

30 Years of Showmanship Part VII

Shooting on the Global Film Enterprises movie, "3 Ninja Kids", began in 1991, with John Turtletaub hired on as Director. It was an action/comedy about 3 young boys who know ninjitsu well enough to foil a gang of international criminals. Charlie Kao, who had worked as an Assistant Director in the Taiwan film industry between 1988 and 1989, was hired on as Second Unit Director (responsible for most action scenes). He was familiar with the Jackie Chan style of filmmaking and had Chan's fight choreographer and several of Chan's stunt men on his second unit team.

Before long, disagreements emerged between Charlie and the film's Director. Being familiar with the American style of action directing, Turtletaub wanted to run through an entire fight scene several times from beginning to end, in order to film several angles of the same scene for editing purposes. This method, however, is very tiring and tedious for actors, and can be especially difficult for child stars. According to the Jackie Chan style of action directing, individual segments of an entire fight scene are broken up, shot in short, sequential bits, and edited together, later. Knowing this, Charlie was constantly clashing with Turtletaub about how things should be done. So much so, in fact, that the Director threatened to quit on several occasions! In the end, though, he needed the job and stayed on. The film was finished and Charlie proved to be right about the best way to shoot a fight scene with kids.

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When finished and offered to distributors, a rough cut was shown to Jeffrey Katzenburg, who picked up the film for distribution by Disney's Touchstone label. Disney poured in \$800,000 to polish the rough cut up in post-production and changed the name to "3 Ninjas". The finished product was released in 1992, where it became the #4 box office hit of its premier week! It has spawned three sequels, all of which were produced by Shin Sang-ok (under the name, Simon Sheen) and his Sheen Productions. Charlie went on to serve as Stunt Coordinator on all of the sequels.

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