

Two of China's most famous filmmakers get together: Not One Less

The Director of *Red Sorghum* and *Raise the Red Lantern*, China's Zhang Yi Mou, used only amateur actors and a documentary style for his latest film, *Not One Less*. This is a very unusual strategy in feature film production in China.

In poverty stricken areas of the country, where the pressures on families are high, it is very common for students to play truant, that is, to stay away from school for long periods. The Chinese Government is making great efforts to correct this problem and this is one of the themes of the film, which was produced by the Chinese Guang Xi Film

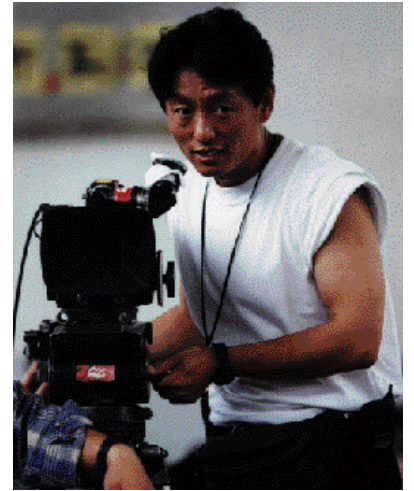
"We avoided heavily pitched, long focus and wide angle coverage"

Studio. In the story, a 13-year-old temporary teacher tries her hardest to institute a "no student missing" policy when she takes over on behalf of an absent teacher.

The style chosen for the film is best described as natural and simple, one of the reasons why non-professional performers were used. The role of the village head was taken by the true village head where the film was shot, for example, and the students' parts were acted by children from the local school. Nevertheless, a lot of time was spent in choosing the cast.

In striving to give the film a strong sense of actuality, Zhang did not overly choreograph movement, or heavily rehearse the actors. Indeed, many of the key players did not read the script. Rather, when they arrived each day he would explain the concept of the play to them and go from there. To some extent the film will look like news coverage, partly because the production unit set aside some modern equipment and materials during production.

The cinematographer on *Not One Less* was Hou Yong, who studied with the director at the Beijing Film Academy. Both men are famous in China and on the international film festival circuit, and belong to the group known as the fifth generation of Chinese filmmakers. Hou graduated from the photography department in 1982 and since then has completed 20 films including: *Sun Zhong Shan*, *Horse Robbers*, *Blue Kite*, *Lany-Loa* and *The Opium War*.



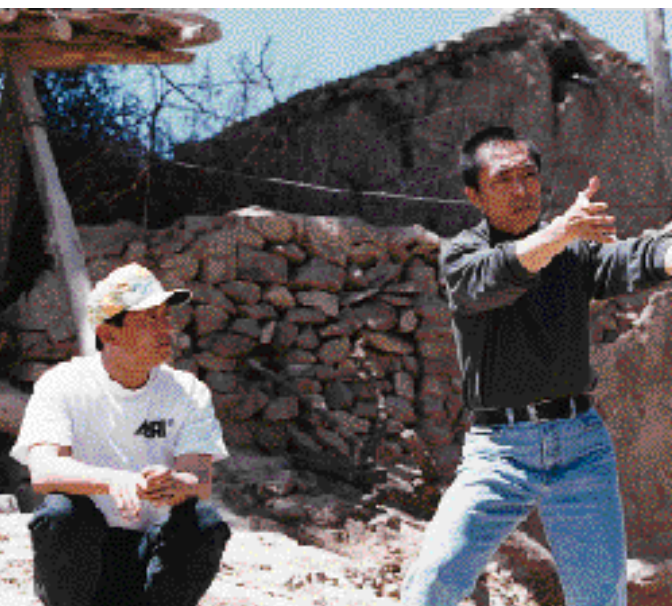
Cinematographer Hou Yong.

He has been honoured many times for his work at the Tokyo International Film Festival, and with the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival and the Chinese Golden Rooster Film Award.

"This was a film unlike any previous film, and the process was also quite different from that of an ordinary film," said Hou, who believes that the photographic concept of any film must not just give the pictures an aesthetic feel, but also match with the plot and theme of the film, and the directors' vision. "The outstanding characteristics were directness and reality, as determined by the subject. Not only did the director select amateur actors to perform, but he also asked each unit to try to get as close to reality as they could, to reflect truthfulness as fully as possible.

"Because the actors were not professional, we had to modify the shooting style. For instance, one three-minute shot of two people in conversation was shot 50 times because the actors' positions and lines were all improvised. This brought certain difficulties."

When the shooting style was determined at the beginning, Hou said, it was decided the film should contain actuality, documentary, and feature



Cinematographer Hou Yong and Director Zhang Yi Mou on location.

"I like high contrast, at the same time, I also like soft tones and wide latitude"

► Hou Yong, preparing to shoot inside the school for **Not One Less**.



aspects simultaneously. From a documentary point of view, this meant hand-held camera techniques, finding the subject within the actor's unforeseen performance, and ensuring there was a feeling of randomness. Because the film was on the topic of children, the director and cinematographer decided the main emotional tone should be positive.

"We made a conscious effort," Hou continued, "to hide the subject not in the key position. We seldom used long shots or lyric shots, nor did we use single shots resolutely. For the most part we kept the figures as the dominant factor — taking the regular watching angle that people usually use in routine life. We avoided heavily pitched, long focus and wide angle coverage and other techniques usually adopted in feature films. Shots were generally done with 35mm and 25mm lenses."

As much as possible Hou used natural light. Without additional lighting, the colours were a little gray, with lower purity and brightness, but strong in brightly lit areas. The idea was to get internal and ordinary beauty on the screen. The beautiful view or seductively beautiful lighting was not included so it could not distract from true beauty. In the film tests the aim was to achieve high contrast. Kodak EXR 5248, Vision 5277 and Vision 5279 films were eventually selected for the shoot.

"EXR 5248 has an excellent image quality," Hou commented. During overcast days with thin clouds covering the sun, or on very cloudy days, the effect is particularly outstanding. If conditions are sunny, the contrast of 5248 will be a bit high and Vision 5277 is more suitable. I like high contrast. At the same time, I also like soft tones and wide latitude. So, the fine white highlights and the rich black shadows of 5277 suited me very much.

"Vision 5279 is the best high-speed

Hou, believes that the photographic concept of any film must not just give the pictures an aesthetic feel, but also match with the plot and theme of the film

film at present. When I shot the film tests, I got a good effect even in very poor light. There are some shots around the city at night in this film, and I used Vision 5279 to perfectly embody the black shadows."

Hou Yong and Zhang Yi Mou plan to work together again soon on a feature film titled, *My Father and Mother*.

Film data

Zhang Yi Mou was born in China in 1950 and studied cinematography at the Beijing Film Academy. He is a leading member of China's "fifth generation" filmmakers and has shot films by Chen Kaige and Wu Tianming. His auspicious directorial debut was **Red Sorghum**. Among the films he has directed are:

Features

Red Sorghum

(Winner of the Golden Bear at the 38th Berlin International Film Festival).

Raise The Red Lantern

(Winner of the Silver Lion at the 44th Venice International Film Festival and Oscar nomination for best foreign film).

Ju Dou

(Oscar nomination for best foreign film).

The Story of Qiu Ju

(Winner of the Golden Lion at the 45th Venice International Film Festival).

Living

(Winner of best film at the 47th Cannes International Film Festival).

Shanghai Triad