



Q&A

Guo Xiaolu has overcome the poverty of her youth to become a novelist, a documentarian, and now the self-described "village punk" talks about her first scripted film.

PAGE 4

the daily Pusan

Wednesday, October 14, 2009
THR.com/pusan

7

The Hollywood Reporter

The right tools to build film biz

By Karen Chu

Cultural policymakers across Asia assembled at the Asian Film Policy Forum on Tuesday to present the strategies to promote and develop film industries in their countries.

Filmmaking funds and subsidies, custom-free imports, tax incentives, infrastructure improvements, plus anti-piracy measures were named as measures to boost local film industries and lure foreign investments to Cambodia, Japan, Korea, Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand.

In Japan, the newly established Film Commission is tasked with attracting foreign filmmakers for location shoots and co-productions, while the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan has launched a 2 billion yen (US\$23 million) "Japanese Film and Moving Images" promotion plan

to rejuvenate Japanese film industry by supporting local film productions, promoting distribution, providing training to aspiring filmmakers, preserving and restoring Japanese films, and to implement an integrated program for promoting the media

continued on page 3



'Vihir'

REVIEW

By Elizabeth Kerr

Though dozens are made every year, it's not very often that song and dance-free Indian films get any kind of attention outside of India. "Vihir" probably doesn't stand much of a chance of changing that trend. Though Umesh Vinayak Kulkarni's well-produced drama is an incisive (if slow) examination of the way children handle death, interest in the film could be limited to large urban markets and broad-spectrum film festivals. There isn't much "Slumdog Millionaire" potential here.

Pune-based Sameer (Madan Deodhar) and his cousin Nachiket (Alok Rajwade) are best of friends despite their nominal age difference. Sameer is a college-bound student while Nachiket is slightly

continued on page 3

Chan tastes 'Duck'

Part of Jia's, X-Stream's four-film slate

By Karen Chu

Jackie Chan is in talks to play a role in "Flying Duck," a US\$5 million comic road movie produced by award winning helmer and festival favorite Jia Zhang-ke, under his production company X Stream Pictures, the director said in Pusan.

Jia was in Pusan to launch the first two films in an upcoming

100 million yuan (US\$14.7 million) four-picture slate scheduled for the coming year.

"Flying Duck," funded by China's Sunny Sky Culture and Media Investment Co., is described as a "cross-border bromance" by its Korean helmer, the Busan-born first-time feature director Baek Seung-Hoon, who studied at

continued on page 3

'Mafia' in line for prod'n grant

By Park Soo-mee

SEOUL - "The Dumb Mafia," a comedy action by Shim Young-rae ("D-War") was selected as one of the three finalists for a production grant from the Korea Creative Content Agency, a government-supported body that promotes local cultural content. Samg Animation's 3-D anime "Vroomies" and "Samhwa Networks' "Tele-cine-

ma" were the other winners.

The works have been mainly chosen for their potential to be turned into multi-purpose medium including animation, games and books through the original content. The winners will receive funding for up to 1.2 billion won (\$1 million). **THR**

WHAT'S INSIDE

► **Reviews** PAGE 5-7



ETSUSHI TOYOKAWA

(“Love Letter” “20th Century Boys”)

A Film by
ISAO YUKISADA

A GOOD HUSBAND

今度は愛妻家



HIROKO YAKUSHIMARU

(“Always - Sunset on Third Street”)

Oct 14 (wed) 17h30 Press & Industry Screening
at CGV Cine de Chef A

Oct 15 (thu) 16h00 Outdoor Audience Meet-and-Greet
at PIFF Village Outdoor Stage
with Isao Yukisada, Etsushi Toyokawa, Hiroko Yakushimaru

19h30 Official Screening
at Outdoor Theater

Film forum

continued from page 1

arts. The agency is also seeking to increase Japanese presence at film festivals around the world, and has developed a program to help Japanese filmmakers participate in festivals. The new government led by prime minister Yukio Hatoyama will also introduce new policies with the help of advisors from within the film industry that aims to encourage collaborations with neighboring Asian countries, said Japan Film Commission chairman Ken Terawaki. "The new policy is shifting the focus from economic development to cultural development," he said. "Japan can now be seen as a new member with new determination."

The Korean Film Council, which oversees the Film Development Fund that amounts to 267.9 billion Korean Won (US\$229 million) in 2009 and has a budget of 50.7 billion Korean Won (US\$43.4 million), has provided financing support for local film productions, exports, promotions and industry infrastructure.

KOFIC's goal is to "push the Korean film industry to the next level, which means supporting the Korean film industry so that it can be self-sustainable," KOFIC chairperson Cho Hee-moon said.

The Council has invested 2.5 billion Korean Won (US\$2.1 million) into the Diversity Film Investment Partnership in 2009, plus another 3 billion Korean Won (US\$2.6 million) into the Development/Pre-production Agency, to launch 20-30 projects a year. It will also launch a media scale /co-production investment partnership of around 25 billion Korean Won (US\$21.4 million) tentatively titled "Global Fund," with KOFIC investing 12.2 billion Korean Won (US\$10.4 million), to strengthen bargaining power on copyrights through main investment, improve investment return rate through better contract conditions, increase penetration in new overseas market, and initiate experimental projects for industry structure renewal.

Under the Film Development Board, Nepal is giving precedence to co-productions of foreign language films and provides custom-free import of all film related goods for foreign investments, and, said Amar Raj Giri, chairperson of Nepal's Film Development Board. More than 400 million NRS (US\$5.4 million) is currently invested in the Nepali film industry.

Rising in profile and significance on the festival circuit, with filmmakers such as Brilliante Mendoza and Pepe Diokno winning accolades in Cannes and Venice, film-

makers in the Philippines have received support from their state-run Film Development Council in the form of subsidies totaling Php 30 million (US\$625,000) to attend overseas film festival.

Meanwhile, Thailand has introduced the Film Act 2008, for which a four-year strategy plan has been drafted with the objective to nurture the local film industry through human resources development, and will announce incentives to attract foreign productions such as tax privileges at the end of the year, said Thailand Film Office director Wanasiri Morakul. **THR**

CineAsia fetes Kimatrai

By Patrick Frater

Twentieth Century Fox's Sunder Kimatrai will receive the Distributor of the Year Award at the upcoming CineAsia convention (Dec 8-10, 2009.)

"In the world of distribution, you couldn't ask for a more dedicated and respected professional who has done so much for their company in bringing film into the hearts and minds of so many moviegoers internationally," said Robert Sunshine, MD of

the event, which like The Hollywood Reporter is part of the Nielsen Group.

Currently vp Asia Pacific, Kimatrai has spent much of his career in different roles at Twentieth Century Fox International. He has worked for the company in Mumbai, Singapore and Malaysia, and is now based in Sydney, Australia. He was last year involved in the establishment of Fox's production and distribution joint venture with STAR TV. **THR**

'Duck'

continued from page 1

China's Beijing Film Academy and is fluent in Chinese. The comedy is produced by Jia and his X Stream partner Chow Keung, and stars Chinese actress Ni Hong-jie and Korean actor Choi Joon-suk.

The producers are in talks with Jackie Chan, Chinese star Ge You ("If You Are the One"), and Hong Kong actor Tony Leung Kar-fai ("The Lover") to appear in the film in cameo or larger roles. "Jackie Chan is very supportive of our initiative to launch new Asian directors," producer Chow said. "He has expressed interest in this film, and his role will play on his cop persona (from the 'Police Story' series)."

"Flying Duck" marks the first collaboration between Hong Kong/Beijing-based X Stream Pictures and Beijing's Sunny Sky Culture and Media Investment Co., which is developing towards an international market, said Sunny Sky GM Hu Meng-xin. The companies are also producing "Love Replacement" by director Tang Xiaobai ("Perfect Life").

Filming will begin in November.

Jia also presented "I Wish I Knew," a documentary on Shanghai produced by China's Shanghai Film Group, X stream Pictures, Beijing Yiming Media International and Star Art Vision. **THR**

'Vihir'

continued from page 1

less ambitious, still unsure as to where he wants to go in his life. The two boys finally meet up after corresponding through letters (actual pen and paper letters) for a relative's wedding in the country. Their easy camaraderie is punctuated by swims in the local well (the title's literal translation). It's clear from the

behavior following the news always feels right. Sameer's final act visit to his grandfather's home sees "Vihir" going to the proverbial well a few too many times; the film could have easily ended twice before it finally does. But the subtleties and quiet introspection otherwise overshadow that minor indulgence.

Sudheer Palsane's lush and emollient cinematography is "Vihir"'s greatest strength; the DOP avoids flash and dash in favor of steady, traditional shooting that captures the essence of place and allows the family dynamic to reveal itself within the unfettered frames. Those details are nicely rendered in naturalistic and believable performances from the supporting cast, and go a long way to creating a context for Sameer's sorrow. **THR**

► NEW CURRENTS

BOTTOM LINE

Carefully observed meditation of how kids process grief

PRODUCTION COMPANY: AB Corp. Ltd.

CAST: Madan Deodhar, Alok Rajwade, Jtoy Subhash, Mohan Agashe.

DIRECTOR: Umesh Vinayak Kulkarni.

SCREENWRITER: Girish Kulkarni, Sati Bhave. No rating, 117 minutes

GUO XIAOLU

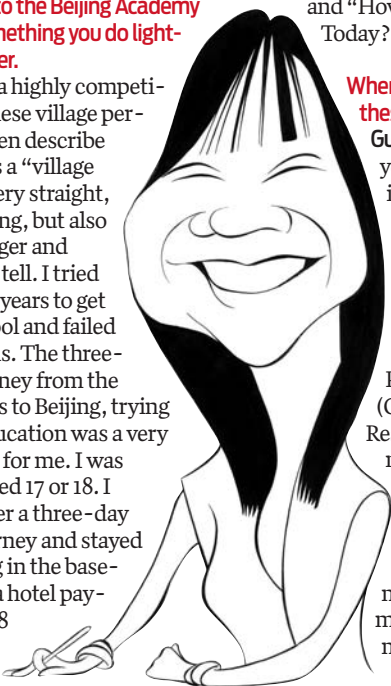
Guo Xiaolu has defied the poverty and obscurity of her youth in rural China to deliver a breathless string of novels and documentaries beloved by the European art house circuit. In Pusan she presents her first scripted feature “She A Chinese” and her latest documentary “Once Upon A Time Proletarian.” The self-professed “village punk” talks to Patrick Frater.

Why and how did you become a filmmaker?

Guo Xiaolu: There are two reasons. One is romantic and one intellectual. I wanted to tell stories through cinema. As a teenager you see these Soviet films or propaganda films and think how wonderful it would be to tell stories like that. Then I went to the Beijing Film Academy and somehow managed to stay for 9 years, going from undergraduate to teacher. So, I was trained as a filmmaker and an intellectual. I actually avoided making film for a long time. I started as a poet at 13 or 14 and had them published regularly. And I’d completed a novel before I went to film school. I was worried about financing and producing films, so I kept putting it off. Eventually I had to.

To get in to the Beijing Academy is not something you do lightly, however.

Guo: I’m a highly competitive Chinese village person. I often describe myself as a “village punk.” Very straight, very strong, but also full of anger and things to tell. I tried for three years to get into school and failed the exams. The three-year journey from the provinces to Beijing, trying to get education was a very big thing for me. I was alone, aged 17 or 18. I remember a three-day train journey and stayed in Beijing in the basement of a hotel paying RMB8 (\$1.20) a night.



Some of this I put into my novel “Twenty Fragments of Ravenous Youth” about a teenager who came to Beijing with the ambition to become a movie extra.

Did you always want to communicate?

Guo: I guess I had a mute childhood. I was suppressed. My father was caught up in the Cultural Revolution and in a prison camp. For more than 15 years. I had never seen my parents while I was growing up. They sent me to my grandparents who were real peasants, made a living from fishing and couldn’t write their names. It was an extreme non-cultural life, without communication and love. My books talk about love and the lack of it, yearning and solitude. Loneliness is a big theme in “She A Chinese” and “How is Your Fish Today?”

Where is home for you these days?

Guo: I left China six years ago and live now in Europe between the U.K., France and Germany. Because of the work. I went to London for the National Film School. I went to Paris because of the (Cannes festival’s) Residence program and now am in Germany because of my film production company. There is no physical home for me. I keep an apartment in Beijing where my books are gathering dust. I spend a

lot of time on airplanes and home is a nice table or a good bed. The man I feel love for is my home. So too is my work – I feel truly at home with myself when I’m writing novels and making films. That may be solitude but it is not the same as my childhood which was truly lonely. I’d like to settle down. But it is not a one-person thing. My life is spent chasing after new passions and new adventures. Now I’m 35, but have gone back to being a teenager and my lost youth. I’ve still got punk energy and inspiration. Maybe in a few years I’ll slow down.

Can you easily flip between documentaries and fiction film?

Guo: A lot of people start with documentaries. They buy a camera, film their parents, then their family problems before broadening to more political and social issues. My first “Country Revolution” is a feature length film with a Chris Marker-like, French New Wave style and an author’s voice. It is about poor peasant workers who come to Beijing to construct the roads and infrastructure for the Olympics. That had a political passion and a personal voiceover. It won some prizes and then got distribution in France. That encouraged me that I could combine a personal, feminine voice with a big political context. After that with “How Is Your Fish Today?” I shot it as a documentary about a Beijing writer thinking of his character like a fugitive in the north of the country. It was invited to Sundance in 2006 where it was programmed as fiction. Then it won a prize in Rotterdam as a fiction film and another in Creteil. After that I got a phone call from my documentary producer, saying “Hey! This is bad for our reputation as documentary company!” For me this is wonderful. I can play with storytelling. I’m a writer, a novelist. It is just a story either way.

vital stats

Nationality: Chinese
Date of birth: April 22, 1955
Film in Pusan: “She A Chinese” and “Once Upon A Time Proletarian”
Selected filmography: “She A Chinese” (2009), “Once Upon A Time Proletarian” (doc, 2009), “How Is Your Fish Today?” (doc, 2006), “The Concrete Revolution” (doc, 2003)
Notable awards: Golden Leopard (Locarno) for “She A Chinese,” Grand Prize Creteil Int’l Women’s Film Festival for “How is Your Fish Today?”

What are the two films in Pusan?

Guo: “She A Chinese” is my first real film, with actors and actually scripted. Before that I’d try and avoid the sheer boredom of working on a script for ages. Then working with the U.K. Film Council and Channel 4, they think of script before and above everything. The journey of the girl from the village to the big city then is quite tightly woven as she discovers what is the meaning of freedom, youth, love and free love. Accidentally,

her desire takes her even further, to England and London where she discovers a foreign culture with her body. It is a kind of wanderlust from a small remote place. I was trying to get rid of this traditional Chinese definition of what a peasant is. Youth just wants to be a youth, irrespective of nationality. The title comes from her Communist, agricultural environment. After that she tries to get rid of this shadow. There is a problem today. Youth in China today wants to have its youth and be able to say “I can have an iPod, listen to the Sex Pistols, or I can be gay, fuck around without getting married,” and wants this youth without restriction. Of course, the clash of that is violent, physically and emotionally,

continued on page 7



For more Q&A with Guo Xiaolu go to thr.com/pusan

ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS MORRIS



"Mundane History"

‘Mundane History’

By Maggie Lee

Thai director Anocha Suwichakornpong's feature "Mundane History" may be loosely defined as "experimental" for some of the non-mainstream techniques she employs, but it is not art for art's sake. Themes of class, patriarchy, mortality, evolution, the cosmic scheme and Thai history are all floating beneath the surface of insipid peace in the bourgeois Thai family she depicts.

Critics and programmers of independent cinema should recognize her distinctive voice. But even an arthouse audience might conclude that the film is perplexing and abstract despite the simple story.

Male nurse Pun (Arkaney)

moves into the household of Thanin (Paramej Noieam), to take care of his son Ake (Phakpoom Surapongsanurak), who is paralyzed from the waist down after an unspecified accident. Thanin is reticent, cordial and extremely distant. Ake reveals his resentment towards his father in small gestures of defiance. His attitude to Pun oscillates between rapport and irritation. Occasionally, one gets a glimpse of Ake's inner world in abstract and visually stunning scenes of the galaxy, culminating in the self-combustion of a planet.

Pun's monotonous daily routine of feeding, cleaning or taking Ake out to the lawn hums with a languid, ritualistic and hypnotic rhythm. Yet, there is an epic or metaphysical dimension lurking in the prosaic rep-

resentation of life. Ake's invalid existence could be read as a metaphor for any kind of unhealthy, even crippling dependence. His failed attempt at masturbation symbolizes omnipotence not only of a sexual nature. The film ends in a haunting montage, which culminates in a graphic Caesarian birth with extended focus on cutting the umbilical cord. It is further suggestive of this idea.

Suwichakornpong's creativity is evident less in conventional storytelling than in her film language, which creates tension out of dissonance. Her professed intention to give the film "a punk feel" is expressed in the music and editing.

The spunky score by Malaysian band Furniture and Thai band the Photo Sticker Machine bursts with a restless,

aggressive energy, which clashes deliberately with the characters' inertia. Her decision to make consistent use of hard cuts in a film composed mostly of longish takes is so conspicuous it becomes a style statement — especially as it goes against the custom of employing jump cuts to speed up the action or disrupt the narrative.

► NEW CURRENTS

BOTTOM LINE

A simple, yet abstract film with a mesmerizing aura.

SALES: Electric Eel Films

CAST: Phakpoom Surapongsanurak, Arkaney Cherkham, Paramej Noieam).

DIRECTOR-SCREENWRITER-

PRODUCER: Anocha

Suwichakornpong. **PRODUCER:** Soros Sukhum, Anocha Suwichakornpong.

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: Parinda

Moongmaiphol. **DIRECTOR OF**

PHOTOGRAPHY: Ming Kai Leung.

COSTUME DESIGNER: Thanon Songsil.

MUSIC: The Photo Sticker Machine,

Furniture. **EDITOR:** Lee Chatametkool.

No rating, 82 minutes.

'Chaw'

By Elizabeth Kerr

If you mixed a little bit of "Razorback," a dash of "Black Sheep," and a whole lot of "Jaws" together the result would look like "Chaw," a comedy-horror cut from the same cloth as those earlier films and a mostly amusing, if derivative, bit of genre fun. Specialized festivals will come calling and theatrical release could be limited to Asia, but careful marketing could help "Chaw" find a life on DVD with the geek set.

"Chaw"'s set-up is familiar: Kim Kang-soo (Eum Tae-

woong, "Forever the Moment") is a cop from Seoul who's reassigned to the small "crimeless" village of Samaeri. Byun Sooryun (Jung Yu-mi, "A Bittersweet Life") is a budding zoologist researching animals in the wild à la Jane Goodall. Chun Il-man (Jang Hang-sun) is a retired hunter living in seclusion, who has a complicated history with his more media-friendly apprentice Baek Man-bae (Yoon Jea-moon). A series of animal attacks, which turn out to be by a giant man-eating boar, makes the village leaders nervous just ahead of an organic food fair expected to be a financial windfall. If you've seen Steven Spielberg's shark attack movie, you know how this ends.

"Chaw" stays well within the parameters set down by this particular sub-genre without adding anything new to the soup. There are more than a few segments and stock characters lifted directly from "Jaws," but "Chaw" never quite realizes the dread or creates the kind of tension Spielberg did — and to be fair that's expecting a lot. Some judicious editing would have helped move things along quicker and jettisoned the more



extraneous plot points, allowing for the spotlight to stay on the monster. That's when the film works best: There's oodles of squishy sounds, squeals from the dark, and lots of rampaging beastie (director Shin Jung-won never skimps on the boar) to satisfy the demands of horror — even if some of the CG is dodgy (this is the clumsiest mutant animal in movie history). But in a film like this, that's not really a bad thing.

"Chaw" (which is probably supposed to recall "Gnaw") is hit and miss with its comedy

elements. Fans of slapstick, toilet humor, and other lowbrow chuckles could get a kick out of the pratfalls here. But for everyone else it could be aggravating at best. One cop tripping down a slope at a crime scene is acceptable; six is over the top. Also coming down on the irritating side is Soo-ryun offering to "cook and entertain" in order to tag along on the final hunt. What else would the token girl be able to do? The less said about the "Finnish" hunters Man-bae brings along to help the better. **THR**

▶ ASIAN FILM MARKET

BOTTOM LINE

By-the-numbers creature feature fun for some

SALES: Finecut Co., Ltd. **PRODUCTION**

COMPANY: Soo Jak Films **CAST:** Eum Tae-woong, Jung Yu-mi, Jang Hang-sung, Yoon Jea-moon, Park Hyuk-kwon.

DIRECTOR: Shin Jung-won.

SCREENWRITER: Shin Jung-won.

No rating, 122 minutes

'The Robbers'

By Elizabeth Kerr

A Tang Dynasty village is the setting for Yang Shupeng's "The Robbers," a confused and mostly pointless action-comedy-drama about two professional thieves unwittingly coming to the defense of a community being harassed by soldiers. Almost anything from Mainland China is a hot property these days, and the presence of star Hu Jun ("Red Cliff," "Lan Yu") could help sell it to art house markets. For the most part, however, this is festival stuff, and not nearly arty enough for some. Anyone looking for the second coming of "Hero" is advised to look elsewhere.

Xue Shi San (Hu Jun) and Chen Liu (Jiang Wu) are partners

in crime who show up at Ma Qi's home asking for water. They claim they're passing hunters but eventually show their true thieving colors. As they're about to make off with some booty, a squad of soldiers passes through, and in a bid to save Ma's daughter Luo Niang, from rape, the duo fight them off. Now wanted men, Xue and Chen try to get away but are recaptured in order to be turned over to the next group of soldiers. There are more escape attempts and more debating within the town council such as it is before it's discovered there is indeed honor among thieves, and Xue and Chen lead the villagers in their own defense—which fails miserably.

"The Robbers" swings



between comedy, drama, action and romance (Chen falls in love with Luo Niang and tells the story in flashback), never quite settling on any one for any stretch of time. The result is a scattered, disjointed narrative that is unable to pull viewers in, peopled with flat, one-dimensional characters that are hard to empathize with. Many of the themes Yang explores are common to Chinese cinema (loyalty, brotherhood, wealth above all else) and so expectations aren't shaken up on that front. But if Yang has another message it

doesn't really come through.

The fight choreography, the cinematography, and the performances all lean toward bland. Hu has been better, and the supporting cast has little more than sketches to work from. And the constant mention of the grandness of the Tang never amounts to much. Nothing about "The Robbers" is incompetent — it's just average.

▶ MIDNIGHT PASSION

BOTTOM LINE

Schizoid period pseudo-drama only kinda pretty and goes nowhere

SALES: Infotainment China Media

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Backlight

Film **CAST:** Hu Jun, Jiang Wu, Lee

Lichun. **DIRECTOR:** Yang Shupeng.

SCREENWRITER: Yang Shupeng.

PRODUCER: Cindy Lin Mi.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Zhou

Shuhao. **PRODUCTION DESIGNER:** Du

Changshun. **MUSIC:** LV Jiajia.

EDITOR: Fang Lei.

No rating, 89 minutes

'Dead Slowly'

By Maggie Lee

Rarely does a film title describe itself so accurately. Hong Kong video artist Rita Hui's feature is indeed deadeningly slow. Like the kind of navel-gazing film school assignment made at the tail-end of 70s experimentalism, "Dead Slowly" drowns itself in a miasma of arty shots, pseudo-intellectual dialogue, extreme cuts, shrill dissonant music and narrative incoherence. However, its worse offenses are its gratuitous sex and nudity, and tasteless eroticization of gore. It is best reserved for multimedia seminars, campus film clubs and private screenings among like-minded artistes.

"Dead Slowly" is structured in the form of three crime cases (a motorcycle accident and two homicides) related to an incident of food poisoning (hence the Chinese title "Slow Poisoning.") Titling which wall-papers the screen provides some factual context or commentary on the cases, but text is virtually unreadable in the time given.

Adultery seems to be a motif — Hui, the amputated victim of the accident is cheating on his wife Mei (Joman Chiang) with her sister. Ying (Cheng Sheung Ling), the first murder victim, is a nymphomaniac. Jing (Samuel Pang), the case's detective, is being cuckolded by his wife Ching (Ko Siu Man) and a fellow officer. Innuendos of Jing's mur-

der of Mei's father eight years ago crop up now and again, with no explanation of motive. Mei gets fidgety with sharp objects. Detained in an asylum, she repeatedly seduces Ying in those "is it real, a dream or hallucination?" montage sequences.

A mural of a tree whose branches spread like tentacles or blood stains definitely leaves an impression, because it seems to have legs, appearing in one scene in Ying's studio, another scene in Mei's dining room and yet another scene in Ching (or whoever's) bathroom.

Another scene, memorable for its MTV trashiness, is Ying soaking in her own blood (possibly disemboweled) on a sofa, in a room filled to the brim with white plastic bags. There are other bloody scenes of violence to oneself and others, writhing bodies of unidentified characters and at least two shots of erect penises — all for no fath-

omable narrative purpose and certainly not for aesthetic enhancement.

Hui supposedly wishes to explore time and relationships in reference to "Alice in Wonderland." The open credit alludes cryptically to a rabbit's travelogue, and in the epilogue, titling presents a conversation between a rabbit and a panda on the subject of love. The only connection one can see between this film and Lewis Carroll's book is that the protagonists and the script are mad as a Hatter.

► NEW CURRENTS

BOTTOM LINE

Confusing and pretentious experimental trifle about death, adultery and food poisoning.

SALES: Ying E Chi Ltd. **CAST:** Joman Chiang, Cheng Sheung Ling, Samuel Pang, Ko Siu Man. **DIRECTOR-EDITOR:** Rita Hui. **PRODUCERS:** Jessey Tsang, Kattie Fan. No rating. 87 minutes.

Q&A

continued from page 4

and follows you all your life.

And the documentary "Once Upon A Time Proletarian"?

Guo: It is quite dark and like the companion piece to "She A Chinese." I love to work and made it during the weekend while I was making "She A Chinese." Much of it is without sound as I forgot to turn on the microphone.

Nine years in film school and you forget to turn on the mike?

Guo: Yeah, I spent too much time in school reading Marguerite Duras novels. It has 12 chapters and each unfolds a social class or one character who each present a facet of China.

So this was an "underground" film.

Guo: Of course it was. I had an idea to make it as a film essay or a poem, more than a classical documentary with just one character. All Chinese docs are like that. I wanted to make one with different, even contradictory, voices. For instance, I have a chapter about two millionaires, they are really tacky. That is a mirror of the chapter on factory workers who

lost their jobs. I wanted to do a film where people speak in their own voices, and without commentary. Between the chapters are black and white scenes of little children reading funny tales about China. It is more poetic and takes people out from the film.

You criticize, you make underground films. What are your political relations with China these days? Are you discouraged by people in power?

Guo: Underground is the wrong word. In China today you are only official if you make propaganda films or if you are Feng Xiaogang or Zhang Yimou making blockbusters. We have 3,000 independent filmmakers making good and not so good films. But in China we don't have an independent art house distribution network even for films that have passed censorship. "She A Chinese" could be fine, there is no explicit sex scene, it could have a release. But distributors tell me it is not commercial. It is not a question of political censorship, rather my film doesn't have a star.

Is it important for you to have your films released in China?

Guo: I'd like it. But it doesn't upset me if they are not. I feel happy if

my films go to festivals and onto the educational circuit. I'll be taking the film to New York and UCLA to do lectures. Often my films show in film museums. They achieve their place because of their special intellectual quality, I guess. My next film "UFO In Her Eyes" might have a bigger audience because it is science fiction, Kafka-ese detective crazy story. "She A Chinese" now has six country distribution.

What is the pitch for "UFO"?

Guo: It's based on a book that is available in English and German. It is a Kafka-like metamorphosis of a Chinese village after a woman claims she has seen a UFO and an alien. That makes it a black comedy, satire with a surreal edge as this unknown woman changes her life and her village's life. I will make this next year in China.

Outside the Film Bureau-approved system?

Guo: Yes.

Why work this way when so many other directors who were underground now get Film Bureau approval?

Guo: Western propaganda always says Chinese censorship is awful ...

Surely it is not just "Western propaganda." I have conversations every day of the week with film companies who talk about the obstacles that are put in their way. Half their creativity seems to be in how they get round the problems.

Guo: It is very complicated. Some filmmakers from the sixth generation like Wang Xiaoshuai who started underground, very angry, they are now making their sixth or seventh films. They are 10 years older than me, they don't speak foreign languages and they have all their family in mainland China. They need authorization and to put their films in Chinese cinemas. They work through that and somehow manage to express a true vision, but I see that it is very tough for them. I'm in strange position as a novelist who writes bilingual books and has a double life in the West and in China. And I started making films, film essays, as an intellectual process, so I sort of didn't care if my films were distributed in the West or China. I don't have to play the game, I don't have to make films that pass censorship. This village punk started out not knowing the rules, then, later says "fuck it." I can't make a science fiction film in China, but I say "Just do it." **THR**

digest



"Good Morning President"



"The Message"

"Good Morning President"

► OPENING NIGHT

BOTTOM LINE: Enjoyable if flawed political comedy-drama that could use more crankiness.

Given the continuing worries over North Korean nuclear capability and with the first black president in the White House, "Good Morning President" certainly has currency on its side. The latest by writer-director Jang Jin ("Welcome to Dongmakgol") is a wildly erratic comedy-drama about politics, ethics, the price paid for public service — usually a personal one — and whatever else seems to have struck Jang as apropos to capital affairs.

Because the film deals — however briefly — with Asian geopolitics, it's likely to stoke interest in Asian-focused festivals, and chances at a release in some cosmopolitan centers isn't out of the question for risk-tak-

ing distributors. It's a polished film with impeccable production values that goes easy on the head-smacking and cursing so common in Korean cinema. That said, the majority of interest in the film will likely remain regional, and the strong cast could make it a hit a home.

— Elizabeth Kerr

"The Message"

► CLOSING NIGHT

BOTTOM LINE: A period spy thriller excelling in suspense.

HONG KONG — Extravagantly produced to exude an abundance of period elegance, danger and intrigue that sparks associations with "Lust, Caution," "The Message" is a '40s Sino-Japanese spy thriller that's replaced lust with torture as the porn. Co-directing with Taiwan's Chen Kuo-fu ("Double Vision"), who also supplies the elaborate screenplay, China's

Gao Qunshu turns his craft at mounting suspense from events set in a tight space and time frame (exemplified by his bomb-detonation thriller "Old Fish") to a more psychological rather than situation-driven level.

Although showy visual effects and cinematography strain the moviemaking, these bells and whistles were designed to impress the target mainland audience, who gave their seal of approval by filling cinemas on opening National Day weekend.

— Maggie Lee

"Toad's Oil"

BOTTOM LINE: Koji Yakusho is better off staying in the limelight than behind the camera.

Had "Toad's Oil" not been the directorial debut of venerated actor Koji Yakusho ("Shall We Dance?"), would people have time for this ponderous, ham-handed tale of a financial

shark's mid-life epiphany? The prestige of Yakusho is a ticket to most festivals, including Toronto where it premiered internationally. Nevertheless, the 131-minute running time is overlong even for art house regulars.

— Maggie Lee

"Running Turtle"

BOTTOM LINE: A film about a man-hunt with more human drama than chase scenes.

Lee Yeon-woo's "Running Turtle" sets a flabby, ne'er-do-well cop on a hunt for a ruthless fugitive with invincible fighting skills, in a scenario akin to the turtle's race against the hare in Aesop's fable. Not in any rush to cut to the chase, this grassroots action-comedy rambles on about the protagonist's domestic woes and endless screw-ups, but packs a wallop in the final show-down.

— Maggie Lee

“McDull Kung Fu Kindergarten”

BOTTOM LINE: *Kung Fu piglet disarms with hybrid Hong Kong-China humor.*

In animated feature “McDull Kung Fu Kindergarten,” Hong Kong’s most iconic cartoon porker goes to learn martial arts at Wudang, birthplace of Taichi, to prove that pigs can fly-kick at a national championship. Sounds like “Kung Fu Panda”? It’s anything but. Unlike past series, “Kindergarten” has a coherent storyline followed through to its wistful end, making it accessible even to non-Cantonese speaking Chinese. The technical quality is a few notches above previous editions. It marks a breakthrough in the series for setting the main story in China, rather than Hong Kong’s colorful old quarter Tai Kok Tsui, scored tremendous success on the mainland for a non-blockbuster.

—Maggie Lee

“Symbol”

BOTTOM LINE: *A one-punch line comedy that pushes many buttons.*

Priapism is elevated to cosmic proportions by Japanese radio-TV comedian Hitoshi Matsumoto (“Dainipponjin”) in his second directorial outing, “Symbol.” Juggling two ostensibly divergent yarns about a Mexican pro-wrestler trapped in the ring and an anonymous Japanese man trapped in a room controlled by phalluses, the script works itself (and the two men) into a sweat for 93 minutes just for one punch line — but a pretty wacky one at that.

—Maggie Lee

“Paju”

BOTTOM LINE: *Deliberate and hon-*

est examination of the female psyche where one is often needed.

After making a debut with a dissection of Korean masculinity in “Jealousy is My Middle Name,” filmmaker Park Chan Ok let it be known she was a director to watch. With her follow up, “Paju,” Park keeps the camera on a man while looking at the influence and impact three women have on his life. Rarely is such detail and veracity bestowed on female characters in Korean mainstream cinema (if Park can be considered mainstream), and Park proves that her first success was no fluke.

—Elizabeth Kerr

“Sawasdee Bangkok”

BOTTOM LINE: *A delightful omnibus that’s more than just a mezze plate of cinematic soundbites.*

Siam’s “City of Angels” ignites the imagination of four Thai directors in the hip and happening omnibus “Sawasdee Bangkok.” Participants for such projects too often are recruited internationally, so their works stay on the level of cinematic tourism. Not so for Wisit Sasannatieng, Aditya Assarat, Kongde Jaturanasree and Pen-ek Ratanaruang. Probing the metropolis as through their own backyard with the love-hate feelings a bachelor has for his messy pad, they show ordinary people fretting, longing or bonding in places never found in guide books.

—Maggie Lee

“Kick Off”

BOTTOM LINE: *A humane and eloquently voiced plea for Iraq’s marginal citizens.*

The plight of minorities and refugees in war-scarred Iraq is



“Lan”

encapsulated by an illegal multi-ethnic settlement that tries to stage a friendly soccer match under obstacle-strewn conditions in “Kick Off.” Iraq-Kurdistan-born Shawkat Amin Korki’s second feature achieves the same even-keeled direction and candidly involving human dramas of his debut “Crossing the Dust.” Moreover, while making a clearer indictment of war and politics, he leavens the grave subject with humor and ravishing black-and-white images of the stadium, which dominates as a potent symbol of the squatters’ socially trapped and spiritually debilitated psyches.

—Maggie Lee

“Lan”

BOTTOM LINE: *Dated drama of growing pains during the Cultural Revolution enhanced by superb elderly role.*

“Lan,” the debut by acclaimed Chinese actress Jiang Wenli (“Lost Indulgence,” “And the Spring Comes”), is a recollection of growing up

under her grandfather’s fold during the Cultural Revolution. Unabashedly personal and dripping with nostalgia, “Lan’s” direction is polished in an old-school way. Yet the film doesn’t soar to a dramatic crest.

—Maggie Lee

“Mongsil”

BOTTOM LINE: *Melodramatic weeper that’s not nearly as lyrical as it thinks it is*

Based on a story by Kwon Jeong-saeng, “Mongsil” is the harrowing period drama about a young girl bounced back and forth between her mother, step-mother, father, and a kindly stranger as she struggles to care for her younger sister in the years at the end of World War II and the beginning of the Korean War. Abjectly miserable and unapologetically gut-wrenching, “Mongsil” loses its way for being simply too much misfortune to have any real impact. It is the cinematic equivalent of donor fatigue.

—Elizabeth Kerr

“Tears”

BOTTOM LINE: A dark and brooding portrayal of a man with a tortured past.

“Tears” is a quietly shattering character study of a bad cop with a good conscience, whose punishment becomes redemption for his past crimes. It calmly traces how negative actions, like small tremors imperceptibly building up to a quake, can have devastating consequences on self and others. The screenplay is the most consistent of veteran Taiwanese director Cheng Wen-tang’s works, equipped with a bleak social background in which to understand the protagonist’s behavior.

— Maggie Lee

“I Come With the Rain”

BOTTOM LINE: Visually stunning thriller whose pictures make you forget its thin plot

A vivid opening segment of a vicious beating sets the tone for this noirish thriller about a traumatized ex-cop on a hunt for the missing son of a powerful pharmaceutical mogul. Jumping from Los Angeles to the Philippines and Hong Kong, “I Come With the Rain” is a

moody, supremely stylistic exercise in sweaty underworld revenge that could have easily teetered over into Orientalism. It never does, thanks largely to director Tran Ahn Hung’s restraint (from heavy exoticizing) and focus on bloody misery and the search for redemption and salvation.

— Elizabeth Kerr

“Lost Paradise in Tokyo”

BOTTOM LINE: A tender film on an unusual sibling relationship.

A Japanese salaryman, his mentally challenged brother and a call girl form an unconventional ménage a trois in “Lost Paradise in Tokyo,” which dramatizes the human need for companionship and contradictory desire to escape from society’s constraints. The film’s low budget and abstention from glossy visuals and artsy-craftsy film language lend it a humble sincerity. That also hampers it from breaking out of small indie circles.

— Maggie Lee

“Our Fantastic 21st Century”

BOTTOM LINE: Low-impact

disaffected youth drama irritates more than it enlightens

Korea’s fraudulent and cash-obsessed youth are at the heart of this dead serious, ironically titled drama “Our Fantastic 21st Century,” about the so-called 880 Generation, referring to the demographic whose average monthly wage hovers at just about that much.

— Elizabeth Kerr

“My Daughter”

BOTTOM LINE: An over-stylized and detached take on a dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship.

Love-hate relationships between mothers and daughters are usually the stuff of soap operas gushing with emotional outpourings. Charlotte Lim breaks the mold by employing abstract and mannered film language in her depiction of a young woman’s ambivalent concern and disgust for her mother, who is stuck in an abusive affair.

— Maggie Lee

“Kanikosen”

BOTTOM LINE: Adaptation of proletarian agitprop doesn’t labor its point.

Imagine “Titanic” only with scenes in the steerage. That’s the bleak and claustrophobic experience “Kanikosen” offers to make sense of the oppression and inevitable uprising of workers on a crab cannery ship in Imperialist Japan. Sabu’s film adaptation of leftwing dissident Takiji Kobayashi’s 1929 novel makes his point against capitalist exploitation clear, but manages to be experimental, absurdist and hip. Think remake of “Mutiny on the Bounty” using “Dogville” as an aesthetic blueprint.

— Maggie Lee

“Mai Mai Miracle”

BOTTOM LINE: A picturesque but loose and overlong animation without dramatic punch.

“Mai Mai Miracle” unfurls the shared destinies of a country girl living in post-war Japan and a little princess from the Heian period (794-1185 AD). The animated feature directed by Sunao Katabuchi is as beautifully illustrated as a Monet landscape painting. It is also as impressionistic, having little depth or momentum. Meticulous production standards ensure “Mai Mai” will be eagerly consumed, and soon forgotten by the anime-hungry domestic and worldwide markets.

— Maggie Lee

“A Little Pond”

BOTTOM LINE: A direct and shattering account of American atrocity in the Korean War.

In “A Little Pond,” Lee Saang-woo recounts in a conventional narrative with unswerving power the South Korean equivalent of the My Lai Massacre. This suppressed story of how the evacuation of a village during the 1950s civil war turned into a massacre by American soldiers compels by its genuine tragic nature.

— Maggie Lee

“I Am in Trouble!”

BOTTOM LINE: An amusing portrait of a misfit poet’s sexual and social gaffes.

The characters of the charmingly wry comedy “I am in Trouble!” could pass for the younger selves of Hong Sang-soo’s narcissistic and libidinous intellectuals. Yet to new director So Sang-min’s credit, he is not a mere Hong-wannabe. His chronicle of a poet-slacker’s blundering attempts to adjust to the real world is underscored by pert observations on insecurities of Korea’s post-college crowd. As So artfully draws out more and more facets of his protagonist through prosaic but telling vignettes, one cannot help but warm to this beguiling character study.

— Maggie Lee



“Squalor”

BOTTOM LINE: Another ‘slum’ film leaves the Philippine Indie cinema assembly line.

Manila’s slums have made their mark on Philippine independent cinema the way “City of God” put Brazil’s favelas on the cinephile map. If the names of Brillante Mendoza or Auraeus Solito ring a bell, “Squalor” will provoke a reaction of ‘been there, done that.’ It is composed of four 20-30 minute segments, all set in the same urban grassroots neighborhood. Characters are linked by six degrees of separation, but each one stands at a crossroads, ultimately getting defeated by social circumstances.

— Maggie Lee



“A Good Rain Knows”

“Moscow”

BOTTOM LINE: Timely drama flirts with crazy roommate thriller status before refocusing

In what appears to be another example of a trend in current Korean cinema, director Whang Cheol-mean taps into the lingering unease surrounding the global financial meltdown. Economic unrest and the widening gap between the middle class and everyone else is clearly on the collective national mind, as “Moscow” is one of several films at PIFF 2009 that uses the never-ending worry over monetary instability and job security as a driving plot point.

— Elizabeth Kerr

“True Noon”

BOTTOM LINE: Tale of division that is becoming a hallmark of the former Soviet states

A historical conflict between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan provides the basis for “True Noon,” a reasonably stirring drama that could take place almost anywhere on the globe right now, what with constantly shifting borders and nation-states reconfiguring themselves. Without any grandiose gestures or set pieces, director Nosir Saidov’s modest portrait

of a once functional town falling into chaos has little potential for broad distribution but could nonetheless see a fairly long life on the festival circuit.

— Elizabeth Kerr

“A Good Rain Knows”

BOTTOM LINE: A cadenced cross-cultural romance set in Sichuan.

Spring rain, bamboo groves, Chinese poetry and stinky noodles are the piquant ingredients that season a pair of lovers’ surprise reunion in “A Good Rain Knows.” Hur Jin-ho’s latest film set in Sichuan marks the first time he shoots outside of Korea. This is probably his most conventional film to date, but he hasn’t sold out or disappointed fans. Mostly, it is bashfully romantic and laced with broad humor, but at critical moments, Hur evokes love with a touch as soft and sure as a heartbeat, and coaxes affecting performances from mainland Chinese actress Gao Yuanyuan and Korean heartthrob Jung Sang-woo.

— Maggie Lee

“The Executioner”

BOTTOM LINE: Apolitical and un-subtle examination of the death

penalty’s impact on its executors

“The Executioner” is one of Korea’s few prison pictures, and because of its rarity on the cinematic landscape there, it mines all the familiar tropes and characters viewers have been trained to expect from the sub-genre. Though not incompetent or dull — its swift running time flies by — there’s nothing new in “The Executioner.”

— Elizabeth Kerr

“Nightmare Elevator”

BOTTOM LINE: Cleverly plotted mystery depicts elevator to the gallows.

“Nightmare Elevator” employs the ultra-minimalist set-up of four strangers trapped in an elevator to make a mystery-black comedy that literally takes the audience for a ride. Working from a fist-tight screenplay in three acts, each act is a reversal of preconceptions and expectations, and calls for a change in acting mode, which the four leads deliver effortlessly. High concept and low budget requirements make this desirable stuff for a remake, whether for screen, TV or theater.

— Maggie Lee

“A Man Who Ate His Cherries”

BOTTOM LINE: Divorce Iranian style

A man with alimony troubles is at the center of “A Man Who Ate His Cherries,” a beautifully shot film that’s appealing in its ordinariness. Reminiscent of “A Light in the Fog” because of its black and white cinematography and focus on the mundane, the same distributors and festivals could likely show an interest here. There’s an enormous difference in the two films’ thematically, however, that may bode well for “Cherries.”

— Elizabeth Kerr

“Be My Guest”

BOTTOM LINE: Horror-comedy that can’t decide what it wants to be

There have been any number of films that meld the conventions of horror with comedy to brilliant effect over the years. “Scream” and “The Evil Dead” spring to mind. In that vein, “Be My Guest” throws its hat into the ring to middling effect. A furious labor activist confronts a family on a day-trip in the country, and the torture he inflicts upon them is the basis for an unusually shrill examination of the fragility of the family unit.

— Elizabeth Kerr

the dailies

- ▶ breaking news
- ▶ latest reviews
- ▶ special reports
- ▶ downloadable PDFs

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER — the global leader with the most comprehensive film festivals and market coverage of any entertainment news daily.
For the complete picture, go to THR.com/festivals



Pusan International Film Festival

Oct. 8-16, 2009

Pusan,
South Korea

▶ *The Hollywood Reporter is the Festival's official daily*



Hong Kong International Film & TV Market (FILMART)

March 21-April 6, 2010

Hong Kong,
China

▶ *The Hollywood Reporter is the Festival's official daily*



American Film Market

Nov. 4-11, 2009

Santa Monica,
USA



Festival de Cannes

May 12-23, 2010

Cannes,
France



Berlin International Film Festival

Feb. 11-21, 2010

Berlin,
Germany



Toronto International Film Festival

Sept. 9-18, 2010

Toronto, ON
Canada

FOR ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITIES PLEASE CONTACT:

Los Angeles: Lauren Marani
+1 323 525 2022

Europe: Alison Smith
+44 20 7420 6143

New York: Paul Mauriello
+1 646 654 5629

Asia: Ivy Lam
+852 2880 3405

The Hollywood Reporter

THR.com

nielsen