



THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

# THE GRANDMASTER

## Production Notes



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**Running Time:** 108 mins  
**MPAA Rating:** PG-13

“Some see to recover what is rightfully theirs. Some wish to penetrate the arcane mysteries. Some light fires and some light lamps to show the way forward.  
Kung fu: between a horizontal and a vertical, dishonour and glory.  
An era: between the rise and fall, exile and reunion.  
The path of a Grandmaster: Being. Knowing. Doing.”

- Wong Kar Wai

“Kung fu – two words. A horizontal and a vertical. Make a mistake – horizontal. Be the last one standing and you win.”

- Ip Man

## INTRODUCTION

THE GRANDMASTER is the highly-anticipated new film by acclaimed director Wong Kar Wai. Six years in the planning and three years in the making, THE GRANDMASTER is an epic action feature inspired by the life and times of the legendary kung fu master, Ip Man. The story spans the tumultuous Republican era that followed the fall of China's last dynasty, a time of chaos, division and war that was also the golden age of Chinese martial arts. Filmed in a range of stunning locations that include the snow-swept landscapes of Northeast China and the subtropical South, THE GRANDMASTER features virtuoso performances by some of the greatest stars of contemporary cinema.

With THE GRANDMASTER, Wong Kar Wai has made a kung fu film like no other. Years of research before production and a virtual battalion of martial arts trainers on set ensured that THE GRANDMASTER portrays both the Chinese martial arts and the world of the martial artists with unprecedented authenticity, with fight scenes choreographed by renowned action choreographer Yuen Wo Ping (THE MATRIX, KILL BILL, CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON.) The trio of international superstars at the film's heart – Tony Leung, Ziyi Zhang and Chang Chen – all underwent several years of rigorous and extremely challenging kung fu training for their roles.

Shot by French Director of Photography Philippe Le Sourd and with art direction by Wong's long-term collaborators William Chang Suk Ping and Alfred Yau Wai Ming, THE GRANDMASTER represents a new chapter in the martial arts genre and in Wong Kar Wai's own stellar career.

## THE STORY

It begins as the story of Ip Man (Tony Leung), the legendary teacher of Bruce Lee and a master of the *Wing Chun* school of kung fu. It becomes the portrait of a bygone era and a lost world.

Ip Man was born in Foshan, in the south of China, to a wealthy family. His wife Zhang Yongcheng (Song Hye Kyo) is the descendant of Manchu nobility. Pursuing a single-minded passion for *Wing Chun*, Ip Man is often seen at the Gold Pavilion, an elegant brothel that serves as a meeting place for Foshan's kung fu masters and whose women possess a few martial arts secrets of their own.

In 1936, China is experiencing political turbulence and the threat of division. The Japanese have invaded the northeastern provinces collectively known as Manchuria. Grandmaster Gong Baosen (Wang Qingxiang), whose home is in Japanese-occupied Manchuria, and who is the leader of the martial arts world of Northern China, arrives in Foshan. He had been to Foshan previously to initiate exchanges between the martial artists of the North and those of the South but this time he has come at the invitation of the Southern masters to hold a ceremony at the Gold Pavilion to celebrate his impending retirement.

An integral part of the ceremony involves a challenge and display of martial arts skills with a younger man. During a similar ceremony held at home in the Northeast, Gong's disciple and successor Ma San (Zhang Jin), a *Xingyi* master, performed this role. Master Gong's daughter Gong Er (Ziyi Zhang), who is the sole inheritor of her father's lethal *Bagua*-style '64 Hands' technique, also arrives in Foshan to witness her father step down. It is here where she encounters Ip Man. Who is qualified to take up the Old Master's challenge? Challenge leads to challenge, and masters contest masters.

Meanwhile, the ongoing Japanese occupation of the Northeast sets the stage for a betrayal that will shake Master Gong's world. It will also cause Gong Er to make a decision that will change the course of her life.

Gong Er and Ip Man meet again in Hong Kong in the 1950s; a new world populated by old alliances, lasting grievances, and fragments of past lives and desires. Ip Man, despite having lived through difficult and terrible times after the Japanese invaded Foshan, will not be defeated by hardship. He opens a school for *Wing Chun* in Hong Kong and soon acquires devoted disciples (including, in reality, Bruce Lee) and popularizes this form of kung fu: it has spread throughout the world and remains popular to this day, taught in countless schools all over the world.

## CHARACTERS

**Ip Man** (Tony LEUNG): Born at the end of China's Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), *Wing Chun* grandmaster Ip Man was the son of a wealthy family in Foshan, Guangdong Province. Ip Man was obsessed with kung fu from the time he was a child, studying the elite form of *Wing Chun* with the legendary teacher, Chan Wah-shun. Never needing to work or think about money before the age of forty, he devoted himself to the study of *Wing Chun*. Foshan was the center of the southern Chinese martial arts world during the Republican era. Ip Man frequently engaged in tests of skill with Foshan's martial artists, but unlike them, he didn't open a school: it was his passion, not his livelihood. After the Japanese invade Foshan, they take over his family home and push him and his family into devastating poverty. At the end of the Civil War, owing to his wartime affiliation with the KMT, he fled China to Hong Kong and was never able to return. In Hong Kong, he begins to teach *Wing Chun* in order to make a living, and transforms this once-exclusive martial art into a popular form that now has adherents all over the world.

**Gong Er** (Ziyi ZHANG): Gong Er grows up in a prominent martial arts family in northeast China, the daughter of Master Gong Baosen, leader of the Northern martial arts world, and a strong proponent of the *Bagua* form of fighting. She grows up amongst fighters, and watching her beloved father's battles. She has become a highly talented fighter herself. As his only surviving child, she would have been his successor had she been born a boy. Her father wants her to leave the martial world, marry and become a doctor. She is single-mindedly devoted to her family and its martial tradition. She has mastered the sinuous, lethal form of *Bagua*, including the Gong family's famous '64 Hands' technique. She is as proud, strong and righteous as any classical hero in the martial arts tradition.

**The Razor** (CHANG Chen): He is a master of the explosive *Baji* form of kung fu and a hot-blooded loner with an air of mystery. He's a patriotic idealist who has joined the Nationalist government's secret police. His role is to hunt down and assassinate traitors. He has a fierce reputation and a strong moral code. After the Communists' victory in 1949, he made his way to Hong Kong, deserted the Nationalist Party and organization and opened the White Rose Barber Shop.

**Gong Baosen** (WANG Qingxiang): Gong Er's father. A highly-respected Grandmaster from the Northeast and the undisputed leader of the Northern martial arts world. He is the first person to combine the martial arts styles of *Xingyi* (which features many animal-based forms) and *Bagua* (which is based on the hexagrams of the esoteric, ancient text, the *I Ching*), into one school. Master Gong has never lost a fight in his

life and is universally respected. However, he is less concerned with personal glory than the promotion of a new generation of kung fu masters so that the great traditions of the martial world may live on. He maintains the highest standards and has equally high expectations of the people around him. He strives to inspire patriotism and achieve national salvation through the martial arts.

**Jiang** (SHANG Tielong): As an executioner during the Qing Dynasty, he became an outcast in the Republican era. Master Gong, recognizing that he had a loyal and honest character as well as a fierce air, took him into his household and asked him to be Gong Er's guardian; her 'Lucky Star', to protect her and watch over her. He is never seen without his pet monkey.

**Ding Lianshan** (ZHAO Benshan): A Manchurian kung fu master who studied alongside Master Gong when they were younger. The two share the same vision but work very differently. Gong is the public face of their movement while Ding works out of view. As the leader of an anti-Japanese resistance force, the Japanese have placed a warrant out for his arrest. He operates in the shadows and hints that he has been a secret player in historical events. In Foshan he is a hotel cook; no one would ever guess at his powers or his past.

**Ma San** (ZHANG Jin): A Northern based master of *Xingyi* and a leading disciple and designated successor of Master Gong, Ma San was a poor orphan who Master Gong took in and named 'San' ('three') to evoke a saying from the martial world about the value of humility. Yet he is deeply ambitious and covets power, wealth and status. How far will he go?

**San Jiang Shui** (XIAO Shenyang): He is a small-time criminal, a bandit from the Northeast, who hangs on the fringes of the martial world, deferential to his superiors but not above bullying or pushing people around when he thinks he can get away with it. He ends up in Hong Kong. Who will he make his master?

**Zhang Yongcheng** (SONG Hye Kyo): The high-born wife of Ip Man and the mother of his children, she is a woman of few words. She and Ip Man don't need to speak to understand one another well. When the war comes to Foshan, they may lose much that is precious, but neither she nor Ip Man ever lose their dignity.

## HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- **1911-12:** A Republican revolution inspired by Dr Sun Yat-sen brings to an end China's last imperial dynasty, the Manchu Qing (1644-1911). The Republic of China is born. The Northern Martial Arts Union is founded to unite the martial artists of the north for patriotic ends.
- **1916-28:** Warlord Era. Across the country, military warlords commanding independent armies challenge the authority of the central government. The country is in danger of being torn apart.
- **1931:** The Japanese invade the three states of Northeast China, which included the traditional homelands of the Manchurian people (the rulers of China in the Qing Dynasty). They commit innumerable atrocities against the local citizenry.
- **1932:** The Japanese place the last Qing emperor, Henry Puyi, on the throne of their puppet kingdom of Manchukuo. They then recruit collaborators from amongst the local people.
- **1936:** The southern provinces of China move to secede from the nation. Master Gong Baosen arrives in Foshan to hold his retirement ceremony.
- **1937:** The Japanese march south. After manufacturing an incident at the Marco Polo Bridge in the southwest area of Beijing, they cross the bridge and invade China proper. For eight years, the Japanese inflict a cruel and violent occupation on China, against which Chinese patriots fight a war of resistance.
- **1938:** The Japanese invade Foshan. Japanese troops occupy Ip Man's home. He and his family fall into poverty and starvation.
- **1940:** Ma San becomes a collaborator with the Japanese puppet government of Manchukuo in the northeast.
- **1945:** The occupation ends with Japan's surrender at the end of World War II.
- **1946-49:** Civil War breaks out between the governing Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek (with whom Ip Man is aligned) and the Communists under Mao Zedong.
- **1949:** Communist victory; Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek flees with his troops and supporters to Taiwan.
- **1950:** Ip Man and The Razor arrive separately in Hong Kong. Gong Er is already there, working as a doctor of Chinese medicine.
- **1951:** The border between the British-run territory Hong Kong and mainland China is closed. Ip Man will never be able to return to Foshan again.

## WONG KAR WAI'S JOURNEY TO THE GRANDMASTER

It was in Argentina, in 1996, when he was filming *Happy Together* (which won Wong Best Director at Cannes in 1997), that Wong Kar Wai took the first step on his journey to THE GRANDMASTER. The director was passing a newspaper kiosk when he noticed a magazine with a picture of Bruce Lee on the cover. Wong Kar Wai was struck by the fact that two decades after his death, Bruce Lee was still a global icon.

"I grew up watching Bruce Lee's films," says Wong. "I loved them." His first thought was to make a film about Bruce Lee. But the more he learned about Lee's teacher, Ip Man, the more fascinated he became. A cultured, educated man from a good family in the southern town of Foshan, Ip Man ended up in exile in Hong Kong, where he became the leading exponent of the martial arts form known as *Wing Chun*. Among his disciples was Bruce Lee.

Ip Man, Wong Kar Wai discovered, had been one of many kung fu masters from the mainland who had ended up in Hong Kong in the 1950s, and who opened rival martial arts schools there. Some streets had more kung fu schools than you could count. Rivalries were intense, and mutual challenges constant and fierce. Wong Kar Wai's original idea for THE GRANDMASTER was to tell the story of one master and one street. But the more he learned, the more he came to see how one street embodied the story of an entire era. He realized that the world he wanted to evoke on film was that of the martial world of the Republican Era (1911-49), the golden age of Chinese kung fu, together with its rivalries, tragedies and esoteric mysteries.

He delved deeply into research, collecting historic photos, books and documents, and keeping journals and notebooks full of clippings and notes. He embarked on an arduous journey over three years (documented in the film THE ROAD TO THE GRANDMASTER, Jet Tone Films) that took him to nine cities in China and Taiwan under the guidance of Chinese national Wushu (martial arts) coach, Wu Bin. Wu was the teacher of Jet Li, the greatest martial arts superstar since Bruce Lee.

Wong Kar Wai was fascinated by the fact that so many of Hong Kong's kung fu masters had come from the north, in particular the Japanese-occupied Northeast, where the Japanese established their puppet state of Manchukuo in the 1930s. Before successive upheavals sent them into permanent exile in Hong Kong, many of these masters had been involved in Wushu exchanges with the Southern masters.

On the road, Wong interviewed a number of great martial arts masters, who shared with him not just their philosophy and their art, but

many secrets and previously untold tales of the martial arts world. Wong Kar Wai realized he was being handed a precious cultural heritage, much of which was in danger of being forgotten. He grew determined to showcase this heritage, in particular the schools of *Wing Chun*, *Bagua*, *Xingyi* and *Baji*, in his film. *THE GRANDMASTER* would be epic – and utterly authentic.

As a testament to the eternal power of kung fu and martial arts in the psyche of the Chinese people, the online, Chinese-language version of the documentary *THE ROAD TO THE GRANDMASTER* had received over 10 million hits even before *THE GRANDMASTER*'s release in China in January 2013.

## THE MAKING OF THE GRANDMASTER

For the casting of THE GRANDMASTER, director Wong Kar Wai needed actors who could make the extraordinary commitment to several years of rigorous kung fu training. He wanted them not just to embody the spirit, dignity and ethical bearing of a grandmaster but also truly to master the moves of the schools they would represent. 'They didn't just have to be appropriate for the role,' says the director, 'they needed to be tough.'

Ziyi Zhang, Tony Leung, Chang Chen and Zhang Jin were up to the challenge. Ziyi Zhang, with her background in dance and exquisite physical grace, would represent *Bagua*. Tony Leung would play *Wing Chun* grandmaster Ip Man. Zhang Jin would play Ma San, a master of *Xingyi* and Chang Chen as The Razor would take on the explosive form of *Baji*.

In fact, under the tutelage of the *Baji* master Wang Shiquan, Chang Chen became so talented at *Baji* that he took first place in a national *Baji* competition in 2012 – an accomplishment that became a media sensation.

Wang Shiquan was among the veritable army of kung fu masters and grandmasters who contributed their expertise and time to the training of THE GRANDMASTER's stars. Others included *Wing Chun* master Duncan Leung, a disciple of Ip Man who studied alongside Bruce Lee and who is the leading proponent and teacher of the form.

Duncan Leung's son, the *Wing Chun* master Darren Leung (who appears in the film as Brother Hung), also spent countless hours training Tony Leung. The goal was that the fights in the film – choreographed by internationally renowned action director Yuen Wo Ping (*Drunken Master, The Matrix, Kill Bill*) – would display an unprecedented authenticity.

Wong Kar Wai's long-term collaborators William Chang Suk Ping and Alfred Yau Wai Ming designed the production. It took Chang two years to search out and collect the beads, ribbons, lace, and materials for the costumes alone; he collected a library of photographic books of the era for visual references. Among the sets they built in southern Kaiping, a town near Foshan in Guangdong Province where the production was based, were a full-scale replica of a train station in Japanese-occupied Manchuria, the magnificent bordello known as the Gold Pavilion, as well as the boarding houses and kung fu schools of 1950s Hong Kong.

Those fans Wong Kar Wai films such as *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* will not be disappointed by THE GRANDMASTER, which is every bit as stylish, sensual and elegant as anything else he has ever done; this is kung fu as only Wong Kar Wai could present it.

After eight years of preparation, principle photography under the direction of Philippe Le Sourd began in November 2009 in Kaiping. From January 2010 to May 2010 the shooting moved to Northeast

China, where they shot under blisteringly cold conditions that took cast, crew and equipment to the very limits of endurance. Shooting resumed in September 2010 and continued through November 2012 in Kaiping; post-production took place in Bangkok in late 2012-13 at Oriental Post. The international crew (China, Hong Kong, France, Singapore, Australia, U.S.A.) worked round the clock by the director's side, often going for days without sleep to achieve the level of perfection he demands and which has put him on every serious film critic's list of top film directors in the world today.

## ABOUT THE CAST & CREW

### WONG Kar Wai (Director, Producer & Screenplay)

Wong Kar Wai was born in Shanghai and moved to Hong Kong with his parents when he was five. He entered the film industry as a scriptwriter and began directing his own scripts in 1988. His debut feature *AS TEARS GO BY* was invited to the Critics' Week in Cannes Film Festival. His second feature *Days of BEING WILD* won five Hong Kong Film Awards, including Best Director and Best Film. He founded his own company Jet Tone in 1992 and spent the next two years working on *ASHES OF TIME*, shooting mostly on remote locations in China. *CHUNGKING EXPRESS*, made very quickly during a break in the post-production of *ASHES OF TIME*, became his first global success; he followed it with the related 'diptych' movie *FALLEN ANGELS*. Shot mostly in Argentina, *HAPPY TOGETHER* premiered at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival and won the Best Director prize. All of his subsequent features have premiered in Cannes: *IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE* in 2000 (winning the Best Actor prize for Tony Leung Chiu Wai), *2046* in 2004 and his English-language debut *MY BLUEBERRY NIGHTS* in 2007. He served as President of the Jury at Cannes in 2006. In addition to his features, he has made a number of shorter films, including *IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE 2001* (starring Tony Leung Chiu Wai and Maggie Cheung), *SIX DAYS* (for the musician DJ Shadow), *THE FOLLOW* (starring Clive Owen, for the BMW on-line series *THE HIRE*), and *THERE'S ONLY ONE SUN* (starring Amelie Daure, for Philips). In 2004, he contributed the episode *THE HAND* to the portmanteau feature *EROS*, alongside episodes from Michelangelo Antonioni and Steven Soderbergh. In 2007, he made the short *I TRAVELED 9000 KM TO GIVE IT TO YOU* for Gilles Jacob's project *CHACUN SON CINÉMA (TO EACH HIS OWN CINEMA)*, which premiered in Cannes.

Filmography (features):

- 1988: Wangjiao Kamen (*As Tears Go By*)
- 1990: A-Fei Zhengzhuan (*Days of Being Wild*)
- 1994: Chongqing Senlin (*Chungking Express*)  
Dongxie Xidu (*Ashes of Time*)
- 1995: Duoluo Tianshi (*Fallen Angels*)
- 1997: Chunguang Zhaxie (*Happy Together*)
- 2000: Hua Yang Nian Hua (*In the Mood for Love*)
- 2004: 2 0 4 6  
Eros (Segment: *The Hand*)
- 2007: *My Blueberry Nights*
- 2008: Dongxie Xidu (*Ashes of Time Redux*)

### **Philippe LE SOURD (Director of Photography):**

French-born, New York-based Philippe Le Sourd's previous credits include Gabriele Muccino's SEVEN POUNDS, starring Will Smith, Ridley Scott's A GOOD YEAR and the French-language films ATOMIK CIRCUS, LE RETOUR DE JAMES BATAILLE with Vanessa Paradis, PEUT-ETRE and CANTIQUE DE LA RACAILLE.

### **William CHANG Suk Ping (Production Designer, Costume Designer & Editor)**

Born to a Shanghainese family in Hong Kong, William Chang (Chang Suk Ping) studied film in Canada. He was assistant director to Tang Shu Shuen on her seminal independent films THE ARCH and CHINA BEHIND. His work almost single-handedly persuaded the Hong Kong film and music industries of the importance of design, and he has won numerous prizes. Since he worked on the editing of Wong Kar Wai's films *Ashes of Time* and *Chungking Express*, he has also been much in demand as an editor. He has worked with both established directors (Stanley Kwan, Yim Ho, Tsui Hark, Ching Siu Tung) and newcomers (Jan Lamb, Eric Kot), but he is probably best known for his daring and innovative work with Wong Kar Wai. He has been closely involved in the making of all of Wong Kar Wai's films. For art direction he worked closely with Alfred YAU Wai Ming, another frequent collaborator of Wong Kar Wai and the art director of some thirty films, on THE GRANDMASTER's production design, for which they share the credit.

### **YUEN Wo Ping (Action Choreographer)**

Coming from an industry in which action directors are celebrities, Hong Kong based Yuen Wo Ping has distinguished himself as one of the best and certainly most famous action directors in the world. Born in Guangzhou in 1945, Wo Ping was the eldest of twelve children of actor Simon Yuen Siu Tin. Siu Tin had trained in the Peking Opera and found work on a long-running, popular series of films chronicling the exploits of Wong Fei Hung, a Chinese folk hero. Having trained Wo Ping in Peking Opera, his father introduced him in his youth to producers with whom he'd worked in the '60's. As kung fu films gained popularity in the early '70's, Wo Ping migrated to Shaw Brothers who used him in small parts and as a stuntman in such films as *The Chinese Boxer* and *Duel of Fists*. *Mad Killer* was Wo Ping's first official film as an action director. Wo Ping would eventually direct his first feature starring a relatively unknown actor named Jackie Chan in *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow*. It was his next film, *Drunken Master*, also starring Jackie Chan that truly propelled both men into mainstream success. In 1979, Wo Ping formed the Wo Ping Films Company. The company's first project was *The Buddhist Fist* which co-starred his father Siu Tin, who subsequently appeared in many

of his son's films, often as an elder drunken boxing master or mischievous beggar. He went on to redefine the action film, not just in Hong Kong but internationally with such box-office hits as *The Matrix*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and *Kill Bill*.

**Tony LEUNG Chiu Wai** (Ip Man): Tony Leung (Leung Chiu Wai) has made a smooth transition from Hong Kong genre movies to leading roles for several of the most notable directors in world cinema. He was awarded the Best Actor prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2000 for *In the Mood for Love* and has won many other awards for his performances, including Best Actor at the 2008 Asian Film Awards for *Lust, Caution*. His films include *The Lunatics* and *People's Hero* for Derek Yee, *Love Unto Waste* for Stanley Kwan, *A City of Sadness* and *Flowers of Shanghai* for Hou Hsiao Hsien, *Bullet in the Head* and *Hard-Boiled* for John Woo, *Cyclo* for Tran Anh Hung, *Hero* for Zhang Yimou, *Infernal Affairs* and *Infernal Affairs III* for Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, and *Lust, Caution* for Ang Lee. His long association with Wong Kar Wai began with a brief guest appearance in *Days of Being Wild* and went on to include *Ashes of Time*, *Chungking Express*, *Happy Together*, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*. The role of *Wing Chun* grandmaster Ip Man in **THE GRANDMASTER** has been his most physically challenging role to date. (see Interview with Tony Leung)

**Ziyi ZHANG** (Gong Er): The multi-award winning Ziyi Zhang is a three-times BAFTA nominee and a regular presence on lists of the world's most beautiful women. She initially trained as a dancer in her native Beijing. She came to international attention at nineteen for her role in Zhang Yimou's 1999 *The Long Road Home* and achieved megastardom as the young girl in Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Her range is remarkably diverse, from action roles to the lead in the 2005 *Memoirs of a Geisha*. She first worked with Wong Kar Wai in *2046*. Her delicate beauty belies exceptional physical strength, flexibility and stamina which, together with her dancer's training (she studied dance before she studied acting) made her the perfect choice for the character of Gong Er, who is a master of the dance-like, flowing and circular *Bagua* style of kung fu.

**CHANG Chen** (The Razor): Chang Chen's first role, at the age of fifteen, was in the late, acclaimed Taiwan director Edward Yang's 1991 *A Brighter Summer Day*. Six years later Wong Kar Wai cast him in *Happy Together*. His first on-screen collaboration with Ziyi Zhang was in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, where he played her lover, 'Dark Cloud'. His list of credits extends to over twenty-films, and he has worked with some of Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China and Korea's top directors. In **THE GRANDMASTER**, he plays a master of the explosive

*Baji* style of kung fu, for which he won first place in a national *Baji* competition in China.

**SONG Hye Kyo** (Zhang Yongcheng): Song Hye Kyo is a multi-award-winning South Korean model and actress. She has starred in a number of popular television series including *Autumn in My Heart* and *All In* as well as in films such as 2011's *A Reason to Live*, for which she won Best Actress in the Women in Film Korea Awards. China Entertainment Television named her one of Asia's top ten entertainers.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY LEUNG

*Author and translator Linda Jaivin caught up with Tony Leung in Bangkok, where THE GRANDMASTER was in post-production. They spoke in Mandarin.*

**LJ:** We've heard quite a lot about the physical training you undertook for this role. What mental preparation did you do for it?

**TL:** In the beginning the director gave me a lot of books about the northern masters, but only a few things about Ip Man.

**LJ:** Really? I thought there'd be a lot written about him.

**TL:** There is, but he didn't give me much of it to look at. He did a lot of research himself, of course. But he wanted me to read more about Bruce Lee. The character would be a kind of blend of Ip Man and Bruce Lee. I've collaborated with Wong Kar Wai for over ten years. We have a strong mutual trust. The movie doesn't aim to be a documentary; we wanted to create a kind of ideal, 'perfect' Ip Man. My impression of Ip Man is that he was very gentle, civilized, a deep-thinker and a gentleman. When he fought, he became someone else, fierce, almost animalistic. I thought this was a fascinating blend. A man who, as the son of a wealthy family, the son of a landowner had everything until the age of forty. Then he experienced a huge fall in his fortunes, and much trauma; and yet, in the end, he was still standing. That really fascinated me. And so with the director's research into Ip Man and mine into Bruce Lee, and through our teamwork, we produced an ideal vision of Ip Man. He's very positive. I've never played such a positive character in any Wong Kar Wai film.

**LJ:** What do you mean by 'positive'?

**TL:** He was extremely optimistic. Otherwise, how could he still be standing at the end of everything he went through? I heard my [*Wing Chun*] master [Duncan Leung] talk about Ip Man as he was when he first got to Hong Kong. It was like he had gone from heaven to hell. He had nothing at all. His home, his wealth, his family, they were all gone. His two daughters died. My master told me Ip Man didn't even have a blanket with which to cover himself when he first got to Hong Kong. He had to borrow one from a disciple, who then needed to take it back. But he remained the sort of person who faced life with a smile on his face. I felt that this was true positivity. I believe that kung fu informed and inspired his approach to life. With Bruce Lee, on the other hand, it was the opposite: life informed and inspired his kung fu. Bruce Lee studied philosophy, Daoism. In fact, Ip Man and Bruce Lee took

different routes to the same destination. In his writings, Bruce Lee often spoke of Ip Man, calling him one of the greats of the kung fu world. Ip Man inspired him to understand that kung fu wasn't just physical training or a means of self-defense but a form of mental cultivation and a way of life. Only by learning kung fu myself did I really come to really understand this. The training helped me to achieve more authenticity in the way I would fight on screen. At the same time, it helped me to get into character in a way just reading about it couldn't do. So I could see why the director asked me to undertake such a long and rigorous process of physical training, during which I broke my arm twice.

**LJ:** Ouch.

**TL:** Yes. I trained for almost four years, only stopping when I got injured. I'd never studied kung fu in my youth. I began when I was 47. After I broke my arm the first time, the doctor said I needed to rest for six months. But I'd have forgotten everything if I did that. I'd have to go all the way back to the beginning again. It was a hairline fracture. So I just had the arm wrapped up and went back to training two weeks later. But it hadn't healed, and the first day I went back to training it broke again. The second time it broke it was a lot worse. So I didn't dare to disobey the doctor's orders again and rested for about four months. Those were the only two times in four years that I wasn't training. So that's how I came to truly understand how a martial artist comes to be, to feel it and not just know it intellectually. If you ask me to imitate the body language of a kung fu master, that's easy. But if you want to portray the spirit of one, that's another matter. This process was crucial for my ability to do that.

**LJ:** Before you began this process, what was your thinking or attitude towards kung fu?

**TL:** I was a fan of Bruce Lee as a kid. I saw his films when I was seven or eight. But in the 60s we were taught that there were only two types of people who learned kung fu: policemen and gangsters. It seemed to be about fighting, brawling, or performing. It was only after taking on this role that I really fathomed what kung fu is about. It was a tough four years but a really satisfying time as well. I want to show young people – and their parents as well – what kung fu really is about, the true spirit of it. The lessons of hard work, discipline, and mind training apply to life. Ideally, you got to a level that's like zen: you want to harmonize with your opponent. He is not your enemy, no more than your environment is your enemy. The goal is not victory but to open your own mind. The more I studied kung fu, the more fascinated I became.

**LJ:** It's like something Master Gong says to his daughter. He criticizes her

for only caring about victory.

**TL:** Yes. I haven't actually seen that scene! But it's true, and it's why this tradition has continued over 4,000 years. It's not just about fighting. If it was that simple, anyone could be a grandmaster. You know, making this film was a blast. I've never made such a film with Wong Kar Wai before! I'm always playing these dark, repressed characters. But this is such a positive, optimistic role. It was very enjoyable. Of course, there's this part where the war comes, and I lose everything...

**LJ:** You cry. And I cried watching you!

**TL:** Exactly. And I'm crying out of frustration as well as loss. But in the end – Ip Man is still standing, not because of how he fights but because of how he lives. It's so interesting. The only thing I knew about Ip Man before this was that he was Bruce Lee's teacher. I knew he was extraordinary, but didn't understand why or how. But learning *Wing Chun*, becoming a disciple myself and then being able to portray a character who was a combination of this great man and Bruce Lee – I feel really happy about it. It felt like a kind of karmic connection. Now that I'm over 50, I'm not that keen on acting in very heavy dramas anymore. I'd rather play characters with a lighter attitude towards life. I felt so lucky to be able to play such a positive character – I felt so lucky on every level to be doing this. But I didn't know how I was going to play Ip Man before we started filming. I was just doing my *Wing Chun* training. The first three years, we just worked on the fight scenes. For a year or two, it was all fighting. We didn't shoot any of the other scenes. I didn't even have a clue what the story was about! It was only in the last six months of filming that I began to shoot dramatic scenes.

**LJ:** That's such an interesting way to make a film!

**TL:** It was crazy! But that's what Wong Kar Wai is like.

**LJ:** What fun.

**TL:** It really is fun. Every time I make a film with him it's an adventure. I usually don't watch the rushes when I work with him. So I'm in the dark about the story, and don't know what the other characters are doing. I don't want to know. I fear I'll start imposing my own ideas on the process. It's got to be Wong Kar Wai's film. My job is to help him fulfill his vision. But yesterday, when I was dubbing some voice-overs, I saw the film for the first time and it's stunning. The process takes time. The more time you have, the more you're able to enter the character.

**LJ:** How much time does it normally take to make a film in your

experience, I mean with other directors?

**TL:** About six months. Maximum six months. People keep asking me if I found it hard going to work on one film over four years. I say, I've been making films for 30 years, and there's never been a time I haven't enjoyed it. What's four years? The more time you have, the more fun it is.

**LJ:** Now that you've finished, will you continue with your kung fu training?

**TL:** I'm not sure. To do it right, you need an opponent, someone to practice with. And it might not suit me at my age. What I'd really like to learn is *Tai Chi Chuan*. You can practice that into your seventies and beyond.

**LJ:** After all that training, when you were doing those big fight scenes, like the one in the rain, what was it like in your head? Were you in a state of excitement? A state of calm? How did you feel?

**TL:** Under a lot of pressure! I could never relax. I was really nervous about hurting people. My master said, 'don't think of them as people. Think of them as punching bags.' I couldn't do that. No way.

**LJ:** So in the film's fight scenes, they're landing serious blows? For real?

**TL:** Yes. They didn't want to film the kung fu scenes in the usual way. They wanted it to be authentic. But I couldn't do it. I couldn't cross that bridge. I'm a bit disappointed in myself for not being able to let go like that. On the other hand, my character wasn't fighting to kill people. For him, it was a kind of game. So there was no need to hit that hard. But I was really tested during these scenes, it was hard for me. I said to Wong Kar Wai that of all the fight scenes, the one in the rain was the toughest – from every angle. We shot it for 30 successive nights. All night every night. From about 7 pm, we were soaked but couldn't change clothes till we wrapped the following morning. By midnight, I'd be shivering with cold. It was like that every night. I began to take cold medicines. I felt myself getting sicker and sicker. When we finished up on the scene, I was laid up for five days. I was taking medicines and living on rice porridge. I thought I had pneumonia. I was coughing and coughing, I couldn't stop. It turned out to be bronchitis. That was the hardest thing about the filming. Also, we were fighting in water that was up to here (points to above his ankle) but Ah Suk (William Chang) is so exacting about the costumes: we had to wear cloth-soled shoes. But they were so slippery. So there we were, fighting in the rain, with slippery shoes... the training doesn't prepare you for conditions like

that! It got so cold.

**LJ:** I'm cold just listening to you. What month was it?

**TL:** October, November. On the first night, despite all the fighting, I didn't feel at all hot, even though I was perspiring. I knew that it'd be awfully cold from then on. The fight scenes really did put me under a lot of pressure. After all, I'm not a kung fu actor. But the film takes kung fu very seriously. I was so nervous. On the one hand, I worried about hurting people, on the other about not fighting well enough. The dramatic parts were easier. There's pressure in those scenes as well, but not as much.

**LJ:** Thank you so much. It's been really thrilling.

**TL:** Thank you.

## **MAIN CREDITS**

THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY  
ANNAPURNA PICTURES  
BLOCK 2 PICTURES  
SIL-METROPOLE ORGANISATION LTD  
Present

a  
JET TONE FILMS  
SIL-METROPOLE ORGANISATION LTD  
Production

a WONG KAR WAI film

## **THE GRANDMASTER**

### **CAST**

Tony Leung as Ip Man  
Ziyi Zhang as Gong Er  
Chang Chen as The Razor  
Zhao Benshan as Ding Lianshan  
Xiao Shenyang as San Jiang Shui  
Song Hye Kyo as Zhang Yongcheng

### **SPECIAL APPEARANCES BY**

Yuen Wo Ping  
Chilam Cheung  
Lau Ka Yung  
Cung Le

### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**

Song Dai  
Chan Ye Cheung  
Megan Ellison

### **PRODUCERS**

Wong Kar Wai  
Jacky Pang Yee Wah

### **CO-PRODUCERS**

Ren Yue  
Cheung Hong Tat  
Ng See Yuen  
Michael J. Werner

**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Philippe Le Sourd

**ACTION PHOTOGRAPHER**

Yuen Wo Ping

**PRODUCTION DESIGN BY**

William Chang Suk Ping

Alfred Yau Wai Ming

**ORIGINAL SCORE BY**

Shigeru Umebayashi

Nathaniel Mechaly

**SOUND DESIGN BY**

Robert Mackenzie

**EDITED BY**

William Chang Suk Ping

Benjamin Courtines

Poon Hung Yiu

**STORY BY**

Wong Kar Wai

**SCREENPLAY BY**

Zou Jingzhi

Xu Haofeng

Wong Kar Wai

**DIRECTED BY**

Wong Kar Wai