



Tongzhi in Love

彼岸浮生

Press Packet

CONTACTS

Beijing: e: info@campfilms.org

New York: e: lennon@campfilms.org

World Sales Agent: Smiley Film Distribution & World Sales
PO BOX 90943, AMSC, Auckland 1142, New Zealand
t: +64 9 3092613 m: +64 27 250 2308
e: bigio@smileyfilmsales.com
www.smileyfilmsales.com

www.tongzhiinlove.com



tongzhi 同志

[pron: tung-jee]

noun

1. companion, buddy, friend
2. comrade, as in fellow Communist
3. (slang) a gay man

How many lives can one man lead?



Tongzhi in Love

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Produced by: Thomas Lennon
Directed by: Ruby Yang

Length: 30 minutes
Film Format: Mini-DV

Original Language: Chinese
Subtitles: English

World Premiere: June 18, 2008

Short Description

“Frog” Cui and his friends navigate the dilemmas of being gay in modern China, torn between the lures of city life and the unyielding traditions by which they were raised. Frog loves his parents: does that mean he must honor his duty to them by marrying and bearing a child?

Paragraph Synopsis

Three young men navigate the dilemmas of being gay in modern China, torn between the lure of big city life and the demands of Chinese tradition. “Frog” Cui and his friends live and work in cosmopolitan Beijing, reveling in the freedom that it affords them. But does their happiness come at the expense of their mothers and fathers? Can they be gay, and still be good sons? The film is directed by Ruby Yang who, with producer Thomas Lennon, won a documentary Oscar in 2006.



250-Word Synopsis

“Of the three filial offenses, failing to maintain the subsequent generation is the worst.”

Confucian Teaching

“Frog” Cui and his gay friends are torn between the lures of city life and the stern demands of Chinese tradition. They live in cosmopolitan Beijing, reveling in the freedom that it affords them. But traditionally, a Chinese son’s solemn duty is to produce a child and carry forward the family line. That China’s laws limit most families to a single child only compounds the pressures on gay men. Many resort to sham marriages.

When his mother arrives to find him a girlfriend, Frog, 28 years old, understands that he cannot delay much longer. “Some of my gay friends have married lesbians,” he confides. “At the wedding, I saw how happy their parents were.”

Long Ze, even as he relishes his sexual life with men, lashes out against gays who refuse to marry. “That attitude is selfish, completely selfish . . . If you live your whole life for yourself, not for your parents,” he says, “how are you going to fulfill your responsibilities as a Chinese man?”

Frog’s good friend, Xiang Feng, has asserted that he will come out to his parents on his next visit home. But when he and Frog travel the thousand miles into the Chinese countryside to the family village, events do not unfold as planned.

The film is directed by Ruby Yang who, together with producer Thomas Lennon, won a documentary Oscar in 2006. Yang Yishu was field producer and cinematographer.



Director's Statement

On a wintry Saturday night in a smoke-filled bar in the back alley of Beijing's oldest district, a beautiful dancer in a scanty chiffon outfit is performing to the music of "Butterfly Lovers." It's standing room only - there are at least 100 patrons, all middle-aged men. Greeted with loud applause at the end, the dancer receives 100 Yuan notes from patrons who stuff the bills inside the cleavage of his dress.

That was 2004, my first introduction to the Beijing gay scene by our field producer, Joe Zhou. We were doing research work on our AIDS awareness documentaries.

In the following months, we spoke with dozens of middle-aged gay men, though no tape recorder would be allowed. One man was so careful, he wouldn't even let me take notes.

"Many of the members of my web site are afraid of extortion," explained the organizer of the aptly-named web site, verytired.com. Many members are established businessmen and white-collar workers who are afraid they will lose their jobs.

In Shanghai, I saw a ballroom where hundreds of gay men - street vendors, storekeepers, tailors, laborers, mid-level office clerks - were dancing an elegant waltz. That was the one venue where they could fully be themselves. By 8:30, they were gone; the lady who ran the place explained that this was a short break for the men, most of whom then return home to their lives as married men.

"I was gay, had a great love affair with a man, I tasted the beauty of love," an AIDS volunteer told me. "Now I'm married and I want to live a normal life with my wife and my baby girl." But his eyes welled up with tears when he spoke.

There's no society where it's easy to be gay, but to be gay in China is to collide with the most central tenet of Chinese tradition: the honor-bound duty of sons to carry on the family name.

"On the Internet, I'm myself and I'm alive - the only time I can be myself," a 26-year old TV producer told me. He was brought along by his boyfriend to the interview.

Stories like these abound as Chinese society continues to open. The predicaments are not unlike those shown in our film, only they went unrecorded because these men couldn't risk their stories being exposed.

Tongzhi bars and clubs are flourishing in big cities throughout China. Gay men are enjoying freedoms that were unimaginable ten or fifteen years ago, and there is a movement towards greater tolerance and understanding. We are witnessing the tipping point, the moment where old pretence is falling away, even if a new tolerance is not yet solidly here to take its place. This moment of change -- profoundly uncomfortable, and unavoidable -- is the subject of the film.



About the Filmmakers

RUBY YANG, Director

Ruby Yang is a noted Chinese American filmmaker whose work in documentary and dramatic film has earned her an Academy Award and numerous international awards. She lives and works in Beijing.



Along with producer Thomas Lennon, Yang founded the Chang Ai Media Project in 2003. Since then, its documentaries and public service announcements about AIDS awareness have been seen more than 500 million times. *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, which Yang directed as part of the project, won the 2006 Oscar for Documentary - Short Subject at the 79th Academy Awards in February, 2007.

Their most recent documentary, *Tongzhi in Love*, which Yang directed, premiered at the Silverdocs Documentary Film Festival and the Frameline32 Gay & Lesbian Film Festival in June 2008. The film won the Golden Gate Award for Best Documentary Short Subject at the 52nd San Francisco International Film Festival.

Prior to her work in Beijing, Yang directed the 1997 production *Citizen Hong Kong*, “unflinching in its honesty, vivid in its kaleidoscopic imagery,” according to the *Chicago Reader*. Both *Citizen Hong Kong* and her 2000 production, *China 21* aired in Hong Kong, Taiwan and numerous European outlets after showing on PBS for Asian Pacific Heritage Month.

Yang has also edited several feature films, including Joan Chen’s debut feature *Xiu Xiu, The Sent Down Girl*. The movie “[tells] a story that feels nearly mythic in its themes of betrayal, devotion and power,” wrote the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “Poetic in its images, devastating in its emotional impact,” the film premiered at the Berlin Festival in 1998 and went on to win seven Golden Horses, Taiwan’s equivalent of the Academy Award. Yang served as Associate Producer of the film. She also edited Chen’s first Hollywood feature, *Autumn in New York*, starring Richard Gere and Winona Ryder.

Yang was Series Editor for Bill Moyers’ *Becoming American - the Chinese Experience* (PBS, March 2003), supervising editing for the entire series, which received four Emmy nominations. She spent more than a year working closely with Moyers, producing, “a model documentary that gets almost everything right,” according to the *New York Times*.

Born in Hong Kong, she moved to San Francisco in 1977. She graduated from San Francisco Art Institute in Painting (BFA) and Filmmaking (MFA) and had been living in San Francisco before relocating to Beijing in 2004.

ruby.yang@campfilms.org



About the Filmmakers

THOMAS LENNON, Producer

Lennon's work in documentary film has won the field's most coveted honors: an Academy Award (two nominations), a duPont-Columbia award, two George Foster Peabody and Writers' Guild awards, and two Emmys (twelve nominations).

Lennon is co-founder with Ruby Yang of the Chang Ai Media Project (formerly the China AIDS Media Project), which launched the first major AIDS campaign in China. These AIDS awareness ads have been seen more than 500 million times in China. Lennon and Yang's documentary, *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, won the 2006 Oscar for Documentary - Short Subject at the 79th Academy Awards in February, 2007.

In 2003, Lennon was series producer and lead writer of *Becoming American - the Chinese American Experience*, a six-hour, two-year collaboration with Bill Moyers that traced Chinese immigration from the early 19th century to the present-day. "This is a model documentary that gets almost everything right," wrote the *New York Times*. "Moyers is clearly working with first-rate talent." The series was cited by the International Documentary Association and the Writers' Guild, and won a Christopher and four Emmy nominations.

More than ten million viewers -- double the PBS prime-time average -- tuned in to the 1998 premiere of Lennon's *The Irish in America: Long Journey Home*. "The filmmaker is a consummate storyteller," wrote *The Boston Globe*; the work, "...looks and sounds like a labor of love," said *The New York Times*. Rated among the year's ten best by TV Guide, the series earned, again, four Emmy nominations, and its companion CD won the Grammy for best folk album of the year.

The Battle over Citizen Kane (1996), co-produced with Michael Epstein, had its premiere at the Sundance Film Festival. "A two-hour tornado of a documentary," declared *Time*. After the film's nomination for an Academy Award, Ridley Scott's production company adapted it as an HBO dramatic film, starring John Malkovich.

Battle of the Bulge, co-written with Mark Zwonitzer, won the Peabody and duPont-Columbia awards for 1995. "Unforgettable," the *Chicago Tribune* wrote, "as great and as moving a documentary as television has ever produced." Lennon's other films include his two widely-acclaimed collaborations with writer Shelby Steele, *Seven Days in Bensonhurst* (1990) and *Jefferson's Blood* (2000), as well as *The Choice* (1992) and *Tabloid Truth* (1994), both written with Richard Ben Cramer.

Before setting up his own production company in 1987, Lennon worked for almost a decade in the Close-up Division of ABC News, with assignments in the Soviet Union, South America and the Middle East. He is a magna cum laude graduate of Yale University.

tl@thomaslennonfilms.com



About the Filmmakers

YANG YISHU, Field Producer & Cinematographer

Yang Yishu is a Beijing-based filmmaker and screenwriter.

While a painting student at the prestigious China Academy of Arts, she began experimenting with film in 2002. Since then, she has made and edited a number of documentaries and short films. Prior to filming “Tongzhi in Love,” she wrote two screenplays for the acclaimed director Wang Xiaoshuai, for whom she continues to work.

BILL FRISELL, Composer

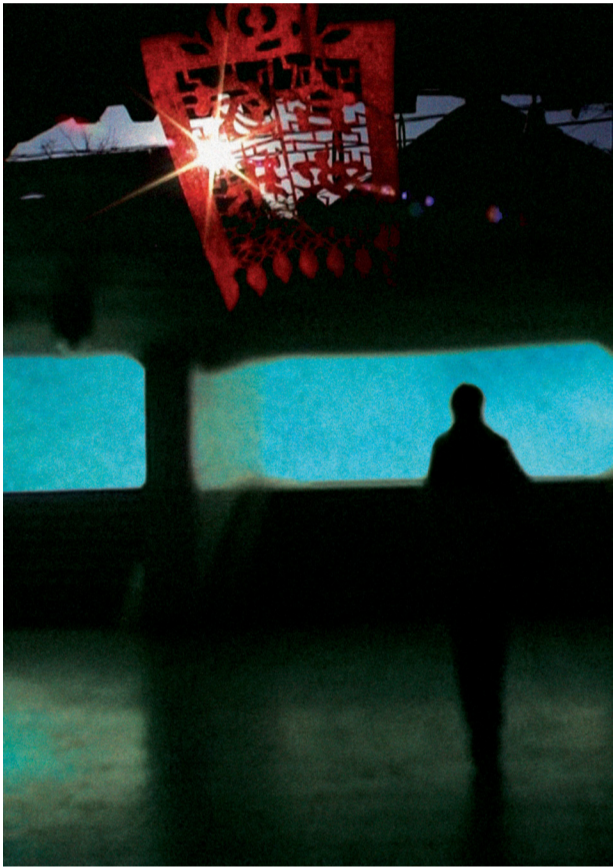
William Richard “Bill” Frisell is an American jazz guitarist and composer.

Along with John Scofield and Pat Metheny, he is one of the best-known and perhaps best-regarded jazz guitarists of the last decade. His playing, on both his own records and his collaborations with others, has covered an impressive range of styles. Unlike most jazz guitarists, who tend to prefer a clean, unaltered tone, Frisell uses a wide range of effects (delay, distortion, reverb, octave shifters, and volume pedals, to name a few) to coax unique sounds from his instrument.

BRIAN KEANE, Composer

Brian Keane is a leading music producer and composer who has won numerous Emmy and Grammy Awards. He wrote the music for Lennon and Yang’s Academy Award-winning film, *The Blood of Yingzhou District*.

Production Stills



Tongzhi in Love 01

“Tongzhi in Love,” directed by Oscar-winning director Ruby Yang, explores the dilemmas of being gay in modern China.

(Photo/Still frame from film)



Tongzhi in Love 02

“Frog” Cui (left) and Xiang Feng (right) are torn between the lures of city life and the stern demands of Chinese tradition.

(Photo/Ruby Yang)



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End Credits

Featuring
“Frog” Cui
Xiang Feng
Long Ze

Produced by
Thomas Lennon

Directed by
Ruby Yang

Field Producer & Cinematography
Yang Yishu

Original Music by
Bill Frisell
Brian Keane

Edited by
Gary Wong



End Credits (Cont.)

Additional Editing by
Ruby Yang

Additional Cinematography
Guan Xin
Qu Jiang Tao
Ruby Yang
Joe Zhou

Animation Sequences Created by
“Frog” Cui

Music Consultant
Tim Sternberg

Music performed by
Bill Frisell (guitars, loops)
Eyvind Kang (viola)
Matt Chamberlain (drums, percussion)
Hector Del Curto (bandoneon)
Leo Huppert (bass)



End Credits (Cont.)

“A city built for others’ dreams”
Chinese rock music courtesy of **Wei Jia**

Assistant Editor
Ju Dan

Post-production Assistant
Alexandra Mattholie

Subtitles by
Catherine Maticic
Lauren Reed

On line Editor / Colorist
Jesse Spencer

Sound Editor
Kyrsten Mate



End Credits (Cont.)

Music Editor
Keith Chirgwin

Re-recording Mixer
Tony Sereno

Re-recording Studio
Skywalker Sound

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and the friends and supporters of the film.**

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Chang Ai Media Project**

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Beijing

info@campfilms.org

New York

e: lennon@campfilms.org