

# Stanley Tong

by Mike Parkin

Having started his movie career as a stuntman, Stanley Tong is now one of Hong Kong's most prominent directors and has been responsible for some of Jackie Chan's biggest hits - especially in the West - such as *Police Story 3* (aka *Supercop*) and *Rumble in the Bronx*. Stanley's most recent collaboration with Jackie is the fantasy epic, *The Myth*, in which Jackie plays two roles - an ancient general and a modern adventurer.

## ***How did you get into the movie business?***

**STANLEY TONG:** I began my career in the film industry as a stunt man, but got my first crack at directing in 1983. And six years later I founded my own film company, Golden Gate.

## ***Who would you say your film idols are?***

**STANLEY TONG:** Bruce Lee - His movies really got me into learning martial art.

***You have directed a number of Jackie Chan's movies, notably Police Story 3, Rumble in the Bronx and The Myth. Given Jackie's reputation for wanting to perform his own stunts and the number of injuries he has endured, how nervous are you as a director when you are shooting his stunts?***



**STANLEY TONG:** Whenever I choreograph my stunt sequence, I'll rehearsal the stunt myself to identify the risk and problem that might happen. Then I'll screen it clearly to Jackie and work on the safety part. Because Jackie and I have been working together for a number of times, I have a better understanding of Jackie's stunt skill. Because all the stunts we created are original, which means none of us has done it before, the risk is high and this is Jackie's label.

***You first directed Jackie in Police Story 3. How difficult was it to direct someone who is also a director in his own right?***

**STANLEY TONG:** This is what I most concerned before I agreed to direct the movie. And Jackie told me that if he wanted to find a director who listens to him then he won't need me to direct the movie. He likes what I have done in my first film 'Stone Age Warrior', he wants to see my stuff and wants me to be the director and the stunt co-ordinator. And he agreed on what I've changed in the story to create a female co-star character which is Michelle Yeoh's role. And we change 80% percent of the original story and Jackie likes the idea. I gave 200% percent of myself try to meet up 80%percent of Jackie's expectation. We end up having a wonderful happy experience. And Jackie got his first best actor award.

***Jackie Chan broke his foot during the shooting of Rumble In The Bronx, and ended up wearing a cast painted to look like his trainers. Luckily this was near the end of the shoot, but how much did it affect the story?***

**STANLEY TONG:** It didn't affect much on the story, it did affect on the shooting. Jackie is tough.

***Your films all contain very memorable action sequences. Does your experience as a stunt co-ordinator and performer inform the way you direct action scenes?***

**STANLEY TONG:** As a stunt man, I have the advantage of understanding the difficulty of the work. So when I start to choreograph the sequence, it will be much more realistic than the others without the background.



***Your latest movie, *The Myth*, is partly set in India, which has its own unique style of cinema. How difficult was it to film there?***

**STANLEY TONG:** Because China and India have a relationship throughout thousands of years, it fits into our story. The locations we chose both in China and India are National heritage sites, both are being protected by their government from film shooting. We had to make a lot of efforts to introduce the project and to insure our crews won't damage anything during the shooting. I had the experience to work in Hollywood, in Hong Kong, and in many other countries in the world, and I have a great crew who had worked carefully to ensure their responsibility, it turns out great. And they welcome us to come and shoot more films in the future. And I think I will.

***You are credited with co-writing the script for *The Myth*. Where did the idea come from, and how did it develop?***

**STANLEY TONG:** I have the original story in 2003. I wrote the script together with the story boards and present it to Jackie. He likes it and called up the chairman Albert Yeung of the Emperor Motion Pictures in Hong Kong, and he showed up in the evening after he looked at the story boards, and I got green light on the same day. I always want to make action adventure movie mixed with romance. It can show the Chinese culture

both at war and in love. In the movie Jackie is an ancient general who were sent to protect the king's concubine. You can feel that they are falling in love but because of loyalty that stops them to have a relationship. They cannot spell out what's real in their hearts like, Jackie can only say 'I swear to protect you with my life' and he did. She meant to wake but ends up waiting for a thousand years and hasn't been changed. I think this is the kind of love that everyone will want to have when you first experienced love. I mean pure love. But now it all seems like the myth for the modern people who have a complicated relationship. This is the spirit of the story.

***What new challenges did filming *The Myth* bring to you?***

**STANLEY TONG:** In the story line, we had both contemporary and epic, on the contemporary part, I tried to stay true to Jackie's character that people used to see but in the epic, the character is dead serious. Jackie had never worked as an ancient general after he became famous. For action comedian, turning into a serious ancient general, his lovely face acting a romance epic is a challenge.

***How involved do you get in casting your movies?***

**STANLEY TONG:** I'll make all the initials of the cast suggestion and run through Jackie and the investor. (Jackie is one of the producers of the movie.)

**You have worked with some of the best screen-fighters in the business - Jackie Chan, Michelle Yeoh, Jet Li, even Mark Dacascos. Are there any contemporary fighters/actors you would like to work with in future?**

**STANLEY TONG:** I think Donnie Yen is one of the action stars I'd like to work with.

**How do you view the use, or need for CGI effects - a necessary evil, or a useful tool?**

**STANLEY TONG:** I think I'll use it as a tool to help me to tell the story. Without visual effects there would be a lot of limitation in our imagination as a writer/director.

**What's the most dangerous stunt you have performed?**

**STANLEY TONG:** I cannot say, I've performed like jumping off helicopters, bridges, cliffs, buildings, jumping onto the speed boats, being hit by cars, falling off on the horse back, setting myself on fire, getting blew away, and, a whole car exploded and I came off the car with my body on fire ...etc. Mostly I work as a double of the movie heroes in all dangerous. I've broken my ribs, both of my shoulders, my back, my knees, my ankles many times, and have a lot of stitches. I'm glad that those days had passed and I became a director and I'm doing fine.

**Which of the movies you've directed would you say is your favourite and why?**

**STANLEY TONG:** I like the experience of 'Stone Age Warrior', which I only have 1 million US dollar without



any movie star and from a key crew of 29 people which ends up to 9 people plus 2 actors and only the camera equipments were 49 boxes and I managed to finish the film. It's a tuff but wonderful experience in my life. The box office wasn't very beautiful. But it introduced me to Golden Harvest, and gave me the honour to meet Leonard Ho.

**What action film would you recommend to our readers?**

**STANLEY TONG:** Too many great action movies have been made. I think everybody has their own choices.

*The Myth is out now on DVD and is available from all leading retailers.*

