刺客聶隱娘

THE ASSASSIN

A film by HOU HSIAO-HSIEN

OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

OFFICIAL SCREENING

Thursday, May 21st
10:00pm / Grand Théâtre Lumière

PRESS SCREENINGS

Wednesday, May 20th
7:00pm / Salle Debussy
10:00pm / Salle Bazin

PUBLIC SCREENINGS

Thursday, May 21st
11:30am / Grand Théâtre Lumière

Friday, May 22nd
2:00pm / Salle du 60ème

刺客聶隱娘

THE ASSASSIN

A film by
HOU HSIAO-HSIEN

Starring
SHU Qi
CHANG Chen
ZHOU Yun
TSUMABUKI Satoshi

TAIWAN - 2015 - Colour - Running time: 105 min - Format: 1.85 / 5.1

INTERNATIONAL SALES
wild bunch

VINCENT MARAVAL & NOEMIE DEVIDE
ndevide@wildbunch.eu

CAROLE BARATON & OLIVIER BARBIER
cbaraton@wildbunch.eu
obarbier@wildbunch.eu

EMILIE SERRES
eserres@wildbunch.eu

SILVIA SIMONUTTI
ssimonutti@wildbunch.eu

INTERNATIONAL PR

MARTIN MCNAMARA
+44 7966 967 294 *martin.mcnamara@nighsthiftpr.com*

KARA MCLEAN
+1 310 254 4934 *karamaclean@me.com*

SYNOPSIS

9th century China.
10-year-old general's daughter Nie Yinniang is abducted by a nun who initiates her into the martial arts, transforming her into an exceptional assassin charged with eliminating cruel and corrupt local governors. One day, having failed in a task, she is sent back by her mistress to the land of her birth, with orders to kill the man to whom she was promised - a cousin who now leads the largest military region in North China.

After 13 years of exile, the young woman must confront her parents, her memories and her long-repressed feelings. A slave to the orders of her mistress, Nie Yinniang must choose: sacrifice the man she loves or break forever with the sacred way of the righteous assassins.

INTERVIEW WITH HOU HSIAO-HSIEN

You've set your film in 9th century China, towards the end of the Tang Dynasty (618-907AD). It's a period known for its short fictions, known as chuanqi, *and I wonder if you took those as your inspiration?*

I've known and loved the Tang Dynasty *chuanqi* since my high school and college days, and I've long dreamed of filming them. THE ASSASSIN is directly inspired by one of them, titled *Nie Yinniang*. You could say that I took the basic dramatic idea from it. The literature of the period is shot through with details of everyday life; you could call it 'realist' in that sense. But I needed more than that for the film, so I spent a long time reading accounts and histories of that period to familiarise myself with the ways people ate, dressed and so on. I was attentive to the smallest details. For example, there were different ways of taking a bath, depending on whether you were a wealthy merchant, a high official or a peasant. I also looked into the story's political context in some detail. It was a chaotic period when the omnipotence of the Tang Court was threatened by provincial governors who challenged the authority of the Tang Emperor; some provinces even tried to secede from the empire by force. Paradoxically, these rebellious provinces with their military garrisons had been created by the Tang Emperors themselves to protect the empire from external threats. After a series of provincial uprisings in the final years of the 9th century, the Tang Dynasty fell in 907, and its empire broke apart. I just wish I'd been able to Skype the Tang Dynasty directly, so that I could have made the film a great deal closer to the historical truth.

Embedded in the film is a key story about a solitary bluebird, which fails to sing or dance until a mirror is placed beside its cage. Did you take that, too, from Tang literature?
Yes, it's a very well-known story in China. You can find versions of it throughout Tang literature; it recurs so often that the words "mirror" and "bluebird" become virtual synonyms.

THE ASSASSIN is a wuxia *film, punctuated with scenes of martial combat. The genre has long been a staple of Chinese cinema, but it's your first* wuxia *film…*
It's the result of a long journey to maturity. When I was a kid, in the Taiwan of the 1950s, my school library had lots of so-called *wuxia* novels. I loved them, and read them all. I also got through the translations of fantastic stories from abroad; I particularly remember novels by Jules Verne. Of course there were also the *wuxia* films from Hong Kong, known in the west as *kung fu* and swordplay movies. I discovered them when I was very young, and went crazy for them. I wanted to try my hand at the genre one day - but in the realist vein which suits my temperament. It's not really my style to have fighters flying through the air or doing pirouettes on the ceiling; that's not my way, and I couldn't do it. I prefer to keep my feet on the ground. The fight scenes in THE ASSASSIN refer to those generic traditions, but they are certainly not the core of the drama. All else aside, I have to think about my actors. Even with protective padding and other safety precautions, even using wooden swords, such scenes are necessarily violent. Shu Qi, my lead actress, came out of filming the action scenes covered with bruises. Actually, the biggest influences on me were Japanese samurai films by Kurosawa and others, where what really matters are the philosophies that go with the strange business of being a samurai and not the action scenes themselves, which are merely a means to an end and basically anecdotal.

Why does THE ASSASSIN open in black-and-white?
Because that's a prologue. I did it that way instinctively. Probably I wanted to refer to an older way of making films, in black-and-white, to evoke the protagonist's past. After that, when we come to the main storyline and tell the story chronologically, we switch to colour. It's like moving into the story's present tense.

There are hardly any close-ups in THE ASSASSIN. What for you is the ideal distance between camera and subject?
That's precisely it: distance! I've always preferred to film in long shots. I like extended sequence-shots which show what's going on behind the characters, the objects that are around them, even the landscapes. Extended sequence-shots let the film go further, always further. One shot, encapsulating everything that's going on. I don't like editing that 'theatricalises' the action… that physically breaks

up movements. Maybe you recall my film FLOWERS OF SHANGHAI, which is pretty long but contains only thirty shots - and that was all I needed. Anyhow, I'm not the kind of director who needs to be up-close with his actors, manoeuvring them and whispering in their ears. Obviously they have to read the script, but once they come on set, I let them do it in their own way. It's probably a matter of upbringing, of politesse, of tact. I don't come too close to their bodies or their faces, because I don't want to disrupt what they're bringing of themselves to the characters they're playing. My job is to accept whatever happens in a scene and, if possible, to capture the best of it. Also, of course, to make sense of the miles of footage that result! That's why I work with duration. For one of the film's most important scenes, an intimate moment between governor Tian Ji'an and his concubine Huji, I shot many, many takes. Not to make the actors suffer or to exhaust them - sadism's not my thing - but rather to reach the point where the scene became theirs, actually more theirs than mine. During the filming, I always place myself somewhere the actors can't see me, so they don't even know where I am. As far as I'm concerned, a director should stay out of sight. I film as if on tiptoe, from the side, diagonally. And I forbid the members of my crew from entering the actors' sightlines.

Shu Qi, who plays Yinniang, has worked with you before in MILLENNIUM MAMBO (2001) and THREE TIMES (2005). And Chang Chen, who was also in THREE TIMES, plays the governor Tian Ji'an. Can you say what draws you to these two actors?
They're my dream actors, and individuals of great quality. The two things go together. What I'm getting at is that I like the way they behave off-screen. Shu Qi is a relaxed young woman who lives in Hong Kong, where she's surrounded by friends. But fundamentally she is very independent and ultimately rather solitary. Chang Chen is very conscientious and rather quiet. Both of them are people who respect themselves and those around them. That kind of self-esteem, and respect for others, is a basic requisite in filmmaking, as in life.

There are many female characters in THE ASSASSIN…
I'm always on the side of women. Their world, their psyches, always seem much more interesting to me than those of men. Women have their own sensibility and a more complex way of thinking, a way of relating to reality that intrigues me. You might say that women's feelings are sophisticated and rather exciting, whereas men tend to think rationally and are rather boring. Furthermore, women's complexities vary greatly from one woman to the next. In the film the governor's wife stops at nothing to protect the interests of the Weibo clan. Yinniang, the assassin, is by contrast torn between her duty - she is supposed to obey orders unthinkingly - and the way she cannot suppress her feelings for the man she has been ordered to kill. Independence, resolve, solitude. I think those are the three characteristics of my women characters.

Where did you shoot the film?
We shot the exteriors in Inner Mongolia, in the north-east of China, and in Hubei Province. I was blown away when I saw those silver birch forests and lakes: it was like being transported into a Chinese classical painting. Water and mountains, evoked in a single brush-stroke - but not a fantasy, an actual splendour, unspoiled at least for now. What I wanted to show with those 'picturesque' shots of the landscapes was how the human presence fits into such overwhelmingly beautiful places. The peasants you see in those shots are real peasants who behaved on film exactly as they do in real life. They even inspired some scenes, suggesting to me how to film age-old customs, very ordinary, very human. When the peasants got hungry, regardless of whether the camera was rolling, they'd cut a piece of dried meat from a larger cut they have dangling from a pole. So that's what I filmed, even if it wasn't in the script. As I said before, it's my method as a director: I let happen whatever happens.

Is it fair to say that THE ASSASSIN is more interested in the unfolding of the plot than in its resolution, as in a good thriller novel?
I've never cared all that much about explications, especially psychological ones. If a film is a river, or more exactly a torrent, I'm more interested in the course it takes, its speed, its detours, its whirls and eddies, than I am in its source or where it reaches the sea.

And where do you place the viewer in all this?
As someone seated on the bank of the gushing torrent, taking in everything that flows past, the flurries of motion and the moments of calm. But I hope also as someone who plunges into the current, literally bathes in it, carried away by the flight of their own imagination.

Interview by Gérard Lefort (English translation: Tony Rayns)

HOU HSIAO-HSIEN BIOGRAPHY

After film studies at the Taiwan National University of Arts, Hou Hsiao-Hsien worked as an assistant director, notably for Li Hsing. In 1980, he directed his first feature, CUTE GIRL, which was a box office hit. In 1984, THE BOYS FROM FENGKUEI further boosted his career. A winner at the Three Continents Festival, this semi-autobiographical tale marked his first collaboration with Chu Tien-Wen, who would become his regular screenwriter. Three highly personal films, largely inspired by his own life, followed: A SUMMER AT GRANDPA'S (1984); A TIME TO LIVE, A TIME TO DIE (1985, FIPRESCI Award, Berlin International Film Festival), and DUST IN THE WIND (1986). In 1989, he won the Golden Lion in Venice for A CITY OF SADNESS, a political drama that began a trilogy on the history of Taiwan, continuing with THE PUPPETMASTER (1993, Jury Prize, Cannes Film Festival) and GOOD MEN, GOOD WOMEN (1995).

A co-writer on TAIPEI STORY, directed by his compatriot Edward Yang, in which he played the lead role, and a producer on Zhang Yimou's RAISE THE RED LANTERN, in 1997 Hou Hsiao-Hsien directed GOODBYE SOUTH, GOODBYE, a depiction of contemporary Taiwan, and the following year, FLOWERS OF SHANGHAI, an enchanting portrait of the world of 19th century courtesans. In 2001, his hypnotic MILLENNIUM MAMBO revealed actress Shu Qi to the Western world. CAFE LUMIERE (2003), a tribute to master filmmaker Ozu Yasujiro, was followed by THREE TIMES (2005), an ambitious film about three love stories set in three different eras, and his sixth selection in Cannes.

Two years later, he directed the short film THE ELECTRIC PRINCESS HOUSE for the 60th anniversary of the Cannes Film Festival, working alongside thirty other major directors to create the collective work TO EACH HIS OWN CINEMA.

In 2008, FLIGHT OF THE RED BALLOON - loosely inspired by Albert Lamorisse's film, and starring Juliette Binoche - was presented at Cannes in Un Certain Regard.

The powerful and unique filmmaking of Hou Hsiao-Hsien - a cineaste of fragments and memories, emotions and sensations - has garnered the attention of several documentary makers, including Olivier Assayas who shot H H H, A PORTRAIT OF HOU HSIAO-HSIEN (2005), Todd McCarthy who enlisted him to speak about one of history's legendary cinephiles in PIERRE RISSIENT: HOMME DE CINEMA (2010), and Jia Zhang Ke, who filmed the director's memories of the city of Shanghai and its upheavals in I WISH I KNEW (2011).

FILMOGRAPHY

2015 THE ASSASSIN

2011 10+10
("La belle epoque")

2007 TO EACH HIS OWN CINEMA
("The Electric Princess House")

2007 FLIGHT OF THE RED BALLOON

2005 THREE TIMES

2003 CAFE LUMIERE

2001 MILLENNIUM MAMBO

1998 FLOWERS OF SHANGHAI

1996 GOODBYE SOUTH, GOODBYE

1995 GOOD MEN, GOOD WOMEN

1993 THE PUPPET MASTER

1989 A CITY OF SADNESS

1987 DUST IN THE WIND

1987 DAUGHTER OF THE NILE

1985 THE TIME TO LIVE AND THE TIME TO DIE

1984 A SUMMER AT GRANDPA'S

1983 THE BOYS FROM FENGKUEI

1983 THE SANDWICH MAN

1982 GREEN, GREEN GRASS OF HOME

1981 CHEERFUL WIND

1980 CUTE GIRL

SHU QI BIOGRAPHY

Born in Taiwan, Shu Qi's acting career began in Hong Kong after a meeting with action film director Andrew Lau, who cast her as the lead in five movies, beginning with STORM RIDERS in 1998.

In 2000, she appeared in Vivian Chang's HIDDEN WHISPER, but it was her devastating performance the following year in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's MILLENNIUM MAMBO that revealed the true depth of her talent. She has pursued an eclectic path, ranging from action movies like THE TRANSPORTER (2002) to the powerful drama THREE TIMES (2005), which reunited her with Hou Hsiao-Hsien, and for which she was awarded the Best Actress Prize at the Golden Horse Film Festival in Taiwan.

Shu Qi was a jury member at the Berlin Film Festival in 2008 and the Cannes Film Festival in 2009. Also in 2009, she appeared in the film NEW YORK, I LOVE YOU in a cast that included such stars as Natalie Portman, Orlando Bloom and Bradley Cooper.

CHANG CHEN BIOGRAPHY

Chang Chen is one of today's best-known Chinese movie stars. Aged 14, he was given his first role by Edward Yang in A BRIGHTER SUMMER DAY, which won the Special Jury Prize at the 1991 Tokyo International Film Festival and Best Film at the 28th Taiwan Golden Horse Awards. Chang was also nominated for the Best Actor Award.

Chang's role in HAPPY TOGETHER, directed by Wong Kar-wai, in which he co-starred with Leslie Cheung and Tony Leung, earned him a Best Supporting Actor nomination at the Hong Kong Film Academy Awards.

In 2000 he played the lead role in Ang Lee's international hit CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON, winner of the Oscar® for Best Foreign Language Film at the 73rd Academy Awards®.

Chang also won widespread critical acclaim for his performances in Wong Kar-wai's EROS, (opposite Gong Li) and 2046, Hou Hsiao-Hsien's THREE TIMES, Kim Ki-Duk's BREATH and John Woo's epic RED CLIFF.

His performance as Wu Ching Yuan in Tian Zhuangzhuang's GO MASTER won Chang the Best Actor Award at the Osaka Film Festival. In 2013, he reunited with Wong Kar-wai to play the lead role in THE GRANDMASTER, selected to represent Hong Kong in the Best Foreign Language Film category at the 86th Academy Awards®.

CAST

Nie Yinniang	SHU QI
Tian Ji'an, the Governor of Weibo	CHANG CHEN
Lady Tian	ZHOU YUN
The mirror polisher	TSUMABUKI SATOSHI
Xia Jing, the aide-de-camp	JUAN CHING-TIAN
Huji, Tian Ji'an's concubine	HSIEH HSIN-YING
Princess Jiacheng & the Princess-nun Jiaxin	SHEU FANG-YI

CREW

Directed by	HOU HSIAO-HSIEN
Screenplay	HOU HSIAO-HSIEN, CHU TIEN-WEN, HSIEH HAI-MENG & ZHONG ACHENG
DP	MARK LEE PING BING
Editing director	LIAO CHING-SUNG
Editor	HUANG CHIH-CHIA
Original Music	LIM GIONG
Set Designer & Costume Designer	HWARNG WERN-YING
Sound Editor	TU DUU-CHIH
Special Effects	ARDI LEE
Martial Arts Consultant	TUNG WAI STEPHEN
Produced by	HOU HSIAO-HSIEN for SPOTFILMS CHEN YIQI for SIL-METROPOLE LAM PETER for MEDIA ASIA LIN KUFN, GOU TAI-CHIANG for CMPC TUNG TZU-HSIEN

wild bunch

artwork: www.foao.fr - credits not contractual