

ASIA TOPA
JANUARY — MARCH 2020

ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE, ACMI AND VICTORIAN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS PRESENT

The Mysterious Lai Teck

HO TZU NYEN

4-7 MARCH

MARTYN MYER ARENA
VICTORIAN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS (VCA)
THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
55 mins

Concept, Direction, Text, Edit

Ho Tzu Nyen

Performer, Voice, Translation

Tay Kong Hui

Research Consultant

Marc Oppen

Lighting Design, Set, Technical Manager

Andy Lim

Sound Design Jeffrey Yue

Musician Black to Comm

Animatronics Creature NFX Workshop Pty Ltd

Director of Photography Amandi Wong

Digital Visual Effects & CG Supervisor

Graham Lamb

CG Animation See Zhi Jie, Chow Shi Kai;

Pamela Lai Li Xin, Goh Si Ying;

Yusuf bin Adnan

Video Consultant Gaël Abegg Gauthey

Animatronics Specialist Paul Trefry

Animatronic Technician Dan Carlisle,

Gregory McKee

Show Control Engineer Steve Kwek

Production Stage Manager Mirabel Neo

Administrative Producer Yap Seok Hui

Producers Tzu + ARTFACTORY

The Mysterious Lai Teck was commissioned by Singapore International Festival of Arts and co-produced by Asia TOPA, International Summerfestival Kampnagel, National Museum of Modern & Contemporary Art Korea, Holland Festival, Kunstenfestivaldesarts, TPAM – Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama and Red Brick Art Museum. Proudly supported by ACMI, VCA, Playking Foundation, the National Arts Council (Singapore), Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (Singapore) and Arts Centre Melbourne.

No latecomers will be admitted

Performed in Mandarin, with English surtitles



POST-SHOW Q&A

WITH DIRECTOR HO TZU NYEN

In partnership with VCA and ACMI

7pm, Thursday 5 March

Martin Myer Arena (VCA)

Moderator: Fiona Trigg

THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tomoyuki Arai, Stephen Armstrong, Max-Philip Aschenbrenner, Claire Bonet, Kevin Chua, Tarek Abou El Fetouh, E-Tec Visualize Lab, Stephanie Goh, Annemieke Keurentjes, Seonghee Kim, Shinu Kim, Lena Kollender, Gaurav Kripalani, Frie Leysen, Hiromi Maruoka, Henning Mues, Muse Pte Ltd, András Siebold, Christophe Slagmuylder, Jobina Tan, Han van Poucke, Ye Junmin, Technical Team of Kampnagel & Kanagawa Arts Theatre.

ABOUT THE SHOW

The most astonishing thing about this byzantine thriller of spies, traitors, betrayal and deceit is that it actually happened.

The Mysterious Lai Teck centres around the man known as Lai Teck, the leader of the Malayan Communist Party from 1939 to 1947. He was revealed to be a triple agent who worked with the French, British and Japanese secret police. He was said to have been killed in 1947.

What little we know about Lai Teck today comes from other agents, spies and traitors, whose stories are edited, selected and re-narrated by the police, before passing into histories. From this mesh of fact and fiction emerges a story full of ghosts and gaps, told by a presence behind a veil of projections and theatrical drapes.

What begins as autobiography gradually proliferates into a polylogue about the ruthlessness of becoming, of being untimely, of crossing lines: the lines between the inside and the outside, fiction and espionage, agency and treachery.

Acclaimed Singaporean artist Ho Tzu Nyen guides you into Lai Teck's labyrinthine underworld in this evocative and haunting tale of lies and counter-lies. Richly theatrical, it is a snapshot of the shifting face of Southeast Asia in the Age of Treason.



Image: Courtesy the Artist

TIMELINE

- Pre-1,000,000 BCE:** During the driest period of the Ice Age, when sea levels were 150m below what they are today, much of Southeast Asia was a single landmass known as the Sunda Shelf.
- Pre-60,000 BCE:** The first Homo sapiens arrive in Southeast Asia.
- 1819 CE:** Sir Stamford Raffles of the British East India Company arrives in Singapore to establish a trading post.
- 1867 CE:** The Straits Settlements, which include Malacca, Dinding, Penang, and Singapore, come under direct British control as a Crown colony.
- Post-1887 CE:** Under the pretext of protecting the work of Catholic missionaries in the country, France progressively carves for itself a huge colony, leading to the formation of French Indochina in 1887.
- Post-1900 CE:** The man known as 'Lai Teck' is born in Vietnam.
- 1934 CE:** 'Lai Teck' arrives in Singapore from Vietnam. He is known by more than 30 known aliases.
- 1939 CE:** 'Lai Teck' becomes the Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP).
- 1941 CE:** The first usage of the term 'Southeast Asia' (in its fully modern sense) appears in the book *Welfare and Progress in Southeast Asia*, by British-born colonial public servant and writer John Sydenham Furnivall. The military forces of the Empire of Japan invade Singapore and Malaysia (known together as Malaya). Founded on 18 December 1941 during the Japanese invasion of Malaya, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) is formed out of a combined effort by the Malayan Communist Party, British colonial government, and various anti-Japanese groups to resist the Japanese occupation of Malayan territory.

TIMELINE

- 1943 CE:** The idea of Southeast Asia as a single region is born with the establishment of the allied Southeast Asia Command (SEAC) under Lord Mountbatten to coordinate Allied operations in the region. From 1944 onwards, the first map of the area is produced, and the region is visualised as a geographic reality.
- 1945 CE:** The Japanese surrender. Radical factions in the MCP propose to take advantage of the power vacuum in Malaya, and the huge cache of weapons gathered through the MPAJA, to begin an armed takeover of Malaya. Lai Teck dissuades the Party from this strategy. The British Military administration re-occupies Malaya.
- 1947 CE:** 'Lai Teck' is exposed as a triple agent, who was working for the French, British, and the Japanese secret police. He escapes with the Party's funds to Thailand, where he is believed to have been killed.
- 1948 CE:** Under the new leadership of Lai Teck's former protégé, Chin Peng, the Malayan Communist Party launches an armed struggle and The Malayan Emergency is declared. But the strategic initiative is lost, and the MCP retreat to the forests, where they gradually recede from memory.



Image: Image Centre, Red Brick Art Museum

CREATOR'S MESSAGE

“But neither physical violence nor psychological pressure is the unavoidable lot of the captured spy. It is still possible for him to cause much confusion to the enemy by supplying false information under the guise of collaboration. To do this, however, requires certain prerequisites, of which the most important is your own memory. To work the deception properly he must also be able to judge from the way his interrogators frame their questions just how much they know and what they do not know.”

Ronald Seth

The Anatomy of Spying: A history of espionage and betrayal

“The traitor is the human manifestation of a political landscape marked by obscurity, abstraction, and lack of transparency, a crisis of both community and enmity. This situation evokes a whole range of political figures whose common denominator is their irregularity.”

Eva Horn

The Secret War: Treason, Espionage and Modern Fiction

“History did not guarantee the identity of reason and reality. Rather, history unfolded in the spaces between subjects and objects, men and nature, whose very non-identity was history’s motor force.”

Susan Buck Morss

The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute

“Laozi, thus, advises us to behave as water which effortlessly and without any interference flows from higher to lower grounds and in the same way, effortlessly and without interference, takes the shape of its containers.”

Truong Buu Lam

A Story of Vietnam

“Treason doth never prosper: what’s the reason?

Why, if it prosper, none dare call it treason.”

John Harington

Epigrams

BIOGRAPHY

HO TZU NYEN

Ho Tzu Nyen makes films, installations and theatrical performances that often begin as engagements with historical and philosophical texts and artefacts.

His one-person exhibitions include: Kunstverein in Hamburg (2018); Ming Contemporary Art Museum (Shanghai, 2018); Guggenheim Bilbao (2015); DAAD Galerie (2015); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2012). He represented the Singapore Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011).

His theatrical works have been presented at: The Kampnagel, Hamburg (2018); TPAM (2018); Asian Arts Theatre, Gwangju (2015); Wiener Festwochen (2014); Theater der Welt (2010); the KunstenFestivaldesArts (2006, 2008, 2018); and the Singapore Arts Festival (2006, 2008).

Tzu Nyen was awarded a DAAD Scholarship in Berlin (2014–2015) and the Grand Prize of the Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Signature Art Prize (2015).

ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE

PO Box 7585 MELBOURNE VIC 3004 Australia

T +61 3 9281 8000

info@artscentremelbourne.com.au

artscentremelbourne.com.au

ABN 83 295 983 059

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