

## 2000 Vancouver International Film Festival

# Interviews with Singing Chen (Chen Xinyi), director of *Bundled*, and Kim Sang-Jin, director of *Attack the Gas Station*

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*David Walsh:* Why did you decide to make this particular film?

*Singing Chen:* I am really interested in the topic of homelessness. And I started to get in contact with homeless people and try to talk to them, understand their conditions, about three years ago. That's when I started to develop the story line for the film. The character of the young man, Whippersnapper, was added to the script later on to make it more complete.

I wrote the script first because I'm interested in the topic of homeless people, and the other thing is I feel that there are a lot of things in this world that do not make sense. So I combined the two ideas together. The homeless problem stems from things within the present situation that don't make sense.

*DW:* Is homelessness a growing problem in Taipei?

*SC:* The problem has always existed. It's not getting better; it's not getting that much worse. But it's more serious in the older communities. And the older communities want to improve and modernize themselves, so that the homeless are pushed around.

*DW:* It seems to me that the film has an unusual subject and unusual style for a film from Taiwan. How do you see your relationship to other Taiwanese filmmakers?

*SC:* I am not that much influenced by other filmmakers in Taiwan, because they want to deal with the history of Taiwan, the identity of Taiwan. The younger generation prefers to deal with the urban problems. Isolation, alienation. But I think I'm more influenced by Third World cinema and literature. I like other Taiwanese films, but I don't think I'm that much influenced by them.

*DW:* There are a number of lines in the film that I thought were interesting. One of them is when the younger guy says: "When we all die, no one will think about it." Is this film a response to that, to make sure that people are not forgotten?

*SC:* That's one of the things that the line means. But, also, I feel that in modern society everything is getting faster, getting bigger, the economy is growing exponentially. There are certain people in this society that are living a different reality. They have a different concept of time.

*DW:* Is that a better way of living, a better conception? You're saying that certain people are marginalized. You almost have the feeling at times that you feel it's a preferable way of life, despite their economic difficulties.

*SC:* I personally like their approach to life and their attitude to life. But in the eyes of normal people, they might be irrational, their thinking doesn't make sense. But I think their world is logical. I like their attitude towards life.

*DW:* Another line which I thought was interesting was when the same characters says: "Why should I forget, why should I go forward?" Which

is a very popular phrase in this country too. "Just forget about the past, move on." It's a kind of collective amnesia.

*SC:* You see different headlines every day. At the end of the day, when everything is consumed, nobody will remember what was on the news yesterday. The world is getting bigger, faster and makes less and less sense. And people want to catch up with other people because they're afraid to stop. Once they stop, they're going to lag behind.

*DW:* There seems to be a particular obsession with private property, or a continuous reference to it. I wonder if that's a particular concern of yours, but also is it a particular concern in Taiwan because it is a small area? Is the question of "my land" and "my property" particularly obsessive?

*SC:* There is a very rigid system because the land is either yours or mine, is either government or private. So all the laws have been laid down. There are a lot of unreasonable things. For example, did you see all the empty buildings in the film? They start to build one and for some reason the building contractor abandons it. And the building is empty. But if the homeless people want to live there, they are going to get kicked out. So this is absurd.

*DW:* Of course the same thing happens in New York, Detroit, Vancouver, Toronto and everywhere else. This is a universal problem. Is there a gap between the people who are very rich and everyone else, is that a growing problem?

*SC:* I can feel that it's getting worse in Taiwan. It's really complicated. Also, the middle class is growing rapidly and the DPP [Democratic Progressive Party]—the new ruling party—wants the vote from the middle class. The DPP actually has more concern for the minorities than the previous ruling party, the nationalists [the Kuomintang]. But there is still a lack of resources and an uneven distribution of resources.

Especially after the big earthquake last year, things are getting worse in the rural areas because the local mafia are trying to get into politics. They have their own territories, so they absorb a lot of the resources that are meant to be shared by the villagers. Also after the earthquake, there was a desperate need for construction and all kinds of construction work. It matters a lot who gets the job and the contract. That's where the local mafia comes into play.

*DW:* Your film discusses dreams and the relationship of dreams to reality.

*SC:* A dream is real, because you actually dream. But in the dream, there are a lot of things that you bend, that you don't want, because it's a release. Just like the people who are abandoned by society, they are "things" that people don't want. So a dream is a reality from another world, or something like the novel that Whippersnapper is writing, about the things that are abandoned or thrown away.

*DW:* I wonder if you want the spectator to draw the conclusion that the

world needs to be changed?

SC: Yes, however, I'm not very optimistic because I think the system is too large for us to resist. So in the last scene, they are on a boat sailing to sea ... what I'm trying to show is that they are trying to find a way out. This might be a dream, they might not be on a boat, but it's a possibility. They are trying to look for new things. Everything is open.

DW: I was wondering if there are other filmmakers, either dead or alive, in Taiwan or elsewhere that you admire?

SC: Do you know the director of the film called *Miracle in Milan*? [Vittorio de Sica, in fact.] Mohsen Makhmalbaf, the Iranian. *Before the Rain*, from Yugoslavia [Milcho Manchevski]. The Greek director, Theo Angelopoulos. And also some South American writers, [Gabriel Garcia] Marquez and others. [Anton] Chekhov. There's an Indian film that we only know by the Chinese title.

I think my ideology is slanted towards the left. In the past, it was really a sensitive matter to be a leftist in Taiwan.

David Walsh: Why did you become a filmmaker?

Kim Sang-Jin: I've had an ordinary life, I never suffered any economic difficulty or hardship in my life. I was well brought up by my family. When I was young I watched a lot of movies. I was called "Hollywood Kid"—one of those people who watch movies all the time and dream about movies. That's probably the reason that I became a director and pursued this career.

Well, there is another reason: when I was young and watching movies, I saw *An Officer and a Gentleman* and I really liked Debra Winger. Oh, and I also liked Nastassja Kinski. As a kid, I wondered how I could meet these women. I didn't think that I could become an actor, so I became a director.

DW: Was the plan successful?

KS: I ended up making gangster movies, so I didn't see as many beautiful women as I wanted to. But I married an actress.

DW: Why the particular mood that's created in this film?

KS: I remember when I was in high school or junior high. I wasn't very courageous, I wasn't a stand-out student. I didn't have a lot of courage or the guts to do something bad. But I had a friend, who was a problem child, who went outside the rules. Just because a child is a problem child in school doesn't mean he'll be a misfit when he grows up. In my youth, I had some friends who were outsiders. But they became strong adults. So I just wanted to bring that out.

DW: In other words, is this a condition that all youth go through?

KS: I have a feeling that the audience relates to the characters. They pick up their hidden desires. They haven't exactly done what they characters do, but they have thought about it. They see their friends doing it. You can relate to that kind of character and the stories. So that's why I received a really good response from young Korean audiences. There are four different main characters and many people in the audience identify with one or another character.

DW: You mention hidden desires. The film's also tapping into, reaching into unconscious feelings. In other words, most people are not going to go out and commit these acts. But the sense of anti-authoritarianism is touching something very deep. I felt that. Do you feel that you're unleashing that kind of unconscious feeling?

KS: You're right, that's the intention. That's the reason for the setting of the movie, a gas station, which is a gloomy place at night—an isolated place. There's always some kind of danger at a gas station, like a safety hazard or something. So there's not a secure feeling there. And there's a theft at this gas station. And during one night at this place, people reverse their social positions.

DW: I think the film is interesting because it triggers all sorts of feelings. The sort of smashing up of material things. The signs, the windows, the money, the furniture—is that some sort of reaction to a materialist-minded society?

KS: I didn't really intend to go that deep or that far. At the beginning of

the film I wanted to grab the audience's attention. A condition that has a destructive feeling is the beginning of something new. That's why there is a lot of smashing at the beginning.

DW: There has been a comparison made to the Jerry Lewis-Frank Tashlin films of the 1950s, in which Jerry Lewis destroys an entire store, even though of course there's always a happy ending. In those films critics have noted a reaction to American society of that time, a very conservative, a very tight society. He tears up the store and the film has an anarchistic feeling.

KS: Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. I'm too young to know Jerry Lewis. There's one scene I got from Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*: there are four or five youths going into a store or theater. They start smashing things and the background music is Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*.

DW: Our attitude towards the four main characters is sympathetic, on the one hand, and sometimes also they seem crazy. Is that a legitimate reaction?

KS: This was intended. At the beginning with the four characters, I wanted to portray them as criminals. More like destructive criminal characters. But as the movie progresses, the audiences finds the characters more sympathetic, because they talk about their inner selves. In ordinary life, if you get to know someone ... at the beginning you have a stereotyped feeling, but when you get to know the person, there's a soft side in everybody. I wanted to bring that out as well as give reality to the characters.

DW: You seem to have combined a number of genres in your films.

KS: I am more into comedy than anything else. Right now Korean filmmakers are primarily pursuing melodrama or science fiction or action. Those categories are the popular ones. Not many directors are doing comedy, but that's my main interest. To comedy, including slapstick, I add a social background. All these elements are together. My directing style is not something polished. I don't want perfect form. It's a little bit messy. But I want to put more power in the film. That's my style.

DW: Well, I think that's there, because the film has spontaneity. What do you think is the general mood of Korean young people at this point?

KS: That's a very difficult question. It's very hard to categorize young people. Where is the cut-off? Ten or twenty or thirty years old? Each different age group within that has different interests. For instance, one group might be very interested in Internet surfing or games or media things. And some are into fashion—they all have different interests. But there are two things which are apparent: they have no interest in politics and, more than anything, they pursue their personal interest, personal style. Those two things are very apparent in young people in Korea right now. They are ignorant about politics and society and their personal lifestyle is the most important thing.

DW: So they feel distant from the political system?

KS: Yes, that's right.

DW: What about the general state of Korean cinema?

KS: Nowadays, more people are investing money into Korean cinema. They could not make these big budget films in the past. But now they can do science fiction, they can do more big budget films. And more and more directors are making new films. In the past, movies from Hollywood dominated the Korean film market. But last year, 36 percent of the films shown in the Korean market were domestic. And this year, it is 40 percent. I think the future for Korean filmmaking is very promising. Korean audiences seem to prefer Korean films to Hollywood films.

DW: That unusual. In most countries it is far less than that. Do you think that the level of the quality is still high?

KS: Yes. You would be surprised to see people line up on the opening day for any domestic movie. The interest is enormous. My movie outdid *The Sixth Sense*. No one expected it.

DW: In other words, it was popular with young people?

KS: Yes, that's right!

*DW:* I'm curious which filmmakers, dead or alive, that you admire?

*KS:* Charlie Chaplin, Hitchcock, Im Kwontaek, the Korean director.

*DW:* Those are very different. Im Kwontaek seems to be working in a different manner than you.

*KS:* Not so different, because Mr. Im has made more than one hundred movies in Korea. And in his twenties, thirties and forties he made quite commercial films. After 50, he had more depth in life. He understands life better and makes more serious stuff. Maybe it won't be so different with me.



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