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Daughter of the Nile

Taiwan 1988. Dir: Hou Hsiao-hsien. Prod: Lui Wen-jen, Ts'ai Sung-lin, Wang lin-jui. Script: Chu T'ien-wen. Photo: Ch'en Huai-en. Editor: Liao Ch'ing-sung. Music: Ch'en Cihyuan. Cast: Yang Lin, Kao Jai, Yang Fan, Li T'ien-lu, Ts'ui Fu-sheng. 91 mins.

The latest film from Hou Hsiao-hsien (*Dust in the Wind*, *A Time to Live and a Time to Die*) is one of his best and marks a change of pace. Unlike his earlier, mainly non-urban, family dramas this one is set in the city and possesses a more tightly constructed plot.

The central character is Hsiao-yang, a teenage schoolgirl who is an avid reader of the popular comic strip "Daughter Of The Nile." Since her mother's death by cancer, she has cared for her father, grandfather, older brother and younger sister, doing cooking and housework as well as working in a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet after school. But she still has time for daydreaming.

The brother is a petty criminal who, together with his charming friend Ah-sang, runs a trendy restaurant. He still commits the occasional burglary and during the film Hsiao-yang becomes involved with some *real* low-life types. Gang warfare erupts in the city and her brother becomes caught up with the police . . .

Hou's film often looks more like the work of his equally talented compatriot Edward Yang, indicating quite a change in style for him. The seemingly effortless directing style is distinctively personal however, together with the perfect compositions and beautiful photography. Repeated establishing shots of the interior of the family home, the exterior of the restaurant and the fast food outlet are reminiscent of the Japanese master Yasujiro Ozu. — *David Stratton.*