



MAGGIE CHEUNG: FILMS OF ROMANCE, MELANCHOLY AND MAGIC

Song of the Exile

Song of the Exile (Haak tou chau han)

Director: Ann Hui

Production Companies: Cos Films Company,
Central Motion Picture Corporation

Producer: Janey Chiu

Production Manager: Jessinta Liu

Screenplay: Wu Nien-jen

Director of Photography: David Chung

Editor: Wong Yee-shun

Art Director: Kenneth Yee

Costume Designer: Shirley Chan

Music: Chen Yang

Cast:

Lu Hsiao-fen (*Aiko*)

Maggie Cheung (*Hueyin*)

Waise Lee (*Hueyin's father*)

Tien Feng (*Hueyin's grandfather*)

Yeung Ting-yan (*young Hueyin*)

Hsiao Hsiang (*grandmother*)

Kaji Kentaro (*Hueyin's uncle*)

Hong Kong-Taiwan 1990

100 mins

35mm

In her semi-autobiographical film, Ann Hui casts Cheung as Hueyin, an aspiring journalist living in London who is called back to Hong Kong to attend her sister's wedding. Reunited with her family, Hueyin struggles to connect with her mother, who has her own painful experiences of immigration. Cheung's subtle but heartrending performance perfectly expresses her character's complex inner journey as she attempts to understand and forgive her parents.

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The standout feature of the 14th Hong Kong Festival was the quality of the movies from Hong Kong itself. The massacre in Tiananmen Square has concentrated the minds of the colony's leading filmmakers, forcing them to confront the implications of 1997, and to question their own future place in the Chinese scheme of things. A new sense of purpose is imparting a backbone to the local cinema that it has too often lacked.

After a shaky start, set in London in 1973, Ann Hui's *Song of the Exile* rapidly finds a proper tone as the story shifts to Asia. Semi-autobiographical, it is a poetic exploration of the emotional and cultural gap between an English-educated Hong Kong girl and her Japanese mother, both deplacees and in search of their roots. The action ranges widely in place and time from the 1940s to the 70s, with scenes set in Manchuria, Macao, Canton and Japan, and the director employs a brilliantly modulated colour palette to provide a tonal code for the film's swiftly changing moods.

The mother finally makes the trip back to her birthplace but finds that she no longer relates to Japanese values. The lifeline has been too long severed and those with whom she ought to be as one have become strangers. In this beautiful and moving film, it is not hard to see a metaphor for another kind of homecoming seven years down the road.

Alan Stanbrook, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1990

Maggie Cheung was born in Hong Kong, but when she was six her family emigrated to Kent in England, where she was the only Chinese kid on the block and in school: 'I was teased a lot.' Working briefly in a bookstore, she realised that as a woman of colour she would always be 'second choice' for better things, even in the modelling industry. At 17 she went back to Hong Kong, where she became a successful cover girl, but quickly suffered from 'overexposure' ('I did McDonald's, I did hair, I did clothes'). She entered one of the beauty pageants that constitute the main recruiting ground for starlets in Hong Kong and as first runner-up was offered a part in a light comedy only two weeks after the competition. 'At that time directors thought that Maggie Cheung was very beautiful, but couldn't be a good actress,' remembers Stanley Kwan. 'I was mostly asked to do reaction shots,' Cheung comments, 'like opening my eyes and my mouth wide when frightened.' Then in 1988, Wong Kar-Wai, who was preparing his first film, *As Tears Go By*, a gangster movie with unusual twists, offered her the part of the protagonist's love interest. 'At that time, she didn't have much ambition for her acting career, because of the kind of roles she was offered,' reminisces Wong. 'I noticed that, if given a lot of dialogue, she would become very nervous; then I cut most of her lines, so she could concentrate on her body language, which is something she was very good at.'

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As Tears Go By Wong Gok ka moon

Sun 1 Sep 12:00; Sat 28 Sep 20:30;

Sat 5 Oct 12:30

Days of Being Wild Ah Fei ching chuen

Mon 2 Sep 20:50; Fri 27 Sep 18:20;

Mon 7 Oct 20:50

In the Mood for Maggie

Tue 3 Sep 18:15

A Fishy Story Bat tuet maat dik yan

Tue 3 Sep 20:35; Sun 22 Sep 18:10

Song of the Exile Haak tou chau han

Sat 7 Sep 20:50; Sun 29 Sep 12:40

Irma Vep

Mon 9 Sep 20:30; Wed 18 Sep 20:50;

Sat 5 Oct 20:50

Farewell China Oi joi bit heung dik gwai jit

Wed 11 Sep 20:45; Mon 23 Sep 18:00

Green Snake Ching se

Thu 12 Sep 20:45; Sat 28 Sep 18:20

The Heroic Trio Dung fong saam hap

Sat 14 Sep 18:35; Fri 4 Oct 20:50

The Actress (aka Center Stage) Ruan Ling-Yu

Sun 15 Sep 18:00; Sat 21 Sep 20:10

In the Mood for Love Fa yeung nin wah

Thu 19 Sep 18:10 + intro and discussion;

Tue 8 Oct 18:30; Fri 27 Sep 20:45; Sat 5 Oct 18:15

Comrades: Almost a Love Story Tian Mi Mi

Sat 21 Sep 17:30; Mon 30 Sep 20:35

Hero Ying xiong

Mon 23 Sep 20:30; Sun 6 Oct 18:00

Clean

Thu 3 Oct 18:00; Tue 8 Oct 20:45

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'Wong Kar-Wai opened that door for me,' says Cheung. 'He made me understand that acting is not just about expressions, but comes from inside. The whole body should follow, not just the face or eyes.' Stanley Kwan, known as a sensitive director of actresses, was completely taken by Cheung's performance in *As Tears Go By*. He cast her in *Full Moon in New York* (1989) as a tough-as-nails yet vulnerable Hong Kong woman living in New York who meets two other immigrants, Sylvia Chang from Taiwan and Siqin Gaowa from mainland China. The film won Cheung her first Golden Horse Award (Taiwan's government-sponsored film awards), and 1990 was a glorious year. Ann Hui cast her as her stand-in in *Song of the Exile*, a delicately crafted autobiographical recounting of Hui's uneasy relationship with her Japanese-born mother. Then Cheung gathered a lot of praise in a supporting role as Lin Ching-hsia's best friend in Yim Ho's romantic/historical epic *Red Dust*, before exploring a more expressionist mode of acting as an immigrant turned murderous schizophrenic in Clara Law's *Farewell China*. Yet none of these achievements had prepared viewers for the emotional depth reached by Cheung in *Days of Being Wild*.

Bérénice Reynaud, *Sight and Sound*, March 1997

Ann Hui on 'Song of the Exile'

Why did you decide to make an autobiographical film after Starry Is the Night?

I wanted to shoot this film back in 1983. There were many production problems and I also worried whether I should make it and how it would be interpreted. Then I found Wu Nien-jen to write the script. We worked together well. He thought the film could be made. We agreed on the format and the treatment and so went ahead.

Is the Taiwan producer a result of his involvement?

The Taiwan producer asked me to make a film; I suggested the story I had earlier shown it to Hong Kong producers but they weren't too sure of the big budget and the location shooting. They worried about not being able to recoup the investment as the story is not commercial enough. I had doubts myself. Wu Nien-jen tried to sell the story to a producer with whom he had had a long association. The producer wanted to make a quality film at the risk of losing money.

Was your collaboration with Wu any different from working with Hong Kong scriptwriters?

No, it was just like working with the best Hong Kong scriptwriters. Wu's scripts are very sophisticated in their structure, in cutting back and forth. Nothing pretentious or overdone. He's not theoretical about it, he just writes it all out.

In shooting this film, did you experience more constraints than when shooting epics, such as Romance of Book and Sword?

Each kind of film has its own constraints and difficulties. With epics, you've constraints such as props, etc. but many problems can be solved if you've money. A film like *Song of the Exile* is more difficult because of your demand on the actors/actresses. They don't think of the film as a whole, just scene by scene. This habit is the major constraint. My limitation is how to instruct the cast to deliver the finer details required in their interpretation. You feel the problem but you can't solve it. As a director, I like to make this kind of film because the different constraints raise your expectations.

BFI London Film Festival 1990