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The Puppetmaster

THE PUPPETMASTER

I wanted to use Li Tien Lu's life to re-examine the concept of the Chinese family and its power to constrain and restrict.

Another motive is my friendship with Li Tien Lu himself. I thought I should do this film while he's still alive to see it. I wanted to tell his story...

A friend once told me the story of her daughter as a young child and how she was so attached to her mother she would yell for her whenever she left her side. If her mother left the room she would scream for her and she would call back, but once was not enough. She would scream again and her mother would answer back and this became a daily ritual.

She told me this at a time when my own teenage daughter was going through a rebellious period and it occurred to me it would be interesting to juxtapose those two stages. I imagined it all in one family – you'd cut from the absolute devotion to the stage of rebellion. I thought of using this idea in the film – the clashes of juxtaposition would take us through the 36 years of Li Tien Lu's life that makes up this story.

But I also needed a connecting thread, and for that I used Li's own narration. And there were also the theatre scenes of Li Tien Lu's troupe. I wanted this to be more than a setting, I wanted stage performers to be an integral part of the film. And so I designed a number of scenes for the stage.

The idea is that these three elements together will add up to a kind of reality for the audience. The stage scenes are actually relevant to the plot, but at the same time

they alter the film's mood and tone. So I am editing these three strands together. It won't make for a cohesive story line or cohesive emotions, but it will reflect life and my interest in the ways people live... living in a tradition, living in eventful times.

These things are very real. We know them through our grandparents and parents and the books we read. Their reality moves us. And that's what I rely on to provide the underlying cohesion. Through the three strands of the film, I want the audience to feel something about the Chinese people, about the traditional family and traditional morality. I hope it will illuminate a bit about Chinese-ness. And I hope it will produce many different emotions. – Hou Hsiao-hsien