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VENICE DAYS

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再見瓦城

A film by Midi Z

The Road to Mandalay

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The Road to Mandalay

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Producer : Patrick Mao Huang - patrick@ffe.com.tw

ABOUT THE FILM

108min | 1.85 | 7.1 | Taiwan · France · Germany · Myanmar

Genre | Drama

Producers | Patrick Mao HUANG / Midi Z

Leading Cast | Kai KO / WU Ke-Xi

Presented by

Fine Time Entertainment Int'l. Inc.

CMC Entertainment Holding Corporation

Star Ritz International Entertainment Co.Ltd,

Presented and produced by

Seashore Image Productions

Flash Forward Entertainment

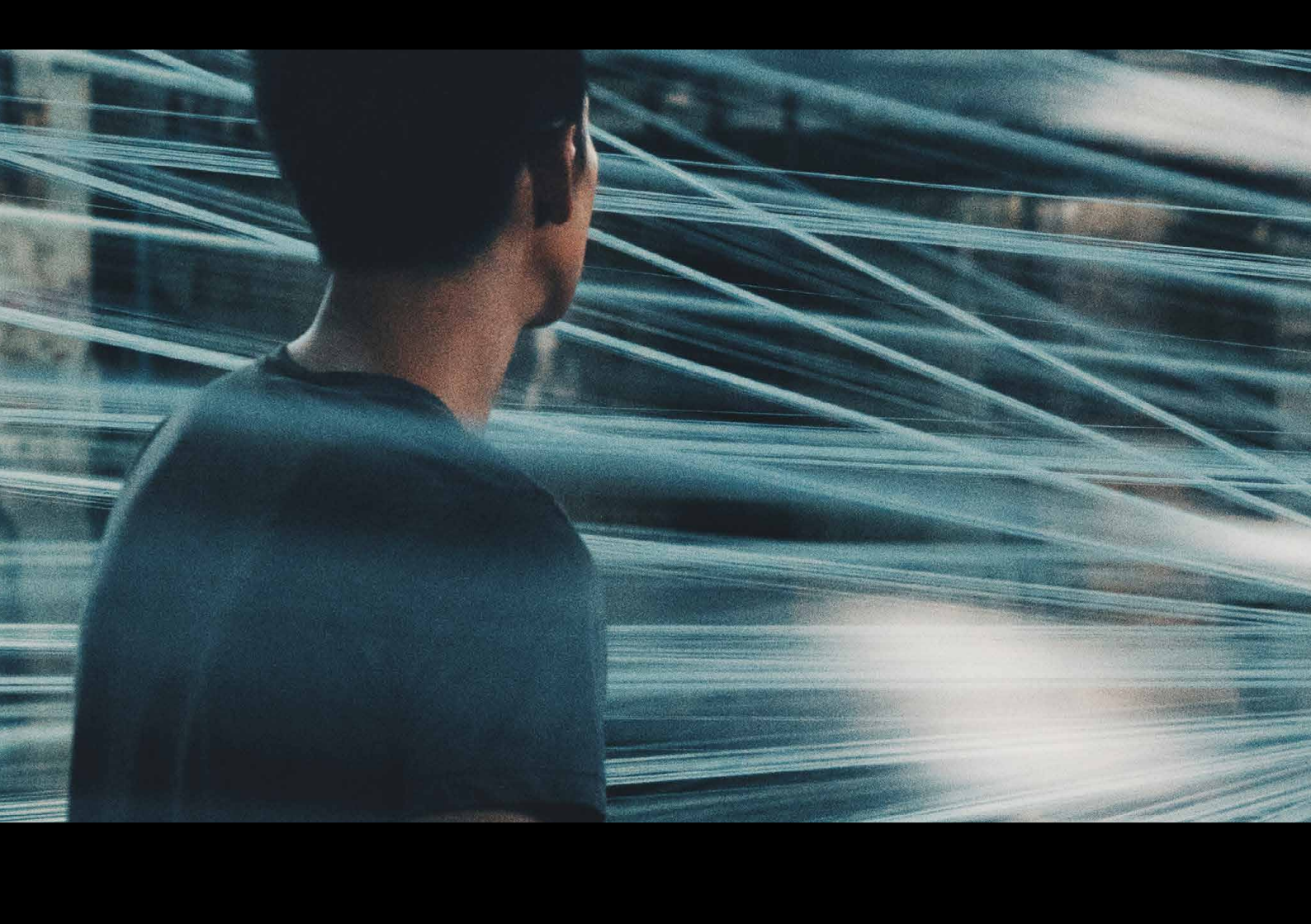
House On Fire

Myanmar Montage Films

In coproduction with

Bombay Berlin film production

Pop Pictures Company Limited





SHORT SYNOPSIS

The human-traffickers have a well-established route: from Burma into Thailand across the Mekong River at Tchilek, along quiet country roads, passing bribed police checkpoints and into Bangkok, where the illegal migrants are on their own. Lianqing is one of five illegals who travels this route one summer night in 2013; along the way a fellow migrant called Guo is kind to her, and their fates later become entwined. Once in Thailand, Lianqing finds 'underground' jobs, saves money and finds out where to buy fake identity papers with the hope of making it to Taiwan. But Guo has different ambitions...

SYNOPSIS

Lianqing is quite typical of the many small-town Burmese who have crossed illegally into Thailand in search of better earnings and opportunities. She puts herself in the hands of the people-traffickers one summer night in 2011. They cross the Mekong River, ride a truck along country backroads, pass bribed police checkpoints and finally reach Bangkok. Along the way, a fellow migrant named Guo is kind to her, and their fates will later become entwined.

Lianqing has prearranged a place to stay with Hua, an old friend from home, but she's dismayed to find Hua unwelcoming, even hostile. Another flatmate, Maomei, is more helpful: she explains that Lianqing will not be able to get a decent, paying job without identity papers and a work permit. By chance, though, Lianqing finds work as a dishwasher and waitress in a small restaurant whose owner is Burmese-Chinese, like herself. She soon starts saving money and sending some home to her mother. But the jealous Hua throws her out of the shared flat, falsely accusing her of theft, and it's Guo who comes to her rescue with a temporary bed at his relative's place. She soon starts sleeping in a shared room above the restaurant.

Guo suggests that she leaves the restaurant and joins him in a textiles factory in the outer suburbs of the city. Lianqing prefers to stay in central Bangkok, but when the restaurant is unexpectedly raided by the police she has no choice but to take up Guo's offer. Factory work is exhausting and arduous, and Guo (like most of the other men) takes amphetamines to get himself through the long night shifts. From her workmates, Lianqing learns that she can buy legal identity papers in a mountainous area in northern Thailand. During their days off for the Songkran Festival, she and Guo travel north to buy the papers – only to find the process longer and more complicated than they've been led to expect.

It's several months later when Lianqing discovers that Guo deliberately failed to pass on a message that her papers are ready; he possessively hopes to return to Burma with her, and so doesn't want her to settle permanently in Thailand. When she gets the paper – a certificate of local registration – she finds out that it's not enough to make her a legal resident. But then she gets an unforeseen break: an offer to assume the identity of a girl her own age who has died in the mountain village. She nervously steels herself to face more formalities, including a face-to-face interview with a police chief. It goes well, and she quits the factory job to move back into the city. But Guo, high on amphetamines, is not prepared to lose her.



AWARDS

Supported by

- Centre National De La Cinématographie Et De L'Image Animée Ministère Des Affaires Étrangères Et Du Développement International
- World Cinema Fund
- Ministry of Culture, Republic of China (Taiwan) - The Rainbow Initiative Funds for Collaborative Cultural Projects
- Asian Cinema Fund, Busan Film Festival 2012

International Film Festival

- **Venice International Film Festival** - World premiere
- **Toronto International Film Festival** - North American premiere
- **Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival** - Closing film

Awards

- 2015 L'Atelier of Cinefondation of Festival de Cannes
- ARTE International Prize
- 2015 CNC Les Rencontres Du Cinéma Taïwanais
- Lightbox Prize
- Les 3 Continents Prize
- 2014 Festival International du Film D'Amiens
- Grand Prize
- 2014 The Golden Horse Film Project Promotion
- Taipei New Horizon Script Cash Prize
- Pixelfly Digital Effects Post-Production Prize



Midi Z

writer/director/producer

Born in Myanmar in 1982, Midi Z arrived in Taiwan at the age of sixteen. He studied design and art before obtaining a master degree from the National Taiwan University of Technology and Science. In 2006, his graduation film, Paloma Blanca, was invited to several festivals such as Busan and Gothenburg. In 2011, Return to Burma, his debut feature, was nominated for the Busan New Currents Competition and Rotterdam Tiger Competition. In 2014, Ice Poison won Best International Film at the Edinburgh Film Festival and represented Taiwan at Foreign Language Oscars.

Features

2016 The Road to Mandalay
2014 Ice Poison
2012 Poor Folk
2011 Return to Burma

Documentary

2016 City of Jade
2015 Jade Miners

Short Film

2014 The Palace on the Sea
2013 Silent Asylum
2009 Hua-xin Incident
2008 Motorcycle Driver
2006 Paloma Blanca



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In Burma (also known as Myanmar), Mandalay was the former royal capital. Economic migrants returning to the country invariably pass through it, partly because of its geographical location, but also to buy presents for their folks in the towns and villages they came from. Mandalay's markets offer goods not available elsewhere, and that has made it an essential stop for returning Burmese who are 'rich' thanks to their earnings abroad.

My father worked as a doctor until he passed away, but he had no formal qualifications. He didn't graduate from a medical college; his formal education ended when he left primary school. His knowledge of medicine was self-taught during Burma's civil wars, and so few people turned to him for medical help. Once in a while, though, people from remote villages would come to him, usually arriving in the small hours. I recall one stormy night in 1992 when someone knocked at our door. It was during the monsoon season, and the rain was torrential. The visitor was a distant relative, arriving in a hired military jeep, asking my father to attend a patient in his hometown thirty kilometres away.

My father didn't get back until the following day. He told us that he'd been called to a death scene, not a living patient. The bodies were those of a newly married couple, who had returned to Burma from Thailand for their wedding. But three days later the husband stabbed his wife to death and cut his own throat; he managed to all but sever his own head.

The dead man's mother wanted the huge gash to be stitched up before he was laid in his coffin. We never knew the full details, but it seems they planned to return to Thailand after the wedding. The husband apparently changed his mind, and that was what led to the tragedy. My father was good at giving us the benefit of his wisdom on such occasions. I recall what he told us: "The wife was ambitious to go abroad again but the husband was too timid – that was the tragedy!"

That incident provided the seed for *The Road to Mandalay*. It left a strong impression on me, but I never thought much about it or tried to find out the precise details of what happened. Afterwards my mother often asked me to write to my sister and brother in Thailand, urging them to stay in touch with the family regularly. When they wrote, those who worked in other countries never mentioned the hardships they suffered, only their moments of happiness. Their letters generally left us to imagine what their lives were actually like, and the money they wired us gave us the impression that they were doing quite well. It was only when I passed through Bangkok on my way to study in Taiwan that I understood the difficulties and pain they endured as 'overseas workers'. In Burma, there's a saying that there are three ways for the poor to escape from their poverty. One is to become a drug smuggler, one is to work in the jade mines, and the third is to smuggle yourself into another country. Illegally moving to Thailand is the most popular of these three options, since it's relatively low-risk and sounds better when it's described as "going abroad".

Since the late 1970s, countless Burmese have found their way into other countries – Thailand in particular. A 2008 survey conducted by a human-rights organization estimated that there were three million Burmese migrant workers in Thailand, two million of them having entered the country illegally.

The situation faced by migrant workers in 2016 is the same as it was thirty years ago. There's no end to these incredible, heartbreaking stories, despite Burma's transition to greater democracy and liberalism. Young Burmese who feel imprisoned in their own country still regard Thailand and other countries as places where they would be 'free' and enjoy a brighter future. They have no idea that they will be 'imprisoned' again – and this time in a bigger prison.

I'm fortunate. If I hadn't moved to Taiwan to study, I could well have ended up like one of the characters in this film. Stories like the one told in *The Road to Mandalay* sound unexceptional to us. Sometimes real-world experiences are more dramatic – and more cruel – than the stories told in the movies.

Between 2008 and 2011, I spent some three years doing field research in Thailand and Burma. I interviewed more than a hundred Burmese migrants in Thailand, and came up with several storylines set in different periods with different endings. I eventually settled on the story closest to my own experience and, in 2015, turned that story in this film as best I could with the limited resources available.

The fact is that people pursue a sense of security in their lives in different ways. Behind a "sense of security" lie money, material comforts, steady jobs and identity papers. Some also need spiritual comforts, like the characters in *The Road to Mandalay*. The man needs love to prove his own existence, while the woman seeks security from acquiring 'papers'.

How on earth can anyone prove their own existence? And if there's no concrete proof, to which group, which country, which ethnicity does one belong?



LEADING CAST

Kai KO

Born in 1991, Kai Ko became famous at the age of twenty from his debut film, *You are the Apple of My Eye* (2011) directed by Giddens Ko. While his fame grew as the film's box office reached more than 1.2 billion NTD in Asia, his role "Ko Teng" in that title won him Best New Performer at the 48th Golden Horse Awards. He then starred in a few Taiwanese films, such as *When the Wolf Falls in Love with a Sheep*. In year 2013, he starred in the popular teen series adapted from renowned Chinese writer Guo Jingming's novel, *Tiny Times*. The success then led to his popularity in China, and brought him to be casted in Giddens Ko's novel-adapted film, *A-Choo* (directed by Kevin Ko and Peter Tsi).

Ko's beating young heart has endowed him a temperament balanced between boy and man, full of theatrical potential to be sculptured into various characters, while his rich imagination, observation, and compassion help him manifest the characters' inner emotions. Director Hou Chi-Jan, who had cooperated with Ko in *When a Wolf Falls in Love with a Sheep*, once described him as "a born actor who achieves certain things effortlessly—which is never easy."

In 2015, Ko starred in Midi Z's film "*Road to Mandalay* (2016)" in which he plays an factory worker and a stowaway. Unlike any of his previous works, this challenging role is believed to open up a new page for his acting career. "*Road to Mandalay* (2016)" is announced to be selected in 73th Venice International Film Festival.

2016 The Road to Mandalay

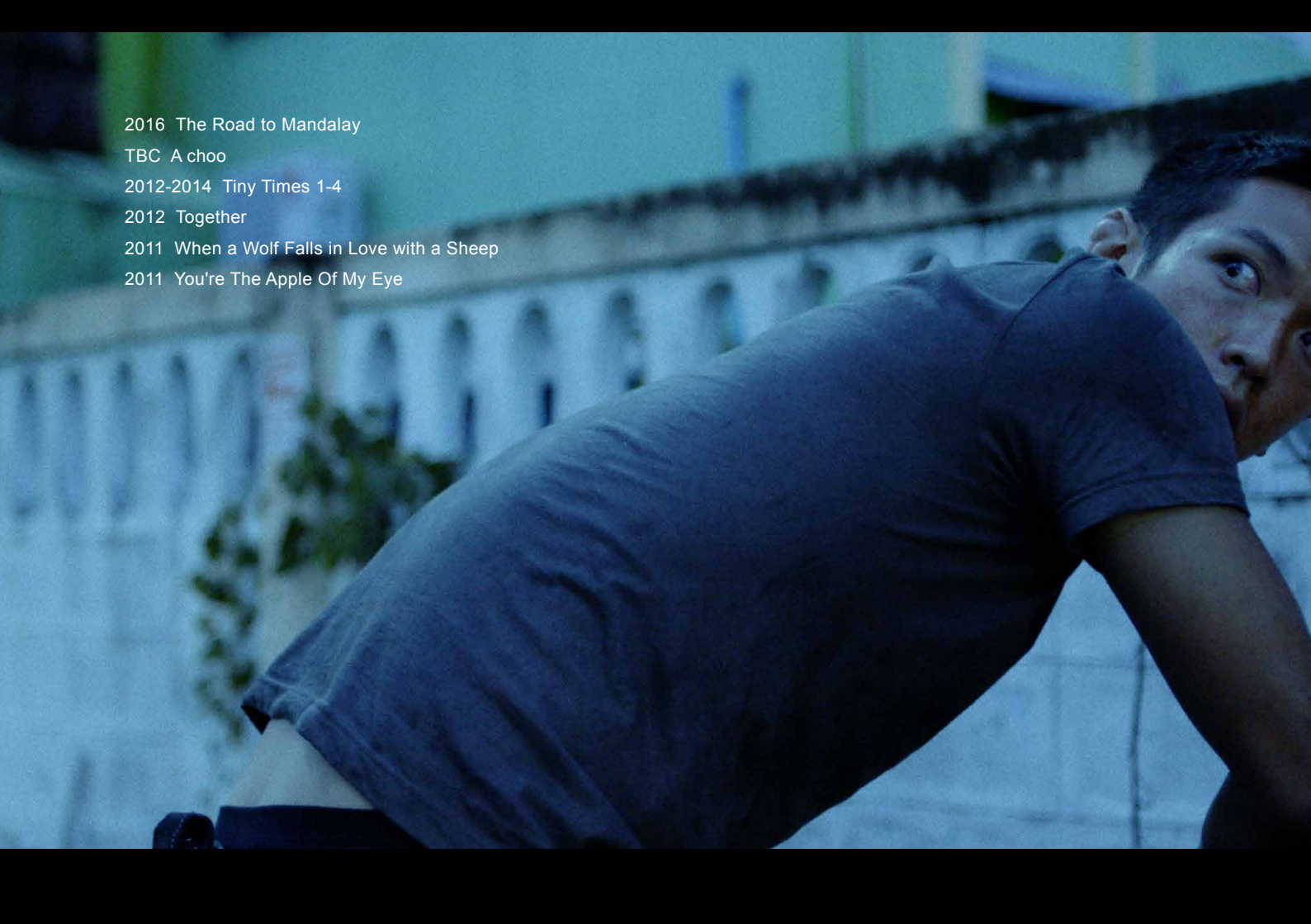
TBC A choo

2012-2014 Tiny Times 1-4

2012 Together

2011 When a Wolf Falls in Love with a Sheep

2011 You're The Apple Of My Eye




WU Ke-Xi

Taiwanese actress Wu Kexi obtained a BA in Turkish from the National Chengchi University. She began her career in street dance and later moved on to stage, advertising and television.

Since Wu met Burmese-Taiwanese director Midi Z in 2010, she has starred in several films set in Myanmar. In order to play these Chinese-Burmese women, whose backgrounds are completely different her own, Wu had been learning the “Burmese Yunnan dialect” for two years and spent long periods of time with the local people in the mountain villages in Myanmar. These experiences have greatly helped her get close to the characters in the stories.

In 2012, Wu collaborated with Midi Z for the first time in *Poor Folk*, which was followed by the 2013 short *Silent Asylum*. In 2014, Wu was nominated for Best Actress at the Chinese Film Media Awards for *Ice Poison* and won Best Actress at the Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia in Tokyo for her performance in *The Palace on the Sea*. In recent years, Wu began to participate in the Taiwanese commercial productions such as *Two Idiots* to extend her repertoire. Hailed as one of the most promising Taiwanese actors, Wu always turns herself into the characters she plays on the screen, and therefore people often fail to recognize the modern Taiwanese woman when Wu appears as herself in real life.

For the character in *The Road to Mandalay*, an illegal Burmese migrant worker in Thailand, Wu spent a year living in a Burmese mountain village and working in a factory in Bangkok to get herself into the role.

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- 2016 The Road to Mandalay
 - 2016 Two Idiots
 - 2014 Jump Off or Live On - Short Film
 - 2014 Ice Poison
 - 2014 The Palace On The Sea - Short Film
 - 2014 Letters from the South
 - 2013 Silent Asylum -Short film
 - 2012 Poor Folk
 - 2010 It All Comes Too Late - Short Film
 - 2010 Individualism - Short Film





PRODUCER

Patrick Mao HUANG

Patrick Mao Huang studied in American Film Institute and Columbia University Graduate Film School. He founded production and distribution company Flash Forward Entertainment in 2002. His producing credits include feature films ICE POISON, POOR FOLK, RETURN TO BURMA, ETERNAL SUNSHINE; documentaries BASEBALL BOYS, THE PIGEON GAME, animation A FISH WITH A SMILE and TV series AMOUR ET PATISSERIE. His films have been selected by Berlinale, Busan, Rotterdam etc. and won numerous awards. Moreover, ICE POISON was selected as the official Taiwan entry for the 87th Academy Awards Best Foreign Language Film. Huang is also a veteran film distributor in Taiwan.



CREW

Presenters | WANG Shih-Hsiung
Bob WONG
Angie CHAI

Associate Producers | CHOU Shih Yung
Aster LAW
Dennis WU

Writer & Director | Midi Z

Director of Photography | Tom FAN

Producers | Patrick Mao HUANG
Midi Z

Lighting designer | HU Yu-Hao

Co-producers | Vincent WANG
Dominique WELINSKI
Aditya ASSART
ZHAO De-Fu
Katharina SUCKALE
ARFI LAMBA

Production Designer | Akekarat Homlaor

Editor | Matthieu LACLAU

Composer | LIM Giong

Sound Desingers | TU Duu-Chih
WU Shu-Yao

Make up & Hair | WANG Chia-Ying





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The Road to Mandalay

