



ART OF ACTION: CELEBRATING THE REAL ACTION STARS OF CINEMA

Red Cliff (Chi bi)

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Directed by: John Woo

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Production Company: Lion Rock Productions

Presented by: China Film Group Corporation, Avex Entertainment Inc., Chengtian Entertainment International Holdings Lim, CMC Entertainment, Showbox, John Woo

Executive Producers: Han Sanping, Masato Matsuura, Kebo Wu, Ryuhei Chiba, Dennis Wu, Jeonghun Ryu, John Woo, Hu Xiaofeng

Produced by: Terence Chang, John Woo

Co-producers: Anne Woo, Yeh Jufeng, Cheri Yeung, David Tang, Wang Wei, Daxing Zhang

Line Producers: Hu Xiaofeng, Rick Nathanson, Mitchell Dauterive, Liu Er Dong, Ivan Wong, Fan Kim Hung

Associate Producers: Lori Tilkin, Todd Weinger, Sirena Siru Liu, Wei Wang

Unit Production Managers: Wang Yue,

Wong Po Wai, Cheung Chun Keung

Key Production Managers: Yang Dong, Lu Sen, Ma Wenhua

Production Managers: Xiao Li, Janet Chan, Li Jun, Leng Huan Jun, Qu Lu Jun, Cui Min Jie, Liu Zhi Hua

Financial Controller: Roger Lee

Post-production Supervisor: Angie Lam

2nd Unit Director (Battle Sequence Unit):

Zhang Jinzhan

2nd Unit Director (Action Unit): Corey Yuen

2nd Unit Director (Naval Unit): Patrick Leung

1st Assistant Directors: Thomas Chow,

Richard L. Fox, Lo Kim Wah, Wu Xi Guo,

Qiao He Ping

Screenplay by: John Woo, Chan Khan, Kuo Cheng, Sheng Heyu

Director of Photography: Lu Yue, Zhang Li

Close Range Aerial Filming: Flying-Cam Inc

Camera Operators: Wang Tianlin, Xu Wei, Xie Ze,

Si Guo Yi, Zheng Yi, Huang Wei, Wang Min, Li Ran,

Li Chao Feng

Camera Operator (Flying-Cam):

Quincy Sze Kwan Chong

Steadicam Operators: Chen Zhu Xiang, Liu Ai Dong

Chief Gaffer: Ji Jianmin

Visual Effects Supervisor: Craig Hayes

Visual Effects by: The Orphanage LLC, CafeFX,

Pixel Magic, Anibrain, Xing Xing Digital Corp.,

Make Inc., Crystal CG, Frantic Films, RedFX,

Digital Dimension

Matte Paintings by: Hatch

Special Effects: Demolition, 37.2, Hanil Engineering

Pyrotechnicians: Bai Cun Ping, Zhao Jia Sheng

Edited by: David Wu, Angie Lam, Hong Yu Yang

2nd Unit Editor: Liu Fang

Visual Effects Editors: Monica Anderson,

Sharon Smith Holley

Production Design: Tim Yip

Art Director: Eddy Wong

Set Designers: Yang Zhan Jia, Chen Hao Zhong

Property Masters: Cheng Chak Wing, Li Bao Tai

Costume Design: Tim Yip

Make-up Artists: Kwan Lee Na, Liu Jian Ping

Special Effects Make-up: Mage

Hairstylists: Chau Siu Mui, Wai-Hing Lau

Main Title Design: yU+co.[hk]

Music by: Taro Iwashiro

Chinese Zither Composer: Tang Jian Ping

Performed by: Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony

Orchestra

Solo Japanese Transverse Bamboo Flute: Michiko

Akao, Hyakushichi Fukuhara

'An Asian Troy' is how John Woo describes the Manichean power struggles that gripped China at the end of the Han Dynasty, as recounted in the 14th-century literary classic *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Woo's film *Red Cliff* focuses on just one of the episodes in that expansive saga, the decisive battle of the title, in which an ad hoc alliance of provincial rulers fend off invasion, against all the odds, from a ruthless warlord eager to annex their territories.

Woo's first film in China for almost two decades, and his first for the state-run China Film Group Corporation in Beijing, it is the country's most expensive production ever, with an \$80 million budget part-funded from Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. It's easy to see where the money has gone: with art direction from Timmy Yip (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*) and visual effects from Californian studio the Orphanage, in terms of sheer spectacle *Red Cliff* easily out-trumps even Zhang Yimou's recent period epics.

That Woo has managed to pull off such an undertaking is as much due to the exalted pedigree of the source material as to his status as arguably the most influential action director to emerge from Asia. The various episodes and vast pantheon of princesses, scheming politicians and military tacticians of which *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is comprised are well known across South-East Asia and have been celebrated in a variety of media, from films and manga to videogames (another take on the material, Daniel Lee's *Three Kingdoms: Resurrection of the Dragon*, pre-empted Woo's film by a couple of months). The story probably won't be so familiar to western audiences, hence the decision to edit the two separately released instalments distributed in Asia into a standalone 150-minute international version. The resulting film doesn't bear too many scars from the truncation, but inevitably it's the three lavishly constructed battles, crammed full of Woo's trademark gravity-defying gymnastics and slow-motion sequences choreographed by Corey Yuen (*The Transporter, X-Men*), that dominate proceedings. *Red Cliff* doesn't waste any time getting into the thick of things, with despotic warlord Cao Cao's sacking of the kingdom of Xu commencing in the first reel.

Woo has stated that his goal for the film was to strip away the mythologising of the novel and get back to its historical basis, as chronicled at the time. To what extent he has achieved this has been the subject of some debate: the director freely admits to borrowing certain scenes from his fictional source, such as the standout sequence in which the alliance's chief strategist Zhuge Liang dispatches a fleet of barges mounted with straw dummies to draw the fire of Cao Cao's naval battalion. In attempting to create an Asian blockbuster in the Hollywood mould, Woo has retained his cinematic verve, resulting in lingering images such as the scenes of the tomboyish Princess Sun Shangxiang leading Cao Cao's cavalry into a sandstorm to be skewered by a hail of arrows, or the awe-inspiring single take of the camera levitating from Cao Cao's face as he stands on deck and tracking over his fleet as it floats ominously down the Yangtze Gorge. If the *mano-a-mano* that seals Cao Cao's fate at the finale comes across as a little underwhelming, it's only due to the sheer virtuosity of what precedes it. *Red Cliff* is seldom short of breathtaking.

Jasper Sharp, *Sight and Sound*, July 2009

Best known for Hong Kong thrillers such as *Hard Boiled* and high-end Hollywood actioners *Face/Off* and *Mission: Impossible II*, John Woo has gone 'back' to China for his Mandarin-language historical epic *Red Cliff*. Released in the UK as a 145-minute version, cut down from its 290-minute totality, the film is set in 208 AD, when two minor Chinese kingdoms joined forces to defeat a powerful imperial prime minister of sinister disposition. Its production was dogged by accidents and disasters: a stuntman was killed, key actors and the cinematographer departed, and the shoot overran. Most of these problems

Conducted by: Taro Iwashiro
 Supervising Sound Designer (Soundfirm):
 Steve Burgess
 On-set Sound Recording: Wu Jiang, Wen Bo
 Sound Mix by: China Film Group Digital Film
 Production Base Co.
 Sound Post-production by: Soundfirm (Sydney),
 Soundfirm Beijing Co. Ltd.
 Sound Post Co-ordinator: Geng Ling, Emma
 Long, Sarah Kong, JB Lai
 Stunt Supervisor: Dion Lam
 Stunt Co-ordinators: Guo Jian Yong, Sang Lin
 Art Department Consultant: Tien-tsung Ma
 Stunt Unit Choreographers: Xiao He Wen,
 Du Pei Jun
 Cast:
 Tony Leung (Viceroy Zhou Yu)
 Takeshi Kaneshiro (Kongming, 'Zhuge Liang')
 Zhang Fengyi (Prime Minister Cao Cao)
 Chang Chen (Sun Quan)
 Zhao Wei (Sun Shang Xiang)
 Hu Jun (Zhao Yun)
 Shidou Nakamura (Gan Xing)
 Chiling Lin (Xiao Qiao)
 You Yong (Liu Bei)
 Hou Yong (Lu Su)
 Tong Da Wei (Sun Shu Cai)
 Song Jia (Li Ji)
 Ba Sen Zha Bu (Guan Yu)
 Zang Jin Sheng (Zhang Fei)
 Zhang Shan (Huang Gai)
 Wang Hui (Cao Hong)
 Xie Gang (Hua Tuo)
 Shi Ziao Hong (Jiang Gan)
 Xu Feng Nian (Zhang Liao)
 Guo Chao (Yue Jin)
 Hu Xiao Guang (Xia Hou Jun)
 Cui Yu Gui (Xu Chu)
 Jiang Tong (Li Tong)
 Ma Jing (Wei Ben)
 Yi Zhen (Cai Mao)
 Jia Hong Wei (Zhang Yun)
 Zhao Cheng Shun (Xun You)
 Wang Zao Lai (Cheng Yu)
 Wang Ning (Emperor Han)
 Wang Qing Xiang (Kong Rong)
 Li Hong (Lady Gan)
 He Yin (Lady Mi)
 Wang Yuzhong (Cheng Pu)
 Meng He Wu Li Ji (Guan Ping)
 Sun Xing Yu (shepherd boy)
 Ma Jing Wu (old fisherman)
 Ye Hua (Tian Tian)
 Chen Chang Hai (Qin Song)
 Zhang Yi (Zhang Zhao)
 Wu Qi (Gu Yong)
 Fu Xiang Rui (baby A Dou)
 He Feng (Man Tun)
 Li Hong Chen (soldier)
 Virgin Islands-UK-USA-People's Republic of China-
 Japan-Taiwan 2009
 145 mins
 Digital

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Woo puts down to attempting to make a Hollywood-style movie without the infrastructure to support it. 'I had to put a lot of time and money aside for training,' he says.

Back in 2004, Woo recalls, he was asked to help the movie business in China. He decided there was only one way to do this: to make a movie there. Where he found shortfalls in skills, he would train people up. 'Chinese movies are changing and I wanted to do something for the young people,' he says. 'I wanted the young people to learn the Hollywood experience, to use new equipment, experience new systems.' One thing in his favour, though, was that at least everyone he employed already knew the story of the film. The famous set-piece battle that forms the core of the film was immortalised 700 years ago in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and is known all over Asia via videogames and Manga comics. Woo recognised that the storyline conformed to Hollywood traditions – the idea of people who team up together against overwhelming odds and defeat an evil centralising power is at the heart of many a Western. He was keen to strip away supernatural and fanciful aspects of the story and go back to basics.

One of the biggest problems he had to face early on was the departure of Chow Yun-Fat from the lead role only weeks before the movie went into production. Various versions of events appeared on the net: a US insurance company rejected 73 clauses of Chow's contract; Chow didn't like being sent a final script with only days to prepare. When asked, Woo doesn't beat around the bush: 'His agent was asking for more money.'

In the event Tony Leung, who had earlier been cast and then left the project, came back on board to play Chow's abandoned role. 'Tony Leung called me up to comfort me,' recalls Woo. 'I asked him to come back on board the film and he did.' Having made three films together, Leung was someone he could trust. 'He'll never leave a set, no matter how hard it is, however tired he is,' says Woo. 'When I was busy working on the big scenes he was helping me take care of other actors. I also think he's getting more charming as he gets older.' With its complex financing from Japan and America, as well as South Korea, China and Taiwan, the film took eight-and-a-half months to film in over 14 provinces. There were six film units. 'In America you work five days and then take the weekend off,' says Woo, 'but in China everyone works seven days a week.' This isn't necessarily an advantage: 'People didn't get enough rest,' he adds. One thing Woo enjoyed, though, was the simplicity of the command structure. 'In Hollywood it takes a lot of time to make a new decision. In China I just made the decision – I didn't have to go to a meeting with a producer.' He also enjoyed commanding 2,000 troops from the Chinese army. Do all directors have a secret yen to command armies, I ask him? 'Oh yes,' he laughs.

Logistically the shoot was like a military campaign. Though Woo's not keen to talk about the bad things that happened – including the death of a stuntman in a freak accident in 2008 – he insists he never lost faith that the film would be finished; his 'very strong will' is something he attributes to his Hong Kong upbringing. Despite talk of the film being unlucky, it was well reviewed (*Variety* claims Woo has got his 'mojo' back), and has made money. Woo says he misses Hong Kong and would like to go back and make a film there: 'A swordplay movie – I'd make it in a studio, because locations are so hard to use there now.' His next film, however, will be another costume drama, a 'Romeo and Juliet story' set in mainland China, in Lu'an. On the horizon after that is a homage to one of his directing idols, Jean-Pierre Melville. His love for Melville's 1970 heist movie *Le Cercle rouge* is on record, but now he has another Melville film his sights. 'One of my plans is to remake *Le Samourai*,' he reveals. 'We are looking for the writer to work on that project. It's one of my great ambitions.'

By Roger Clarke, *Sight and Sound*, July 2009