

***In Broad Daylight* and the New Hong Kong Film Generation: An Interview with  
Lawrence Kan Kwan Chun**

Gary Bettinson

The sophomore feature of writer-director Lawrence Kan, *In Broad Daylight* (2023) is among the finest films yet produced by Hong Kong's rising crop of filmmakers. It dramatizes a factual scandal still fresh for the 2023 Hong Kong audience. In 2015, the pro-democracy news outlets *Ming Pao* and (the now-defunct) *Apple Daily* reported systemic failings and individual malfeasance within the city's network of unsubsidized care homes. This startling reportage documented chronic understaffing and unsanitary living conditions, the care centres swarming with rats and cockroaches. At one facility, elderly residents were disrobed and left on an outdoor terrace for ninety minutes as they queued for showers. Abuse of patients was commonplace: one caregiver slapped an infirm wheelchair user hard across the face (an attack captured on another resident's smartphone), while the warden of Kwai Chung's Bridge of Rehabilitation centre was charged (and controversially acquitted) with raping a mentally impaired patient. In 2016 *Apple Daily* reported at least eight mysterious deaths at Bridge of Rehabilitation, including the apparent suicide of an autistic teenager who hurled himself from a window. All these incidents get powerfully woven – more or less faithfully, and in ways that avoid Category III exploitation – into the *In Broad Daylight* screenplay, signed by director Kan and co-writers Li Cheuk-fung and Tong Chui-ping.

*In Broad Daylight* and other films by the new Hong Kong directors have been widely characterized as social-issue dramas, but this description tends to overlook their engagement with popular genre. Not infrequently the social critique finds a conduit in familiar forms and formulas. Ho Cheuk-tin's *The Sparring Partner* (2022) is a courtroom drama, Oliver Chan's *Still Human* (2018) a comedy-drama, and Jun Li's *Tracey* (2018) a family melodrama. By the same token, *In Broad Daylight* funnels its social-problem story through the norms of the newspaper movie. Kan's drama presents an archetypal cadre of newshounds: the hotshot journalist (Kay, played by Jennifer Yu), the idealistic cub reporter (Jess, played by Vanora Hui), the peppy sidekick (Leung, played by Leung Chung-hang), and the irascible city editor (Eric, played by Chu Pak-him). The plot traces the team's newsgathering activities as they probe reports of malpractice at the fictional Rainbow Bridge care home. Mobilized, too, are the structural oppositions that buttress the newspaper movie genre – home versus work,

idealism versus cynicism, objectivity versus subjectivity<sup>1</sup> – as well as the fin-de-siècle atmosphere that perennially hangs over the newspaper business. Not least, there is the genre’s thematic emphasis on journalistic ethics, the intimate ties between newspapers and institutional power, and the social value of serious news reporting. *In Broad Daylight* at once embraces these genre tropes and subjects them to imaginative revision.

Contrary to claims that the 2000s launched an era of “post-Hong Kong” cinema,<sup>2</sup> *In Broad Daylight* relies upon storytelling principles firmly rooted in local filmmaking tradition. A reel-by-reel plot structure and parallelisms among characters lend the drama a robust architecture. Much of the film’s structural rigour, not to say emotional force, springs from a dense web of motivic associations, another longstanding cornerstone of Hong Kong dramaturgy.<sup>3</sup> Director Kan clusters several visual motifs around star reporter Kay and the elderly Tung (David Chiang), an ostensibly senile resident at Rainbow Bridge. Cigarettes, smartphones, Tung’s omnipresent cap – these realistic details, sprinkled across several reels, unobtrusively acquire symbolic resonance, drawing out parallels between Kay and Tung and charting their burgeoning relationship. More broadly, the film teems with motifs of mobility (planes, cars, playground swings, birds). These symbols ironically counterpoint both the oppressiveness of the nursing home (Kan deploys aperture framings to conjure a claustrophobic ambience) and the sometimes-literal imprisonment of the residents. A recurrent pictorial play with daylight (e.g. the “pillow” shots of a bright sky) and darkness (the low light levels afforded the care home) creates a visual dynamic shot through with moral implications. In all, *In Broad Daylight* gains thematic and emotional richness from local norms of story and style. At a period of Hong Kong filmmaking allegedly governed by Mainlandization and Hollywoodization, this film reminds us that local storytelling principles can yield powerful drama.

Acclaimed upon release, *In Broad Daylight* scooped up numerous prizes at the Hong Kong Film Awards and elsewhere. Critical encomium singled out director Kan for eliciting strong performances from a cross-generational troupe of actors. Indeed, the film delivers memorable characterizations from its youthful players (including Rachel Leung and Henick Chou as victimized teens Ling and Ming, respectively) as well as from Bowie Lam as an obsequious warden and Baby Bo as a diabolical nurse. Not least, the film spotlights a poignant turn by Shaw Brothers idol David Chiang as Tung, the retiree over whose mental capacity the film equivocates. At first, Tung talks in non sequiturs, and Chiang marshals a suite of physical tics (eye saccades, blinking, swaying on the spot) that denote bewilderment.

But gradually, the film hints that Tung might be feigning senility, and Chiang deftly modulates his performance accordingly. Under Kan's aegis, the veteran star delivers a complex, finely calibrated performance that complicates spectatorial identification and yields an emotionally satisfying payoff.

In the following interview, Lawrence Kan chronicles the production history of *In Broad Daylight*, illuminates the film's thematic meanings, and ruminates upon an exciting new corps of Hong Kong directors that includes, among others, Chan Kin-long (*Hand Rolled Cigarette*, 2020), Norris Wong (*My Prince Edward*, 2019), Jun Li (*Drifting*, 2021), Sum Lam (*The Narrow Road*, 2022), Sunny Chan (*Table for Six*, 2022), and Nick Cheuk (*Time Still Turns the Pages*, 2023). The interview was conducted in English on 27 May 2025 in Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong.

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**Gary Bettinson: Were your early years spent in Hong Kong?**

Lawrence Kan: Yes. I was born in Hong Kong on 26 August 1987. I grew up in Hong Kong, and then I studied in Canada for five years. I spent two years in high school and more than two years at Vancouver Film School. I had a fine art background; I'm a painter. I remember when, in 2004, I told my parents, "I really want to get out of Hong Kong." Maybe I was influenced by *Cinema Paradiso* (1988). I literally told my parents, "I want to see the world. I don't want to be stuck here." Back then I painted a lot, but to be honest the education system in Hong Kong did not value art, really. I just wanted to see the world, so I went to Canada.

**What films and filmmakers influenced you as an aspiring director and writer?**

Wong Kar-wai, of course; I think every film student in Hong Kong loved Wong Kar-wai. Johnnie To, Ann Hui, Peter Chan, Tsui Hark. And Derek Yee, the producer of *In Broad Daylight*. These directors are like heroes to me. I grew up watching their movies. They created the dream, the industry, for my generation to chase. That's why I could tell my parents, "I will study film and I will be able to get a job, don't worry about it – there is an industry." So they were my heroes. Francis Coppola, Steven Soderbergh, Steven Spielberg – all these Hollywood directors are my heroes too. One of my favourite movies is *The Godfather* (1972).

**Can you describe your early career in film?**

I graduated from Vancouver Film School in 2009 and came back to Hong Kong. I worked in a media company as a videographer and editor. I was producing material for luxury digital magazines. Those were the days when magazines were beginning to do things online, such as creating their own YouTube channels – they tried to shift from the practical world to the digital world. Then I worked a lot doing pre-wedding photoshoots and videos for weddings. And then I won a short film contest in Hong Kong and I got a chance to direct my first film, *When C Goes With G7* (2013). It was funded by a youth organization. They had a campaign to support young people, and I was in that programme. And I got a chance to direct my first film, but it was very low budget. That's how I started my career. But when I finished my first film, I still didn't feel like I'd broken into the film industry at all. After that I worked a lot making music videos, I worked with singers, I shot many commercials and short films. And I pitched a lot of projects to film companies. That didn't work until I met Derek Yee. I had the story of *In Broad Daylight* and I told him about it. I think it reminded him of his directorial debut film, *The Lunatics* (1986). And then he agreed to be my producer. He brought me to join the Hong Kong Film Awards creative committee and he introduced me to a lot of active filmmakers and directors. This was in 2018, and finally I felt like I had gotten close to industry people. But the script for *In Broad Daylight* was rejected by my investors. At the start, the film company paid me a scriptwriting fee, but later they felt that there wasn't any potential to develop the film. They didn't want to invest in the project anymore, so they rejected it. Then I got a chance to start my television project, *In Geek We Trust* (2021-2022), for ViuTV, and at that point I stopped working on *In Broad Daylight* for about two years. After the television show, I went back to reboot the project and talked to different film investors. Finally, I got investment from [actor-producer] Louis Koo, who loved the project when Derek Yee brought it to him. Louis bought out the script from the previous film company. He cares a lot about this kind of subject, actually, and he really wanted to do it. That's why Derek Yee brought it to him.

### **What attracted you to the subject matter of *In Broad Daylight*?**

Back in the day, when I saw the news about the care home abuse in Hong Kong, I was shocked. At that time, I was in a period of writer's block. I was kind of lost. I was working on a different project with some producers and investors in Mainland China. I wanted to do my own film, but the producers wanted me to do *their* project first and earn the chance to direct my own project. But I really hated the project that they wanted me to direct, and in the end it wasn't made. So I was quite lost. And then I talked to one of my filmmaker friends. We were

both in our late thirties at the time. And he said to me, “I think that now we are in our thirties, we have to make the right decision, to define how – ten years in the future – people will see us as filmmakers.” What kind of filmmaker do I want to be in the future? How will we be remembered? My friend said, “I want to be a respectable filmmaker like Teddy Robin.” Teddy Robin is a great mentor to most of the young filmmakers in Hong Kong. And I thought, “True, I should stick with my gut feeling. I want to do something that I *want* to do, that I feel passionate about, instead of just being a director for hire. I want to tell a story that I really want to tell.” So, when I saw the news about the care home scandal, it triggered me a lot because I had a very close relationship with my grandmother. She has since passed away. Back in the day, I think those kinds of emotions, and the relationship between me and my grandmother, hit me a lot. And when I saw the news, it gave rise to all these memories of the relationship between me and my grandmother. I got that very strong feeling, some kind of calling, that I really want to do that film. So I started to call the journalists involved in covering the scandal; I wanted to hear more from them. That’s how I started the project.

**What other activities did the research process entail?**

I talked to the journalists. I talked to the family of one of the victims. I talked to social workers. I talked to the law makers back then.

**When did the other scriptwriters, Li Cheuk-fung (Fung Li) and Tong Chui-ping (Iris Tong), join the project?**

At first, I had partnered with other writers. I usually work with writers because I type so slowly. But also I didn’t want to write the script by myself – I like to co-write with people. The former writers left the project. One of the writers that then came onboard, Fung Li, used to be my intern in my production company. I ran into him again when I was working on the project I told you about – the one with the mainland investors; the one I really hated. I told Fung about the story I really wanted to work on – the story that became *In Broad Daylight* – and then he was onboard. The other writer, Iris Tong, was introduced to me by one of my actress friends. She was touched by the story too, and so she joined the project.

**Among the writing team, what was the division of labour?**

We worked closely together. We did the research together. And we debated virtually every line of the script. We also had help from Derek Yee, the producer. He’s a creative kind of producer. He really doesn’t care about money; he cares about the story and the script. We had

meetings and meetings and meetings with him about the script. So it was a process of learning from him too; he gave us a lot of good advice. But he didn't write the script for us. He just mentored us. He offered suggestions. And we worked on the script for four or five years – we spent a lot of time to craft the script structure.

**Did the shooting script change in any significant way from the first draft?**

We had to balance how much to take from the real-life incidents and how far to adopt a dramatic approach. If we make the film too dramatic, it becomes fake. But at the same time, we're not making a documentary or mockumentary. We have to touch people; we have to move them. I think the first draft was too dramatic to the point that it was too contrived, so we tried to tone it down a little bit. But then one day we went to court to watch the trial of one of the care workers accused of abusing his residents, and we found that the reality was way more dramatic than cinema. We had to pick the right sort of elements from the real-life story. I think that was our main challenge.

**As preparation, did you study other journalism films such as *All the President's Men* (1976) and *Spotlight* (2015)? What did you learn from them?**

*Spotlight* is one of the films I made reference to. Also the Korean film, *Silenced* (2011). These two films influenced me through the way they portrayed the story and how they managed to avoid exploiting the real people's suffering while also telling the story in a dramatic way. These two films were a great reference for us.

**Were there any Hong Kong films that you took as a model?**

Not really. Not at all.

**What about *A-1 Headline* (2004)?**

Yeah, we named the newspaper in the film "A1 News" as a tribute to that film. But it's a different sort of film from *In Broad Daylight*.

**What budget did you manage to acquire?**

Around ten to eleven million Hong Kong dollars. That's a typical average budget for young filmmakers in Hong Kong. It's higher than some of them, but it's not a high budget.

**How long did you spend on each phase of production?**

From the point the film got green-lighted, preproduction lasted two months. Shooting lasted twenty days, filmed over six weeks – so it's not like we were shooting every day. And editing took half a year, maybe. We spent a lot of time on editing, actually. Preproduction was challenging, because it was so hard to find the real locations. For one thing, it was COVID time. And also, if we told the care homes the kind of story we wanted to make, I doubt they would allow us to shoot there. Thanks to the producing team, we found a care home that was out of operation. It was a vacant location – it used to be a care home, and the setup inside still looked like a care home. We changed it for the benefit of the shooting, but thankfully we found the place and we could shoot there.

### **What about the newsroom?**

That was an actual newsroom. It belonged to a news company in Hong Kong. The floor where Kay works was the entertainment news department, and we could shoot when the staff was not there. We shot all the film's newsroom scenes in two days!

### **Postproduction was fairly protracted by Hong Kong standards. What occupied your time in the editing room?**

Through preproduction and production, I talked to my actors, my DP [Director of Photography], my editor, my composer – I explained to them that we want to tell the right story but that the film is not a platform for us to show off. We are depicting real people's suffering, and I didn't want to exploit that. It's so hard. We knew we wanted to tell a story that will impact the audience, the society. That's why I talked to the cast and crew, and said, "Don't show off – let's use our techniques or our talent to tell the right story, to impact people." So we tried not to have any crazy camera angles and that kind of thing. We're not trying to show off how good we are at filmmaking. We tried to tone down the camera angles and camera movement. During editing, I tried not to play any crazy editing tricks. We tried to create the right tone for every scene. That was our challenge. We tried so hard to get it right, especially when it came to the music track. Wan Pin Chu is a great composer. We had to decide whether to put music into the scenes to encourage viewers to feel the emotion. If we used too much score, viewers will think, "You're trying to manipulate us." That's why we went to Italy to record the music. I'm a huge fan of Italian culture and cinema. I went to the studio of Ennio Morricone to compose the tracks, because the musicians there don't show off. They are the most capable musicians to portray a track that can touch people's hearts. If we

had composed the music in China or Prague, there are skilful musicians there, but they don't touch you emotionally.

**What about the song that bookends the film? What did you want to accomplish with this choice of music?**

Oh, "We'll Meet Again." I know the history of that song – it's a coming home song for the soldiers in World War I. The lyrics – "we'll meet again" – are very direct. Sometimes a journalist tries to focus on a case, and they talk to the subjects, the people. But what happens if they get emotionally attached to those people? When the case is finished, they have to move on. In this context, the song is like an oxymoron. But somehow the characters in *In Broad Daylight* played by Jennifer Yu and David Chiang *will* meet again. This is the kind of feeling I wanted to put in the film at the start and at the end. Also, it was a personal choice for me, because I think that I will meet my grandma again.

**Given your background in fine art and your strong visual imagination, do you storyboard your films?**

No. We have shot lists, but we don't have storyboards.

**And you shot the film using sync sound?**

Yes, location sound. We tried not to use dubbing. We do have a little bit, but not much.

**Were you able to include a rehearsal period in the preproduction phase?**

No. I held a meeting with the actors and told them what kind of story we were going to make. I took Jennifer and some of the young actors to the news company to meet the real-life journalists, to study the care-home case together, and to let them observe the journalists' daily routine. And I had a private meeting with Bowie Lam and David Chiang. Of course, they had their own comments and opinions about the script. They're so good and they are open to any ideas. Some of their ideas I listened to. For example, the scene when David Chiang places his cap on Jennifer's head was an improvisation – it wasn't in the script. When David Chiang was on the set – it was a real location – and he saw the rain, he got the feeling that he had to hand the cap to Jennifer to show how much he cares for her, just like a caring grandfather. I was not too sure about that idea at first. But he said, "Just trust me, let me do it." I said, "Sure." And then when he did that scene and I said "Cut," all my staff and even some of the extras were crying, and I saw the magical impact of cinema. As a filmmaker, you can't

control everything, but you prepare everything so that a surprise or accident can happen. And that was the moment. You know, when I saw David Chiang and Bowie Wu [who plays Shui, an endearing care home resident] on my set, speaking my lines, I was thrilled. They are two legends that represent the 1960s Hong Kong cinema, the *wuxia* cinema. I was filming two legends. I felt like I'm a proud grandchild to my grandmother. When I saw David Chiang on set, it's a feeling that somehow – we call it the god of cinema – we want to accomplish something great together. That's the magical power of cinema. Even my DP said, "I think the magic is there" – the lights, the natural daylight, everything prepared for David Chiang to shine again. It was that moment, that scene in the rain. David Chiang was so in-character. And to be honest, he didn't talk much. He chats with you about the script and about daily life. But he wasn't like typical Asian mentors who talk a lot. He's a very to-the-point kind of person.

**How did you come to cast David Chiang? Was he proposed by his real-life half-brother (and the film's producer) Derek Yee?**

No, most of Derek Yee's casting suggestions I didn't pick, actually (laughs). We both strongly agreed that Rachel Leung was the best choice for the character of Ling. For Kay, we cast Jennifer Yu. We held auditions. Back in 2018 or 2019 when I worked on *In Broad Daylight* at the previous film company, I had wanted to cast Bowie Lam as the warden, but he rejected me because of his schedule. It ended up that we didn't make the film at that time. So after a couple of years, when it came time to cast the film, I thought that he didn't want to play that character. Louis Koo said that if no other actor wants to play the warden, then he, Louis Koo, would play that part. I felt thankful to him, but he doesn't fit the role at all – he's a too good-looking guy. I told him, "If you want to play that role, then we will need to transform your looks." It would require a lot of time to apply the make-up on him every day of shooting. And then he said, "What about Bowie Lam?" I replied, "I talked to him a couple of years ago, and he rejected me – I don't think he wants to play that role." Louis Koo said, "Let me talk to him." So he did. I think Bowie forgot that he had rejected me. He read the script, he liked it, he understood the purpose behind the script, and then we had a little meeting together and he accepted the role.

**And David Chiang?**

He wasn't suggested by Derek Yee at all. I talked to a few of my peers and filmmaker friends. We often go to bars and talk about our projects and our casting options, and they somehow

mentioned David Chiang. “Maybe you can cast him as Tung.” I thought the role would fit him and so I scheduled a meeting, and he accepted the role.

**Since Chiang brings a lot of cultural baggage to movies, did you actively try to suppress or subvert his star persona? Or conversely, were there facets of his screen image that you wanted to exploit or enhance?**

I never suppressed anything. I think I tried to use his persona. I tried to merge the character with the actor. That’s the way I work. It’s funny, you asked me about the changes between the first draft and the final draft – well, in the first draft we wrote the David Chiang role as a twist. In the original script, it’s only near the end of the film that the audience realises, “Oh, Tung is actually smart and he knows what is going on – he isn’t senile at all.” It was originally written as a plot twist. But eventually, before we started shooting, David Chiang and I both decided that this sort of surprise twist was way too dramatic for us, and we discarded it. Instead, we tried to do it in a very “uncertain” way as opposed to the first draft where the audience suddenly discovers he is only acting.

**Did you consider including David Chiang’s character in the rooftop bathing scene, in which elderly residents are stripped naked and hosed down in public view?**

No. The fact that Tung isn’t there on the roof is a clue that he knows what’s going on. But David Chiang, as an actor, didn’t mind, actually – he was willing to be in that scene. He’s a great actor.

**Chiang has a history of filmmaking that, like *In Broad Daylight*, tackles social issues. Were you familiar with the social-problem dramas that he starred in and/or directed earlier in his career (e.g. *The Singing Killer*, 1970; *Young People*, 1972; *The Generation Gap*, 1973; *Friends*, 1974; *The Drug Addicts*, 1974; *Silent Love*, 1986)?**

Yes, I did talk to him about his earlier films. *Silent Love* is an amazing film. I do think that he cares about society and the social impact of movies. He was that kind of director. But he said, “I just thought *Silent Love* was a great story.” I think he was just being humble.

**I once asked him if he believed that movies had the power to effect positive social change, and he said “no”! (Bettinson 2011: 8)**

Yeah (laughs).

**I’d like to ask you the same question.**

I *do* think so, because I have been impacted by movies throughout my life, and so I think movies carry a huge impact on people. But even though I might not believe that a movie I make can change the whole world or the whole society, as long as I can change one person's heart, or the hearts of a group of people, then that's a great start. I remember when I first met Derek Yee and I presented him my script, the first thing he said was: "I don't believe that movies can change the world. But at least we can ask questions, we can voice our questions to the society." And I think this is still my motto in my film career. Back in the days when I was a very young passionate filmmaker, I did think that we can make a change by making a movie. But it's good that we can see the practical side of real life too. To me, what Derek Yee said is great. We are not the best people to give solutions to the society, but we can raise awareness and pose questions.

**Let's turn to *In Broad Daylight's* visual style. Why shoot in widescreen format? Did this choice pose challenges when trying to convey the claustrophobia of the nursing home?**

I realised that nowadays a lot of film festivals like movies to be shot in 4:3. Today that has become very artsy, and I didn't want *In Broad Daylight* to be like that, because I wanted the film to look like a proper cinema format. That's why I shot in 2.35:1. And we tried to create that kind of claustrophobic feeling.

**Yes, you frame characters in apertures or behind caged surfaces. Something we notice when we first enter the nursing home is that the doors are fully ajar – the patients are deprived of privacy and dignity.**

It was like that in real life. Having no doors or gates inside the home makes it easier for the carers to operate. I sort of exaggerated that a little bit. The carers in the actual nursing homes tend to block all the windows, they blur them out, but I like to use the daylight to create a visual effect. I showed paintings of Caravaggio to my DP to show him what I wanted. Caravaggio portrayed a lot of suffering in his paintings, and daylight is a huge theme in his paintings. I showed some of his paintings to my DP, and then we tried to create that kind of image on film.

**So your fine art background came into play...**

Yes!

**Do you often use paintings as visual references?**

Yes, I often do that. Edward Hopper, Caravaggio – I learned a lot from those legendary painters. If I only show my DP visual references from other movies, then we filmmakers are just copying from each other, so instead I borrow visual references from different media. That way, our films are a mixture of different artforms. I like this kind of creative process.

**In certain scenes, you employ a documentary-style handheld camera...**

Yes, because I wanted to separate the world of the care home from the world of the newsroom. I argued a lot, actually, with my DP, but then we both agreed that the newsroom action needed to be shot handheld. He brought in a piece of equipment that was like a tripod but could still do handheld movement to create tension, to convey the busy work life of the newsroom.

**This technique is quite subtly applied compared to the shakycam found in certain other newspaper movies.**

Subtle is the key word – we wanted to do everything in a subtle way, so the audience can feel the tension rather than be distracted by the camera movement.

**At the level of characterization, *In Broad Daylight* furnishes two memorable malefactors in the form of Warden Cheung (Bowie Lam) and Nurse Fong (Baby Bo). How did you conceive of these figures? Why, for instance, did you choose to make the villainous warden blind in one eye?**

I took that from the real person. It's just my own opinion, but I think he used that as an excuse for his behaviour. It was a way for him to get in touch with the victims – how he justified his actions. I was in the courtroom and I watched him. It's just my own opinion, but I think he used it as an excuse.

**Your script quotes the real person verbatim when the warden says, “I’m the victim here.”**

I talked to Bowie Lam about how to portray this character. Obviously, the warden is the villain of the story, but most bad guys don't think they are bad guys.

**“Everyone has his reasons.”**

Yes, exactly – everyone has his reasons and motivations. They think they are the protagonists, or the heroes, of the story. I used that kind of mentality to inform how Bowie played that character. I showed Bowie some video clips of the real guy. But I wasn't trying to portray that

person – the character I wrote is a composite, a mixture of different cases. But I think Bowie, as an actor, was able to steal a few body gestures and movements from the actual person to portray the character. Bowie is good at that.

**The malevolent nurse played by Baby Bo doesn't display any soft edges. Were you tempted to try to "humanize" her?**

We did have some deleted scenes. Originally, we gave reasons why she became such a bad person – we took strictly a dramatic approach. For instance, we created a romantic relationship between Bowie Lam's character and the nurse. But when we finished editing the first cut, I felt that if we put these scenes in the story, it would make it seem that the nurse abuses the residents because she doesn't get enough love from Bowie Lam's character. It was wrong for the message we were trying to present, so we cut out all those scenes. It would have been a distraction. It would have put the emphasis on those two characters. To us, the antagonist of the film is the system, not just one or two persons. We didn't want the audience to just focus on their relationship, so we cut all those scenes out.

**I wondered if *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) was an influence? Not only in terms of the tyrannical nurse...**

Yeah, actually, this film was one of our references.

**...but also with regard to David Chiang's character, who feigns senility much as R. P. McMurphy feigns insanity.**

Sort of, yeah. When Derek Yee saw the script, it reminded him of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* too. And we tried to make the nurse character a reference to that film.

**Also the joyful trip outside the confines of the care home.**

Oh yes, that part too. Well, it's funny how this part came from the research I did. When I went to the care homes to do some observations, I saw an old man in a window, and he tried to wave to me to say "hi" – he just wanted to talk to strangers, because he hadn't talked to people for a couple of years. That stuck in my mind, and I tried to put it in that scene. And I thought it was a good way to also make reference to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, so I put it all together to create that scene.

**The powerful, matter-of-fact way you present Ming's suicide recalls a similar moment in *Ida* (2013). Was Pawel Pawlikowski's film a reference point?**

Yes, *Ida* was the reference point for Ming's suicide scene.

**Can you talk about your approach to the rooftop shower scene that we touched on earlier? This proved the most controversial scene in the film.**

Yes, it's controversial for some people who felt it was too dramatic. But we needed that scene to be the most impactful scene for the audience. When I talked to my composer, we decided we needed to make it impactful through the music. Some people thought the slow motion was too artsy, but I could have made it way more artsy than it is! Slow motion is a very subtle way of showing the action. If there is one thing I would now take out of that scene, it's the choir on the music track. I think that's the reason why people thought it was too much. I would take out the choir and just use the strings.

**The scene ties in with an earlier slow-motion shot in which a caretaker pours a bucket of water on the floor...**

Yes, I planned it with my DP. It was his idea, and I think it's pretty good. The water is meant to signify cleansing, but water can be dirty too – dirty water – so it's like a metaphor. Also if you have the water hit the camera it makes an impact on the audience – to crash into the camera, right in your face.

**You also pack the film with motifs of freedom and escape, such as recurring shots of the sky and the sea, as well as the airplane and bird imagery.**

The birds are credit to my DP and my editor. My DP did a lot of great B-rolls. And my editor watched all three hours of the B-rolls and found that there are a lot of birds in the footage. It's funny, it's like how birds see us people...

**They're silent witnesses to what's going on?**

Yes, like, "you humans with your life and privilege think you're better than us, but we are more free than you guys." There is that kind of feeling. My editor picked all the bird scenes and put them in. We tried to make it very subtle.

**In contrast to the motifs of freedom and flight, you place emphasis on the fact that the care home residents cannot move anywhere and are deprived of agency.**

Yes. We tried to create a backstory for the David Chiang character: he used to be a sailor and he travelled around the world, but when he got old, he came back to Hong Kong, which is his home. And now that he could travel only within this small city, he didn't feel that previous

sense of freedom at all. The backstory we created was that as a sailor he travelled to the United States by sea and bought himself a souvenir cap. He treasures this cap a lot because it symbolises his identity back when he was so free as a sailor. Now he feels trapped in Hong Kong. So, he gives the cap to Kay, which shows how much he cares for her. All these metaphors are in the film, but I tried not to announce them in a heavy-handed way. And although it's a very sad and tragic story, I still tried to put hope in it.

**The cigarette motif is meaningful as well.**

Oh yes. Kay is a person who suppresses herself a lot and she needs a cigarette as a release. I don't think the managers in real life would let the residents of the care home smoke cigarettes, but the cigarette motif emphasises the bonding between the characters played by David Chiang and Jennifer Yu.

**He constantly puts her cigarette out.**

Yeah, that choice came from David Chiang. At first, I wanted Tung to teach Kay how to smoke, but David Chiang said: "What about this: I care for her so much and because I know smoking is bad for her, I put her cigarette out." And I thought, yes, it's kind of funny, it's even better, actually, than my original idea. We tried to portray Tung in such a way that he's pretending to be senile, but he's actually the smartest guy in the whole area. He reminds Kay of her real grandfather. She projects her emotions about her grandfather onto him. And they rely on each other. Kay's relationship with Tung is a second redemption for her. For me, too, it's a second redemption, because I feel guilty about my grandmother. I have my own personal feelings that I put into the script. For David Chiang's character, it's simple: he is lonely. A young woman, Kay, comes to talk to him, and he just relies on her because he is so lonely. And for Kay, it's like redemption – "I can do it again."

**Did you consider your work on the film to be a kind of journalistic endeavour? Much like a reporter, you had to research the case, interview the people involved, adapt the events in a way that involved selecting certain elements and omitting others, all the while taking care not to distort the purported facts. Did you perceive any kinship with the kind of journalistic activity you depict in the film?**

When I talked to the journalists, I found there are a lot of similar elements between journalism and filmmaking. Like journalists, we filmmakers have to pick different elements to put in our story and try to impact the audience as much as we can. When I talked to the

journalists, they feel that nowadays people only care about gimmicks and clickbait and don't care about the quality of journalism anymore. But if we make a movie, maybe the story can last longer than a newspaper report and have more emotional value or impact on the audience. I do find there is a similarity between filmmakers and journalists. We sort of portrayed our struggle as filmmakers through the characters played by Jennifer Yu and Chu Pak-him [who plays Eric, the newspaper editor].

**Did you think it important to make a film about a free and truthful press at this particular time in Hong Kong society? Amidst the closure of *Apple Daily*, *Strand News*, and other pro-democracy news outlets, was there a need to reaffirm the importance of the press in Hong Kong?**

I think press freedom is important not just in Hong Kong, but also the world. I'm speaking here of freedom of speech and the quality of journalism. People nowadays check out their phones, and they only care about content – they want it fast. Who cares about the truth anymore? There is so much fake news and AI news. I think it's a global topic, not just in Hong Kong. That's the kind of story I want to tell, instead of a story just about Hong Kong. People in the States, in Europe, in Japan, are facing the same problem. I'm not saying that my perspective is right and other people are wrong. I try not to be cynical. But these are some of my observations during these recent years. What is journalism to the world, to the society? I don't have an answer. It's like a journey for me to explore. Do people care about fact-checking the news? Do people care about the truth? Is news becoming just a form of entertainment to people – infotainment?

**And as *In Broad Daylight* describes, official print journalism seems to be endangered, with newspapers and news bureaus being shut down ...**

This resonates with the film industry. Do people care about the cinema experience? People watch movies on streaming platforms – that's alright, it's okay – but are people patient enough to sit in a cinema and enjoy the journey? I'm worried that cinema – the film industry – is in danger. That's why I feel that journalists and filmmakers have the same destiny.

**A number of movie theatres in Hong Kong have closed recently, and production output is shrinking.**

It's low. But I do have hope. I think it's a cycle. Take David Chiang – he used to be the *wuxia* star, and then people got bored with those *wuxia* movies, and then some young directors came

from overseas and worked in the local TV stations, and they tried to make some films about society. They were the Hong Kong New Wave. And now, after decades and decades...I'm not saying I am part of a new wave, but I think it's a cycle. I think cinema plays a very important role in human culture and for humanity. So I do have hope.

**You are one of a crop of new Hong Kong filmmakers making films about important social issues.**

Most of us are good friends and we support each other. Chan Kin-long [*Hand Rolled Cigarette*], Norris Wong [*My Prince Edward*] – these are my best friends and buddies, and we talk about our projects, we support each other, we watch the first cuts of each other's films. I'm not saying we are the new wave, but in these years we make films together and we hope that we can keep making movies with a different perspective from those of the past. We're not trying to say, "We are the new wave." We became friends naturally. We learned together and we have made some films that reflect upon the society, so that is what is happening right now.

**You said that you want to make films that depart from what came before. Are you making a conscious effort to draw a line under the "old" cinema and embark on new ventures of your own?**

It's funny how back in the day, when the 1980s/90s directors were young, they did the same thing. They didn't want to do those *wuxia* movies and studio films anymore. They got influenced by Kurosawa and Fellini, and they just wanted to make movies that were different from the old days. We're not trying to wash away what the Eighties filmmakers did, but maybe my generation got sick of those crime movies and cop movies – or even if we do make those kinds of stories, we want to make them in a different way. So it's a normal procedure of cinema history. I'm sure that one day when my peers and I get old, the young filmmakers of the future will get sick of our work. I don't know what the trend will be in twenty years' time, but the young directors of the future will have their own decades to express themselves. I think it's a cycle.

***In Broad Daylight* won several major prizes at the Hong Kong Film Awards. Is awards recognition important to you at this early phase in your career?**

It's weird, because I was also the creative director of the Hong Kong Film Awards ceremony – so I planned my own ceremony! I didn't know the results beforehand; you never know.

Derek Yee is the chairman of the HKFA, so it was kind of funny. It was like a party for us. We finally enjoyed the moment after a lot of hard work – especially when Rachel Leung and Jennifer Yu got recognised. And the moment I saw David Chiang walk up on the stage receive a standing ovation, I felt very touched by that. I'm happy for Jennifer, Rachel, and David Chiang, but the main purpose of making a film is not about awards, it's not about box office. It's a journey for me to tell the story that I want to tell – that is way more important to me. Box-office success allows me to stay in the game, at the table. But that's it.

***In Broad Daylight* shines light on an important local issue in Hong Kong society. Do you think of yourself as a Hong Kong director, or do you find this label too restrictive?**

I'm proud to be a Hong Kong filmmaker, but I try not to put myself in the category of local movie director. I try to make films that get global recognition, films that are for audiences around the world. I don't mind people calling me a Hong Kong director, because I'm from Hong Kong, but I'm not just making movies about Hong Kong. Derek Tsang, the son of Eric Tsang, is a good friend and he's a great example for us. He makes Hong Kong movies, but he is successful in China too. Po Chih-leong is another great filmmaker who is successful overseas. I think they are good examples for us. They're not just stuck in Hong Kong but also have eyes on the world.

**Earlier you said that you had given serious thought to the kind of filmmaker you want to be. Are you very conscious of creating a legacy and an auteurist body of work?**

No, I'm still thinking about what kind of filmmaker I want to be. When I have been interviewed by reporters and journalists, they asked me, "What kind of movies do you want to make? What kind of genres?" I want to try as much as I can. My next movie is a love story. It's called *Marriage Drive*. It's a story about a marriage but it's also about divorce. I've written the script with my writing partners from *In Broad Daylight*. It's a story about the Admiralty and Central districts in Hong Kong. It's about Cotton Tree Drive, a marriage registry in Central. People can go there and sign their marriage papers. The story centres on a lawyer and an auditor. In Hong Kong we fantasise about lawyers, auditors, bankers – all these professions. In the future, I want to work in different genres, not just get stuck in one kind of genre. People ask me if I just want to make movies about society – no, no, not at all. One day I really want to make an action movie with a good story.

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**\*Lawrence Kan consents to this interview being published\***

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For excellent studies of the journalism film tradition, see Ehrlich (2004) and Ehrlich and Saltzman (2015).

<sup>2</sup> I rebut this perspective at length in Bettinson 2020.

<sup>3</sup> In *Planet Hong Kong* (2011: 114-126), David Bordwell provides an incisive account of Hong Kong cinema's traditional norms of plotting and audiovisual style.