

## **Words and Images: A Conversation with Hou Hsiao-hsien and Chu T'ien-wen**

Michael Berry

Hou Hsiao-hsien (Hou Xiaoxian) is an internationally acclaimed filmmaker who has directed fifteen feature films, including *A Time to Live and a Time to Die* [*Tongnian wangshi*] (1985), *City of Sadness* [*Beiqing chengshi*] (1989), and *Flowers of Shanghai* [*Haishang hua*] (1998). Hou Hsiao-hsien was born in Mei County, Guangdong Province, in 1947 to a Hakka family that immigrated to southern Taiwan in 1949 when Hou was still an infant. He graduated from the National Taiwan College of Arts in 1972. In addition to his directorial features, since 1973 Hou has worked on more than twenty-five additional films in a variety of capacities including assistant director, screenwriter, actor, and producer. Hou was a key member of the influential New Taiwan Cinema movement (1982–1986), which included fellow filmmakers Edward Yang (Yang Dechang), Wan Jen (Wan Ren), Wu Nien-chen (Wu Nianzhen), and Ko Yi-cheng (Ke Yizheng).

Chu T'ien-wen (Zhu Tianwen) has, since 1983, been Hou Hsiao-hsien's most faithful creative partner. Born in 1956, Chu is a graduate of the English department of Tamkang (Danjiang) University and has collaborated with Hou on all his feature films since *Boys from Fengkuei* [*Fenggui lai de ren*] (1983). She received the best screenplay award at the Golden Horse, Venice, and Tokyo film festivals. In addition to her work in film, Chu T'ien-wen is also an accomplished writer who has published more than fifteen books of her own, including the highly acclaimed collections *Fin-de-Siècle Splendour* [*Shijimo de huali*] (1990) and *A Flower Remembers Her Previous Lives* [*Hua yi qianshen*] (1996), as well as the award-winning novel *Notes of a Desolate Man* [*Huangren shouji*] (1994).

In 2001 Hou Hsiao-hsien and Chu T'ien-wen sat down for an extended interview. During the course of their conversation, Hou and Chu discussed everything from their early influences and collaborative process to their body of work, including their latest feature, *Millennium Mambo* [*Qianxi manbo*] (2001), and the future of Chinese cinema. Producer and film critic Peggy Chiao (Jiao Xiongping) and novelist Liu Ta-jen (Liu Daren) were also present for portions of the interview.

**Michael Berry:** When did you first begin to become interested in film and were there any particular films that left an especially deep impression on you growing up?

**Hou Hsiao-hsien:** I actually first became interested in movies quite early. But I probably shouldn't call my early attraction to the big screen "interest in film." When I was a kid, there were really not a lot of opportunities to go to the movies; moreover, our family didn't have much money, so there was no way my parents could afford to buy us tickets. When I was little, I was always causing trouble, and my interest in films really began with my mischievous nature. So it must have been when I got to middle school that I really started going to the movies.

There were all different ways we used to sneak into the theaters. I grew up near the temple market in Fengshan and there was a movie house in the neighborhood called the Dashan Theater, and that is when my earliest memories of the movies begin. When I was in elementary school, we used to line up outside the theater to try to get a glimpse of the last few minutes

of the performance. They would open up the doors and let people in for free to see the last five minutes—this was a kind of marketing strategy, in Taiwanese they call it *quo shee buei [jian xi wei]*, or “catching the tail end of a performance.” Most of the performances I saw were of puppet theater [*budai/zhangzhong xi*]—the type of theater that Li Tianlu devoted his career to.<sup>1</sup> These were some of my earliest impressions of the theater. I remember always standing outside the theater entrance watching the adults in line waiting to buy tickets. I’d always beg them to buy me a ticket and help me get in; “Uncle, uncle, take me inside!” and sometimes I’d be able to wiggle my way in.

**MB:** Was the clown in your 1983 film *The Sandwich Man* [*Erzi de da wan'ou*] also inspired by these childhood memories of going to the theater?<sup>2</sup>

**HHH:** You used to often be able to see people on the street riding around on large tricycles with all kinds of theater advertisements. Then there were people who would wear a tall dunce hat and a clown outfit, they would walk around beating a drum—that was the way movies used to be promoted in the old days.

Later when I began middle school, there was an ever increasing number of opportunities to see movies. The reason for these new opportunities was largely because I was then big enough to climb over the wall and sneak in—I had a way to get into all three of the movie theaters in Fengshan. The wall around the Fengshan Theater was relatively low, and although there was barbed wire running along the top of the wall, we would often cut the wire and climb over. Then there was the East Asian Theater—we would tear a hole in the screen and crawl in through the bathroom window. Another way to get in was by using old tickets. People would always throw their tickets on the ground after the movie, and we would go pick them up. Not all of the tickets would be ripped in half; some would only have a little tear in them, so we could still use them. Sometimes I would also get in with the help of an old buddy of mine named Ah Xiong. He was friends with the usher who would rip the tickets. Ah Xiong would sometimes joke around with the usher and grab a handful of ticket stubs from him. We would take these stubs, tape them together, and use them to get in. The ushers would usually

never notice that there was anything wrong with the tickets, so I ended up being able to see a lot of free movies.

As for the films that left a deep impression on me, there were so many. I watched so many films back then. . . .

**MB:** Were most of these films Taiwanese productions or Hong Kong productions?

**HHH:** A little bit of both. There were also a lot of Japanese films. Actually, back then there was no real difference between Hong Kong cinema and Taiwanese cinema. There were a lot of films produced by studios like MP & GI and Shaw Brothers,<sup>3</sup> which didn't really take off until a bit later. What other kinds of films were there?

**Chu T'ien-wen:** There were a lot of martial arts [*wuxia*] films.

**HHH:** That's right, there were.

**CTW:** But they came a bit later.

**HHH:** Right, that was later. But there were a lot of Japanese films, especially horror films. There was one Japanese film in particular called *Five-Petaled Camellia* [*Go ben no Tsubaki*] [1964] that left a particularly deep impression on me. It was adapted from a novel by Shugoro Yamamoto and starred Iwashita Shima and Yoshitaro Nomura. When she made that film, Iwashita Shima couldn't have been older than sixteen or seventeen. That was a work that really had a strong impact on me when I was younger.

**MB:** As you got older, you slowly entered the film world yourself. How did you go from being a calculator salesman to directing your first film, *Cute Girl* [*Jiushi liuliu de ta*] in 1980?

**HHH:** Actually, although I watched a lot of movies when I was younger, never once did I think about pursuing a career as a filmmaker; I just liked films. Early on I was a naughty kid, and going to the movies was simply something to do; but slowly it turned into a kind of habit. After high school I went into the army to fulfill my mandatory military service. I didn't get into college right away. After I got out of the military, I went to Taipei and studied for the college entrance exams while working some part-time jobs.

Finally I was admitted to the National Taiwan College of Arts. At the time there was not a separate film school, and I was a student in the Department of Film and Theater [Yingju ke]. I graduated in 1972, but it was really difficult to find a job in film. I ended up taking a job as a calculator salesman, where I worked for eight months. Only later did I get an opportunity to work as an assistant on Lee Hsing's [Li Xing]<sup>4</sup> 1973 film *A Thousand Knots in my Heart* [*Xin you qianqian jie*].<sup>4</sup>

**MB:** Before you got behind the director's chair, you spent many years as an assistant director and screenwriter. How did this early experience as a screenwriter shape your later cinematic sense once you began to direct films?

**HHH:** It was really essential. I feel that a director that doesn't have screenwriting experience will always be at a disadvantage. If all you have is a technical background, you will constantly be dependent on others for everything else. You need a point of departure, a perspective, a structure—these are all essential components for a good director. Take, for example, Ang Lee [Li An] and Wong Kar-Wai [Wang Jiawei];<sup>5</sup> both of them have screenwriting experience, and you can see how this experience has worked to shape their directorial vision.

**MB:** Chu T'ien-wen, you must have had a very different experience growing up, especially coming from a modern-day literati family. Not only was your father, Chu Hsi-ning [Zhu Xining], a well-known writer, but both of your sisters, Chu T'ien-hsin [Zhu Tianxin] and Chu T'ien-i [Zhu Tianyi], are also respected and popular writers in their own right. At what age did you begin to write fiction, and when did you decide that you wanted to make writing your career?

**CTW:** I started writing during my first year in high school when I was about sixteen. But I don't really count my earliest works as literature. Back then everybody would write, whether it be diary entries or just writing countless letters to your friends. At the time I was young and would write about all kinds of feelings and experiences that were important to me at the time. Most everything I wrote was centered around those aspects of life I was most familiar with: school life, stories that I heard from the older generation,

or even my own childhood fantasies and daydreams. My experience was extremely limited, so I wrote a lot of sentimental works guided primarily by my perceptions of those around me. At the very most these early works provided readers with something new and fresh. It seemed so natural for me when I first picked up the pen. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that my father, his brothers, and all the people around our house were very active in literary circles.

**MB:** Was your mother also a writer?

**CTW:** She was translator of Japanese literature. She focused primarily on translating the works of a number of modern Japanese writers like Yasunari Kawabata [Nobel Prize–winning author of *Snow Country* (1956)]. So it was really natural for me to take up writing. It wasn't until college, however, that I really began to become self-conscious of many of the more delicate aspects of writing.

It was during college that we started up our own literary magazine called the *Sansan jikan*, and it was then that we really began to develop a highly self-conscious sense of “mission.” We didn't want to simply hone the technical skills and techniques of writing; we were aiming towards something more like the concept of the *shi*, or traditional Chinese scholar. The closest thing we have to this in contemporary society is the intellectual, but intellectuals today are really quite different from the traditional conception of the *shi*. Back when we were running the *Sansan jikan*, we very consciously decided that we didn't want to settle for being mere writers. After all, what's the big deal about being a novelist; all it's based on is technique. Like the traditional Chinese *shi*, we wanted to develop our understanding of politics, economics, and a whole array of other fields. Living in this world, we wanted to feel involved with what was happening in our country and in our society.

Because we had such a strong sense of mission, we went all around Taiwan to different colleges and high schools to hold roundtable discussions to promote our ideas. At the time, our sense of mission told us that there was no way we should settle for being simply writers—we should be intellectuals and take the responsibility of providing a voice for society. That is when we started to become conscious of the responsibility that comes with writing. When we were younger, our impressions were very sharp, and writing was a

natural outpouring of this emotion into literature. After three or four years, the *Sansan jikan* seemed to naturally wind down and come to the end. Some of the contributors went into the army while others went abroad; gradually our lives seemed to move in different directions. Just like the early May Fourth era literary societies like Crescent Moon [Xin yue],<sup>6</sup> they were perhaps able to create an impact for a time, but eventually they all naturally break up.

After the magazine came to an end, the decision to devote myself to writing came as the result of a kind of process of elimination. Nothing really seemed interesting; there was no way I would ever get accustomed to a typical office job. I slowly became clearer and clearer about my future as I began to eliminate all the possibilities—until nothing was left but writing. And gradually I came to really appreciate my talent. Because no matter what may happen in life, no matter how bad or good things may get, in the end, you can always take in everything around you and turn it into literature. Writing serves as a way out, a way to release all the crazy experiences you may go through in life. Slowly, writing no longer feels like a mission—it is simply the only path you have left to take. You suddenly realize that writing is the only thing you can do, but at the same time, you feel that it is really a blessing.

You can use writing to continually put yourself in order and reflect on your life. In the end, the result of this process of putting yourself in order is a crystallization, a blooming. There are so many things in life that we have to take in, so many books to read, but what do you do with all of this experience and knowledge? That is where writing comes in to play; it provides your life with a kind of crystallization of experience. Its meaning exists as a mirror that allows you to look at yourself.

**MB:** When you were still a teenager, your father's friend Hu Lancheng moved in with your family.<sup>7</sup>

**CTW:** Yes, he lived with us for six months.

**MB:** Suddenly your family had yet another writer in its wings. In your long prose essay *A Flower Remembers Her Previous Lives* you wrote about the profound influence Hu Lancheng had on you. Could you tell us a little bit

about your relationship with Hu Lancheng and the impact he had upon your writing and your overall view of life?

**CTW:** The *Sansan jikan*, I was talking about earlier, was actually only started because of Hu Lancheng. Because of his controversial political past, serving under Wang Jingwei in the Japanese-run puppet government, he was labeled a traitor to China and his writings were banned. We, on the other hand, saw something really special in both he and his works that other people didn't seem to recognize.

Hu Lancheng was originally teaching at Cultural College on Yangming Mountain when a publisher reprinted one of his books that had been written almost thirty years before in 1950. We never imagined that because of its content, the book would be banned immediately after publication. The book also inspired a wave of critical attacks, which got so bad that his college had no choice but to fire him. The college's actions, however, were exceptionally crude, they not only fired him but drove him out of his campus housing. As coincidence would have it, our neighbor next door had just moved out, so we quickly rented the apartment and had Hu Lancheng move in next to us. So for about six months he was basically our private tutor; he taught us a lot of classical literature like the *Book of Songs* [*Shijing*] and *The Four Books and Five Classics* [*Sishu wujing*], which had an immense influence on me later in life. During those six months, we decided that since Mr. Hu's works couldn't be published, perhaps we could start up a magazine to print his work. He wrote under the pen name Li Qing and published works every month in the *Sansan jikan*.

In many ways, the aforementioned aspiration to become more than a mere writer or literati and strive to become like a traditional Chinese scholar, or *shi*, all had its start with Hu Lancheng. Six months later, Hu Lancheng returned to Japan. He originally intended on coming back to Taiwan, but since by then our magazine was already established and doing quite well, he was afraid that returning would incite more critical attacks that would hurt the magazine's future. In the end, Hu Lancheng never came back to Taiwan. Although he never returned, he would send us his submissions via airmail on pages of extremely thin rice paper that were covered with small handwritten characters. We continued to publish his work in our magazine

*Sansan jikan*, and later we established a publishing house, *Sansan shufang*, where we published collections of his work.

Hu Lancheng passed away in 1981, so all together we only knew him for seven years. He was only in Taiwan for three of those seven years and only lived next door for six months—but those six months had an immense influence on our later lives as writers. The greatest impact he had on us was probably in terms of the field of vision he opened up for us. There is a line of poetry from the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties by Ji Kang entitled “Qin fu” that goes, “*Shou hui wu xuan, mu song feihong*,” “The hand plucks the five strings, while the eyes see off the flying geese.” What it means is that although what you are doing may be a relatively small task, like playing the zither, your mind is far off, gazing at the geese soaring at the edge of the heavens. This is a lot like fiction writing; after writing for a while, you start to see an entire world emerging on the horizon beyond your fiction. This vision came from Hu Lancheng. So in the end, he shaped our reading habits and our ability to take things in around us so that we nurtured a very broad field of vision, where we could read about and observe all kinds of things rather than be trapped in a purely literary world. Naturally, I still only write fiction, but this field of vision has allowed me to open up my world. This perspective, this vision is really perhaps the greatest gift that Hu Lancheng left us with.

**MB:** Early on in your careers, both of you went through a “melodramatic phase” and separately produced a series of popular romance fiction and films. For Chu T’ien-wen these works included many of the novels and short stories originally published in the aforementioned *Sansan jikan*, like *Record from Tamkang* [*Danjiang ji*] and *Tales* [*Chuanshuo*]; for Hou Hsiao-hsien these included such early films as *Love Will Last Tomorrow* [*Ai you mingtian*] [1977], *The Old Man under the Moon* [*Yuexia laoren*] [1976], and *Yesterday’s Rain Patters On* [*Zuori yu xiaoxiao*] [1979], for which you served as assistant director. In some ways, the simple, almost naïveté of these works reflects the relative naïveté of Taiwanese society before the lifting of martial law. Looking back now at these early works, how do you view them, and what place do they have in your respective trajectories as a writer, and filmmaker?

**HHH:** Well, I was young back then. When you are young, what you really need is an imagination, a vision, the kind that T'ien-wen just mentioned. When we were children, we watched a lot of stage performances, especially hand puppet and shadow puppet shows. And then there were knight-errant novels [*wuxia xiaoshuo*]; ever since I was a child, I started reading volumes of these knight-errant novels, as well as all those works of premodern vernacular fiction. But all of these genres—puppet shows, knight-errant fiction, etc.—they all fall under the umbrella of popular or folk entertainment. So in the beginning you start to imagine doing something different within these limits. The whole process is unconscious, so when you first come face to face with the medium of film, you naturally incorporate aspects of the novels, plays, and films that you had come in contact with in the past into your own work. It is only natural that the earliest genre you come in contact with is that of popular films, most of which deal with love and romance. So early on, it only makes sense for you to adopt these types of popular romances for cinematic material.

**CTW:** Early on, one usually starts with love and romance. Compared with mainland China, Taiwan at the time had a much larger threshold when it came to individual space. The power of the nation never really got to the point whereupon it infringed upon the individual, at the least we didn't feel it at the time. It was only much later when we started reading a lot of materials that we realized that we were actually living in a very closed society. But even in this closed society there was still room for the individual. Within this personal space you had room to fall in love, talk about romance, etc. Gradually as you get older you start to realize that the world is a very different place than you had imagined. You start to read about all kinds of things that had previously been suppressed and slowly start to build up a critical consciousness. This also has a lot to do with the background against which you grow up. Then as soon as martial law was lifted in 1987, all of this suppressed energy exploded.

**MB:** Your first film collaboration, *Growing Up* [*Xiaobi de gushi*] [1983], also falls under the umbrella of this early melodramatic phase—it also marked Chu T'ien-wen's first attempt at screenwriting.<sup>8</sup> At the time, however, your relationship was not that of screenwriter/director; instead you were

cowriters, with Hou Hsiao-hsien also taking the role of assistant director. This was the beginning of a long and ever-fruitful partnership, which produced some of the most important films ever made in Taiwanese film history. Looking back on this experience of eighteen years before, what was special about that first project?

**HHH:** It all started when I read a feature in the *United Daily* [*Lianhe bao*] entitled “The Story of Love” [*Ai de gushi*], in which a series of writers each submitted short pieces. After reading Chu T’ien-wen’s short story, I really liked it and got in touch with her. We met in a coffee shop to discuss her story and the possibility of turning it into a film. Before this T’ien-wen had already written a TV script with Ding Yamin entitled *Look After the Sun, Look After You* [*Shou zhe yangguang, shou zhe ni*]. I had also read some of T’ien-wen’s work much earlier, such as a short story titled “Nuzi shu.” I even read a lot of her father’s work. Before I went into film, I actually used to read quite a bit, and even now I still try to keep up. Anyway, after our conversation she agreed to cowrite the script with Ding Yamin and myself. We added a lot of personal experience into the screenplay; T’ien-wen wrote the first half, Ding Yamin wrote the second half, and I adapted the two parts into a screenplay. . . .

**CTW:** Actually, the whole thing was a waste because, in the end, we kept rewriting the script as they were shooting. It was like a loaf of bread hot out of the oven; we would write a dialogue the night before, and they would shoot the scene the very next morning. We kept revising as we went, and it wasn’t until two-thirds of the film was in the can that we finally had a complete script. After realizing that we had basically changed the entire story, I started to have doubts about whether or not we were really contributing anything useful to this film. I didn’t realize that after eight years as a screenwriter, Hou Hsiao-hsien already had a set formula for dealing with scripts. He can look at a screenplay and tell you exactly how many seconds any given scene will be on film.

**HHH:** But that only goes for action and dialogue sequences; scene descriptions are another matter. But since T’ien-wen is trained as a novelist, she really brings a kind of atmosphere to scene descriptions.

**CTW:** So although we had never written screenplays for film, that was exactly what Hou Hsiao-hsien wanted. He was looking for something fresh and new to break his old formula. This was probably the most useful thing Ding Yamin and I brought to that first collaboration with Hou. Sometimes when you are inexperienced, strange and magical things happen—and that's exactly what they were looking for, something fresh to break through their formulaic approach. They wanted something that was going to make them stop and think about what they were doing from another angle.

**HHH:** The timing here was extremely important. I entered the film world in 1973 and had spent ten years in the industry as a screenwriter and assistant director when we met. As it would happen, our paths crossed just as the New Taiwan Cinema movement was getting off the ground.

**CTW:** Before that they were trying to smelt steel in their backyards! [*Laughs.*] Besides Edward Yang, none of the directors who were a part of the New Taiwan Cinema studied abroad.<sup>9</sup>

**HHH:** Actually Edward Yang doesn't really count because although he spent time abroad, he didn't really study film there. People like Wan Jen, Tseng Chuang-hsiang [Zeng Zhuangxiang], and Ko Yi-cheng were all trained in Taiwan. Edward Yang and Chen Kuo-fu both learned filmmaking on their own; neither of them had any real formal study. Edward Yang originally studied engineering before going to the United States; he didn't settle on a career in filmmaking until he was thirty-three or thirty-four. He decided to change his career path and at first wasn't sure if he should go into architecture or film. But in the end, he decided that he would regret it if he didn't give filmmaking a try. He went to film school in Los Angeles but only stayed half a semester when he decided that film wasn't really something that could be taught in a classroom. . . .

**CTW:** So in some way he did study film abroad, but as soon as Edward returned to Taiwan, he basically started from scratch. Here is where that timing comes into play; people like Edward returned to Taiwan with their experience abroad and met up with Hou and others who had had ten years of working experience, and it was pure magic. As soon as they came together, everything fell into place. The birth of New Taiwan Cinema boils down to

these two forces running into one another at the perfect time—it really was all timing.

**MB:** There has been a lot written about those early days of the New Taiwan Cinema movement. Especially some of the now-legendary gatherings at Edward Yang's house where the seeds were sown for what would eventually blossom into a kind of golden age of Taiwanese film.

**HHH:** It was really magic, and besides Chu T'ien-wen, there were also a number of other novelists at the time who started delving into film, people like Wu Nien-chen, Hsiao Yeh [Xiao Ye], and Huang Chun-ming [Huang Chunming]. When it comes to reflecting the Taiwanese experience, film always comes later than fiction. The time lag is usually about ten years. Descriptions in literature always come first, then comes a cinematic representation several years later. So we often borrow material from novels, or sometimes they open up new perspectives or points of view for us.

It is really interesting the way this works. During the white terror when Taiwanese society was closed, all kinds of repression built up and was released with the coming of New Taiwan Cinema. But this release was only in the visual realm; it actually happened much earlier in literature, even though there was naturally a lot of censorship and control over publishing as well. For film, however, this release came right around 1983.

**MB:** Can you talk a bit about the script-writing process? Besides the two of you, writer/director/actor Wu Nien-chen is also a frequent partner you work with on screenplays. In fact *Dust in the Wind* was based on one of his actual life experiences; how does the process change when a third writer, like Wu, is involved?

**CTW:** Wu Nien-chen only worked on three scripts with us, *Dust in the Wind*, *City of Sadness*, and *The Puppetmaster*.

**HHH:** This is how it works when there are three of us working on a script; I always start with a concept, and after playing around with it for a while, I approach T'ien-wen and bounce my ideas off her. Then I go back on my own and formulate a structure. Once that's done, I go back to T'ien-wen and go through it with her. Once we have a fairly clear structure and plot,

T'ien-wen organizes it and writes it up into a first draft. Only after we have a first draft do we approach Wu Nien-chen. Wu's job is basically to clean up and sharpen the dialogue—that's because he has such a strong handle on Taiwanese. So we really only bring Wu Nien-chen in for films with a lot of dialogue in Taiwanese.

**MB:** Chu T'ien-wen, besides your own novels, you have also adapted works by such writers as Wu Nien-chen, Eileen Chang, and Huang Chun-ming. How does adapting a novel by another writer differ from adapting your own work?

**CTW:** Actually the only one of Hou's films that was adapted from one of my novels was *Growing Up*. There are a number of other films that *seem* to be adapted from my fiction, like *Summer at Grandpa's* [*An An de jiaqi/Dong Dong de jiaqi*] [1984] and *The Boys from Fengkuei*, but actually in both cases the screenplay came *first* and the short story later to promote the film.

*The Sandwich Man*, *The Puppetmaster*, and *Flowers of Shanghai* were all adapted from other writers' works.

**HHH:** But *The Puppetmaster* doesn't really count as an adaptation. It was based on interviews with Li Tien-lu, which someone else prepared.<sup>10</sup>

**CTW:** I have always felt that there is a clear distinction between these two mediums. When it comes to cinematic adaptations of literature it is ridiculous to even attempt to "be loyal to the original." Once you become familiar with the medium of film, you realize that these are two completely different worlds. It is a fundamentally different approach when you tell a story through language as compared to telling a story through images. There is an entire thought process and system of logic that go hand in hand with the written word. In the language of images, on the other hand, there is a completely different vocabulary for expressing your story. They are completely separate. Once you understand this, you come to realize that when a director wants to adapt a certain work of fiction, it may very well only be a certain portion of the work that moves him. It may even be simply a certain feeling that he wants to capture, or perhaps only a certain sentence. Your job as a screenwriter is to take this feeling, take this sentence and think through it in images. Images have to guide your thoughts, your language,

and your entire adaptation. Anyone who reads an original literary work and attempts to transfer it directly to the screen is heading for disaster.

So screenwriters for directors like Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, and Wong Kar-Wai, who is probably the best example of this, always feel like they have accomplished nothing. When it comes down to it, you are basically doing nothing but drawing up trial outlines. My biggest contribution probably comes during the early discussion process when we are still working through the story and bouncing ideas around. After the discussion I turn our ideas into words. But these words are almost never read by the director—he already knows what we are doing from the discussions. So in the end, the script is really only for the actors and technical staff. Wong Kar-Wai has taken this to the next level, where he has actually done away with even the script and thinks his way through the entire shooting process. He uses film as his rough draft; it's so expensive! So my role as a screenwriter with Hou boils down to our discussions. The actual screenplay is just something to give the actors and staff direction.

**MB:** You have talked about the influence of Shen Congwen on your aesthetic strategy, which really began with *The Boys from Fengkuei*. Could you retell the story about how Chu T'ien-wen introduced you to Shen's works and the influence he has had on your work as a filmmaker?<sup>11</sup>

**HHH:** When you are preparing a screenplay for a film, you really need a clear perspective and formulation. Say, for instance, you want to tell a story about a group of young people like we did in *The Boys from Fengkuei*; you have to know what kind of perspective can contain the subject matter. First you have to pinpoint where your perspective and approach lies. In the past, I used to simply write up a screenplay and rush straight to shooting. But after I met T'ien-wen, I started looking for a perspective. You may have content, but what's your form? I used to think that making movies was quite simple, and then I encountered some of the members of the New Taiwan Cinema wave who brought all kinds of ideas back with them from abroad which really got me thinking more about form rather than focusing only on content. *The Boys from Fengkuei* started with a personal experience of mine from when I went to Penghu Island, which I wanted to make into a film about growing up. Chu T'ien-wen asked me from what point of view I was approaching

the story, and I really couldn't answer. It was then that T'ien-wen gave me a copy of Shen Congwen's autobiography.

Shen Congwen's works were not available in Taiwan until after the lifting of martial law; before that his books had always been banned. After reading Shen's autobiography, I thought there was really something special about his approach. Everything that he was describing was about his own life and experience growing up, yet he took a very cold, distanced approach.

**CTW:** The perspective is as if you are looking down from the heavens. The whole narration comes to you through a detached bird's-eye view. What always left the deepest impression on me were those passages where he describes executions.

**MB:** His language is so calm and detached that he might as well be describing a family dinner.

**CTW:** Exactly, the entire perspective is from above. Hou Hsiao-hsien didn't know how to approach *The Boys from Fengkuei*; but once he read Shen Congwen, everything became clear.

**HHH:** During our preliminary discussions for that film, everything centered around this perspective, this view. Although I read quite a bit, T'ien-wen, her sisters, and her father are all much more well-read than I. So they are often able to offer a completely new perspective on the material I am approaching.

Let me give you a concrete example: From time to time, I shoot some commercials, and recently I directed an automobile advertisement. The company that hired me wanted to do something that no one had done before; they wanted to show the audience the inside of the car. Their starting point was the image of someone slicing open a car, just like you would slice open a watermelon, to show exactly what it was made of. Now naturally you cannot just slice a car open like a watermelon, without some kind of methodology or perspective. It was about this time that T'ien-wen introduced me to a book of collected lectures by the Italian writer Italo Calvino entitled *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, which was part of the Norton Lecture Series at Harvard. In one of the essays Calvino asks, Where is the depth or profundity in a novel or literary work? His answer is that depth is hidden, hidden in the surface

of language, in its structure and descriptions. So I took this perspective and applied to the car advertisement. [*Laughs.*]

**CTW:** It provided a kind of formulation for the advertisement. It even became a kind of slogan, “Where is the depth? The depth is hidden. Hidden where? Hidden in the surface.” So when we sliced the car open, this provided our perspective.

**HHH:** Actually, this is exactly what it is like to make a film. You may have content, but when it comes down to creating a form, you need a formulation, a point of view. This view is a kind of philosophical perspective on different forms and lifestyles.

**CTW:** When we are in the early stages of a script, this is really what we spend the most time on. Exchanging ideas on things we have seen, read, and experienced. . . .

**HHH:** We talk about everything, Taiwan politics, all kinds of crazy things. But in the end, there are a handful of things that for some reason grab us and we hold on to them. The feeling you get, the perspective is all the same so you can express it in a very concrete fashion.

**CTW:** All of this came from Shen Congwen.

**MB:** Could you talk a bit about your decision to take on a cinematic adaptation of *Flowers of Shanghai*?

**HHH:** In the past I had read a lot of Eileen Chang’s fiction, but I never read her rendition of *Flowers of Shanghai*. After I finally read it, I really found it devilishly enjoyable. Although it was incredibly complicated with so many characters and so many details, I was truly fascinated by the novel and tentatively decided to film it.

**MB:** *Flowers of Shanghai* left behind the cinematic trajectory drawn out by your earlier films in several ways: Firstly, the film not only avoids issues of Taiwanese nativism, which are so prevalent in your earlier works, but avoids “Taiwan” entirely. Secondly, *Flowers of Shanghai* tackles a historical era that you never before attempted to capture or portray on film, except for a portion of the late Qing depicted in *The Puppetmaster*. And

finally, rather than adapting the film from a work of contemporary fiction, you were confronted with a bona fide literary classic by the late Qing novelist Han Ziyun [Han Bangqing], which had been translated/adapted by Eileen Chang, who also has become a literary icon in her own right in recent years. What kind of challenges did these three departures pose for the film?

**HHH:** The moment you decide to film a work of fiction, you and the writer are essentially already sharing the same feeling. If you don't have this meeting of minds, there is really no way that you can take on the project unless there is that connection. So upon reading *Flowers of Shanghai*, I became enthralled with the author's description of Chinese everyday life, which is also very political. Actually, I have always felt that the Chinese life experience has always been very political. So once I was grabbed by these descriptions, I decided to make the book into a film. But once this decision is made, there are a number of obstacles you have to get past. The first obstacle is, as you just mentioned, the historical background of the story is too far away from your life experience.

Although the life experience depicted in *Flowers of Shanghai* is indeed very far away from us, ever since we were young, we basically grew up reading novels and literature from that period, which turned out to be very helpful. So there is actually a certain familiarity. I've always loved the feeling of those huge extended families depicted in novels like [the early Qing masterpiece] *Dream of the Red Chamber* [*Hong lou meng*]. I also was always attracted to those big banquet scenes, even though these may be terribly complicated. The biggest difficulty comes with how you are to recover these elements and capture them.

Film isn't historical in the sense that you can go through and research all the details; that would be impossible. All that we want to do is capture that atmosphere and re-create it in a way that represents our imagination of *Flowers of Shanghai*, as well as all those other early vernacular novels we are familiar with. This is the most difficult part. So we had to do multiple takes of every shot. It would have been impossible to print anything after the first take because we were allowing the actors to slowly acclimate themselves to the atmosphere and ambience of life in a late Qing brothel.

**MB:** Each shot is also extremely long. In your entire catalog of films, *Flowers of Shanghai* stands out as having the most extended takes.

**HHH:** There are only thirty-nine shots in the entire film. It basically comes down to one shot per scene.

**MB:** Although these extended shots present a challenge to typical film audiences, *Flowers of Shanghai* not only received wonderful reviews but also had an especially lucrative commercial release—especially in France, where it ran for several months to an awestruck Paris audience. Were you surprised by the level of success the film received there?

**HHH:** My impression of France is that both audiences and critics have always been very interested in cinematic form. But I think that even coming before form, it is the content that really attracted them. The original novel is really an incredible work, it is so polished and honed. The author spent his entire life amid the Shanghai brothels of the late Qing and concentrated all of his experience into this novel. So the dialogue is incredible; Han Ziyun reaches such a high level in terms of how clearly he reveals the personalities of his characters through their words.

Because of its length, we were faced with a difficult task in how to extract portions to adapt for the screen. So I had to select some excerpts, extracting certain subplots, and use them to re-create the atmosphere of life depicted in the novel. We spent one full year working on this process of adapting the novel. Although this period of trial work is the most difficult and trying stage of the whole filmmaking process, in the end, it pays off because you can really feel completely comfortable with the content of the film.

**MB:** *Flowers of Shanghai* was originally scheduled to be shot on location in mainland China, but at the last minute your crew was denied permission to film there. In the end, the film was shot in Taiwan, the result being you had to use exclusively interior shots to shoot the film. This created a new visual approach to the entire work. This is a case where you transformed a practical limitation into a new stylistic vision.

A similar situation occurred with *City of Sadness*, where the leading actor, Tong Leung Chiu Wai's [Liang Chaowei] inability to speak Taiwanese, or even standard Mandarin, forced his character in the film to be a mute. Once

again, however, you turned this limitation around, and his inability to speak worked on a highly symbolic level, becoming one of the most powerful aspects of the film. In both cases you turned practical limitations into powerful symbolic motifs which utterly reshaped the original conception of the films. Could you talk about these or other similar examples and how you dealt with them?

**HHH:** When I began scouting interior locations to shoot *Flowers of Shanghai* in mainland China, I found it extremely difficult. There are so many more requirements for outdoor locations that finding one proved even *more* difficult. Meanwhile, as we were scouting locations, censors were reviewing the script. Although they didn't reject the screenplay outright, they did make it clear that they were not in favor of a film depicting this side of the old society. In the end, I realized that the society depicted in the novel is in and of itself a very closed world, and it would actually work perfectly if we used only closed interior shots, leaving out all exterior shots, to really demonstrate this in a visual way.

All creative work has limitations; if you didn't have limitations, then there would be no boundaries and you wouldn't know what to do. But you have to be clear about what your limitations are. Once you know your limitations, they become your biggest assets. You can exercise your imagination however you please within the space of these limitations.

**MB:** And sometimes these limitations can become the foundation for newfound creativity, like in the case of Tony Leung's character in *City of Sadness* . . .

**HHH:** That's right; these limitations are reality set in stone. There is no way around them, you simply have to think within their parameters. So knowing your limitations is really the greatest freedom an artist can have. The longer you make films, the clearer it becomes that there are inherent limitations that come with form.

**MB:** Following the success of *Flowers of Shanghai*, several Chinese-language films also won virtually unprecedented critical acclaim in the international film market. Two of these films, Edward Yang's *Yi Yi: A One and a Two* and most notably Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, especially the latter,

seems to have broken the U.S. market for foreign-language films wide open. Do you foresee an expansion of the market or any imminent changes in the manner and scope with which Taiwanese—or Chinese-language—films are distributed internationally?

**HHH:** Expanding the market for Chinese-language films isn't as easy as it looks. [*Laughs.*] This whole phenomenon is really just a fad. European audiences seem to have nurtured an interest in Asian cinema, including the cinemas of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, but this interest is really very one-sided and only extends into certain genres. Just like back when New Taiwan Cinema was winning over all kinds of audiences, this is another fad. But this fad is different from when Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, and other Fifth Generation directors created a stir in Europe. The popularity surrounding *Flowers of Shanghai* centered around audiences understanding a completely different Chinese form of expression on a much deeper level.

Now one of the more positive results of all of this, besides the box office success, is that mainstream film markets like the United States have begun to invest in pictures like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Originally *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was just another local film produced for Asian markets. The reality of the U.S. film market is that it is almost impossible for non-English-language films to break in. The market and box office success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* spurred Hollywood's interest in investing in more foreign films—actually Hollywood has always been investing in foreign films. For instance, I know that Hollywood invests in a lot of German productions, because local films there have always taken in such a large percentage of the national box office receipts in Germany. They are such big moneymakers because they can already make a profit with their local target audience, then you can turn around and make additional profit in the U.S. and other foreign markets—so naturally Hollywood is going to want to have a piece of this.

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is the best example of this. The awesome success of this picture has inspired a hot market. So there are all kinds of Asian films that are currently in production, like Tsui Hark's *Legend of Zu* [*Shushan zhuan*], that are being bought up by the big studios. Even

the rights to King Hu's [Hu Jinquan] old films have been purchased, and they are planning to redistribute his works. Everybody is all excited and worked up about Chinese films, but this kind of excitement never lasts. There is always an upside and a downside; it probably won't be long before things start swinging in the opposite direction. But at the least, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* has opened up new opportunities for Chinese film.

**MB:** James Schamus, the coproducer and co-screenwriter of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, has stated that he believed there was crossover potential from the beginning. One of the reasons he gave for his optimism was the fact that due to the computer/Internet revolution there is now a generation of young Americans that, having grown up accustomed to reading print on screens, should be much more receptive to viewing subtitled movies.

**CTW:** That's interesting; during a conversation with the writer Nanfang Shuo, he brought up another reason having to do the globalization of literature. He gave the example of the growing number of immigrants from countries like India, Indonesia, and other Asian countries who write in English for a primarily American readership.

**HHH:** Right, the terrain of European and American fiction is gradually being transformed by increased globalization. Moreover, many of these writers who immigrate at a young age go through a kind of culture shock that heightens their sensitivity and inspires new perspectives and originality. Film works the same way.

**MB:** Although we are very much in the midst of a renewed, and perhaps unprecedented, interest in Chinese film, and Chinese-language films from Hong Kong and the PRC are widely available, Taiwanese films remain few and far between. Is this a distribution problem, or what accounts for the inaccessibility of Taiwanese films abroad?

**HHH:** Compared with film industries of the PRC and Hong Kong, Taiwan's case is rather particular. Firstly, the output of the motion picture industry in Taiwan is relatively small, especially in recent years. Secondly, there is a distinct separation between many Taiwanese films and the mainstream film industry. Movies are only a small part of most people's lives. [*Laughs.*]

Your average person doesn't have the time or patience to really watch and understand Taiwanese films, so there is really only a small audience. The majority of audiences are closer in tune with mainstream Hollywood-style films.

**CTW:** Most audiences look at film simply as a means of entertainment and relaxation.

**HHH:** Right, and when it comes to these types of films—comedies and pure entertainment movies—Hong Kong and mainland China's output far surpasses that of Taiwan. Actually one of the reasons for the success of the Hong Kong film industry is because Taiwanese investors funnel so much Taiwanese money into Hong Kong. This is a major reason; Taiwan is too small, so investors are reluctant to invest in the Taiwan motion picture industry. Now without the proper financial backing, it is virtually impossible to sustain a healthy and thriving local film industry. Without financing, genres and production numbers are limited; we are basically confined to the same space that we opened up twenty years ago with the birth of New Taiwan Cinema. My feeling is that perhaps in the future there will be some new opportunities arising. In Taiwan there are actually a wealth of filmmakers and people who are interested in cinema. Perhaps some of these filmmakers will gradually start to move closer to the mainstream. But this takes time, and I still feel we have a long way to go before this happens.

**MB:** Your 1989 work, *City of Sadness*, has been considered by some film critics to be one of the most powerful films ever made. As the first cinematic work to directly confront the February 28th Incident,<sup>12</sup> *City of Sadness* caused a sensation when it was first released in Taiwan—it was not just a landmark for Taiwanese film, but for the entire society. It brought with it great historical, sociological, and political implications, creating a new social phenomena. What first inspired you to make *City of Sadness*?

**HHH:** During the early days of New Taiwan Cinema, everyone was making films about our background growing up and the Taiwan experience. The entire process came a full decade after literary works reflected similar themes. The subject matter of *City of Sadness* was a political taboo in Taiwan, so it came even later, a full decade later in 1989. Chiang Ching-kuo passed away,

martial law was lifted, and the times changed. Suddenly a new space opened up, creating the possibility to film subjects that were once off limits. Even before martial law was lifted, I heard all kinds of stories about the past and read an assortment of political novels, like those of Ch'en Ying-chen [Chen Yingzhen].<sup>13</sup> That perked my interest to start digging up all kinds of materials about the white terror and the February 28th Incident. The timing was perfect; originally I hadn't intended on making a film about the February 28th Incident, but rather, a motion picture about the aftermath of the incident. I wanted to make a film about the lives of the next generation, who were living in the shadow of the February 28th Incident. That would have been more dramatic in nature, but because martial law was lifted, we decided to confront the incident itself and made *City of Sadness*. So it really all comes down to timing.

**MB:** Strictly speaking, you didn't focus on the incident itself, but on the historical space of 1945–1949, a kind of limbo that falls between the end of Japanese rule and the beginning of the full KMT takeover.

**CTW:** The entire social terrain was transformed during those five years; society had been very well balanced when suddenly everything lost its center of gravity and had to start over. So this is what we were really interested in, the process through which people and their society struggled to regain their balance.

**MB:** Does the “city” in *City of Sadness* refer to Taipei, where the incident first began, or Jiufen, where the film is set?

**HHH:** Neither; the “city” in *City of Sadness* is actually Taiwan itself. *City of Sadness* is the name of an old Taiwanese song; there is also an old Taiwanese film of the same name, also called *The City of Sadness* [*Beiqing chengshi*].<sup>14</sup> But that film has absolutely no connection with politics; it is a romance film.

**MB:** Once the film was released, it inspired a massive wave of social reaction and controversy. Did you anticipate such a reaction back when the film was still being shot?

**HHH:** At the time I didn't give any of that much thought. [*Laughs.*]

**CTW:** All we really thought about were technical difficulties involved with producing and shooting the film. These problems involved everything from the actors to the locations. . . .

**HHH:** Finding appropriate locations proved to be a particular challenge because so many of the places from the past are gone. Taipei was where the incident first broke out, but after undergoing such massive urban change, how are you supposed to film Taipei as it was in 1947 at the time of the February 28th Incident? The entire city has been transformed. We even had to go to mainland China to shoot a few of the exterior shots, like the shot of the port at Jilong. Taiwan has become so developed that we no longer have places like that anymore.

The February 28th Incident in and of itself is already a very complicated incident. But our perspective is very clear. The February 28th Incident has its own set of inherent historical impetuses, causes which are extremely difficult to depict clearly on film. What would be the purpose of depicting these causes, especially when so many others have already done that quite clearly in written form. So I only used the incident as a backdrop, to create an atmosphere for the film.

**MB:** What inspired you to present the story of *City of Sadness* from the perspective of a gangster, or underworld, family?

**HHH:** These types of families have actually been a major part of the Taiwan social structure for a long time. But we shouldn't call them "gangsters"; they are really simply local families that had power and money. Their primary function was to resolve local problems and disputes. At the time, they were relatively conservative, and there were a lot of things that they refused to have a hand in. That was really what the social structure was like at the time; it was called *shantou shili*, or "factional power." It works the same way our local elections work today. I had the structure and the characters, people like Li Tianlu, and made them into a family. After all, families always undergo changes in times of war. [Laughs.]

**MB:** *City of Sadness* also became the first in what would be a Taiwan trilogy, which also included *The Puppetmaster* and *Good Men, Good Women* [Haohan

haonü] [1995]. Was it your original plan to make a trilogy, or was it spurred on by the success of *City of Sadness*?

**HHH:** It was after the success of *City of Sadness* that I decided to go ahead and make an additional two films and use the trilogy as a backdrop to confront modern Taiwan history. Each film is, however, really quite unique. *The Puppetmaster* actually takes place before the events depicted in *City of Sadness*, reflecting primarily upon the period of Japanese occupation. *Good Men, Good Women*, on the other hand, is set after *City of Sadness* and depicts the era of the White Terror. So the trilogy is a portrait of modern Taiwanese history from three distinct angles. But although the backdrop changes for each film, the primary focus is on the depiction of the lives of the characters.

**CTW:** Li Tianlu is another key to this puzzle; he is really the reason we made *The Puppetmaster*. Sometimes Hou Hsiao-hsien is drawn in by a particular actor, and that was definitely the case with Li. Li Tianlu was simply incredible, and the more we worked with him, the more potential we realized he had. We first worked with Li Tianlu on *Dust in the Wind*, then later we worked again with him on *City of Sadness*. After these two films we really felt that he was amazing.

**HHH:** His whole life was amazing; he was a truly fascinating man.

**CTW:** But he was quite old, and we knew that before—we knew that in the blink of an eye he could be gone—and there would be nothing left. So we went after him; we wanted to make a kind of cinematic testimony to his life experience.

**HHH:** It's easy to give people labels like "traitor to China," which we discussed earlier in reference to Hu Lancheng, but Li Tianlu was *born* under the Japanese occupation. That was the only world he knew; under these kinds of circumstances, it is very difficult for us to place moral judgments on his actions. So we attempted to take a very humanist perspective and look at his life from the standpoint of how society was at the time. We tried to be as objective as possible and narrate his story through the massive changes he witnessed in his lifetime.

**CTW:** The lives of everyday people are like an ocean; they move with the tide but never really change. Unlike the lives of intellectuals who are often caught up, or even swept away in the waves, everyday people have a way of changing with the times and adapting with the tide. For example, some people might have questions about Li Tianlu joining the Japanese propaganda team and wonder why he did that. But actually there are a lot of different issues at work here. You can look at it from an array of different perspectives, but it all comes down to life being like an ocean. People have to live, they have to think about the next generation. The crops have to be planted this year and harvested next; this is what life is about. For your average person, they couldn't care less about who is in power, they just live their lives. It is a very different life experience than what many intellectuals go through. So, in this sense, *The Puppetmaster* is a portrait of life as an ocean, an immovable ocean.

**MB:** A lot has been written about your “aesthetics of violence,” especially in reference to your aforementioned interest in nativist “gangster culture” as seen in such films as *City of Sadness*; *Good Men, Good Women*; and *Goodbye South, Goodbye* [*Nanguo zaijian, nanguo*] [1996]. What inspired your interest in this subject matter?

**HHH:** This has a lot to do with my background growing up. I grew up around Chenghuang Temple in Fengshan. When I was a growing up, the Chenghuang Temple was what McDonald's is to kids today—this demonstrates just how dramatically cultural space has changed in Taiwan. There was a whole community of people and small stores there where we used to like to hang out. But Chenghuang Temple wasn't just for young people; even men from my father's generation used to go there to meet their friends. These generational groups would often hang out together, and whenever any problems arose, they would work together to resolve them—this is what we in Taiwan call *jiaotou*, local power. In the Chinese tradition this is really quite a common phenomena; it is really nothing like an organized underworld. But there is a feeling of brotherhood that develops here between men, which often leads to conflict with the outside world. This experience left such a deep impression on me because I spent so much of my life there—I hung out at Chenghuang Temple from elementary school all the way until

I went into the army. I experienced all kinds of things there during those years, fights. . . .

**CTW:** If it hadn't been for filmmaking, he would have ended up there for life. . . .

**HHH:** A lot of my childhood friends ended up being murdered or turning into drug addicts. Earlier T'ien-wen talked about her experience growing up and how after the breakup of her magazine, the contributors all went in different directions. Well, I'm talking about lower-class kids who had a completely different experience; they also came to a point where they went in different directions, but the paths open to them were all so narrow. There were really no opportunities. Besides me, there was only one other guy my age who went on to college after high school. The rest of them were lucky to get through high school; a lot of them only had an elementary school education. They had no choice but to follow the reality of their environment—in the end, so many of them fell victims to drug overdose, or ended up being killed. Gradually their condition worsened as Taiwan's reality changed. So this interest in so-called gangster culture is really nothing more than a crystallization of my own personal experience.

**MB:** Another recurring theme in several of your films are “on-the-road” sequences. Whether it be cars, trains [*Dust in the Wind*, *City of Sadness*], motorcycles [*Goodbye South*, *Goodbye*], or simply walking, the whole issue of movement and the dialogic relationship between the country and city is very important in your works. There are many different readings for this restless, searching movement. Are these purely visual devices, or is there a larger allegorical reading behind this insatiable movement?

**HHH:** It is a longing for the world outside. Living in a small place like Fengshan, where I grew up, you can't help but long for what's on the other side of the sky. When I was young, transportation wasn't very well developed, so we would have to take the train to get out of Fengshan. We would travel all around the island, from north to south, east to west. My feeling is that people are always longing for a different life that lies outside what they are familiar with. This outward longing actually holds true not only for the individual, but for Taiwan as well. Whether it be economics, or what have

you, Taiwan has always been forced to look outward because of its dense population and limited local resources. Living in a small, closed place it is only natural to look to the outside in order to develop. This longing for the outside seems to have, almost unconsciously, worked its way into my films in these road sequences.

Even my personal experience is the same, so as soon as I completed my mandatory military service, I headed straight to Taipei. You know, men always want to venture out into the world. [*Laughs.*]

**MB:** In stark contrast to these on-the-road sequences, there is that unforgettable scene towards the end of *City of Sadness* where Lin Wenqing and his family are standing on the train platform. They are waiting for the arriving train, but when the train pulls out of the station, they are still standing there—there is nowhere left to run; no longer is there an outside world to look to.

**CTW:** He is trapped. No matter where he goes, he can't leave the island. At least in mainland China he would have had a place to run.

**HHH:** Right, there is nowhere left to go. Taiwan is so small that even if they hid out in the mountains, in the end, they would still be found.

**MB:** Of all of Chu T'ien-wen's works, *Notes of a Desolate Man*, the story of a gay man trying to come to terms with the impending death of his childhood friend to AIDS, has without question been her most acclaimed work abroad and, arguably, in Taiwan as well. Have you ever considered adapting Chu's novel for the silver screen?

**CTW:** [*Laughter*] You really need to feel an attachment to a work to want to film it. The world of *Notes of a Desolate Man* is quite complex, and I don't think that Hou Hsiao-hsien can really capture it. [*Laughs.*]

**HHH:** It is a very subtle, understated work. And there is somewhat of a conflict between the subtlety of the novel and my own nature. It would be impossible for me to ever make a film like Wong Kar-Wai, and he could probably never make one like me. Everyone's artistic intuition is different. Maybe this has something to do with the fact that my sign is Fire and I'm an Aries, while Wong Kar-Wai's sign is Water and he is a Cancer. The whole

feeling is completely different. Everyone has their own particular focus and parameters.

**MB:** Your latest collaboration is a film entitled *Millennium Mambo*, which stars Shu Qi and your longtime collaborator, Jack Kao (Gao Jie). Would you like to talk a bit about your newest feature?

**CTW:** The idea for this film all originated with Hou Hsiao-hsien. We should have completed the film over a year ago, but we kept extending the shooting time. The film traces the stories of a group of young people in contemporary Taipei.

It was a really difficult film to make because he didn't have enough time to really digest the subject matter. Many of Hou Hsiao-hsien's earlier films depict life from thirty or forty years ago, so the events had time to settle and there was room for a kind of aesthetic distance. Hou Hsiao-hsien has always had an easier time filming subject matter in which there is a historical distance. But when it comes to contemporary Taiwan, he is too close and has trouble finding the right perspective to capture his story. Young people often don't reflect and meditate on what they do; everything is centered around action. I was the same when I was younger; I never theorized about what I was writing, I simply wrote. Young people making films about themselves don't need any kind of distance because they know themselves—no one understands their reality better than they do. All they have to do is reveal themselves for what they are. They have their own inherent energy and rhythm.

Hou on the other hand is already in his fifties; how can he get into their world? I'm still in my forties, but when I look at young people today, I really cannot help but disagree with so many of the things they do. Their system of values, their lifestyles are completely at odds with mine. Although Hou Hsiao-hsien gets along wonderfully with many of his younger friends, I know that deep down, he carries deep reservations about their attitudes and lifestyles. But Hou Hsiao-hsien has the ability to put his opinions aside and really bond with them. Behind their friendship, however, their respective backgrounds indeed couldn't be more different. So the problem comes when he is at once so close to them, yet at the same time so far away; after all he is more than thirty years their senior, so how to approach them from

a cinematic perspective becomes a huge challenge. This is what he finds most difficult about filming contemporary subject matter. When filming the past, everything has settled, and there is already an inherent aesthetic there waiting. With contemporary subjects you don't have that historical sediment; everything is moving—nothing has settled. This is Hou's biggest challenge when it comes to contemporary pieces.

This is in complete contrast to directors like Ozu, who always made films set in contemporary Japan. Hou Hsiao-hsien was really curious about this and even asked Ozu how he could film subject matter that he was so close to. People always have a difficult time seeing themselves. Like the Confucian story about a big strongman who can lift the heaviest of objects, but no matter how hard he tries, he cannot lift himself. People rarely see the age in which they live clearly. And this is our problem; Hou Hsiao-hsien has his own values and perspectives, and it has been very difficult matching them up with the energy of these young people. We should have shot the film last year, but precisely because of this problem we had to push everything back a full year.

**MB:** Both *Flowers of Shanghai* and *Millennium Mambo* reflect a kind of decadently romantic fin-de-siècle aesthetic. Is there an intentional connection between these two films which portray the Qing courtesan houses of the late nineteenth century and cosmopolitan Taipei at the end of the twentieth century?

**CTW:** Actually, *Millennium Mambo* is the modern version of *Flowers of Shanghai*! [Laughs.] The young men and women depicted in *Flowers of Shanghai* were actually the most fashionable group of their era, just like the young people are in *Millennium Mambo*. At one point during shooting Hou Hsiao-hsien sighed and said, "My god we're making a contemporary *Flowers of Shanghai*!" There is really this kind of feeling.

**HHH:** But *Millennium Mambo* was actually much more difficult to create than *Flowers of Shanghai*. For *Flowers of Shanghai* we could read the novel, as well as other works from the same period, and accumulate a sequence of ideas. Although Ozu made films set in his contemporary surroundings, he always focused on family life, especially relationships between fathers

and daughters. This is something that built up within him ever since his childhood. Wong Kar-Wai also makes contemporary pieces, but his focus is not on the immediate present; it is a nostalgic look back at his past. He grew up in Hong Kong, where modernization happened extremely fast under colonial rule, so he has his own style which has built up and developed—his entire cinematic trajectory is actually an ever-expanding development of what he has built up. I on the other hand grew up in a small country town, so this is all alien to me; I don't have the same reservoir of experience that they have, so it is very difficult for me to approach contemporary urban subject matter. Moreover, kids today change so fast. The casting director for *Millennium Mambo*, who is about the same age as the actors, told me that the pace of their lifestyle is so quick that there is really no way to catch them. About a month ago he saw a picture of some of the actors taken about two years ago and couldn't believe that he was looking at the same individuals. From their fashion, to their entire lifestyle, the change is incredible. They are also at an age where they are all going through changes. In just the year that I have known the actors, the difference I see in them is truly unbelievable. Part of what I am doing is capturing them in this moment because I know that tomorrow they will be another person. At the same time, my aim is not to make a documentary. Then there are all kinds of complex emotional feelings, especially when it comes to romantic relationships, that are really difficult to capture—and virtually impossible for nonprofessional actors to portray in any kind of a convincing manner. Then again, even professional actors like Shu Qi have trouble capturing these emotions. When this happens, I have no choice but to step back and let the actor bring the character closer to him- or herself. It is really a huge challenge especially when it comes to subtle emotions they feel with the opposite sex.

Actors like Shu Qi—actually this is a problem with a lot of Asian actors, especially those from Hong Kong and Taiwan—have a lot of issues when it comes to portraying passion and intimacy with the opposite sex. Now if they reject these scenes, we end up with a very traditional portrayal of relationships; moreover, when they do so, the result often seems even more contrived and forced. The same thing happened with *Goodbye South, Goodbye*, for which I shot over 180,000 feet of film, but even after all that footage, I still felt that there were a lot of things that we couldn't capture.

We are now finally finished shooting *Millennium Mambo*, but over the course of the editing process you always discover that all of those problems you assumed that you had already resolved suddenly reappear.

**MB:** Besides your own work as a director you have also served as a producer for several landmark films such as Wu Nien-chen's masterpiece, *A Borrowed Life* [*Dousang*] [1994], and mainland Chinese director Zhang Yimou's 1991 award-winning film *Raise the Red Lantern* [*Da hong deng gaogao gua*]. The latter film was produced just four years after martial law was lifted in Taiwan and was an unprecedented cross-straits cinematic collaboration. Could you talk about just how much creative input you had on the production?

**HHH:** My producer at the time, Chiu Fu-sheng [Qiu Fusheng] of ERA International, very much wanted to work with Zhang Yimou. Since I was quite close with Zhang Yimou from all of the international film festivals we had attended together, I helped Chiu Fu-sheng set things up. I was simply the executive producer, and Zhang Yimou had complete freedom to make the film that he wanted.

I remember meeting with him in Beijing to discuss the screenplay. At the time he had hired Ni Zhen from the Beijing Film Institute to write the screenplay. I remember telling them that because of the experiential gap between Taiwan and the mainland there was really nothing I could contribute unless I was to stand in Zhang Yimou's shoes—and that is something that I really felt I couldn't bring myself to do. If I were to film a similar story, I would much rather focus on the large extended family, like the one portrayed in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. I would love to explore the subtle relationships that build between concubines and their servants, and the understated conflicts that arise during those large banquet scenes. This is a much more complex approach, but those are the details that attract me. But Zhang Yimou took the story and presented an utterly stylized interpretation. That approach is something that I could never attempt to do. I have always felt strongly about making films the way you feel they should be made. There was some room to provide some technical opinions, but the reality of mainland China is so different from Taiwan that I really couldn't get into their world. When it comes to wardrobe, aesthetic perspectives, and even

the film's form of expression, I really tried to fully respect Zhang Yimou's style and his cinematic practices.

**CTW:** When it comes down to it, Hou's role in *Raise the Red Lantern* was basically that of a facilitator to help Chiu Fu-sheng. Hou Hsiao-hsien's name appears in the credits for the investors and from a marketing perspective more than anything else. It was clear from the beginning that Zhang Yimou would be given full artistic freedom and that Hou would refrain from exerting any real influence on the film.

**MB:** You have also long been extremely supportive of younger filmmakers and recently you have taken a new step in this direction with a new foundation and Web site, Sinomovie [www.sinomovie.com]. What is the aim of this new project, and how have digital cameras and the Internet changed the Taiwanese film industry?

**HHH:** As soon as the idea for the Web site came up, I immediately started to think about all of the possibilities that a Web site could help open up. The space that a Web site creates is virtually unlimited. We went digital, which is currently very popular, when designing the site. It is also important because shooting in digital is so much less expensive than traditional film stock. The site really opens up an immense new space for showcasing the work of young up-and-coming filmmakers. This really makes the site much more meaningful.

Moreover, the existence of these types of film-related Web sites will gradually change the way we watch and make movies. This also has to do with what we talked about earlier in reference to the fact that audiences are growing increasingly comfortable reading words alongside images. The Internet is also creating a market for short films, which can also be collected and marketed together as part of a larger project. But in the beginning the scope is very small. So the site has really opened up and developed a new space for short features and showcasing young talent. But just one short year later the entire dot com industry collapsed. It is now almost impossible to offer any real content online; the entire system is still incomplete. It is like the Time Warner–AOL merger; they both thought that all kinds of new business opportunities and new paths would appear, but they never did. Individuals

are very slow to change; although companies may be ready for a new media development, that's not necessarily the case with the consumers. The entire process is very slow, especially in Taiwan.

So, in the end, we decided to develop our site into a media window. Although everyone is talking about change and media revolution, we are sticking with what we know best and developing a forum for film production.

As for digital film, I originally really wanted to shoot *Millennium Mambo* in digital. I thought that if I shot the film with digital cameras, I would be able to speed up the entire shooting process.

**MB:** *Millennium Mambo* has been alternately referred to as *The Name of the Rose* [*Qiangwei de mingzi*]; is the film part of a larger project?

**HHH:** *Millennium Mambo* is the title of a six-part series, of which *The Name of the Rose* is only the first installment. Part of our aim with the new Web site was to create a series with the city Taipei at the hub. We wanted to create a cinematic tree of relationships by following the stories of different young people in Taipei. Now if we had gone with digital from the beginning, we probably could have completed the entire series by now because the medium is so quick and inexpensive. If you use traditional cameras, you need extra space for the equipment, extra technical support; the entire process becomes much more time consuming, and in the end you can't catch that rapid change I was speaking of earlier. If you use digital, you are able to get closer to the pace of their lives.

However, my cinematographer pointed out that the process of transferring digital to stock film is also very expensive. So we may save money during shooting but will end up multiplying our expenses during postproduction. Because digital is still a relatively experimental medium, we didn't want to take such a big risk with a major feature production. The timing simply wasn't right. Supposing, however, we had stuck with our decision to go digital from the beginning, it is very possible that we would have not only finished all six installments but would have even gone beyond our original plan. However, we also had to take the investors into consideration. Although we were trying to capture actual stories, we couldn't employ strictly nonprofessional actors and had to go through casting to recruit some better-known

actors. Now by the time we get through casting, there is already a time lag. So it is really difficult. If this first installment is successful, then perhaps I will experiment with some new methods of filming for the follow-up installments. If everything works out, we could spend ten years making films centered around Taipei city. If the concept turns out to be successful, we can then expand the series to other cities like Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Tokyo.

**MB:** Your films have a highly lyrical, descriptive, almost meditative style. Besides Shen Congwen, are there any other *writers* that have influenced your visual style?

**HHH:** Early on I read a lot of knight-errant fiction. Often I would take a liking to a particular writer and track down all of his books to read. Later on, however, I felt that of all the knight-errant novelists out there, Louis Cha [Jin Yong] was the best. His works were more complex and had more depth to them than many of the others. I read quite a bit of works from other genres as well, from old *yanqing* fiction all the way down the line. But there were very few truly powerful works that were able to reach deep inside and grab me. Besides Shen Congwen, who we already talked about, there are also a few stories by Wang Zengqi that really moved me.

Besides Chinese fiction I also read quite a bit of European and Japanese literature. Because the geographic, social, and political environment of every country is different, each respective author adopts his or her own unique perspectives. Right now my feeling is that what is going on in European literature is really amazing.

**MB:** You just mentioned the influence knight-errant fiction had upon you early on. In the wake of the profound success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, there seems to be a newfound interest in martial arts fiction and film; from Tsui Hark's *Legend of Zu* to Zhang Yimou's current project *Hero* [*Yingxiong*] [2002], everyone seems to be jumping on the martial bandwagon. Do you have any future plans to make a martial arts/knight-errant film?

**CTW:** In fact we do! Actually I could never understand why he didn't make a martial arts film before; after all he grew up reading martial arts fiction.

**HHH:** It all comes down to the same principle behind the making of *Flowers of Shanghai*. The reason I've never attempted to make a martial arts film all boils down to technical problems and limitations. There has always been a huge gap between the practical and technical capabilities of film and the martial arts world of my imagination. I have read so many works of martial arts fiction that in some way I feel I'm already past that. It actually would be difficult to find an angle to approach the subject matter; I simply always felt that I needed something fresh and modern.

So although we are now planning on making a martial arts film, it won't be based on later knight-errant novels like those of Jin Yong, but the much, much earlier period—which are actually much more modern.

**CTW:** We are looking at adapting a story from *Tang Tales* [*Tang chuanqi*] about a female martial arts heroine, Nie Yinniang.<sup>15</sup>

**HHH:** My feeling is that people were actually much more modern back then. They were not impeded by traditional customs and could escape from all of the moral standards of their time. This gives us a much larger perspective, a perspective that is actually very modern.

**CTW:** Ever since I first met Hou Hsiao-hsien he would always talk a lot about martial arts novels, especially in relation to his own childhood and the so-called gangster culture that you spoke of earlier. That is because ever since his childhood he was very heavily influenced by this conception of *xiaoyi* [chivalry], or what you might call *yiqi* [loyalty, brotherhood]. So if we had attempted a martial arts film earlier on, Hou Hsiao-hsien would have without doubt approached it from the perspective of *xiaoyi*, or chivalry. But the story of a female assassin like Nie Yinniang is a completely different world. Nie Yinniang is a very different figure from the kind of characters we encounter in traditional martial arts fiction that we are familiar with. Her story doesn't really center around concepts like loyalty and chivalry. She was actually a very “modern” woman.

**MB:** Would it be fair to say that, in one sense, some of your earlier films like *Goodbye South, Goodbye* are actually portraits of contemporary *xia* figures?

**HHH:** [*Laughs.*] I guess you could say that in a certain respect the characters are indeed a kind of contemporary roaming *xia*. But the more films I make, the more marginalized this concept becomes. One of the implications of this marginalization is that I have the freedom to preserve a kind of pure chivalric character, which is utterly impossible if you remain in the center. Taiwan has changed dramatically, and everything in the mainstream today revolves around power and profit. That also has something to do with my interest in portraying marginal characters.

This is also the fundamental reason why I am interested in adapting the story of Nie Yinniang; it is completely different from traditional martial arts/knight-errant fiction. There is a Daoist sentiment in the novel wherein the protagonist tries to escape from the traditional morals and customs that are normally associated with chivalry.

**CTW:** One would think that after all of the contemporary martial arts fiction that Hou Hsiao-hsien read growing up, he would want to make a more traditional film centered around chivalry and brotherhood, but instead we grabbed on to the Tang tale of Nie Yinniang. She represents something very different from chivalry. My personal feeling after reading the story was that Nie Yinniang was a very modern character.

**HHH:** “Nie Yinniang” starts with a Buddhist nun who catches sight of a young ten-year-old girl while passing by a large mansion. The nun wants to take the girl away, but the girl’s parents naturally object. Then one evening, in the middle of the night the girl disappears. The girl does not return until almost a decade later when she is around eighteen.

**CTW:** The whole time she had been gone, Nie Yinniang had been engaged in martial arts training with the old nun. There is a long passage in the story describing how the nun trained Nie. . . .

**HHH:** Traditionally speaking, the foundation behind this period of training is to eliminate evil and public scourges. But the story takes a completely different perspective on this concept, and Nie Yinniang spends her whole life killing people without the slightest remorse or feeling. She keeps a dagger hidden in the back of her head that the nun had implanted there. [*Laughs.*] So it is really very different from most conventional chivalric fiction.

Moreover, so many of her viewpoints and ideals are completely unhindered by prevailing customs.

One interesting scene occurs early on in her training when the nun asks Nie Yinniang to assassinate someone. The nun never explains why she wants this person dead, and Yinniang doesn't return from her mission until very late. When the nun asks what took so long, Yinniang explains that she hesitated after seeing her target playing with his son. In the end the nun gives her a harsh reprimand and warns her that she is not allowed to have compassion.

**CTW:** One of the most interesting things about Nie Yinniang is her system of values. When she finally returns home, she decides to marry a young man who polishes mirrors.

**HHH:** Her family dares not disapprove of the marriage, even though her father is a prominent official and she comes from a well-to-do family that would normally reject such a marriage.

**CTW:** But Nie Yinniang takes the matter into her own hands and decides on her own accord that she is going to marry this young man who polishes mirrors. So she makes the decision to leave her family. . . .

**HHH:** Later she ends up caught between two opposing court factions. She serves one side for a time before defecting and going to the other side. The reason for her switch was due to the fact that the second official had an uncanny understanding of Yinniang—he understood her completely. So her actions are in no way dictated by loyalty or the fact that she was already committed to the first official; there is something very different going on. . . .

**CTW:** After Nie Yinniang confronts the second official, whom her original employer had hired her to kill, it only takes a few moments for her to realize that he knows everything about her. She immediately values this strange camaraderie with the second official over her previous commitment to the first. So the ideals that guide her actions are actually completely at odds with traditional Confucian knight-errants. We have really been taken in with the whole process of adapting the details of the story for film.

**CTW:** She is not loyal to any concept of professionalism, but rather to her own Way. She completely changes her values in that moment when she first feels that connection with her opponent. This is very different from stereotypical knight-errants, which really gave us a fresh, modern feeling. Moreover, because she is a woman, there is another added dimension there.

**HHH:** She returns to the secular world but subscribes to a lifestyle and system of values that remain outside the bounds of this secular world.

**CTW:** Exactly; she hangs on to her own individual perspective.

**HHH:** As does her husband, the mirror polisher. There is one scene where they ride into a town on a pair of donkeys, one white, one black. In the end, it turns out that these donkeys are actually magically transformed from paper cutouts—it is completely Daoist in nature.

**MB:** Is the script complete?

**CTW:** No, right now all we have is the story, which we started working out a few years ago. It has actually been two years since we had any serious discussions about the script—the entire project was interrupted by *Millennium Mambo*. Now we have to start presenting the story to investors. . . .

## Notes

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Hou Hsiao-hsien and Chu T'ien-wen for so graciously sharing their time and thoughtful insights. Special thanks also go to Susan Greenwell and David Der-wei Wang for helping set up the interview. I would also like to thank Professor Tani Barlow for her interest in this interview.

- 1 Li Tianlu (1910–1998) was one of Taiwan's most famous puppet masters of the stage. He was also a featured actor in Hou Hsiao-hsien's films *Dust in the Wind* [*Lianlian fengchen*] (1987), *Daughter of the Nile* [*Niluohe nüer*] (1987), *City of Sadness*, and *The Puppetmaster* [*Ximeng rensheng*] (1993), which was adapted from Li's memoirs. He also appeared in such films as *The Chess King* [*Qi wang*] (1988) and *Long Live the Children's Party* [*Tong dang wansui*] (1988).
- 2 *The Sandwich Man* is generally regarded as one of the inaugural films of New Taiwan Cinema for its stylistic and thematic characteristics. The film is made up of three shorts, "The Son's Big Doll" ["Erzi de da wan'ou"], "Xiao Qi's Hat" ["Xiao Qi de na xiang maozi"], and "The Taste of the Apple" ["Pingguo de ziwei"], the first of which was directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien. "The Son's Big Doll" is the tale of a young father who dresses up as a clown and rides around

on an oversized tricycle promoting films for the local movie house. His infant son eventually becomes so accustomed to his father in costume and makeup that he does not recognize his father when he is in ordinary dress.

- 3 MP & GI (Dianying maoye gongsi, also known by the abbreviated Dianmao) was a popular film studio established in 1956 in Hong Kong by Lu Yuntao, the former head of Cathay Films (Guotai jigou youxian gongsi). MP & GI produced a string of box office hits including *Our Sister Hedy* [*Si qian jin*] in 1957 and *Star, Moon, Sun* [*Xingxing yueliang taiyang*] in 1962. After the death of Lu Yuntao in 1965, MP & GI was renamed Cathay (HK) Films (Guotai jigou [Xianggang] youxian gongsi). Shaw Brothers (Shao shi xiongdi) was established in 1957 by Sir Run Run Shaw (Shao Yifu) and his brother Runme Shaw (Shao Renmei). They produced countless classics such as *Love Eterne* [*Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai*], in 1963, and *King Ha's Come Drink with Me* [*Da zui xia*] (1964).
- 4 Lee Hsing (b. 1930) is a key figure in the development of early Taiwan cinema. He is the director of such films as *Execution in Autumn* [*Qiu jue*] (1971), *Oyster Girl* [*Kenü*] (1963), and *Beautiful Duckling* [*Yangya renjia*] (1964). Hou Hsiao-hsien and Lee Hsing collaborated again in 1980 on *Good Morning, Taipei* [*Zaoan Taibei*], on which Hou served as screenwriter.
- 5 Ang Lee (b. 1954) is the Taiwanese American director of such films as *The Wedding Banquet* [*Xi yan*] (1993), *Eat Drink Man Woman* [*Yinshi nannü*] (1994), and the Academy Award-winning blockbuster *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* [*Wohu canglong*] (2000). Wong Kar-Wai (b. 1958) is the Hong Kong-based director of such groundbreaking features as *Ashes of Time* [*Dongxie xidu*] (1994), *Chungking Express* [*Chongqing senlin*] (1994), and *In the Mood for Love* [*Huayang nianhua*] (2000).
- 6 Crescent Moon was an influential literary society in Republican China that operated from 1922 to 1933. It was founded by a group of leading intellectuals including Xu Zhimo, Liang Shiqiu, Hu Shi, and Wen Yidou. The society began a monthly journal of the same name, *Crescent Moon*, in 1928 from Shanghai, which featured regular contributions from Shen Congwen, Feng Youlan, Ling Shuhua, and Lin Huiyin, among other well-known writers, poets, and thinkers of their era.
- 7 Hu Lancheng (1906–1981) began writing for the *Chinese Daily* [*Zhonghua ribao*] in 1937 and served as minister of propaganda in Wang Jingwei's puppet government. He married renowned writer Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing) in 1944, and they divorced in June 1947. Hu Lancheng spent three years in Taiwan, but having been labeled a collaborator by the Chinese government, he moved to Japan, where he lived out the rest of his life. His major works include *This Present Life* [*Jinsheng jinshi*] (1959) and *The Years of the Nation* [*Shanhe sui Yue*] (1954).
- 8 *Growing Up* is generally considered one of the early cornerstones of New Taiwan Cinema. This 1983 production was directed by Chen Kun-hou (Chen Kunhou) and traces the turbulent relationship and eventual reconciliation between a young boy, Xiao Bi, and his stepfather.

- 9 Edward Yang (b. 1947) is among the most prominent figures in New Taiwan Cinema. He is the director of such landmark features as *The Terrorizers* [*Kongbu fenzi*] (1986), *A Brighter Summer Day* [*Kuling jie shaonian sharen shijian*] (1991), and his most recent masterpiece, the award-winning *Yi Yi: A One and a Two* [*Yi yi*] (2000).
- 10 *The Puppetmaster: The Memoirs of Li Tien-lu* [*Ximeng rensheng: Li Tianlu huiyilu*] was prepared and edited by Zeng Yuwen and published by Yuanliu in 1991. It was one in a series of published memoirs, audiotapes, and scripts transmitted orally by Li. Others include Li Tien-lu, *Grandpa Li Tien-lu Tells Stories* [*Li Tianlu yeye jiang gushi*] (six audio cassettes) (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1990); Li Tien-lu and Ye Ziyin, *A Life in Puppet Theater* [*Zhangzhong ju rensheng*] (Taipei: Minsu biji, 1991); Li Fucan, ed., *Puppet Theater: A Collection of Scripts Orally Transmitted by Master Li Tien-lu* [*Budai xi: Li Tianlu yishi koushu juben ji*] (Taipei: Jiaoyu bu zhongyao minzu yishu chuanyi jihua chubanshan, 1995).
- 11 Shen Congwen (1902–1988) was one of the most influential, pioneering, and prolific writers of the pre-liberation era. Best known for his moving portrayals of minority customs, scenic beauty, and depictions of military life, Shen authored more than two hundred short stories and ten novels, including the famous novella *The Border Town* [*Bian cheng*] (1934). After 1949 he effectively gave up fiction and focused on researching traditional Chinese costume art.
- 12 The February 28th Incident (1947) began with a crackdown by the Taipei City Monopoly Bureau on a forty-year-old window allegedly selling contraband cigarettes. A conflict broke out between the bureau investigators and the vendor, Lin Chiang-mai, which incited a series of violent, islandwide confrontations between Taiwanese natives and the recently arrived Nationalists. The incident eventually escalated into a widespread bloody purge of Taiwanese intellectuals and political leaders. For more on the incident see Lai Tse-han, Ramon H. Myers, and Wei Wou, *A Tragic Beginning: The Taiwan Uprising of February 28, 1947* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).
- 13 Ch'en Ying-chen (b. 1937) started his career in fiction in 1959 writing in markedly modernist style. He was imprisoned for seven years during the white terror for his Marxist views and emerged in 1975 as a leading proponent for nativist literature. Ch'en's best-known work in the West is the widely anthologized short story "Mountain Path" ["Shan lu"].
- 14 *Beiqing chengshi* is a 1964 black-and-white Taiwanese-language feature film directed by Lin Fudi and starring Jin Mei, Zhou You, and Yang Ming. The film depicts the trials and tribulations of Yu Qin (Jade Zither), who after being sent to prison and working as nightclub singer eventually dies, only to be resurrected and reunited with her lover Wen De.
- 15 "Nie Yinniang" is a widely anthologized Tang dynasty short story by Yuan Jiao.