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U.S. Premiere

AH CHUNG

by Chang Tso Chi

15th SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL

Saturday, March 8, 1997

9:15 PM

Pacific Film Archive

Berkeley

&

Monday, March 10, 1997

9:30 PM

AMC Kabuki Theatres

San Francisco

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15TH SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL ASIAN AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL 6-13 MARCH 1997

For ticket and general Festival information, please call (415) 252 4800

SYNOPSIS

Ah Chung's neighborhood is a shanty town in the suburbs of Taipei. It is next to a national wildlife reservation area and is a dumping ground for sewage water, factory chemical waste and trash.

Ah Chung's retarded younger brother is almost knocked over by a truck that has come to the area to illegally dump waste. Ah Chung's mother is admonished by a policeman for letting a retarded child run along the road in the middle of the night.

Ah Chung's mother believes that gods see everything. Having a retarded son, a daughter raped by the stepfather, as well as the other environmental miseries, she believes, are the consequences of not serving the gods sincerely enough. Therefore, she makes Ah Chung join the Pa Chia Chiang, a religious performing troupe for gods, to exchange for gods blessings and protection for the family. Ah Chung's alcoholic father does not think joining Pa Chia Chiang is a good idea. Ah Chung's mother also makes her son change to her family name in order to bring good luck to the family.

Ah Chung's grandfather is senile and spends most of his time wandering around the neighborhood, with Ah Chung's retarded younger brother, playing the suona.

The grandfather dies on a visit to the country and Ah Chung's sister is gravely injured in a gang fight..... Ah Chung leaves the Pa Chia Chiang troupe. Ah Chung's mother blames him for not practicing Pa Chia Chiang sincerely enough to change the family's luck.



Ah Chung

CREDITS

Director	Chang Tso Chi
Screenplay	Chang Tso Chi
Producer	Lin Tien Ron
Executive Producer	Chang Hua Fu
Production Designer	Yao Hong Yi
Cinematographer	Chang Chan
Music Composer	Chang Yi
Sound Recording	Tu Du Tse
Editor	Liao Ching Sung
Costume Designer	Cheng Ging Ping
Makeup Artist	Wu Mei Hwei
1st Assistant Director	Wang Ging Gue
2nd Assistant Director	Yang Sheng Wei
Production Manager	Lin Wan Yu



CAST

Ah Chung	Liu Sheng Chung
Mother	Chou Shio Min
Father	Tsai Chieh Der
Grandfather	Lu Ying
Kid Brother	Ho Huang Chi
Sister	Chang Chiao Ming

Background

Taiwan, a self-proclaimed future economic dynamo of the Asia-Pacific region: a place where politicians and careerists bicker over the status of the nation: a trading center for rhinoceros horns: a place where fabulous wealth and ignominious poverty mingle: a place where... adjectives abound! It is above all, a strange place.

Its topography similarly fluctuates, according to the fortunes of political elections: it is a place where wild aquatic birds fly... its destiny has changed from cheap residential districts to grand industrial estates... Today, Taiwan is a protected sanctuary for aquatic birds... nobody knows how the topography of the place will change further.

Like many people in Taiwan who do not have the right to express themselves, Ah Chung and his family rely on the Gods as their only hope. Thus, Ah Chung is exhorted by his mother to serve the Gods, to perform the Pa Chia Chiang, in the hope that the family may be blessed with good fortune. Although hopelessness seems a foregone conclusion, they are not "tragic": it is how they adjust to or accept their fates.



About "Pa Chia Chiang"

The practices of Taiwan's folk religions involve the performances of ceremonies before the Gods. Apart from offering supplications to the Gods, such ceremonies are intended as thanksgiving for the Gods' protection and as prayer that the coming year will bring peace and prosperity.

Of the ceremonial rituals or performances, the "Pa Chia Chiang" is the most solemn, the most imposing, the most stunning and mysterious. The ceremony is designed as a ritual to the Gods who "suppress evil and control the demons". The tasks of these Gods are to protect the chief deity, to wipe out demons and arrest the malicious spirits: they may be described as the police force of the nether world. The ritual of Pa Chia Chiang takes on the characteristics of trance and possession: at its most solemn, it climaxes in its practitioners wielding swords in a choreographic dance, with some bloodletting to signify the suppression of evil and the sincere faith of the adherents.

Following the changing circumstances of a modern economy, the believers invoke Pa Chia Chiang as a ritual to avoid natural catastrophes and to bring good luck and prosperity. Consequently many Taiwanese parents send their children to Pa Chia Chiang troupes to learn the rituals in order to serve the Gods. This is a form of offering to the Gods, a prayer of wish fulfillment.

As the ceremony of Pa Chia Chiang becomes more common, the features of the ritual performance in costume, sword choreography and gestures adopt the stances of bravery, ferocity, and hatred. In addition, Pa Chia Chiang is dominated by gangsters and underworld figures who initiate young men into the ritual, exploiting their anger, violence and bravery.



Director's Biography

Director Chang, Tso-chi was born in Chia-yi, Taiwan in 1961. Graduated from the Film and Drama Department of Culture University. Worked as assistant director for Hou Hsiao-hsien in the film CITY OF SADNESS. Has made several TV episodes produced by Taiwanese Television and Public TV. Wrote and directed the theatre production of THESE PEOPLE AND THOSE PEOPLE at the National Theater. His directorial debut SHOOTING IN THE DARK was invited to both Hong Kong Film Festival and Kwangtung Film Festival in Mainland China in 1994. AH CHUNG, his second feature film, has won the Jury Prize of the 41st Asia Pacific Film Festival 1996. The film is invited by Toronto International Film Festival, and has entered the competition section of Mannheim International Film Festival as well as Pusan International Film Festival this year.



Director's Statement

As a matter of fact, I feel somewhat fortunate to have made Ah Chung on a \$290,000 US dollar budget. I am not bound by a big budget nor do I have any cultural burdens to carry. As a result, I feel an indescribable sense of excitement to be working with a group of inexperienced amateurs. I am torn between "telling a story" and "expressing reality". As far as I am concerned, film is not only a "story-telling" medium or a channel of "reality", it allows me to display a certain attitude towards "life", towards "humanity", it is an attitude that makes a deep impression on the self. Someone once said that it is not difficult to make commercial movies, and that it is difficult to make movies that "leave a deep impression". I've never forgotten those words.

Screening History :

1996 PACIFIC ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL, NEW ZEALAND

TORONTO INTL. FILM FESTIVAL, CANADA

PUSAN INTL. FILM FESTIVAL, KOREA

INTL. FILMFESTIVAL. MANNHEIM-HEIDILBERG, GERMANY

THESSALONIKI INTL. FILM FESTIVAL, GREECE

FESTIVAL DES 3 CONTINENTS-NANTES, FRANCE

1997 INTL. FILM FESTIVAL OF INDIA

INTL. FILM FESTIVAL ROTTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS

BELGRADE INTL. FILM FESTIVAL, YUGOSLAVIA

GOTEBORG FILM FESTIVAL, SWEDEN

FESTIVAL DE FILMS DE FRIBOURG, SWITZERLAND