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# The Puppetmaster

人生戲夢  
侯孝賢作品

A Film by Hou Hsiao Hsien

Starring: Lin Chiang, Yang Li Yin, Huang Chian Ru, Cai Zhen Nan Producer: Chiu Fu Sheng Executive Producer: Michael Yang Production Supervisor: Chang Hwa Kun  
Co-ordinator: H.T. Jan Original Story: Li Tien Lu Screenplay by: Wu Nien Jen, Chu Tien Wen Music composed by: Jan Hong Da, Chen Ming Zhang  
Director of Cinematography: Li Ping Bin Editor: Liao Ching Sown Sound Recordist: Du Du Jih, Meng Chi Liang Directed by: Hou Hsiao Hsien



2p # 31105



Hou Hsiao Hsien's long-awaited epic, *THE PUPPET-MASTER*, is based on the autobiography of real-life puppetmaster Li Tien-Lu, the same actor who played the role of the grandfather in Hou's last three films, *DUST IN THE WIND*, *DAUGHTER OF THE NILE*, *A CITY OF SADNESS*. The film is also intended as the first part of a trilogy on Taiwan, of which *A CITY OF SADNESS* is the concluding chapter.

The story spans thirty years from Li's birth in 1909 through World War II and the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, which marked the end of fifty years of Japanese occupation in Taiwan.

Reflecting the complex identity of Chinese life under Japanese rule, the year in which Li Tien-lu was born is recorded in Taiwan history in two different ways: in dynastic terms, it was the second year in the reign of Henry Pu Yi, the last emperor of the Manchu Dynasty. Under the Japanese, it was known as the 42nd year of the Meiji Era.

Li was only eight years old when World War I ended and he lost his mother to consumption in the same year. His father married a former prostitute the following year and Li often suffered mistreatment at the hands of his new step-mother. He learned the craft of puppeteering from his father and was already working as stage assistant at the age of nine. He made his debut performance at fourteen and the stage was thus set, so to speak, for a life-long career in the puppet theatre.

Li established his own theatre troupe at twenty-two. Six years later, the Sino-Japanese War broke out and the Japanese government banned all performances of traditional Chinese theatre. During this period he found work as a travelling vaudeville actor. In 1941 he was forced to join the Puppet Propaganda Group organized by the Japanese and his puppets were replaced with traditional Japanese figures in kimono and martial uniforms.

Toward the end of World War II Taiwan was heavily bombed by the Americans and Li once more had to suspend his troupe's performances. On the day he was

finally able to retreat to the countryside with his family, Japan was defeated and their occupation of Taiwan began drawing to a close. That same year malaria struck the countryside and the entire Li family was affected. Li lost both a son and his father-in-law to the disease and, though continuing to perform during this time, was himself greatly debilitated for a long period.

Now eighty-four, Li Tien-lu makes appearances throughout the film as narrator, drawing together events and reflecting on the forces that shaped his life in this period. "My hands breathed life into my puppet figures," he says. "I created them and directed the drama of their fates, almost as though I were God himself. But the reality is that with someone above me pulling the strings I, too, am a mere puppet. My life has been both a drama and a dream".

Three different actors portray the character of Li Tien-lu with the most significant part played by Lin Chiang, one of Taiwan's most popular singer-songwriters, whose work has been compared to that of Neil Young. The rest of the cast is a typical assembly of the non-professional actors favored by Hou.

After shooting for five months in Taiwan and China, Hou began editing in mid-January and expects to deliver a first print in April. The film has a budget of NT\$50 million (US\$2 million). Photography is by Li Ping-bin who shot Hou's earlier *A TIME TO LIVE AND A TIME TO DIE*. The screenplay is by long-time Hou collaborators Chu Tien-wen and Wu Nien-jen.

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