

Night-fragrant Flower

KORE-EDA Hirokazu



Genre: Drama
Format: 35mm
Estimated Running Time: 120 min.

Budget:
US\$11,000,000 (HK\$85,800,000)

Producer:
SHIGENOBU Yutaka

Writing Credit:
KORE-EDA Hirokazu (screenplay)

Production Company:
TV Man Union, Inc.

HAF Goals:
Co-producers, Funds

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Introduction

Born in turbulent times, Li Xianglan lived a complex, controversial life in which everyone seemed to have experienced multiple identities. The lives of Kawashima Yoshiko, Hasegawa Kazuo, Amakasu Masahiko, Eileen Chang, and Li Xianglan – who, herself, later became Yamaguchi Yoshiko – will all be captured by the lens of Japanese director Kore-eda Hirokazu. With his talent to unravel tangled drama and his sensitivity to life issues, Kore-eda will follow Li Xianglan through her intersections with these legendary historical figures in this classic in the making.

Synopsis

The film is set in Manchuria in the 1930s and 1940s. In February, 1946, Li Xianglan, the famous actress in Japan's National Policy Films, stands trial for treason in a military court. Once a humble Chinese girl on screen, Li now is sentenced to death. Yet, the judge asks, "What is your real name?" "Who are you really?" A story of ambiguities and identities unfolds for the main character and those with whom she interacts.

Originally a princess in the Qing Royal family, Kawashima Yoshiko was adopted by a Japanese man. Often disguising herself as a man, she returned to China hoping to restore the Qing Dynasty. She was executed as a Japanese spy in 1947. Hasegawa Kazuo was a Japanese actor who co-starred with Li Xianglan in the well-known "Mainland Trilogy," that turned Li into "the woman men desire most" or "the Chinese that the Japanese desire most." Another key person was Amakasu Masahiko, the director of Manchuria Movie Association. Finally, the world famous novelist Eileen Chang represents a decadent Shanghai – a mixture of European civilization and the chaotic state of Chinese culture.

The story of Li Xianglan shows her encounters with these diverse characters as an extraordinary Chinese journey from legendary star to suspected traitor. In the end, Li avoids execution by revealing her Japanese identity and sails back to Japan, reborn as Yamaguchi Yoshiko as the film closes.

Director's Statement

My father was a Japanese man born in 1920, the same year Li Xianglan was born, but in the city of Kaohsiung, Taiwan when the island was still under Japanese rule. Drafted for service in Manchuria, the Soviet Army took him to Siberia as a forced labourer for almost three years after the defeat of Japan. Like most Japanese men living in wartime China, he was portrayed as a perpetrator in the grand narrative of world history while surviving as a victim in his own personal history: living in pain, both physically and mentally, after the war.

My mother, born and raised in Tokyo once proclaimed about Li Xianglan, “She’s so pretty! ... I never thought she’s Japanese...” She continued to say this after Li transformed herself into Yamaguchi Yoshiko after the war.

“What was that war all about?” remains the fundamental question. For me, “Li Xianglan” often reminds me of my father and my mother, living in their memories that are an integral part of their personal history. Telling the story of Li Xianglan is my personal tribute to the memory of my late parents.

Director

Kore-eda Hirokazu was born in Tokyo, Japan, in 1962. After graduating from the Literature Department of Waseda University in 1987, Kore-eda joined TV Man Union, directing many prize-winning documentaries. His first feature film, *Maborosi*, won the Ozella D’oro at the Venice Film Festival in 1995. His second feature, *After Life* (1999), brought Kore-eda wide international acclaim, being successfully distributed in over 30 countries. 20th Century Fox is currently remaking it. His third film, *Distance* (HAF 2000 Project), showed in competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2001 while his fourth film, *Nobody Knows*, received the Best Actor Award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2004. Kore-eda’s latest feature, *Hana* (2006), set in the Edo period, explores the world of chivalry and revenge.

Kore-eda has also produced three films by young Japanese directors. *Kakuto*, directed by Iseya Yusuke, premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam 2003. *Wild Berries*, written and directed by Nishikawa Miwa premiered at New Directors/New Films in New York 2003, while her second feature, *Sway*, showed in the Director’s Fortnight at Cannes in 2006.

Producer

Born in 1941 at Sakhalin, Shigenobu Yutaka entered the Tokyo Broadcasting System, Inc. (TBS) upon graduating from International Christian University in 1964. In 1970, he assisted with the founding of TV Man Union, Inc. (TVU) and was appointed President in 1986 while he became the CEO and Chairman of the Board in 2002. Shigenobu is a veteran producer of many highly acclaimed films and television works, including Kore-eda

Hirokazu’s *Maborosi* (1995), *Nobody Knows* (2004), *Hana* (2006), and Nishikawa Miwa’s *Sway* (2006).

Production Company

A group of producers and directors founded TV Man Union, Inc. (TVU) in 1970 as the first independent production company in Japan and a creative co-op. Over the past 36 years, TVU’s works in the fields of drama, documentary, entertainment, arts, music, sports and science programming have built its reputation as the most successful and progressive production company in Japan. TVU works with all the major broadcasters in Japan and has developed partnerships with major sponsors for some of the most successful entertainment programmes in Japan. In 1996, together with Imagica, TVU launched its own pay TV channel, Cinefil Imagica, which quickly became one of the most popular movie channels on SKY PerfecTV!.

TVU has also produced most of Kore-eda Hirokazu’s feature films, including *Maborosi* (1995), *After Life* (1999), *Distance* (2001/ HAF 2000 Project), *Nobody Knows* (2004), and Kore-eda’s latest, *Hana* (2006).

