

**Channel 4 and British Film Culture Conference**

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**Missed, Lost and Forgotten Opportunities: *Ping Pong* and *Soursweet***

Felicia Chan, University of Manchester & Andy Willis, University of Salford

In 1986 British Chinese director Po Chih Leong returned to the UK, after working for many years in the Hong Kong film industry, to direct what was widely seen as the first British Chinatown movie, *Ping Pong*. Produced by Film Four International and Picture Palace Productions, upon its release the film was given some favourable reviews, not least from Julian Petley, who, in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, said it had, 'a visual flair and verve sadly lacking in many of its British counterparts'. Yet today *Ping Pong* remains a virtually unknown and forgotten British film. Two years later, and once again with the support of Channel 4, Mike Newell's adaptation of Timothy Mo's *Soursweet* was released in the UK. Together these films offered an innovative cinematic exploration of the experiences of British Chinese and suggested that there was great potential that more such films might follow. They did not. This paper will explore the 'canonisation' of certain Channel 4 films of the 1980s, most notably *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), and the ways in which this process – often with academics at the forefront – has condemned some of the most thematically and aesthetically interesting films of the period, such as *Ping Pong*, to relative obscurity.