



The Blood of Yingzhou District

颖州的孩子

Press Packet

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The Blood of Yingzhou District

Produced by: Thomas Lennon
Directed by: Ruby Yang

USA/China
Length: 39 minutes
Film Format: Mini-DV

Original Language: Chinese
Subtitles: English

World Premiere: June 14, 2006

Short Byline

A year in the life of children in the Province of Anhui, China, who have lost their parents to AIDS. Traditional obligations to family and village collide with terror of the disease.

Paragraph Synopsis

Gao Jun, the child featured in “The Blood of Yingzhou District,” does not speak a word until the closing minutes of the film. Little is known about him, not even his age. Yet the AIDS orphan’s search for a home to call his own forms the dramatic center of this documentary set in rural China, directed by Ruby Yang and produced by Thomas Lennon. In February 2007, the film won the Academy Award for Best Documentary - Short Subject.

120-Word Synopsis

Gao Jun, the child featured in “The Blood of Yingzhou District,” does not speak a word until the closing minutes of the film. Little is known about him, not even his age. Yet this young AIDS orphan reveals his ferocious resolve to live while his extended family weighs whether or not to keep him. The documentary, directed by Ruby Yang and produced by Thomas Lennon, tells the story of traditional Chinese obligations of family and village colliding with the terror of infection and how these forces play out in the lives of children in the remote villages of Anhui. Framing the film is Gao Jun’s search for a family to call his own. In February 2007, this film won the Academy Award for Best Documentary - Short Subject.

Long Synopsis

No-one knows how old Gao Jun is. Four? Older? Younger? Whatever his biological age, he has none of the verbal babble, or ready tears, of a child his age. The film tracks this orphan for a year as his closest surviving kin -- his uncles -- weigh what to do with him. The older uncle’s dilemma: if he allows his children to play with Gao Jun, who is HIV-positive, they will be ostracized by terrified neighbors. The younger uncle’s dilemma: so long as Gao Jun remains in the house, the young man may not be able to find a wife.

Gao Jun is one of just a handful of children we come to know in this film: Nan Nan, who after her parents’ death, was shunned by relatives and left to live without adult care with ‘Little Flower’, her teenage sister; and the Huang siblings, who vividly describe their ostracism at school. The suffering of these orphans is all the more devastating for being largely unnecessary, the function of misinformation about the nature of the disease.

Yet the film is more than a mere catalogue of woes. Nan Nan reveals her impish humor and joy; the Huang children resolve to become educated and outstrip those who shun them; and Gao Jun, in the closing scenes, demonstrates his ferocious determination to live.



The Blood of Yingzhou District

Director's Statement

The fourteen-hour train ride from Beijing to the villages of Anhui, in rural China, is a journey back in time: fields fallow in the winter cold, earthen gravesites visible through the stubble, fishermen at the riverbanks. If you forget the telephone poles, you can imagine yourself a century back in time -- a time when disease had the power to strike incomprehensible terror into the lives of farming families.

The three Huang children, orphaned by AIDS, led me to their family home. It was full of empty medicine bottles and old toys, and children's scribbles covered the walls. But it was the smell -- the smell of death -- that had a deep impact on me.

It was something that couldn't be captured in a documentary.

But what could be captured was the range of the children's desires and feelings: hurt, yes, but also anger, playfulness, mischief, longing and above all, a fierce will to live.

And yet, neighbors and classmates, scared of infection, shunned the children. Here a filmmaker could lend a hand -- dispel some of the unneeded fears and ease the stigma that surrounded them. And with the help of my collaborator, Thomas Lennon, that is what I set out to do.

The Blood of Yingzhou District

Biography of Director and Producer





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.

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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.

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The Blood of Yingzhou District

Production Stills: Captions



Blood of Yingzhou 01 – Ren Nannan

The Blood of Yingzhou District follows the story of Nan’nan Ren after she loses her parents to AIDS in Anhui Province, China. Most of her surviving relatives have shunned her; will her sister leave her as well? (Photo / Yan Yi)



Blood of Yingzhou 02 – Gao Jun

After he lost his parents to AIDS, Gao Jun stopped speaking. Yet this boy, whose age is unknown and who remains mute until the last minutes of the film, stands at the dramatic center of the new documentary, *The Blood of Yingzhou District*. (Photo / Yan Yi)



Blood of Yingzhou 03 – Gravesite

Villagers mourn at the gravesite of a relative lost to AIDS in Anhui Province, China, the setting for the new documentary, *The Blood of Yingzhou District*. (Photo / Yan Yi)



Blood of Yingzhou 04 – Huang Children

The Huang children, featured in the new documentary, *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, describe their ostracism at the hands of fellow villagers after they lost their parents to AIDS. But they vow they will have the last word. (Photo / Yan Yi)



Blood of Yingzhou 05 – Grief

A grandmother in Anhui Province, China, mourns the loss of her son to AIDS, in the new documentary, *The Blood of Yingzhou District*. (Photos / Yan Yi)



Director & Producer

Director Ruby Yang (right) with Producer Thomas Lennon of The China AIDS Media Project (now the Chang Ai Media Project), creators of the first major AIDS awareness campaign on Chinese television. (Photo / Pamela Gentile).



The Blood of Yingzhou District

Featured Children, Production Crew
& Credits

The Children

(In order of appearance)

GAO Jun	高峻
REN Nan'nan	任楠楠
REN Xiaohua	任小花
HUANG Xinlei	黄新雷
HUANG Jinhong	黄金红
HUANG Xinmei	黄新梅



Produced by
Thomas LENNON

Directed by
Ruby YANG

Director of Photography
QU Jiang Tao

Edited by
Ruby YANG
MA Man Chung

Original Music by
Brian KEANE



Additional Cinematography

Lambert YAM

Production Manager

Michelle MI

Associate Editor

LU Qing Ying

Assistant Editors

JU Dan

Sharon LU

Production Assistants

Suy CHEN

Vicky ZHANG

Translation by

Sharon LU

Shirley SHEN

On-line Editor/Colorist

Jesse SPENCER

Re-recording Mixer

James LEBRECHT

Sound Editor

Patti TAUSCHER

Erhu performed by

George GAO

Music Consultant

Tim STERNBERG

“Chinar es (You are a plane tree)”

choral music courtesy of

Celestial Harmonies/Mayflower Music Corp.



We want to thank:

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CHINA AIDS MEDIA PROJECT
(now the Chang Ai Media Project)

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The Blood of Yingzhou District

World Premiere at SILVERDOCS AFI/Discovery
Channel Documentary Festival

June 2006
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gao Jun, the child featured in the film *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, does not speak a word until the film's last minutes. Little is known about him, not even his age. Yet he stands at the dramatic center of the documentary directed by noted Hong Kongborn filmmaker Ruby Yang and produced by Academy Award-nominated filmmaker Thomas Lennon. The film opened at SILVERDOCS: The AFI/Discovery Channel Documentary Film Festival on June 14, 2006.

A young Chinese village boy orphaned by AIDS, and himself infected with the disease, Gao Jun appears to be about four years old. After his parents died, he was taken in by his eldest uncle, as Chinese tradition demands. But his uncle wrestles with a dilemma: if he allows Gao Jun to live in his family's house, his own family will be ostracized by other residents of the village. The film reveals how traditional obligations of kinship and village collide with terror of the disease, and how these forces play out in Gao Jun's search for a family to call his own.

Ruby Yang and Thomas Lennon are leaders of an ambitious AIDS prevention effort in China, The China AIDS Media Project. Yang and Lennon previously wrote and edited the first major AIDS-prevention campaign aired on Chinese television, featuring basketball icons Yao Ming and Magic Johnson.

"With this disease, film and television can save more lives than doctors can," said producer Thomas Lennon. "Our work in China is a humanitarian effort first, and artistic considerations are a distant second. How could it be otherwise? And yet here Ruby Yang has made a highly personal film."

"As I made my way through these remote villages in Anhui," said director Ruby Yang, "I could feel all the traditional stigmas and silences of Chinese family life. And that's what I set out to capture."

In addition to Gao Jun, the film features 14-year old Ren Nan'nan and 'Little Flower,' her sixteen-year-old sister. Shunned by their relatives, the two girls were inseparable, living together without adult supervision since their parents' deaths. But the sudden decision of Little Flower to marry shines a light on her relationship with her younger sibling and on the code of silence that governs village life.



Also profiled are 10-year-old Huang Xinlei and his sisters, orphans stung by the rejection of neighbors and schoolmates: “I hate being put down,” declares Huang. “One day, I will surpass them all.”

Uniting the separate strands of the film is local businesswoman Zhang Ying, who organizes a shoe-string charitable effort to come to the aid of the orphans of the district of Yingzhou, in Anhui Province, where the film is set. Shot with small-format cameras entirely by Chinese film crews, notably Beijing cinematographer Qu Jiangtao, the film achieves a level of intimacy and candor rarely seen in documentary work from China.

The China AIDS Media Project was founded by Lennon and Yang in 2003 to help spread AIDS information in the most populous country on earth. The project’s first goal was to reduce the stigma which drives the disease underground; the Yao Ming/Magic Johnson public service announcements, which Lennon and Yang wrote and edited, featured the two men embracing and sharing food together. Made in cooperation with the NBA and world-renowned AIDS researcher Dr. David Ho, these spots premiered during the excitement of the October 2004 “China Games,” the first ever NBA games played in China, and have since reached untold millions of Chinese television viewers, probably in the hundreds of millions.

In late 2005, the China AIDS Media Project got its first documentary work on the Chinese airwaves: a portrait of “Julia,” a university student who contracted AIDS through sexual contact and who decided to go public about her disease. This broadcast marked a watershed: one of the most candid explorations of pre-marital sex ever seen on Chinese television, whose content was closely monitored and censored by the state.

By the next year, CAMP was working in cooperation with UNICEF and the Chinese Ministry of Health to produce a series of ads designed to promote greater acceptance of children affected by AIDS. Starring popular Chinese folk singer Peng Liyuan and featuring several children from *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, the ads began their run on CCTV starting June 2006.

The Blood of Yingzhou District is the project’s first effort to reach international audiences.

The two filmmakers met on Bill Moyers’ “Becoming American: The Chinese Experience,” the acclaimed PBS series of which Lennon was Series Producer and Yang Series Editor. “This is a documentary that gets almost everything right,” wrote the *New York Times*. “Mr. Moyers is clearly working with first-rate talent.” It was during the making of that series that Yang and Lennon also came to know Dr. David Ho.

Key advisors to *The Blood of Yingzhou District* were Joan Ganz Cooney, co-founder of Sesame Workshop, and Professor Jing Jun of Tsinghua University in Beijing. The film was made possible in part by a grant from the Starr Foundation.



The Blood of Yingzhou District

***The Blood of Yingzhou District* triumphs
at Academy Awards**

March 1, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The China AIDS Media Project is pleased to announce that *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, produced by Thomas Lennon and directed by Ruby Yang, has won the Oscar in the 2007 Academy Awards® Documentary Short Subject category. This is the first win for both Thomas Lennon and Ruby Yang. Lennon has previously been nominated for the feature documentary *The Battle Over Citizen Kane* (1995).

The Blood of Yingzhou District tells the story of traditional Chinese obligations of family and village colliding with the terror of AIDS. Gao Jun, a young village boy from Anhui province, lost both parents to the disease and is himself infected. Little is known about him, even his age, and he does not speak a word until the closing minutes of the film. Yet Gao Jun reveals a ferocious resolve to live, even as his extended family weighs whether or not to keep him.

“Our work in China is a humanitarian effort first, and artistic considerations are a distant second. How could it be otherwise?” said Lennon. “And yet, here Ruby Yang has made a highly personal film.”

Yang and Lennon are architects of the China AIDS Media Project (CAMP), established in 2003 to help spread AIDS information in the most populous country on earth. *The Blood of Yingzhou District* is the project’s first effort to reach international audiences.

Shot with small-format cameras entirely by Chinese film crews, notably Beijing cinematographer Qu Jiangtao, the film achieves a level of intimacy and candor rarely seen in documentary work from China.

For Yang, that level of intimacy reached its climax in a visit to the home of the Huang siblings, who also lost both parents to AIDS.

“The three Huang children led me to their family home. It was full of empty medicine bottles and old toys, and children’s scribbles covered the walls. But it was the smell -- the smell of death -- that had a deep impact on me,” Yang said. “It was something that couldn’t be captured in a documentary.”



“But what could be captured was the range of the children’s desires and feelings: hurt, yes, but also anger, playfulness, mischief, longing and above all, a fierce will to live.” That will was what inspired Yang and Lennon in their current project: China’s first major public awareness campaign about AIDS.

Many of the children featured in the documentary appear in the campaign, made in cooperation with the Chinese Ministry of Health. The latest series of ads, featuring popular folk singer Peng Liyuan, are designed to ease the stigma and social rejection suffered by children affected with AIDS. The PSAs have aired over a thousand times on China’s national television network, CCTV, reaching an estimated 200 million viewers or more. In 2004, in cooperation with the NBA and noted AIDS researcher Dr. David Ho, Lennon and Yang created a widely-seen PSA and web campaign about AIDS featuring basketball stars Yao Ming and Magic Johnson. Until recently, AIDS has been a taboo subject in the Chinesemedia, and many Chinese are still ignorant of how the disease is spread.

“With this disease, film and television can save more lives than doctors can,” Lennon said.

The Blood of Yingzhou District premiered at the Silverdocs AFI/Discovery Channel Film Festival in June 2006, taking home the DOCS Rx Grand Jury Award, and has since been shown at over 24 festivals and screening venues worldwide and around the U.S.

Key advisors to CAMP include Professor Jing Jun of Tsinghua University in Beijing and Sesame Workshop co-founder Joan Ganz Cooney. *The Blood of Yingzhou District* was produced in association with Sesame Workshop and HBO Documentary Films and was made possible in part by a grant from the Starr Foundation.

**The China AIDS Media Project
(now the Chang Ai Media Project)**
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