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# Hou Hsiao- hsein in Prague

## **Ponrepo Cinema, 2–10 May 2017**

Prague's Ponrepo Cinema presents a Special Screening of selected films by Hou Hsiao-hsien, to commend his visit to Prague between May 2-10 this year. The world-renowned Taiwanese film director, screenwriter, producer and actor, Hou Hsiao-hsien (born 1947) and his close cooperater, the famous female novelist and playwright Chu Tien-wen (born 1956), are coming to Prague on the occasion of an international conference on Taiwanese Cinema and Cultural Dynamics, organized by the Chiang Ching-kuo International Sinological Center (CCK-ISC) at Charles University in Prague.

## **The Chiang Ching-kuo International Sinological Center (CCK-ISC) at Charles University celebrates the 20th Anniversary of its Foundation**

The main objective of the Center is to support research and study of Chinese culture in the Czech Republic, as well as in academic institutions and universities throughout Central and Eastern Europe. The CCK-ISC promotes projects in the wide field of academic studies, including linguistics, comparative literary studies, history, philosophy, and history of religion and culture, including the fine arts, music, theatre, and film.

## **Hou Hsiao Hsien filming style and awards**

Hou Hsiao-hsien's unique observational, documentary-like style of portrayal of the daily lives of the Taiwanese – his use of deep focus and long takes, peculiar lighting, nonlinear narrative, elliptical editing, and refined music accompaniment – made him a leading figure of the Taiwanese New Cinema. Hou's personal victories on the international film festival scene, including winning the Golden Lion at Venice for *A City of Sadness* in 1989, and the Best Director award at Cannes for *The Assassin* in 2015, represent a triumph and vindication of the Taiwanese New Cinema.



# Films

## **Cheerful Wind** (風兒踢踏踩, 1981)

Is a crazy romance situated in a small fishing town, in the style of the first Hou's feature movie – *Cute Girl* (1980). This early comedy is driven by swift camera work joined with a light and lively musical sound track. It presents a love story of a pretty, yet eccentric and selfish television producer, who falls in love with a blind youth and must overcome various obstacles to let the ethereal dream come true.

## **A City of Sadness** (悲情城市, 1989)

Touched on political events of “The White Terror” that were forbidden in public discourse before 1987, when the government of Taiwan finally admitted that its army had killed an estimated 28,000 native-born Taiwanese in the 1947 massacre. The film conveys a story of a large and rich local family (the Lins). The story unfolds along several narrative lines – it follows the eldest Lin son, who gets entangled in the local mafia's activities only to get killed by newcomers – gangsters from Shanghai. The third son is an idealist who is hiding in the wild mountains, leading a secret communist cell, which in the end is smashed by the new government army. The leading line, however, follows the gentle and handsome dumb-and-deaf son (played by a young Tony Leung). He makes his living as a photographer and is lucky to be loved by a Japanese girl, Hiromi, and have a son with her, only to meet the same tragic fate as all the other male members of the family. The intricate family saga is narrated with exceptional esthetic care – slow camera shots joined with a refined color combination, illumination and fine music – which won Hou Hsiao-hsien the Golden Lion in Venice in 1989.

## **Goodbye South, Goodbye** (南國再見,南國, 1996)

Is a criminal drama which unfolds within the oppressing atmosphere of the yellowish tobacco smoke in the capital's underground – in neon-glowing bars and dark gambling dens. It follows a group of hoodlums and their girlfriends through their meaningless lives. Yet a sparkle of hope twitters here and there during the long motorcycle rides – a typical feature of youth life in Taipei and all over Taiwan.

## **Flowers of Shanghai** (海上花, 1998)

Is a historical film based on a 20<sup>th</sup> century novel by the Chinese writer Eileen Chang. The story is set in the cloistered environment of luxurious brothels at the end of Qing dynasty. It is remarkable for its quaintness and stunning colorful interiors, where all the secrecies and intrigues of “the flowers of Shanghai”, the first-class concubines, take place.

**Millenium Mambo (千禧曼波, 2001)**

Is a film told from a point of view of Vicky – a beautiful, yet fragile waitress from a nightclub. The young woman tries to solve a dilemma of her love for two men, recalling the times of a decade earlier and contemplating her future, wondering how to fill the emptiness of her uprooted life. This film expresses feelings of the young generation at the turn of the new millennium – their ambivalent relationships, sorrow over the past failures and tense anticipation of the approaching new age.

**Three times (最好的時光, 2005)**

Is a minimalist story film which connects the past and the present, and the history of China and Taiwan. It features three love stories, gradually set up in three different periods – 1966, 1911, and 2005. Two young lovers (played by the same actors) encounter the same problems of love, passion and personal freedom – only the background changes. The oldest story is set in a brothel, the second in a billiard club, and the third takes place in a photo studio and during long motorcycle rides through the city. The film is based on banality and repetitiveness of everyday life. Nevertheless, its slow pace is not boring – it rather boosts the fascinating strong emotions that can sparkle between a man and a woman.

**The Assassin (刺客聶隱娘, 2015)**

Adapts a novel from the 8<sup>th</sup> century into an original *wuxia* film about a female assassin, Nie Jin-niang. Heroines of this genre are distinguished by an absolute command of body and soul – they are beautiful women and skilled warriors who know no fear. Like the legendary Taoist immortals, they can fly in the air and their swords never miss the target. Hou's heroine, however, is a genuine and sensitive human being who cannot commit murder in the end, although she had been trained to be a perfect assassin since an early age.

In general, the Chinese *wuxia* films feature complicated stories and unclear intrigues, yet Hou Hsiao-hsien presents a very clear narrative by employing a simple story and his original, esthetically rich visual style with long takes of both interiors and landscapes. The beauty and luxury of Chinese palaces of the Tang period enhances the artistic appeal of Hua's narration. For his masterpiece, Hou was awarded the Best Director award at Cannes.





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*filmová*

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