

WIP F - The Third Wife (Working title)



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN : Vietnam

GENRE | FORMAT | LANGUAGE | RUNNING TIME : Drama | HD | Vietnamese | 100 -120 mins

DIRECTOR :
NGUYEN Phuong Anh

PRODUCER :
TRAN Ngoc

WIP GOALS :
Funds, Sales agents, Pre-sales, Festival Screening

PRODUCTION COST :
US\$750,000

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY :
First Feature Direct

ONE-SENTENCE SYNOPSIS

In 19th-century rural Vietnam, newly married 14-year-old May must fight to find her own place within a household full of strangers.

SYNOPSIS

In late 19th-century rural Vietnam, 14-year-old May is given away in an arranged marriage. She becomes the third wife to her husband, Hung, a man brought up to believe that power is about

control. After the violent wedding night, May learns that she can only gain status by asserting herself, not just as a sexual being, but also as a woman who can and will give birth to a male child.

May's hope to change her situation turns into a real and tantalising possibility when she becomes pregnant.

However, the path towards security is fraught with danger when May starts to develop an attraction for Xuan, the second wife. May discovers that Xuan is having an affair with her husband's firstborn, Son. This both excites and frightens her. Xuan's beauty and freedom, especially in nature, draws May like a moth to the flame. The affair comes to a breaking point when May's husband decides to find his son a young wife, also via an arranged marriage.

May grows close to Son and is sympathetic to his heartbreak, because she is also harbouring forbidden love for the same woman. When May cannot contain her feelings any longer and confesses how she feels to Xuan, the rejection devastates her. On the day of Son's wedding, we see that the new bride, Tuyet, is younger than May and is even more terrified. Rejected by both Son and her new family, the young girl hangs herself.

The night Tuyet dies, May goes into labour. She gives birth to a baby girl and finds herself lost amidst the preparation of the funeral. May realises she must make a choice to either carry on in silence and safety or forge a way towards personal freedom, the price for which may be greater than her own life.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The inspirations for *The Third Wife* have surrounded me all my life. Many of the women in my family lived through both the French Indochina War and the Vietnam War. The stories I inherited were always filled with life-and-death situations. The characters in my film, especially the three wives, are drawn from a collection of true stories and real people.

May is desperate to have a son because the child leads to status, power and safety. What she does not realise is that love eventually causes these desires to become mundane and meaningless. May's growth as a sexual being is subtle but also significant. May's relationship with the second wife, Xuan, and her desire for Xuan attest to the shades of intimacy women have with themselves and with each other. Same-sex love was more of a taboo than sexual violence and even abortion. I wanted to look at how the foundation of our morality undergoes metamorphoses through the ages and how these reflect the differences in gender expectation in the period.

This story is not only about how the women are thwarted by a patriarchal society. Even though it might have been to a lesser degree, the men of the period also suffered from severe restrictions of personal freedom. A chauvinistic society hurts everyone, men and women both.

The theme of escape and transformation is prevalent in my story, and I hope to convey this not just through characters and plot but also through imagery. Throughout the film, characters find

ways to leave the imposing constriction of the house by appealing to nature. Unfortunately, they are never entirely successful.

DIRECTOR

NGUYEN Phuong Anh

Nguyen Phuong Anh (aka Ash Mayfair) is an award-winning writer-director who divides her time between New York and Vietnam. She was born in Vietnam and educated in the UK and the US. She received a BA from the University of Oxford in English Literature and a post-graduate degree from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London for theatre directing. Her foray into directing for the screen began in 2006, when her short *The Convent Threshold* won Best Student Short at the Oxford Film Festival in the UK. She has made several short films since then, all of which have been screened at numerous film festivals in the US and internationally.

PRODUCER

TRAN Thi Bich Ngoc

Tran Thi Bich Ngoc (Tran Ngoc) graduated from Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Cinema in 1998. Since then, she has produced and gained tremendous experience in Vietnam's film industry. She is the producer of *Big Father, Small Father and Other Stories* (2014), directed by Phan Dang Di, was selected for official competition at the Berlin International Film Festival 2015. The film *The Third Wife*, was presented at the 14th HAF and won the HAF Award for Non-Hong Kong project. Her ambition is to support Vietnamese filmmakers and help bring Vietnamese cinema to the world.

PRODUCTION COMPANY

An Nam Productions

An Nam Films was established and is operated by Tran Thi Bich Ngoc in 2015. The purpose of the company is to help support young filmmakers, and it allows her to have full control over creativity and financial matters.

Three Colors Productions

Three Colors Productions is an initiative that encourages new Vietnamese filmmakers to develop more personal and artistic stories. It is fostered by the Vietnamese Broadcasting Corporation (VBC), a production company that specialises in reality television and branded content in Ho Chi Minh City. Under Three Colors and VBC, Nguyen Phuong Anh has developed and brought to execution more than 100 hours of broadcasted content, including children shows, lifestyle segments, game shows, travel documentaries and news casts.