

BLINDER SCHACHT - MANG JING



PRESSEHEFT

Credits

Hongkong, China/Deutschland 2003

Länge 92 Min., **Format** 35 mm, 1:1.85, Farbe

Regie & Buch Li Yang, nach dem Roman „Shenmu“ von Liu Qingbang

Kamera Liu Yonghong

Kameraassistentz Cao Guangyu, Mao Yongan

Schnitt Li Yang, Karl Riedl

Schnittassistentz Zhao Xuelei

Ton Wang Yu

Mischung Xu Hui, Zhao Nan, Olivier Fontenay

Ausstattung Yang Jun

Kostüm Wang Xiaoyan

Maske Lu Yongmei

Regieassistentz Bao Zhenjiang, Ah Long

Herstellungsltg. Gao Hua

Produzenten Hu Xiaoye, Li Yang

Co-Produktion Li Yang, Filmworkshop, Berlin

Darsteller

Song Jinming - Li Yixiang

Tang Zhaoyang - Wang Shuangbao

Yuan Fengming - Wang Baoqiang

Xiao Hong - An Jing

Chef Huang - Bao Zhenjiang

Tang Zhaoxia - Sun Wei

Mamasan - Wang Yining

Ma - Zhao Junzhi

Lao Li - Liu Zhenqi

Kellnerin - Zhang Lulu

Xiao Fang - Li Yan

Xiao Li - Zhao Hong

Chef Wang - Nie Weihua

Mu Jie - Cao Yang

Kartenverkäufer - Jian Chengwen

Karaoke-Manager - Zhi Lei

Peripher Filmverleih – www.peripherfilm.de – Tel: 030 6142464

Pressematerial - www.kinopresseservice.de

INHALT

Ein klarer Wintermorgen im Norden Chinas. Wie üblich haben Song und Tang einen harten Tag in einer der vielen, nur unzulänglich gesicherten Kohlenminen vor sich. Tangs Bruder Chaolu, der erst vor wenigen Tagen hier eingetroffen ist, begleitet sie.

Tief unten im Schacht passiert es: Song und Tang greifen zu ihren Spitzhacken und erschlagen Chaolu. Dann bringen sie die Mine zum Einsturz und entkommen dem „Unfallort“ unversehrt. Während sie so tun, als würden sie den Tod des Bruders heftig beklagen, verlangen sie vom Besitzer der Mine eine Entschädigungszahlung – sonst würden sie den Unfall bei den Behörden melden. Aus Angst, dass der illegale Betrieb seiner Mine ans Tageslicht kommt, erfüllt der Eigentümer ihre Forderung. Nachdem die beiden das Geld kassiert und an ihre Familien geschickt haben, machen sie sich auf die Suche nach dem nächsten „Verwandten“.

Am Bahnhof, wo es vor Arbeit suchenden Wanderarbeitern nur so wimmelt, entdecken sie ein potenzielles Opfer – Yuan, einen 16-jährigen Jungen vom Lande. Sein Vater hat ebenfalls in den Minen gearbeitet und ist niemals aus ihnen zurückgekehrt. Daher hat Yuan keine andere Wahl gehabt, als von der Schule abzugehen und sich nach einem Broterwerb umzusehen. Tang schlägt ihm vor, Arbeit für ihn zu suchen und ihn den Minenbesitzern vorzustellen. Es gibt nur eine Bedingung: Er muss sich als Songs Neffe ausgeben.

Song ist jedoch der Ansicht, dass Yuan angesichts seines Alters verschont bleiben sollte. Er gerät darüber in Streit mit Tang, gibt angesichts dessen Hartnäckigkeit aber bald nach – der Plan wird zügig vorangetrieben.

Doch heimlich heckt Song etwas aus, das Yuan als Opfer disqualifiziert. Das Verhältnis zwischen den Partnern verändert sich langsam – und in letzter Minute nimmt ihr Vorhaben eine unerwartete Wendung. . .

Biografie

Geboren 1959 in Xian, China. Sohn einer Schauspielerfamilie und im Theater groß geworden. 1978-85 Schauspieler am Theater der Jugend in Beijing, 1985-87 Regiestudium am dortigen Institut für Fernsehen.

1988-90 Germanistikstudium an der Freien Universität Berlin, 1990-92 in München, hier auch Schauspieler beim Fernsehen.

1992-95 Regiestudium an der Kunsthochschule für Medien in Köln. MANG JING ist nach drei in Deutschland gedrehten Dokumentarfilmen sein Spielfilmdebüt. Lebt in Beijing.



Interview

Stephen Teo: How did you conceive the production of Blind Shaft?

Li Yang: I spent many years preparing for the project because I've always had the dream of making a movie. I was an actor before I studied filmmaking in China and later in Germany. After graduation, the conditions were not ripe for me to make a film and so I began making documentaries. Then I felt I shouldn't go on making documentaries, but that I should make a movie, and started looking for a subject to make into a feature. At the time, I was debating about whether to make a film with a Chinese background or one with a German background, and I finally opted to make a film in China because I could penetrate a Chinese subject much quicker, although I was living overseas and might even consider myself a stranger. On the other hand, the sensation of being a stranger could be an advantage since you are not completely inside: you are outside but you are familiar with the place. It was under such circumstances that I returned to China, firstly, to re-orient myself with the country and, secondly, to read novels and search for suitable material. This was in 2000. A friend introduced the Blind Shaft novel to me. I was moved after reading it, and this fitted into my perspective of cinema, which is that at the very least I myself should be moved by my own film. There's no meaning otherwise. This being my first movie, I didn't want to make it for the purpose of making money although making movies is a means of doing just that, but I see it as a heart-to-heart communication between the filmmaker and the audience.

ST: The novel dealt with mine workers. Did you have prior exposure to mine workers, or did you work in mines before?

LY: No, nothing like that; but when I was an actor on the stage, around 1979, I rehearsed a play about mine workers. That was my first exposure to the subject. We went down to the mines to experience the conditions and see what it was like. The miner's lifestyle was quite dreadful even then although they were all state-controlled at the time. So when I read the novel, I didn't feel it was all that strange. After deciding to adapt the novel, I visited many small mines to look at locations, and to experience the conditions once again. I went down the mineshafts to observe the miners at work, to talk with them and share their experience. Through the process of adapting the novel, I slowly became familiar with the workers. There was a very great difference between the first draft of the script and the final draft, which was the sixth draft. The first draft was dry and didn't contain too many details about the miners' lifestyles. After four months of interviews and revisions, we came up with the sixth draft, which included many details of lifestyle, like for instance, the tough woman who lives in the mining camp and thinks nothing about barging into the men's bathroom. The style that I wanted to pursue was one of directness and simplicity in order to let people feel that this isn't an absurd exaggeration. We didn't use any special music - I decided not to use music at all because I feel it's something you add on as an afterthought. The camera is never higher than basic eye-level. On the streets, the style of photography is a bit like that of a documentary.

ST: You used a lot of hand-held camera work.

LY: Everything was hand-held. There isn't a single shot that was taken off the tripod. I wanted a sensation that you were right there on the street, not that you were detached from the narrative like a stranger, as might have been done in a conventional way, but rather that you were close to the protagonists.

ST: You didn't use the steadicam?

LY: No. We wanted to avoid a conscious use of technique. The steadicam makes everything feel stable and as a result, the technique becomes obvious. I cut down as much as I could on using such types of techniques, so that I could focus on events, people, and people's lives. Everything extrinsic to that I tried my best to avoid. Therefore, we didn't use many artificial lights. We shot in such a way that it was like real life. That's how we did it with the lighting, and that's also how we did it with the sound.

ST: Everything was done on location in real mines?

LY: Right. We shot on real locations, and we actually went down the mineshafts.

ST: Did you need to have the cooperation of the authorities? How did they regard your script?

LY: The practice in China is unlike other countries where you have to cooperate with authorities. In fact, it's no use getting their cooperation even if you were to submit all the paper work. If they decide it's too dangerous for you to shoot your film, you can't proceed. So you have to use alternative methods. We shot mostly in privately owned mines, and of course we had to make contact with local government officials, primarily for the locations we wanted because some of the mines were actually overseen by bureaucrats within the local government. So this was our basic approach. We contacted some of these officials through friends and because of this "backdoor connection" (guanxi), we were given more direct access and not through secret ways. With the state-owned mines, it wouldn't have been possible. But you know, for the mine owners, problems of being blackmailed or being swindled really do happen everyday in the mines. It's not made up.

ST: Did they read your script?

LY: No, not the mine owners...well, some did and some didn't. Basically, I didn't give them the whole script to read; and besides when I was filming, some of them were on the sidelines helping with the shoot. The biggest threat was that we didn't have permission from the government so I had to handle this matter differently, which meant that I had to do it like guerrilla warfare, or through backdoor connections. An even greater threat was the dangerous conditions inside the mines during shooting. It was dangerous, of course, during our research. There were many things we had to be mindful of, like journalists, for example. We were most afraid of journalists because if they exposed the problem of the mines, the mine owners would stand to lose millions of dollars. The whole scandal of their relationship with corrupt government officials would be exposed. Since the mines in theory belong to the nation, the businesses often pay off local bureaucrats to get licences to operate the mines. So we had to take account of these complicated social forces involving money and personal relationships.

ST: You didn't liaise at all with government officials or the Film Bureau?

LY: Naturally, we did the basic contacts and supplied certain "credentials". Our subject matter concerns things that happen all the time in China but which for the Film Bureau don't make good stories. However, our story wasn't anything like reactionary or counter-revolutionary since the novel itself won the highest literary award (the Lao She Prize) in the country, so there wasn't any political stigma attached to it.

ST: Your film hasn't been shown in China, has it?

LY: No.

ST: I suppose it's banned. What is its status?

LY: The film is not considered a Chinese film, that is to say it's not produced through official channels in China. The money came from overseas and from Hong Kong, but the exteriors were shot in China. Such a film, according to the present system, doesn't come under the Chinese censorship regime. However, there were reports in the newspapers that said that officials in the Film Bureau regarded the film as an illegal production because it was shot illegally. Since the Film Bureau regards it as illegal, then I suppose it's banned. Nobody has told me whether or not I've been blacklisted. Nobody will tell you, right? (laughs) But some media reports have said that this is the case.

ST: You said there were six drafts of the screenplay. I haven't read the novel but I presume you must have made substantial changes.

LY: There is a huge discrepancy with the novel because I have always felt that film adaptations of famous novels usually don't turn out to be very good. As an adaptor, I was constantly thinking about this problem. We had the agreement of the author to make drastic changes to the novel, including the structure, characters, and some of the locations. But I wanted to respect the spirit of the novel and its details. The three characters are taken from the novel, but we expanded the character of the prostitute - she was hardly described in the novel and so you might say we made her into a full-fledged character in the film - or the character of the mining housewife who doesn't exist in the novel. We added some situations.

ST: What was it about the novel that attracted you most?

LY: That's difficult to say because I haven't thought about it. It's not so much the characters as the events that inspired me, for example, China undergoing a period of transition in the economy, from its previous worshipping of ideals to the current worship of money or desire for material wealth that has the effect of wiping out our morality and humanity - these were the sorts of questions that affected me most after returning to China from overseas. The modernisation pursued by China emphasises industry - the building of skyscrapers, an improvement in people's lives - which in itself gives little cause for criticism, but there's not enough emphasis on education or the spiritual side. I am extremely disgusted by the practice of education in China today as a business. Because I live in Germany, which is a social democratic state where education is free, I note the difference of approach; and Germany's quality of life is very high and its industry is at the very top. There are still many families in China who don't send their children to school because the fees are too high.

ST: When you were interviewing the miners, did they talk about reforming their conditions, their demands for a better lifestyle?

LY: Naturally they hope their conditions would improve because they live and work in such dangerous surroundings.

ST: How much do they earn?

LY: Not a lot because they are paid on piece-work. On average they would earn slightly more than one thousand yuan a month, and that's based on how much you produce. If you don't work, you don't get paid. It's a completely capitalistic system.

ST: And they all live in the mining compound?

LY: There are no houses. I saw a lot of them living in an underground shelter or a hole that is simply dug out of the mountain, which is where they live and sleep, like rats. If you notice clearly in the movie's first scene, the workers emerge out of a hole in the mountain for the morning's work. It's quite miserable. With houses, it's too cold, and the caves are much warmer. They are a cross between cave dwellings and houses, you might say. And there's no clean water, so you have to pay for water, either to drink or to wash yourself, and it's very expensive. We took some artistic licence in depicting our miners washing and bathing with so much water, but in real life, you can't waste water like that because it's so expensive. Life is very hard for them.

ST: How did you choose your actors?

LY: Apart from the two male leads who were professional actors, non-professionals played all the other roles. Basically I wanted them to reject everything that was external and beyond the frame but to be realistic and true to life. The kind of film I was making didn't need handsome men or beautiful women. My standard criterion was characters, which is to say that they were playing roles not unlike real people.

ST: Did you need a long time to rehearse your actors?

LY: Not always. I have a different method with different actors. Like the kid (Wang Baoqiang), I wanted him to be intuitive, so rehearsing him might be counter-productive. There's no way that he could remember what to do this time or next time and so on...I don't force him. In fact, I make more demands on professional actors and I discuss the script more with them. For the young boy, you find a way to guide him but not to rehearse him because that would make him more rigid. So with amateurs, you have to have another method in handling them. There's a different method for dealing with child actors and another for dealing with adult ones. Like An Jing, who plays the prostitute, she had never acted before. For the sake of realism, I asked her to strip, which for a Chinese girl is quite difficult to do, due to prudishness in traditional Chinese society. I am greatly opposed to falsehood, and perhaps this has something to do with my background in making documentaries or perhaps the fact that I live overseas. But I feel you can't be fully dressed acting in a scene that takes place in a brothel. That's not possible.

ST: I was quite startled by the nude scenes, which is quite daring for Chinese cinema. It's practically never been seen before in a Chinese film.

LY: Never before. Not even in a Hong Kong film, apart from the "Category Three" softcore stuff...

ST: How did you handle the actors in this instance?

LY: You have to work with them and convince them. They have seen scenes like that in European and American films on DVD or pirated discs in China, and so they understand the rationality. The female lead in the film was originally a medical student who became interested in acting. I felt she had the disposition and feeling for the role so I cast her. And it's a difficult job really because of societal reservations due to traditional mores. But it was done; and they took off their clothes for the sake of art, so I am very grateful to them.

ST: How much of the scenes were due to improvisation?

LY: The bulk of the script was already determined but I didn't want to restrict the actors too much. The dialogue was basically written but there were cases where the actors made up their lines. If they were comfortable saying those lines, I let them do it. I was an actor for a long time so I know how they feel. A screenplay must be handled as a totality but with actors you have to be much more pragmatic. The starting point is that of character and if a certain line or delivery is more natural to the character, then I let the actor do it. It doesn't matter how you say a line so long as it doesn't conflict with the principle that you want to express. That's why there's a lot of swear words in the film because that's how it is with the peasants. Besides, the swear words don't often represent abuse but rather a habitual way of speech which is sometimes used in occasions of joy between friends. I preserve this kind of speech, write them down and let the actors do it. I feel that film is a collective art even though you have a director, but the group must realize a director's intentions. The process of realization is through a process of collective creativity.

ST: I'd like you to comment on your intentions for making the film. You've talked about the miners and the need for reform of their lifestyle and conditions. When you were conceiving the film, did you want to express a message to the audience to that effect, or did you want to avoid being too didactic?

LY: I didn't think about a message, because I am not God and I don't want to tell people how to live. I don't know what's right and I take life as it comes. So I didn't have the intention of telling the audience about reform and all that. My aim was more to tell a story. Certainly, the story would touch upon my own vision of life and society but this vision doesn't include a deliberate plan to prescribe some truth in a didactic fashion. As a director, I was more concerned about how best to tell a story and to make it entertaining. That's why when we were doing the script, I wanted to put in a lot of humour. When I was observing the miners, although their lives were hard, they were not morose or dispirited. They possessed a kind of humour, or a sort of magnanimous view of life - what the Chinese call renming (or an acceptance of fate). They want to change their lives but they can't do it. Being poor citizens they are concerned about how to earn money safely and go home to feed their families. I didn't have a deliberate plan to depict their tragic lives. This wasn't my focal point.

ST: But you see the darkness of human behaviour in the two lead characters.

LY: True, but only to represent a certain type of human being that exists in our present stage of ideology. You have to portray a person in his own right, or his own personal thought. The two characters don't represent the whole of China. In order to portray them, you have to use their thinking to reflect upon them. When I had a fifth or sixth draft of the script, you could say I was already breathing along with them in order to transmit their thoughts and their sense of values. Naturally the audience will look at them and feel that they are despicable.

ST: Do you sympathize with them?

LY: I do. Definitely, I adopt a sympathetic attitude to portray them. Because one of them wanted to free himself from the evil but couldn't do it. Though we are confronted with his immense evil, humanity isn't entirely obliterated and he's capable of being touched by sentimentality or the benevolent side of humanity. Under such circumstances, I sympathize with the character.

ST: In fact, he's quite a traditionalist Chinese...one who is bound to family.

LY: That's completely right... Although I am not saying I planned it that way, the idea is still to reflect on why these two men are the way they are. They have a decent side - they are thrifty as shown by the fact that they are not willing to spend even five dollars watching a video, and they stay in cheap hotels - the first thing they do once they have money is to send some back to their families. Why are such people capable of evil? I want to lead the audience to think about this question. Why are these two people on the road to destruction? They are exterminating their own humanity. They have grown up under the red flag, under a different standard of education and a different ideology. But times have changed. What are they to do with their lives? It's not just these two individuals but a whole generation - people in their forties and fifties who followed every whim of the Communist Party. They went where the Party sent them. When the Party said not to go to school, they didn't go to school. So what has happened to these people? They want support but are not given it, they want skill and they don't have it, and they are losing their physical strength when they still need it...

ST: For people who have grown up under the red flag, including yourself, do you still preserve a traditionalist view of the family?

LY: The family as a virtue has been passed down through thousands of years of Chinese civilization. Our traditionalist culture in respect to the family, its ethical values, has withstood the Cultural Revolution and foreign invasion. Why has it continued to be passed down the ages? I have constantly thought about this question. The family is a theme in the background, and because of this, you can't say that conscience has been completely eliminated from the two characters. But I have relegated it to the background rather than the foreground of the story in order to let the audience think about it...probably because I am utilising a method from traditional Chinese art which is to leave a lot of space for the audience to ponder over. That's why I also decided to cut my film down from its original rather lengthy running time - to leave the audience something, not to reveal the whole story or to say everything clearly. Perhaps that's why after the first 20 or 30 minutes, it's still not clear, there are still some doubts...What exactly has happened? What's going on?

ST: After 30 minutes when they start looking for the boy, the atmosphere turns to one of suspense.

LY: Right...

ST: Did you plan it that way? To be suspenseful...

LY: Naturally. So that the audience can continue watching...you're telling a story and you want to tell it well, to make the audience watch.

ST: This leads the audience to anticipate how the two miners will kill the boy.

LY: Correct. Because the audience wouldn't know what the ending is...

ST: Did you spend a lot of time thinking about the ending?

LY: Sure. We shot a lot of endings but there wasn't one that was ideal. The ending now isn't ideal either, but compared with the others, it's more acceptable. The most difficult things to do are the opening and the ending. A fine start, a substantial middle, and a pretty finish...they are very difficult to achieve. As for the ending, vis-à-vis the boy's fate, I wanted something open. ... A child is the hope of mankind...he is also the hope of the story.

ST: I suggest that the audience can draw a message from the story after all - something to do with China's modernisation and industrialisation programme. How do you yourself see China's industrialisation programme?

LY: My personal view is that China is undergoing a very rapid pace of industrialisation, which is probably necessary. From the time of the Opium War to 1949, China had fought 100 years of war. From 1949 to the period of reform and the "Open Door" policy, there was nothing but a long series of political campaigns. How many countries can afford to go through over 100 years of continuous calamity? Once you come into a relatively stable phase of your history, you need to develop your economy, which is all to the good - looking at it from the historical point of view.

ST: You have a line in the film, "China lacks everything except human beings". How do you interpret that?

LY: (laughs) It's best I don't interpret it, because everyone has his or her own opinion. But some people have the view that China indeed has too many people and therefore the value of a human being isn't all that high. One of the facts about China is that life is cheap. To cite a simple case: when China fought its war with Vietnam in 1979, a soldier killed in the war was worth only a few thousand dollars, which was the amount given to his family. The price was such because we have too many people. That's why China has a poor record in human rights, humanitarian issues, or concerns about human beings. It's always been like that. However, looking at it from the many stages of China's history, I feel that the current stage of development is pretty good. I really do. But that's not to say that there are no problems. The problems come when you neglect the spiritual side of human development, the essence of humanity, the problems of good and evil. When you have so many bureaucrats and human beings corrupted by money, the problems pile up. When the economy develops up to a point, human beings need to return to developing themselves. This is a process that cannot be avoided.

ST: The final objective is to attain a comparatively well-off living standard for the whole of society (xiaokang shehui). Don't you support that?

LY: I do, but what are the basic criteria of xiaokang shehui? Is it to attain a per capita income living standard of about US\$5,000 or US\$10,000? What kind of criteria do you use? I don't think it's all about money, or how much you produce per capita. When your economy takes off, you have many films, such as that of Fassbinder's in Germany, which criticise the society. This is quite common in many countries...Taiwan, for example...it's a stage common to humanity. How do you tackle this stage as a topic? I completely support the goal of attaining a moderately well-off society, but the problem is that it has many negative side-effects. You can't ignore them. I put greater emphasis on this dimension. Some people may make lots of money, but they wipe out their individuality. If everything is money, that's a pretty horrible thought.

ST: I wonder how you see yourself in the context of Chinese cinema. Do you identify with the Sixth Generation, or do you see yourself as an independent?

LY: I don't know how to define myself, and I don't know how others look at me. There's an article that described me as that "black man, Li Yang", so I am a black man... (laughs). It's actually quite embarrassing. You can say I am a German director and that I am using that identity to wander about. As for the Sixth Generation or the Fifth Generation, my own thought is that there isn't a Sixth Generation...

ST: There is no Sixth Generation?

LY: That's my own personal feeling. A generation can't be determined by age but by a film idea that is relative... for example, the French New Wave, the new German cinema, or Italian neo-realism, where there's a trend of thought or an understanding towards film which can constitute a "generation" different from others. The Fifth Generation was unlike what came before so it could become a "generation" relative to previous "generations"...

ST: Isn't the Sixth Generation relative to the Fifth Generation?

LY: Yes, but it's only a matter of difference in age; I don't think there is a cinematic difference. In terms of age, I can belong to either generation. In fact, I am closer to the Fifth Generation by age. My friends and classmates are from that generation. We went to middle school together and some of them were actually junior to me. They went on to university while I was working as an actor because my family didn't have much money. Later, when the financial situation of my family improved, I entered university together with students of the Sixth Generation. So where do I fit in? I don't know. Maybe I have the thoughts of both the Fifth Generation or the so-called Sixth Generation. But personally, I am of the opinion that the Sixth Generation isn't formed yet. If the Sixth Generation is a critical response to the Fifth, then it could be the declaration of the Sixth Generation, but there's nothing like that...no works that could form a body like that of the Fifth Generation's which was a revolt.

ST: Don't you think Jia Zhangke's films are a revolt?

LY: But he's only one person...

ST: There are others. Zhang Yuan...

LY: It's difficult to place Zhang Yuan into which generation...

ST: What about Lou Ye?

LY: He's got another different style. But I would say for these people ... basically each person is doing things in his own way. To the critic, this may be how a generation comes into being but from a long-term historical point of view, this generation will disappear, because apart from doing things your own way, you must have a declaration of intent, do you understand me? A generation is formed by some kind of film idea, a basic morality, which everybody can identify with. Without such a rallying point, how can there be a generation? Hong Kong has gone through long years of movie-making but there's no divisions of generations. It's the same in Hollywood. Even if you have an idea and that stands for a generation, how do you evaluate Zhang Yuan? His previous films were anti-establishment films but now he makes a film such as Jiang Jie (literally "Sister Jiang") that loudly proclaims "Long Live the Communist Party!" What generation does he belong to?

ST: Are you an outsider then?

LY: I feel I am in an awkward position. Naturally, I hope to be with the Sixth Generation. I don't agree with some of their approach, but there are other things I do agree with. But I feel that for a generation to be formed, people like Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai, whose films I admire although they are younger than I am - we should all sit down and work out a guiding principle, or a trend of thought. Only then can a generation be formed. Without it we can't be considered a generation. We can identify a Fifth Generation, but what of the generation before that? You can't find it. From the time we made our first movie to the 1940s, what generations are those? Nobody has yet told me. What are the third and fourth generations? Nothing. In truth, you have to look at the problem over the long term, and not the present. When people ask me which generation do I belong to, I can't say which one because I can't make it out myself. I am still searching.

ST: Let's just say you are a Chinese director.

LY: Yes, absolutely, you can say that. I feel that I am a Chinese director, and I wouldn't change such a definition. But it's difficult to place me in which generation. Comparatively speaking, I feel that my film is quite close to some of the concepts in Jia Zhangke's films, his concern for the "nobodies" or his description of the lifestyle of the grassroots - and I would also include the films of Wang Xiaoshuai - and their ideas about films, which are unlike the more grandiose works of the Fifth Generation. They were all concerned about the fate of the country, right? We have all come up with our own thing.

ST: What is your next film?

LY: It's still in the scriptwriting stage, and nothing is definite as yet. The story is still being written so I don't wish to talk about it, but I can say that it is related to China. I am very concerned about the fate of China and the human essence of the Chinese people - individuals and personal lives. These are the things I hope to express.