

The Filmmaker and the Composer: Hu Tai-Li and Shih-Hui Chen

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During the spring of 2013, Hu Tai-Li and Shih-Hui Chen, two Taiwanese-born scholar-artists, will present an original mixed media event at a number of major American universities.

Hu Tai-Li did her Ph.D. in anthropology at the City University of New York, studying with Professor Burton Pasternak. She also took anthropology classes at Columbia University with Professor Myron Cohen, who will host the event, which is sponsored by Columbia's Weatherhead East Asian Institute.

When Dr. Hu returned to Taiwan, she became a member of the Institute of Ethnology, which is housed in a building the size of a village. She first did the usual kind of clear-cut fieldwork research and writing. Her first book, *My Mother-in-Law's Village* (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 1984), is a detailed study of a dying rural culture in Taiwan. The book is written with clarity and deep feeling for the individuals and families facing such profound change.

In the years that followed she produced five more books before shifting her mode of scholarly presentation and becoming a self-taught documentary filmmaker – a radical step, but one particularly suited to the way she approached the material. Her first film, *Passing through My Mother-in-Law's Village*, expanded upon her first book and was a superb piece of work; and she has since proven herself in film after film, examining yuanzhumin religion and culture in films such as *Stone Dream*, a masterpiece that illuminates the life of a people and their religion. *Voices of Orchid Island* is another quietly powerful film, which is both an introduction to a well-known island and its people and a condemnation of Taiwan's methods of storing atomic waste from their reactors. Her other ethnographic films include: *The Return of Gods and Ancestors*, *Songs of Pasta'ay*, *Sounds of Love and Sorrow*, *After Passing*, and most recently, *Returning Souls*.

The familiarity with and fluency in both Taiwanese and U.S. cultures evidenced in Hu Tai-Li's work are apparent in the career and the work of Shih-Hui Chen as well. Born in Taiwan, Professor Chen did a DMA at Boston University and currently teaches at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

Recognition of a composer's talent comes in a number of ways; commissions are of prime significance. Professor Chen has received commissions from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, Chamber Music America, Meet The Composer, the Tanglewood Music Center, and the Barlow Foundation. As well, the orchestral works she has composed have been performed by a number of major orchestras, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, and the Utah Symphony. She has also composed chamber music, which has been presented by the Arditti Quartet, the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, the Seattle Chamber Players, the Ensemble Instrumental Appassionata (in Quebec, Canada), and the Freon Ensemble (in Rome, Italy). Recent performances of Professor Chen's compositions include *Mei Hua* for String Quartet by the Formosa Quartet at Lincoln Center, the Library of Congress, and throughout the UK; *Fu II* by

eighth blackbird with Yang Wei and Cliff Colnot in the Contempo Series at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago; Returnings by Dinosaur Annex in Boston; ... becoming... a mini-flute concerto by Carol Wincenc at the Juilliard School; and Our Names by Network for New Music in Philadelphia.

Finally, Professor Chen's work has received significant recognition in the form of grants that have included a Guggenheim Fellowship, an American Academy in Rome Prize, and in 2010, a Fulbright Fellowship to live in Taiwan and research aboriginal music and Nanguan music. At Academia Sinica she met anthropologist and filmmaker Hu Tai-Li, and they formed an artistic partnership. Shih-Hui Chen wrote the film score for Hu Tai-Li's documentary film, *Returning Souls*, which tells the story of the aboriginal Amis, and how their young people recovered the souls of their ancestors for the tribe.