



LEFT-HANDED GIRL FILM PRODUCTION

LHG FILMS LIMITED GOOD CHAOS LE PACTE & TAIPEI FILM COMMISSION

present

# LEFT-HANDED GIRL

A film by SHIH-CHING TSOU

With SHIH-YUAN MA, JANEL TSAI, and introducing NINA YE

Written by SHIH-CHING TSOU & SEAN BAKER

Run time : 1h49 – SCOPE – 5.1

## INTERNATIONAL SALES

**Le Pacte**

5, rue Darcet – 75017 Paris

<https://le-pacte.com/international>

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**Synopsis:**

A single mother and her two daughters return to Taipei after several years of living in the countryside to open a stand at a buzzing night market. Each in their own way, will have to adapt to this new environment to make ends meet and succeed in maintaining the family unity. Three generations of family secrets begin to unravel after the youngest daughter who's left-handed is told by her traditional grandfather to never use her "devil hand".

## Interview with Shih-Ching Tsou

**LEFT-HANDED GIRL is your second film and first solo feature, 21 years after *TAKE OUT* co-directed with Sean Baker. Why was there such a long gap?**

I once told Sean that my grandfather used to say the left hand was the devil's hand—and that moment planted the seed for *Left-Handed Girl*. We traveled to Taiwan to explore the idea and shot still photos, which we later edited into a visual trailer. But at the time, the project felt too ambitious—too many characters, too many locations, and we didn't have the resources to make it happen. So, we shifted focus and made *Take Out* instead. In 2010, we returned to Taiwan and completed the first draft of the script, we even began casting. But because it was a Mandarin-language film set in Taiwan, financing it from the U.S. proved impossible. The project was shelved again. Over the years, I continued collaborating on Sean's films—*Starlet*, *Tangerine*, *The Florida Project*, *Red Rocket* — but I never let go of this story. After *Red Rocket* premiered at Cannes, we shared the script with Le Pacte. They immediately saw its potential. That's when *Left-Handed Girl* finally came to life.

***Left-Handed Girl* conceals its main twist; its final reveal leads the audience to reconsider the events leading up in a new light. How did you conceive of the story?**

This story is very personal. The film was born from a vivid memory: my grandfather once told me not to use my left hand because it was the devil's hand. As we developed *Left-Handed Girl*, I began collecting stories—some from friends, some from family, and even from strangers. One particular twist in the film came from a friend who had lived through a similar experience. That story resonated deeply with me in unexpected ways. I was drawn to the tension within traditional families — how fear of judgment or rejection by society can lead to secrets being buried for years. That's why we incorporated this twist: the family may seem ordinary on the surface, but underneath, they're concealing something profound.

**Beyond a family story, would you say it's also a film about the culture of secrecy among women? Across generations, each character is hiding something.**

Definitely. In Chinese culture in particular, it's very important to save face. You have to show people your best, concealing the ugly things you're ashamed of. It's really specific to this culture. We have tried to show this while preserving everyone's perspective. Particularly when we're with I-Jing, the little girl, filmed at her height as she strolls through the night market. The same goes for I-Ann, her older sister, who wants above all to be herself. They are navigating their own worlds, where they are basically trying to survive, each in her own way.

**The main cast is almost entirely female, with the exception of Johnny. And even then, he is treated with disregard and, at some points, hostility.**

In Taiwanese society, men are often seen as the heads of the household. But in reality, it's often the women, like Shu-Fen, who carry the emotional weight and quietly guide the direction of the family. Even Johnny, the one character who shows real kindness toward Shu-Fen and her daughters, remains more in the background. The men are there, but it's the women who truly hold the story together.

**Similar to *Take Out*, this new film is in keeping with the spirit of those you made with Sean: a realistic social story told in a more unreal atmosphere – a “cinéma-vérité” approach.**

*Left-Handed Girl* is somehow closer to *Take Out* than you might think, particularly in the way it follows its characters. But it's still a story of a different register, closer to the intimate story of a family. *Take out* was in its own way, but in documentary form, inspired by the time spent with the Chinese immigrant community in its preparation. Even more fictional, *Left-Handed-Girl* follows a similar process: it's based on my wanderings through Taiwan's night market, and the friendships I made with people there. I even based the character of I-Jing on a real little girl I met there.

**Locations have a real importance in your work. One wonders if you conceptualize them before you have the idea for the story. As a Taiwanese woman who's been living in the USA for many years, was this film a way of reconnecting with your roots?**

In all our films, locations are characters in their own right, and that's especially true here. The night market was an ordinary place when I was growing up in Taiwan. But after living in New York City for many years, everything started to feel special again. Shooting the film in Taiwan felt like rediscovering the beauty of my home country. My cinematographers kept asking why I wanted to capture certain details — like the green pavement the girls walk across after leaving the pawnshop, or the classical music drifting from a garbage truck reminding people to take out their trash. These are small, everyday things — but they're so uniquely Taiwanese, and I find them beautiful now.

***Left-Handed girl* is set in a sensory, colorful universe, while its screenplay tends towards a darker, more melancholy tone. Why was that contrast essential to the film?**

That contrast was very intentional. *Left-Handed Girl* takes place in a night market — a place full of light, sound, color, and life. But beneath that sensory vibrancy is a story filled with silence, repression, and unspoken pain. I wanted the film to mirror many of our

experiences of family life in Taiwan: everything looks lively and “normal” on the surface, but deep emotional currents are running underneath. That tension between the bright exterior and the quiet sadness inside was essential. I remember when we finished filming the birthday banquet scene, where three generations finally confront each other — many of the extras were in tears. It was a deeply emotional moment, captured in a very grounded, realistic setting. Sean and I have always admired films like *Secrets & Lies* by Mike Leigh — stories that peel back everyday life to reveal what’s going on inside.

**The film feels naturalistic, and for that you might have considered non-professional actors but instead you hired many well-known actors in Taiwan.**

On Sean’s films, it’s common for us to do casting during pre-production while already on location, we meet locals, and many of them end up on screen. But in Taiwan, the prep time was so short that I didn’t have the luxury to do that kind of spontaneous casting. Instead, I turned to Instagram. That’s how I discovered Shih-Yuan Ma, a model, and immediately felt she had the right presence for the role. For Shu-Fen, the mother, I had a hard time finding an actress in her forties to fifties. Then I came across an interview with Janel Tsai — a model-turned-popular TV actress — where she mentioned wanting to take on more challenging roles. I jumped at the chance and reach out.

***Left-Handed Girl* is obviously personal to you and deeply rooted in Chinese culture. What motivates you to tackle these identities? And even more so, to film characters struggling against the weight of their cultural traditions?**

Because it’s something so many of us quietly navigate. The tension between personal identity and cultural expectations. I grew up in Taiwan and later moved to the U.S., not because I was trying to escape, but because I was searching for more space to explore who I am. In Taiwan, especially as a woman, there are many unspoken rules about how to behave and what paths are acceptable. But those expectations also shape you in meaningful ways. With *Left-Handed Girl*, I wanted to explore that complexity — the push and pull between tradition and individuality. I hope to encourage people to reflect on where they come from and also to feel empowered to carve out their own path, even if it’s not a straight one.

Interview with Sean Baker

**Your collaboration with Shih-Ching Tsou goes back a long way. You co-wrote and edited *Left-Handed Girl*. What sets this film apart from your earlier collaborations**

I totally withdrew from all physical production, and wasn't present a single day on the set. Shih-Ching produced it, cast it, assembled the technical team and, of course, directed it. Before editing, after all the years it took to get this project off the ground, I spent time with her in Taiwan while co-writing some new draft of the script, then refined it until it was ready to be shot. After that, I stayed out of the process, until the dailies came in. It was very strange to edit this film, though, because it was the first time I'd done it for someone else. Especially as, despite having co-written the script, I relinquished all control.

**And yet you've followed *Left-Handed Girl*'s evolution closely, from the first draft of the script...**

We started writing years ago, but everything in the story was already there. We wrote it in English, but once it was translated into Mandarin, some nuances appeared in the dialogue. And of course, between the time we started writing it and the time we went to Taiwan for a long stay in 2010, there were some adjustments, but in the end the script is very close to the original intention.

**The fact that it was written in English is not just a detail: most of your films are about a community, a specific identity. *Left-Handed Girl* is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Did this have an impact on your editing?**

Yes and no: *Left-Handed Girl* is not my first immersion in the Chinese community. *Take Out*, which Shih-Ching and I co-directed, preceded it. As far as Chinese culture is concerned, we incorporated it right from the writing stage. Moreover, there wasn't much improv from the actors on *Left-Handed Girl*, so the dialogues we'd both agreed on didn't change much, and I was familiar with Chinese acting intentions and modulations. But of course, the cultural connection was there, if only in the central idea of a child scolded for using her right hand. Or in the weight of secrets... All this came from Shih-Ching, so all we had to do was figure out how to build a linear narrative structure around these elements.

***Left-Handed Girl* seems similar to your own films in its use of natural settings, from which you build an aesthetic.**

Absolutely. This film was essentially born out of our desire to make a film set in Taiwan's night market. We adapted our ideas to the location, making our protagonists this family who have a shop there. And above all, we knew that the energy and life that emanate from this place made it particularly cinematic: there's the constant hustle and bustle, the lights, the food being cooked. And all the colors. We knew that all this, as well as the rendering of this ant-hill nightlife, would be exciting to capture on film.

**Your films are also often inspired by the stories of local people you've met. *Left-Handed Girl* is partly rooted in Shih-Ching's own life experiences. Was this an advantage or a handicap in co-writing or editing this movie?**

Not really. As with all our other films, the starting point was the desire to tell a story at a human level, with highly embodied characters. In my films, I draw on the authenticity of details from encounters, and this was no different, except that we drew on Shih-Ching's background to create a story and dramatize it. In fact, I don't really know what comes from her life in this film. I do know, however, that she wanted it to tackle the question of equality between men and women in society, because she felt that during the years she lived in Taiwan, this fed a certain frustration in her. The last part of *Left-Handed Girl* is clearly a catharsis for her and for the characters.

**Does *Left-Handed Girl* confirm a new phase in your career as a filmmaker? After *Anora*, for which you were credited with the screenplay for the first time, this is the first solo film directed by one of your closest collaborators. Does this represent a new trend?**

Absolutely. But it's an idea that's been in the air for a long time. Whether it was with Shih-Ching or Chris Bergoch, my other recurring co-writer, we always told ourselves that even though we work together, and are very proud of these yarns, each of us would end up making our own. We just built a common work space where we could develop our personal visions so that they could express themselves fully one day. That's why I'm so pleased that Shih-Ching has been able to bring *Left-Handed Girl* to fruition. Even if I'm part of it, it's really and totally her movie.

## CAST

SHIH-YUAN MA	I-Ann
JANEL TSAI	Shu-Fen
NINA YE	I-Jing
BRANDO HUANG	JOHNNY



## Technical sheet

Directed by	SHIH-CHING TSOU
Written by	SHIH-CHING TSOU SEAN BAKER
Produced by	SHIH-CHING TSOU
Producers	SEAN BAKER MIKE GOODRIDGE JEAN LABADIE ALICE LABADIE
Executive Producers	ALEX C. LO NEILL BARHAM ADITYA CHAND JENNIFER JAO
Cinematographers	KO-CHIN CHEN TZU-HAO KAO
Editor	SEAN BAKER
Production Manager	MIKE GOODRIDGE
1st AD	HUNG-LI HSIEH
Sound	BONAS HUANG SIDNEY HU

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