Wong Tao was Tae kwan do exponent and already famous movie star Tan Tao Liang – known as Flash Legs. It was decided that the villain should

be played by the choreographer himself, Tommy Lee, whose peroxide hair, lame limping walk and echoing voice would become focal talking points for fans worldwide.

The film was shot in just under 40 days, with Lee keeping things well under budget, having only to expose 40,000 feet of negative, an average of about four takes per shot. The work was quite unique in every aspect, from the opening multicoloured backdrop to the breathtaking stop motion two-on-one finale. It was a hit, and a string of others followed.

Green Jade Statuette came next, starring the cool, laconic Shaw Brothers actor Chik



Shawlin vs Luma

Kune Kwan, who had finished his contract with Shaw Brothers and was now freelancing, and kung fu pretty boy Meng Fei. Once again Tommy Lee was to play the limping villain. This film lacked the power of its predecessor, but delivered in the tight department. The film that followed, *Eagle's Claw*, was to become Lee's masterwork. Tommy Lee stood down as villain and was replaced by Oriental superstar Chang Yi, whose demeanour in the film even surpassed Tommy's. The tall, witch-like hat and curled up boots would become an immortal image in the kung fu genre. It had everything going for it – style, stars, story, music and powerhouse fight sequences. Said Lee: "We worked hard on *Eagle's Claw*, especially Wong Tao. He put a lot of ideas into the script and the fights. The film was well planned in advance, and that's my secret. Pre-planning and getting a good team together."

Eagle's Claw was a hit all over the world, especially in the west, in India and the USA. When it played its UK premier at the Brixton Ace a near riot broke out when the manager played a joke on the 1200 strong, mostly black audience, coming on stage and announcing, "No *Eagle's Claw*." Well, they did see *Claw* and loved it, as did everyone else including Lee: "I would say that of all the kung fu movies I've made, *Eagle's Claw*



is the finest." Following *Eagle's Claw* came a string of Wong Tao films: *Fatal Needles*, *Challenge of Death*, *Shaolin Invincible Sticks*, *Kung Fu Phantom*. Said Lee: "Of all the actors I've worked with, I think Wong Tao is the best. He has a feel for the camera and really believes in what he's doing. He's a

good martial artist as well, very powerful."

In between these films Lee shot two pictures in Hong Kong for First Films. One was a sleazy Bruce Li film entitled *Edge of Fury*, a modern day action picture, and the second was an interesting project, *The Tattoo Connection*, starring Jim Enter the Dragon Kelly and Flash Legs Tan Tao Liang. The film was unique, a modern day action film about a diamond smuggling ring run by Chan Sing. According to many people involved, a personality clash between Jim Kelly and Flash Legs erupted on the set and fights often broke out. Said Lee: "Jim was a good fighter and a well known star but then so was Tan. Jim's problem was that he didn't

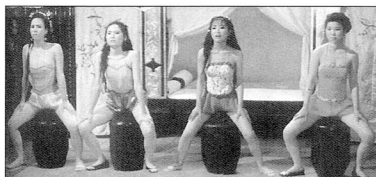


want to get hit a lot, he said it made him out to be weak. I told him this is necessary for in the end when you fight back the audience will really be rooting for you, and it makes you act as more a human being, rather than an unbeatable superman. Also he thought Tan had too much screen time and when

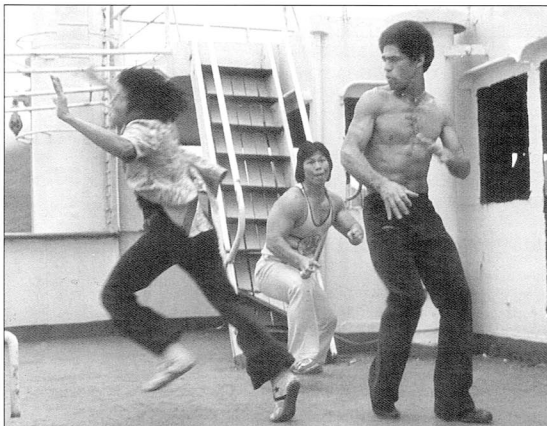


Fast, furious action (and silly shows) in *Eagle's Claw*





Left: Alexander Lo Rei and Lin Shao Lo in *The Ghostly Ruffian*
 Top Right: Toilet training in *Killing in the Nude*
 Right: More concubine training in *Killing in the Nude*
 Below: Stars galore in *The Tattoo Connection*



they fought on screen real blows were exchanged." The film made a lot of money for First Films but is not one of Lee's favourites.

Towards the end of the '70s, Lee tried a new formula to buck up the fizzling industry. He employed a new choreographer and close friend of Jackie Chan, Pang Gang, and signed up Peking Opera beauty Hsia Kwan

Lee for two pictures, *Woman Avenger* and *The Leg Fighters*. Although excellent in terms of story and fight action, the films did little to help the dying genre. The ninja had appeared and ninja movies from all over the globe swamped the market. Lee's offering to this weird and wonderful phenomenon was two excellent pictures, *Life of a Ninja* starring Chen Kwan Tai and Taiwanese beauty Yeung Hui Shan, and *Challenge of the Lady Ninja*, with a guest appearance by Robert Tai as Scorpion Head.

The ninja craze was quickly replaced in Asia by the Shaolin Temple craze. In 1981 the Mainland Chinese had released a film entitled *Shaolin Temple*, shot on location in the actual Shaolin Temple and starring five times Wu Shu champion Jet Lee. It was a huge hit and movie producers in Hong Kong and Taiwan were quick to cash in. Lee Tso Nam's effort was the brilliant *Shaolin Vs*



Kung Fu Wonderchild



Beauty Investigator



Fury Phoenix



Kung fu heavy hitter Lin Shao Lu in Cheatsy Ruffian



"This is how it's done." Lee directs Korean babes in *Killing in the Nude*



Lee dialogue coaching Yueng Hui Shan in *Life of a Ninja*

Lama, starring Alexander Lo and Korean 5th Dan Chang Shan.

The fight scenes had a unique style and nothing like them has been seen on any screen since, except for Lee's next film *Wild Panther*, a low budget movie shot in Korea starring Chang Shan and Wong Tao. It was strongly influenced by the Stallone classic *First Blood*. Said Lee: "My favorite actors are Bruce Lee, Stallone and Robert Redford." The film vanished soon after its release.

Lee remained in Korea to shoot three Category III exploitationers; *Killing in the Nude* was the first and best known. Set in the Ming Dynasty, it focuses on the sex training for royal concubines.

Following these Korean sex escapades, Lee was requested by his old mentor Ting Shan Si to assist on the mammoth project *The Story of Sun Yat Sen*. He was given the task of directing second unit in London.

Next, Lee moved into the vampire/fantasy genre, producing as well as directing a string of films, the most famous being *Kung Fu Wonder Child* and *Child of Peach 3* aka *Fiery Phoenix*.

Most recently, Lee has directed *The Beauty Investigator*, a femme fatale action fest starring Moon Lee and Yukari Oshima. With the current Asian movie market problems and with the might of cable, work for directors like Lee Tso Nam is becoming less in demand. He is currently working for CTS in Taiwan, where he is directing a kung fu TV series.



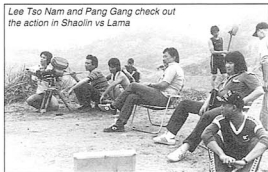
Chang Shang vs Alexander Lo

Lee Tso Nam

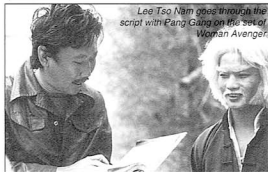
Selected Filmography

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1973 | • 10TH DAN MASTER |
| 1976 | • EXIT THE DRAGON, ENTER THE TIGER
aka BRUCE LEE STAR OF ALL STARS |
| | • FIST OF FURY 2 |
| | • THE HOT, THE COOL AND THE VICIOUS |
| 1977 | • GREEN JADE STATUETTE |
| | • EAGLE'S CLAW |
| | • FATAL NEEDLES, FATAL FISTS |
| | • EDGE OF FURY |
| 1978 | • CHALLENGE OF DEATH |
| | • TATTOO CONNECTION |
| | • SHAOLIN INVINCIBLE STICKS |
| | • KUNG FU PHANTOM |
| 1979 | • MISSION KISS AND KILL |
| | • WOMAN AVENGER |
| | • LEG FIGHTERS |
| 1080 | • LUNATIC FROG WOMAN |
| 1980/81 | • LIFE OF A NINJA |
| 1981 | • CHALLENGE OF THE LADY NINJA |
| | • SHAOLIN VS LAMA |
| 1983 | • WILD PANTHER |
| 1984 | • KILLING IN THE NUDE |
| 1986 | • THE STORY OF SUN YAT SEN |
| | • KUNG FU WONDERCHILD |
| | • A BUDDHIST STORY |
| 1987 | • FIERY PHOENIX |
| 1988 | • PUNK POLICE |
| 1989 | • DEMON CRYSTAL |
| 1990 | • GHOSTLY RUFFIAN |
| 1991 | • BEAUTY INVESTIGATOR |
| 1992 | |

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Lee Tso Nam and Pang Gang check out the action in *Shaolin vs Lama*



Lee Tso Nam goes through the script with Pang Gang on the set of *Woman Avenger*