

Hong Kong B-movie titan and 'Ip Man' choreographer celebrates his past while keeping a hopeful eye on kung fu's future



Sammo Hung is best known as a fight choreographer, working behind the scenes with stars like Jackie Chan and John Woo and on films such as *Ip Man 2*, above.

PHOTOS: TAIPEI TIMES AND COURTESY OF SERENITY ENTERTAINMENT INTERNATIONAL



## A king of kung fu films savors work and honors

BY JOYCE HOR-CHUNG LAU  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, HONG KONG



Respect is paid when Sammo Hung (洪金寶) lumbers down the streets of Tsim Sha Tsui, the neighborhood where he first learned martial arts as a boy.

Women ask for his autograph at a cafe where he has his black coffee. Laborers stripped to the waist in the summer heat crowd against the edge of their truck and wave. Tourists snap photos as he strolls along the Avenue of the Stars — a sort of Hollywood Walk of Fame here — where his

hand prints are between Jackie Chan's (成龍) and Brigitte Lin's (林青霞).

Not particularly well-known among mainstream international audiences, Hung, 58, is known as the "Big Brother" of the Hong Kong kung fu film. The famously hefty actor did not go the Hollywood route that Chan has pursued but has stayed mainly in Asia, where he has directed, produced, choreographed or acted in about 200 movies. He is best known as a fight choreographer, working behind the scenes with stars like Chan and John Woo (吳宇森) and playing an integral role in the development of the kung fu genre.

That earned him a lifetime achievement award last week at the New York Asian Film Festival, which runs through Thursday. It is showing four of his works: *Eastern Condors* (1987), a darkly humorous Vietnam War-era film that is said to have been an influence on Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*; *Kung Fu Chefs* (功夫廚神) (2009), a comedy; and the two *Ip Man* (葉問) movies (2008 and 2010), based on the life of Ip Man, a grand master of wing chun (詠春) kung fu who taught Bruce Lee (李小龍), and for which Hung did the fight choreography. A sold-out screening of *Ip Man 2* opened the festival.

The entertainment business runs in Hung's family. His grandmother, Chin Tsi-Ang (錢似鶯), was one of the first sword-wielding martial-arts actresses, and his grandfather was a director.

Born Hung Kam-bo in 1952, he was trained in the old Peking Opera School tradition, in which parents sent young children to live on campus and to apprentice under a master who taught them martial arts, acrobatics, singing and dancing.

"I was never good at school and was always fighting in the streets," Hung said. "So they sent me to learn to fight."

When he was 9, he was sent to be trained in the Tsim Sha Tsui neighborhood of Kowloon, where he met a younger student named Chan Kong-sang, who became Jackie Chan. Under the school's management they became child stars in a performing troupe.

"We woke early in the morning and worked until 11 at night," Hung said. "There was a small, square wooden stool, and we had to do a handstand on it for an hour. Of course they beat the children. I lived there for seven years."

Decades later, in 1988, Hung played his former master in *Painted Faces* (七小福), a drama that depicts the boys' spartan life. "Our real suffering," he said, "was much worse than what we put in the movie."

Hung said he did not learn kung fu specifically until after he left school. He also spent years studying a variety of fighting styles from China and other Asian nations.

He established himself as an action director, choreographing the elaborate combat scenes for which Hong Kong films are known and sometimes fighting himself. He plays the portly Shaolin monk, for example, whom Bruce Lee battles in the opening of *Enter the Dragon* (龍爭虎鬥) (1973).

Through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s Hung was involved in scores of movies, which the Hong Kong studio system was churning out quickly and cheaply. He specialized in the B-films so beloved by audiences here.

Hong Kong cinema began developing its own look and moving away from stylized Mandarin-language costume dramas. Filmmakers started using bawdy humor, urban settings, tight hand-to-hand combat shots and the rough Cantonese of the streets.

"Kung fu films have to move with the rest of the world," Hung said. "You couldn't keep on doing sword fights in historic films. People wanted superheroes. They wanted something fast and new."

From 1998 to 2000 he starred in *Martial Law*, a CBS prime-time TV drama, in which he played a kung fu-fighting Chinese cop.

Like everyone in the Hong Kong movie business, Hung is doing more work in China, as it opens up and as its entertainment industry grows. That said, he noted that "the local Hong Kong flavor is getting lost in some films."

"I wish there were more kung fu films," he said. "They are a part of our culture. But there are no young new stars out there. Who's making a new generation of kung fu films now? If all young actors want is to star in romances, what do they need to learn kung fu for? The sex scenes?"

Hung's three sons — Timmy, Jimmy and Sammy — have acted in various projects with him, but he said he was not going to push them. "I want them to see the world for themselves," he said.

Nor did he see the film festival award as the culmination of his career. Once the festival ends, he plans to return home to Hong Kong, he said, and start shooting again.

"I'm not quite ready for a lifetime achievement award," he said. "It makes it sound like I'm going to retire soon, and I feel like I've just started."

### TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

JUNE 25 TO JULY 1



1 Peter Ho (何潤東) and *Remembered Love* (我記得我愛過) with **14.68%** of sales

2 Danson Tang (唐禹哲) and *The First Second* (D1秒) with **13.07%**

3 Bibi Zhou (周筆暢) and *i, fish, light, mirror* (i·魚·光·鏡) with **5.66%**

4 Yen-J (嚴爵) and *Thanks Your Greatness* (謝謝你的美好) with **4.26%**

5 Jay Chou (周杰倫) and *The Era* (跨時代) with **4.13%**

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

### PLANET POP

American party girl **Paris Hilton** on Saturday said she still loved South Africa despite being arrested for drug possession although the charges were later withdrawn.

Hilton and her friend, former Playboy Playmate **Jennifer Rovero**, were taken into custody for carrying a joint at the Brazil-Netherlands quarterfinal match in the southern city of Port Elizabeth on Friday.

But the state dropped the charges against the heiress after Rovero pleaded guilty.

In a post on Twitter after the incident Hilton wrote: "Hey guys, there's a lot of crazy rumors going around. Just want you all to know the truth. Everything is completely fine."

"I was not charged or arrested, cause I didn't do anything. I was assisting the police with the investigation and answering their questions."

"Everyone was super nice and friendly to me. I love South Africa! Such an amazing place, especially during The World Cup! Hope that clears everything up. Love you guys, thanks for your concern. Xoxo P."

Hilton and Rovero appeared in one of South Africa's special World Cup courts for foreigners early Saturday morning.

Police approached the pair outside the stadium on Friday after smelling

marijuana, a police spokeswoman said.

A joint was thrown to the ground and the women apparently were ushered inside by bodyguards, she said.

Meanwhile, protests flared in Tokyo on Saturday as Oscar-winning dolphin-hunting documentary *The Cove* was screened despite outrage among people who complain the film is anti-Japanese.

About 30 protesters, mostly right-wingers, briefly skirmished with supporters of the film ahead of its first commercial showing at a Tokyo theater where police were on guard.

"Don't bully fishermen," a protestor screamed through a loudspeaker and held a banner reading: "The anti-Japanese movie, *The Cove*, is a poison that discriminates Japanese."

The movie shows graphic scenes of the bloody but legal dolphin slaughter filmed using hidden cameras, and nationalist groups say it should be banned because it is anti-Japanese.

Police were also deployed inside the cinema, where all tickets had been sold out to about 100 spectators for the first showing, according to an official from the distributor Unplugged.

An official from the Taiji fisheries union voiced concern that showing the film could spread misunderstanding about dolphin hunts, but added that the union hopes audiences will get an

"exact understanding" of what actually takes place, Kyodo reported.

At the Oscars ceremony, director **Louie Psihoyos** denied he was guilty of "Japan-bashing" and said *The Cove* was intended to be a public health warning to Japanese who are sold dolphin meat contaminated by mercury.

Earlier this week, a South Korean actor and singer who rode the wave of Korean pop culture in Asia was found dead at his home in Seoul in an apparent suicide, police said.

**Park Yong-ha**, 33, was found in his room by his mother on Wednesday after he apparently hanged himself with an electrical cord, Yonhap news agency said.

Park spent his last moments on Tuesday night with his father, who is suffering from cancer.

He reportedly massaged his father for a long while before leaving with the words: "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Park shot to fame through the 2002 hit television drama series *Winter Sonata* and won fans in Japan and other Asian countries. He also released albums as a singer.

He had been chosen for the leading role in a Korean TV drama, a remake of the popular 1996 Hong Kong film *Comrades, Almost a Love Story*. Shooting was set to begin in July.

Park was deeply anguished by his

father's illness and was also suffering financial difficulties as an entertainment agency he set up in February struggled to make money, Yonhap said.

Park's Japanese site crashed temporarily due to overwhelming traffic, it said, adding he was scheduled to fly to Japan on Thursday as part of a concert tour with his new album *Stars*.

Park is the latest of a number of South Korean entertainers to kill themselves. They include top movie actress **Lee Eun-jo** who committed suicide in 2005 and **Choi Jin-sil** who died in 2008.

Suicide is the highest cause of death among those in their 20s and 30s in South Korea, which in 2007 had the highest suicide rate among developed countries.

Little-known British actor **Andrew Garfield** will be the star of the next film based on web-slinging superhero Spider-Man, it was announced on Thursday.

Garfield, 26, steps into the void vacated by **Tobey Maguire**, the star of the first three films in the franchise which have grossed nearly US\$2.5 billion worldwide.

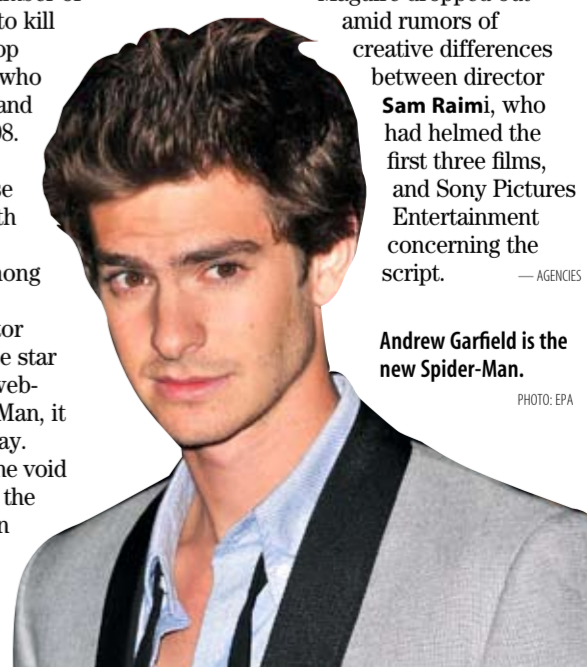
Garfield's previous credits include **Terry**

**Gilliam's** quirky *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassius* and the British indie film *Boy A*. He also has a starring role in this year's film based on the rise of Facebook, *The Social Network*.

The new *Spider-Man* will be a reboot of the franchise, taking the character of Peter Parker back to his origins, studio bosses have said.

Maguire dropped out amid rumors of creative differences between director **Sam Raimi**, who had helmed the first three films, and Sony Pictures Entertainment concerning the script.

—AGENCIES



Andrew Garfield is the new Spider-Man.

PHOTO: EPA