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LOST LOTUS

未見蓮華



A film by LIU SHU

Hong Kong - Netherlands / 2019 / Color / Drama / 82 min
DCP | Mandarin | 24 fps | 16:9 | Dolby 5.1



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Maria Ruggieri | head of sales | maria@chineseshadows.com
Lya Li | head of festivals | lya@chineseshadows.com
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SYNOPSIS

A young Chinese teacher, Wu Yu, searches for the hit-and-run driver responsible for her mother's death. As she tries to understand her mother's faith, Buddhist principles slowly grow in Wu Yu and start appeasing her pain.

While she keeps on with the investigation, her quest for justice soon isolates her from the rest of the world: her husband wants to negotiate a cash compensation, and Buddhist beliefs require her to let go of her demand since destiny should bring justice in the next life.

All Wu Yu asks for is to meet the driver face to face. If only she could find him...



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

About five years ago, I came across a story on the news: a young Tibetan man accidentally killed someone in a car accident. The mother of the deceased was absolutely shattered, yet what jarred me the most was that the mother not only didn't prosecute the driver, she ended up forgiving him. The offender, upon receiving the mother's clemency, was astounded. He visited her at her home and begged for her punishment and the mother embraced him instead.

This story had an enormous impact on me. Although I could not describe just how much awe and respect I had for the mother's generosity, I could not comprehend just how it was possible that a human could turn such deep hatred into forgiveness. How did she do it? It was beyond me to fathom just how this mother could hold such compassion, until I started learning about Buddhism.



One day, I was recommended by a friend to start reading the Surangama Sutra. This opened me up to understanding the five Buddhist precepts, including the first virtue as “harm no living things”. A disciple must practice “no killing” and vegetarianism in order to cultivate his/her inner peace and compassion. As soon as one is able to achieve a state of unwavering compassion, he or she begins to possess the ability to turn evil into good. I finally understood that compassion allowed that Tibetan mother to forgive the man that fatally killed her son.



I was born in China in the 1970's, and all the education that I received was about materialism. Studying the scripture and practicing Buddhism, I couldn't quite accept everything that I had read. I started to become unsure: are all misfortunes a result of the karma from the previous life? I was suspicious. I felt close to Buddhism yet at the same time I resisted it. I felt scared. And somehow it seems as a very complex feeling. This very sentiment inspired me to create LOST LOTUS. The film examines the two sides affected by a car accident: a daughter who lost her mother in the accident and the driver who caused it. Following her mother's Buddhist belief, can the daughter forgive the driver, and can the driver reconcile with what he did?

INTERVIEW WITH LIU SHU

How did you develop the story and the characters?

One day, I started thinking of: can one comprehend the true meaning of life and get rid of the bondage of love and hate through religious belief? So I began to conceive the whole story by asking myself this same question over and over. And I have realized: the more you want to grasp, the less you can get. As these characters all cling to something, they cannot let go and thus get lost.

The idea of previous life and afterlife is something we cannot neither confirm nor deny the existence. But we are sure about the existence of this life. The perception of “now” is the only thing valuable and meaningful. Buddhism as well as Christianity pin all visions on the future. For example, in Tibetan Buddhism, people ought to accept and endure all sufferings so that they get compensation in the next life. But why not try to solve the problems now? Why not fight for justice in this life? Love, kindness and mercy in this life, that is my answer.



The idea that our life is controlled by our destiny, and that we cannot change what is happening to ourselves, seems to be quite common in China. But while everybody asks Wu Yu to accept the situation, she keeps refusing and goes on fighting. Why did you decide for her to be the only one who does not want to fit in?

I should and had to do so. Many people are just drowning in superstition. They think that all the pain you have now is because of the bad things you did in the previous life. And they will never really think about what justice is. This should not be the protagonist in LOST LOTUS.

This woman reacts without thinking too much. However, in the ending, I try to be neutral and keep a balance. She does not kill the guy who is responsible for her mother's death. I would like to have faith in humanity. The compassion must not be annihilated but has to be triggered.



Wu Yu experiences a complex process about her Buddhist belief: initiation – faithfulness – disillusion. In your eyes, what is the meaning of faith in contemporary life?

In China, we are educated to be atheistic. And in the consumption society, we tend to use up all resources on earth. Only people who have faith leave scope for life. With faith, we care about the long-term future. That helps us to be forbearing and to restrict our material greed. That is why faith is even more important today.

In your film, the world of women and men are very different. Both of your films focus on a woman's choice and fate. Did you observe any changes of women's condition in Chinese society?

Barely any changes... I know some other Chinese female directors. They are also making films to represent the contemporary situation of Chinese women. And they are doing very well. However, personally, I did not feel any change. I am a woman. I see the world and tell the story from my female perspective. Women are relatively more flexible, more affectionate and more responsible. Generally speaking, our world is still male-dominated. And in the film industry, male filmmakers already have so many opportunities to express themselves. So as a female director, I am inclined to speak about women and for women.

Your first film, LOTUS, was also about a female character, which fights the system and stick to her values and principles. Why do you see your main protagonist as such idealist?

Both heroines are teachers. As intellectuals, they feel the urge to speak and to convey their thoughts through education. They are supposed to reflect on the fall of society, to awaken people and to seek for all possibilities of justice. Although the single fight seems to be powerless, I believe it is an obligation for intellectuals with conscience to assume more social responsibility.



Is it difficult to be a Female director in China? How do the industry and the audience in China see films directed by women?

It's too difficult! The reality in China is that people care far more about a woman's physical appearance than her talent and ability. In the film industry, a male director has more resources than a female one. If I stand next to a male filmmaker, he always gets more attention than I have. But I am already used to work in a quite isolated environment. You have to find your way to deal with all the difficulties.

How did you choose your main actress?

Yan Wensi is a very good actress with art education from early age. She is a good dancer and plays very well piano too. She is an independent woman, and she lives in Canada. My producer recommended her to me. I was impressed when she played Bach. Exactly like the character, she looks so tender but is very tough inside. She was the perfect choice. While editing, I constantly felt touched by her performance.

Where does the Chinese title come from?

The title is from the sutra. In Chinese, it means that lotus has not yet appeared. Lotus flower is one of the most recognizable symbols in Buddhism. The deceased will go to *Sukhāvati* (Western Paradise) where lotuses of all colors bloom. This flower represents beauty and purity of mind. You can see lotus only if you release yourself from worldliness. But in this film, no one really sees it, including Wu Yu. They cannot contemplate the impermanence of life or let go of the attachment to love and hate, so they will never get to this zen of *vimutti* (release) to see the lotus flowers. Then we tried our best to find a similar meaning in English, and we finally decided that “Lost Lotus” was close enough to the Chinese meaning.



LIU SHU, Director

BIOGRAPHY

Liu Shu, born in Jining in Shandong province, graduated from Shandong Normal University majoring in Arts.

She first worked as a journalist for CCTV and China Beijing TV Station. She started getting involved in independent cinema in 2005. As a NGO employee, she initiated several events showcasing independent and underground films in different universities, as well as at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing.



She wrote, directed and produced her first feature LOTUS (Xiaohe/小荷, 2012), that premiered at Venice Critics' Week in 2012.

LOST LOTUS is her second feature film.

FILMOGRAPHY

LOST LOTUS (未見蓮華) 2019, feature
- Tallinn Black Night Film Festival, Competition

LOTUS (小荷) 2012, feature
- Venice Film Festival 2012, Critics' Week Competition
- Stockholm Film Festival 2012, Competition

CAST & CREW

Cast

Wu Yu
Husband
Lawyer
Nun
Abbot Dacheng
Mother
Chen Guohua
Mother's friend
Student

YAN Wensi
ZHAO Xuan
YUAN Liguo
JI Dan
ZHANG Kai
ZHAO Wei
XIAO Yiping
SHA Lijun
FU Wang

Crew

Director
Script
DOP
Editor
Art Director
Sound Design
Sound Mixing
Producers
Co-Producer
Executive Producer
Production

LIU Shu
LIU Shu
ZHENG Yi
Patrick MINKS
MENG Luyue
Ranko PAUKOVIC
Jaim SAHULEKA
MAU Hat, LIU Shu
Denis VASLIN
LIANG Ying
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