

The image-maker comes to light

Mark Ping-bing Lee's unique sensibility has shaped the look of Taiwanese cinema for more than two decades. Now he finds himself on the other end of the camera

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER



When Hou Hsiao-hsien (侯孝賢) was making *Flowers of Shanghai* (海上花, 1998), the only instruction he gave cinematographer Mark Ping-bing Lee (李屏賓) was "to make the images look kind of oily."

Wong Kar-wai (王家衛) was no better. For the poignant scene in *In the Mood for Love* (花樣年華, 2001) when Tony Leung (梁朝偉) whispers to a crack in a wall at Angkor Wat in, the director only told Lee: "The secret is hidden inside the crack" and "be bold."

These are just a few of the anecdotes included in the new documentary *Let the Wind Carry Me* (乘著光影旅行), which depicts Lee, 56, as an accomplished cinematographer, a loving son, and a famous artist in his own right. With a prolific career that has spanned more than 25 years and included a life-long collaboration with Hou that dates back to *A Time to Live and a Time to Die* (童年往事, 1985), Lee is one of the world's most sought-after cinematographers, having also worked with directors such as Hong Kong's Ann Hui (許鞍華), Japan's Koreeda Hirokazu and Vietnam's Anh Hung Tran.

Taiwanese director Chiang Hsiu-chiung (姜秀瓊) and Hong Kong cinematographer and director Kwan Pun-leung (關本良) began work on *Let the Wind Carry Me* in 2006. Three years of following Lee across the globe and one year of painstaking editing later, the director duo has delivered an intimate portrait of Lee as a ruggedly handsome virtuoso who is quiet and sensitive but always makes people feel comfortable around him.

Audiences are quickly drawn to the cinematographer's artistic world through interviews with friends and colleagues that are carefully intercut with scenes from the movies lensed by Lee. The

Cinematographer Mark Ping-bing Lee, left, and with Hou Hsiao-hsien, above left, and his mother, above right.

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artist's unique sensitivity and approach to cinema surface when French director Gilles Bourdos recalls how Lee used plastic bags to light a scene in *A Sight for Sore Eyes* (2003). Chinese director Jiang Wen (姜文) remembers how "Brother Bing" maintained his composure when a snowstorm suddenly blew in during the shooting of *The Sun Also Rises* (太陽照常升起, 2006) in the Xinjiang desert and filmed an enchanting scene while the rest of the crew panicked.

Through the lens of Chiang and Kwan, Lee is seen building his aesthetic vocabulary through keen observations on what is happening around him. A clip from Lee's home movies, for example, shows him videotaping a leaf trembling on a branch. The cinematographer himself also sheds light on his philosophy on image-making with the documentarians, discussing colors, breezes, changing light and shadows, smells and textures, and how it is his job to capture them on film.

Lee's words and images often amaze and inspire, but the emotional motif of the film lies in the brief moments that he shares with his octogenarian mother, Wang Yung-chu (王永珠), who was widowed early in life and brought up five children by herself. Lee doesn't see his mother often, having spent most of his life away from home making movies. When mother and son meet, few words are exchanged, but they are spoken with tenderness and affection. By contrast, a brief appearance by Lee's teenage son at their home in Los Angeles reveals the artist as an absent father and husband.

For Chiang, herself the mother of two young children, the sacrifices Lee makes to pursue his dreams strike a cord, since she also put her family aside to complete the documentary, which she and Kwan shot, edited and produced pretty much by themselves.

Deep down, Chiang believes, Lee's mother plays a vital part in the

cinematographer's life. "Lee and his mother are very much alike. They are both warm and considerate of others' feelings. The way his mother treats people and lives life influences Lee, and that in turn impacts on Lee's images," Chiang said. "I am always fascinated by his images, and in the end I realize that Lee and his images are the same: natural, tender and comforting, but all the while there is an immense force and strength underneath."

After screening in Taipei, *Let the Wind Carry Me* will hit theaters in Kaohsiung and Tainan on May 21 and Taichung and Hsinchu on June 4. For more information, go to thewind2010.pixnet.net/blog or www.letthewindcarryme.com.

Film Notes

LET THE WIND CARRY ME (乘著光影旅行)

DIRECTED BY:
CHIANG HSIU-CHIUNG (姜秀瓊) AND
KWAN PUN-LEUNG (關本良)

STARRING:
MARK PING-BING LEE (李屏賓) AS
HIMSELF, WANG YUNG-CHU (王永珠)
AS HERSELF, HOU HSIAO-HSIEN (侯孝賢)
AS HIMSELF, GILLES BOURDOS AS
HIMSELF, WONG KAR-WAI (王家衛) AS
HIMSELF

RUNNING TIME:
90 MINUTES

LANGUAGE:
IN MANDARIN, ENGLISH, FRENCH
AND JAPANESE WITH CHINESE AND
ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE:
TODAY