



THE BLOOD OF YINGZHOU DISTRICT

World Premiere at SILVERDOCS

Press Release, June 2006

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 Kong-born 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 Prof. Jing Jun of Tsinghua University in Beijing. The film was made possible in part by a grant from the Starr Foundation.