

空中之家

nishao



China Southern Airlines Inflight Magazine
中国南方航空集团公司航机读物

英文月刊
September
2004
No 9 Vol 63

Bangkok

Eats and retreats in
Asia's wildest city

Isamu Noguchi
Museum & Garden

Atacama Desert Race

Akira Isogawa
Cross-cultural
couture

Mane Attraction
The Beijing
Jockey Club



THE BIGGER PICTURE

Terence Chang, famed director John Woo's producing partner, shares his love of the cinema and struggle to Hollywood glory with Eric Hiss



John Woo and Terence Chang in their Lion Rock Productions office

In classic John Woo films such as *The Killer* (1989), the protagonist always has a trusted partner to cover his back. In a case of life imitating art, Woo has just such a counterpart in producer Terence Chang, 55.

Indeed, their story plays out like a classic buddy film – beginning in their early days when the duo worked together in Hong Kong, moving on to their struggles to get started in Hollywood and now, as successful partners in the high-profile company Lion Rock Productions.

During a recent visit to the company's offices in Santa Monica, California, the busy producer described his love of film, fast-track career and ongoing partnership with action director John Woo.

"I can still remember the first picture I saw; it was *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*," says Chang, who remembers sitting for hours watching American films in the 40-cent matinee houses in his native Hong Kong.

It is a suitable metaphor for someone now at the peak of his profession who regularly cuts deals

with studios such as Paramount and Universal, oversees casts, budgets and a myriad of other details for major productions while teaming up with one of Hollywood's hottest directors. Today, with approximately 30 projects in various stages of development, Chang is a very busy man indeed.

But it wasn't always plush offices and big budgets. When he first left Hong Kong for the United States to attend The University of Oregon, he originally wanted to be an architect. Moreover, for his conservative family, a film career was unthinkable. But a critical turning point occurred when his parents passed away. Feeling that now was the time to do what he really wanted to do, he left Oregon for New York University to study film, before finally returning to Hong Kong.

Chang says it was his dream to be a director, but instead he started his career as a production manager with the dubious first assignment of producing a Bruce Lee feature five years after the superstar's death. "They said come up with something, so I did, using alternate cuts and close-up shots."

It wasn't long after that he first met his future business partner and friend, director John Woo. Inauspiciously, the film project on which they were to collaborate fell apart when Woo had a disagreement with the studio. The two men didn't see each other again for 10 years.

Chang remained busy producing and distributing films such as *Everlasting Love* (1983) – which was included in the Director's Fortnight at Cannes in 1984 – and helping launch the careers of stars such as Michelle Yeoh and Brandon Lee. Woo, meanwhile, was working as a contract director, turning out hits such as *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) and *The Killer*.

Released in 1989, *The Killer*, starring Chow Yun-fat, changed the pair's destiny and set them on a course straight for Hollywood. "There was never really a conscious decision to work in America," Chang says. "I was doing sales here, looking for additional revenue for my films and pushing several directors. But it was John they really wanted, especially after *The Killer*. When calls from American studios started coming in, they set up a meeting. It lasted all of two minutes."



John Woo directing Ben Affleck in *Paycheck* (2003)



Woo with Colm Feore in *Paycheck* (2003)

“When you finish one film, you dream up the next one and do it. That’s a very different world from Hollywood.”

In Chang's own words, the resulting meeting was "a complete disaster". The studio executive – a big fan of Woo's work – had asked the director if he wanted to make a film with them. Woo's surprising one-word answer was "no".

"I was shocked. We had flown all the way from Paris, so I asked him why he said that. John's response was he couldn't understand a word the man was saying, so to be safe, he said no. I had no idea he couldn't speak English... we always spoke Chinese."

Back in Hong Kong, they formed their own company, Milestone, which produced films such as *Once a Thief* (1991), and Woo's American directorial

debut, *Hard Target* (1993). Chang also put the director to work learning English by reading old movie scripts and studying with a tutor six days a week.

Respect from Hollywood remained elusive, but the duo decided to leave Hong Kong in 1992 and try their luck anyway, forming a new company with the only American executive who would return their calls. Under the WCG banner, Chang and Woo worked with top stars like John Travolta and Nicholas Cage in films such as *Broken Arrow* (1996) and *Face/Off* (1997). With the success of those films, the pair finally became established Hollywood players. Finally, in 1998, they established their own Hollywood-based production



Courtesy of Paramount Pictures

company, Lion Rock Productions. High-profile films produced by Lion Rock include *Mission Impossible: II* (2000), starring Tom Cruise, and *Windtalkers* (2002), starring Nicholas Cage.

Although Chang and his partner prospered, there were challenges along the way. "In Hong Kong the director is king, so in Hollywood John had to get used to more collaboration. Also, financing is more streamlined there. When you finish one film, you dream up the next one and do it. That's a very different world from Hollywood."

Nevertheless, the Hong Kong-Hollywood connection that Chang and Woo helped forge has also resulted in something entirely new – a progressive wave of entertainment that embraces global culture. That cross-cultural current is showcased by new Lion Rock projects including an HBO film using both US and Chinese crews and a joint Hong Kong/UK musical Chang

is co-producing with music legend Peter Gabriel.

Staying in the game for Chang and Lion Rock now also means exploring the brave new world of videogames with the company's subsidiary, Tiger Hill. Not much of a gamer himself (Chang admits to getting motion sickness when playing racing games), they are still making tracks in the industry, capitalising on the increasing convergence between the two industries. Their reputation is opening doors with top publishers such as Sega and Microsoft, while attracting projects such as film tie-ins for the popular video games *Metroid* and *Spy Hunter*.

Although it isn't likely that Chang and Woo will be wielding any weapons to ensure their continued success, it's safe to assume this dynamic duo will be packing a one-two punch in Hollywood for years to come. ■