

逆境

Ni Jing Thou Shalt Not Steal

a Short Film by Roberto F. Canuto & Xu Xiaoxi
羅伯托·卡努圖 & 徐小溪 短片電影作品



ALMOST RED PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS "NI JING: THOU SHALT NOT STEAL" 亂紅 影像工作室 出品 "逆境 THOU SHALT NOT STEAL"
SHERRY XIA RUIHONG WAN YINHUI ZUO WENFEN LUISA LIU SHUN JOSEF LI CHEN 夏瑞紅 萬銀輝 左文芬 劉舜 成幕
DIRECTED BY ANDREA CENTAZZO PRODUCED BY XU XIAOXI & ROBERTO F. CANUTO EDITED BY DI FANG 安德烈·琴塔佐 監製 徐小溪 & 羅伯托·卡努圖 剪輯 芳娣
CASTING BY XU ZEZHU COSTUME DESIGNER LUISA LIU SHUN EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS EUNICE WU GONG LEI PRODUCED BY LONG ZHONG 徐澤鑄 製片 劉舜 執行製片 龍重
DIRECTED BY ROBERTO F. CANUTO & XU XIAOXI 導演 徐小溪 & 羅伯托·卡努圖

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Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal

a Roberto F. Canuto & Xu Xiaoxi short film
羅伯托.卡努圖 / 徐小溪 電影作品

with
Sherry Xia Ruihong, Wan Yinhui
and Zuo Wenfen, Luisa Liu Shun, Josef Li Chen

Premiere: Autumn 2013

Length: 29 min Image: 1.85:1

PRODUCTION

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Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal



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Logline

"A true story of a naive Chinese girl who is forced to confront betrayal after she awakes in a remote forest covered in blood. "

*"IN A WORLD OF HYPOCRISY
YOU NEED TO KNOW SOMEONE REALLY WELL
TO REALIZE YOU ARE STRANGERS"*

Synopsis

Xiaofan, a young girl who works at a Karaoke Club, awakes one morning in a remote forest with her body covered in blood. As she struggles to find her way out, she tries to understand the dramatic circumstances which got her into the situation, events mainly related to her attractive and unpredictable boyfriend. She needs to make a decision that may change her life.

Betrayal, hypocrisy, and social commentary are represented in this story, which was inspired by real events and shot in Sichuan (China), using the local dialect.

Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal



Medium Synopsis

“Chengdu. Morning of a summer’s day. A young and naive girl, Wu Xiaofan, wakes up in a remote forest with a snake entwined in her hand. She realizes that her white skirt is covered in blood, and the pain that she is experiencing makes it difficult for her to walk. As she tries to find her way out of the forest, she discovers a plastic bag with a cooked rabbit head inside. This brings back some of her memory, as she associates it with the beginning of her nightmare. In her journey she faces the unsympathetic nature of various strangers and, as her memory begins to clear, she realizes that all of her problems are related to her attractive and unpredictable boyfriend, Chen Zhong. The betrayal and lies, together with the dream of a better life, create an uncertain and painful destiny for her. But she has to make a decision that may change her future.”

The film “Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal” is based on true events, and uses a realistic approach in terms of style and storytelling. The narration tells of a young couple who take completely different actions and attitudes when confronted with a situation which is beyond their own life experiences.

The character portrayal and their reactions towards the events reflect the society of our day, as well as the attitude of many young adults in China when faced with commitment. The lack of emotional maturity and the way in which youngsters face the reality of love, marriage, materialism and responsibilities, is represented in the film.

“Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal” is a short film shot in Sichuan, using the local dialect together with Mandarin. It was co-directed by a Chinese director Xu Xiaoxi and a Spanish, Roberto F. Canuto. It is their first project in China, after their previous works in the USA.

The Title

The Chinese title of the film, “Ni Jing” and the English “Thou Shalt Not Steal” are complementary, and in any case are the translations of each other. “Ni Jing” is a Chinese expression that literally means “*In a Complicated Situation*”, but also has different interpretations. It is a more direct view of the story. The English section of the title refers to a moral imperative, the 7th commandment in the Roman Catholic Church, also used in the Jewish religion. The “Steal” action in the film is not the central plot of the story, but it may affect the destiny of the character. The filmmakers used this title with irony. As often occurs in real life, things of less importance habitually hold the center of our attention, while events of real significance are overseen. Therefore, It is important to ignore these distractions, to look beyond the veil of mundane occurrences in order to focus on those questions of a more significant nature.

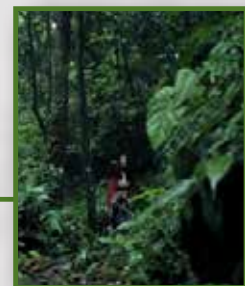


Inspired by True Events

The initial idea of the story came from a friend of the filmmakers, who experienced very traumatic events, close to the ones depicted in the film. Since she kept these events secret and never even reported them to the police, they changed some details and maintained only the essence of her story. The poison, relationship and danger of death were maintained and, as is usually the case, the reality was crueler than the fiction. The most important aspect that they have tried to highlight in this film is the great contrast between male and female, with regards to their way of living and life aspirations. This discord is represented by the pivotal decision made by the central character which, in western eyes, may be seen as edgy, but it is fully understood from a narrative point of view as the vision of the Chinese society.

Locations

The film was shot in real locations in Chengdu and surrounding areas, such as: *Chengdu city center* (an area that evolves day by day and grows at an incredible rate), the more traditional urban areas and mountain restaurants of the region (where typical foods, such as rabbit head, that are equally delicious and visually disturbing are served), the forest at *Qing Chen mountain* (a beautiful area and home of a Buddhist temple, which is well known in the region) as well as different roads that interconnect these locations.



Xu Xiaoxi

Director, Writer, Editor



Xu Xiaoxi is a Chinese filmmaker born in Chengdu. He graduated from the *Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University* in South Africa, with a *Fine Arts* degree, specializing in the field of *Video Art* with his work "The Fluxes of ID". Xiaoxi moved to Los Angeles in 2008 to study a *Master in Fine Arts: Filmmaking* at the *New York Film Academy*, Universal Studios in Hollywood. He graduated in 2009 with the feature film "Desire Street", shot in 16mm. He received a Special Mention for Best Feature Film in its premier at *Mix Mexico Film Festival* in 2011.

He has collaborated as a cinematographer, editor, and writer in many projects, including the award winning "Toto Forever", a short film directed by Roberto F. Canuto. His short film "Mei Mei" was presented in various film festivals in 2010. Currently Xiaoxi works in the field of advertisement and fiction films in Chengdu, China. "Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal" is his first professional fiction short film shot in China, to be released in 2013.



Roberto F. Canuto

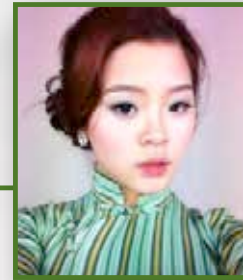
Director, Writer, Editor

Roberto F. Canuto is a filmmaker from Gijon (Asturias), Spain. He obtained his bachelor's degree in *Image and Sound* at the *Complutense University of Madrid* in 1998. During his years of study, and after frequent sessions at the *Spanish Cinematheque*, he was influenced by many classic directors. In addition to his film experience, he has degrees in *Music Studies* from the *Royal Conservatory of Music of Oviedo* (Spain).

In 2008 Roberto moved to Los Angeles to complete a *Master in Fine Arts* (MFA) at the *New York Film Academy* (Universal Studios, Hollywood), where he directed different shorts (like the award winning "Toto Forever"). His graduation film, "Desire Street", co-directed with Xu Xiaoxi, received a Special Mention for Best Feature Film in *Mix Mexico International Film Festival* in 2011. He moved to China in 2011, where he currently works with Xu Xiaoxi in advertisement and fiction films. "Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal" is his first fiction short film in Chinese, to be released in 2013.

Sherry Xia Ruihong

Lead Actress (Wu Xiaofan)



Born in Urumqi (Xinjiang, China), **Xia Ruihong** studied painting for many years. With her early love for art as a foundation, her focus slowly shifted from painting to acting, which she discovered was a great passion of hers, and in 2009 she was successfully admitted into the *Sichuan Institute of Media and Performing Arts*, in Chengdu.

Xia Ruihong starred in the stage play dramas "Nightclub" and "Goddess of Mercy" and the music video "On Road". In 2012 she performed with the *Sichuan Province Repertory Theatre* in the drama "The Chengdu Mahjong Battle". "Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal" is her first experience in the film industry. She belongs to a new generation of young actors in China, the 90's generation.

The Character, "Wu Xiaofan"

Xia Ruihong performs the role of Xiaofan, a Sichuanese girl in her early 20's. She works at a karaoke club and she has been going out with a boy, Chen Zhong, for some time. She dreams of having a secure life: getting married and having a baby with him, as are the main aspirations of many young women of her generation, in order to make her countryside dwelling family proud.



Wan Yinhui

Lead Actor (Chen Zhong)

Wan Yinhui was born in Henan Province, China. He was interested in acting since an early age, and in 2012 he started his acting studies at the *Sichuan Institute of Media and Performing Arts*, in Chengdu.

He has some experience in theater acting as part of his school program. His performance in the stage play "East Sea Wilderness Home" was remarkable. "Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal" is his first experience in the film industry. He belongs to a new generation of young actors in China, the 90's generation.

The Character, "Chen Zhong"

Wan Yinhui perform the role of Chen Zhong, a young man from Hunan. He is a student at Chengdu University who tries to follow in the footsteps of his father in the business field. His main focus in life is his career and to accumulate enough wealth to make his family proud.

Andrea Centazzo

Music Composer

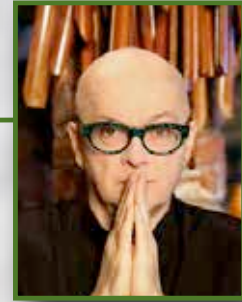
Andrea Centazzo is an Italian-born American percussionist and composer of minimal music. He lives in Los Angeles, California.

During his artistic career that spans over 30 years, composer, conductor, percussionist and video artist Andrea Centazzo has given more than 1500 concerts and live performances in Europe and the United States, as well as appearances and performances on numerous radio and television broadcasts worldwide. He has recorded over 150 LPs and CDs. He has performed at festivals, concert seasons and theaters as a soloist and conductor of his compositions, conducting the *American Youth Symphonic Orchestra*, the *LA Contemporary Orchestra*, the *Mitteleuropa Orchestra*, the *ER Youth Symphonic Orchestra* and many Ensembles. He also directed and staged his own operas as well theatrical plays of other US authors. His opera "Tina" was highly acclaimed in Italy as well in California.

For 20 years now Centazzo has been working to create multi-media experiences, combining live music with video images, blending traditional instrumentation with the latest digital audio-visual technology. "Mandala" (inspired by the Buddhist Universe) and "Eternal Traveler" (inspired by Leonardo Da Vinci) got vast acclaim from audiences and critics both in USA and Europe, appearing in TV broadcasts at CBS, KPFK, RAI and several international magazines.

Lately Centazzo has written and directed 2 worldwide acclaimed multimedia shows: "Einstein's Cosmic Messengers" (inspired by the Gravitational Waves) and "R-Evolution" (inspired by the life and work of Charles Darwin).

He composed the scores for various films in the 1970's and 80's, and his collaboration with the filmmakers Roberto F. Canuto & Xu Xiaoxi started in 2009, with the award winning short film "Toto Forever" and "Mei Mei". In 2011 he composed the exquisite score of the award winning feature film "Desire Street". His latest collaboration with the filmmakers is "Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal", to be released in 2013.



The Score

Andrea Centazzo creates a very sensitive score for "Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal". Always from the point of view of the main character, Xiaofan, the music guides the emotional journey of the character through the film. From her initial moments of horror and confusion, until the final, more romantic moments. Centazzo composed some experimental tracks for the beginning sequences, mixing sound effects, electronic music and real instruments, and for the melodic and romantic pieces towards the end, using piano and flute as the main instruments.

DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW

Xu Xiaoxi & Roberto F. Canuto



Why did you choose filmmaking as a profession? How did your interest in film begin?

Roberto: In my case, I never doubted that my dream profession was related to movies, since I was aware of their existence. My family took me to watch some Disney films when I was 5 years old, and I think that “The Jungle book” was the first film I watched in a theater. When I started middle and high school I discovered the works of many filmmakers. I mainly watched their works on TV on La2, with different seasons dedicated to people like Rohmer or Hitchcock, or on late night show broadcast on programs dedicated to classics like “Cine Club”. This is where I discovered the type of films that I would really like to make one day. Unfortunately that tradition is now lost on TV programming.

Xiaoxi: I decided to work in film when I was busy finishing my Fine Art Degree in South Africa. At that time my major was Painting and Video Art and I found that I felt more comfortable using moving images as a medium to express ideas. At the same time I noticed that I wanted to create more narrative works, and I found that film was a medium that combined all the other arts in one.

One of the first movies I watched in Cinema with my mother was “Ju Dou” by Zhang Yimou, when I was 7 years old. In China there is no age restriction and I remember my mother covering my eyes in certain scenes, which made me even more curious to watch them. It was a very special experience that I will always remember. When I was in high school I got a video camera and I used to shoot friend’s music videos and documentaries, just on an amateur level. My first realization though, that I wanted to dedicate my life to filmmaking, started many years later in South Africa.



What was the inspiration behind the story?

Roberto: The main inspiration was the real story of a close friend of ours, which made us think about how extended and representative of society such dramatic and edgy events can be.

We wanted to represent the different ways in which young people confront relationships in Asia. The perspective is very different for males and females, and pressure from the family is really strong. We do not try to teach or give advice on how things should to be handled; our aim is just to make people think about the nature of such issues, and whether they are right or wrong. Even without exploring in depth the social or family pressures that the characters experience when making decisions (mainly for the short format and the specifics of the story), we can see in the film how these pressures affect the personalities of the characters.

Another element which doesn't even come into consideration for Xiaofan, it is the possibility of becoming a single mother. That was a point of interest for some western audiences. This is not a possibility here because of the great difficulties of even registering a baby without a father. In many places it is not even possible.

We are very curious to see the contrast in reactions when we show the film to Chinese and western audiences. So far we have had very different reactions. In China her decisions are mainly fully understood, even if sometimes the audience do not fully agree with her (but they focus on whether she forgives him or not). But for Western audiences so far we have had the opposite reaction. In Spain, for example, they focused more on the betrayal and in the USA on the fact that she made the decision to put an end to the life of a baby. That contrast is a very interesting element with which to start a multi cultural dialogue.

Xiaoxi: Even though this was the story of a friend, I could not keep all the facts in place. When she told me what happened to her and how the story ended, with her deciding to forgive her boyfriend and not tell the police because it would get him into trouble, I was very surprised. I spent many years overseas and I absorbed and got to understand many different perspectives and values, but I still comprehend her reactions towards the circumstances when I think about the society that we live in at the moment in China. I can feel contradictions, even understanding their concerns. It is a very interesting phenomenon to understand the fact and doubt its legitimacy at the same time.

You two belong to very different cultures. Where did you find the connection to work as a team, and does it arouse any conflict?



Roberto: There are always things to be found in common, no matter what nationality or background people may come from. Since we met in Los Angeles we found inspiration from each other's work. We have different ways in which we approach stories and characters which are complementary and make our work move forward very fluidly. We both like to tell stories that may represent a sector of society which is usually overlooked, but at the same time may represent people from anywhere in the world. The cross culture is a theme which is very interesting to us, since we both spent many years living in different countries and amongst different cultures.

Xiaoxi: Living in a globalized world, there are not many differences in the way in which people appreciate and experience art. Lifestyle is different in every culture, mostly in terms of language, religion or food habits, but not that much in terms of how they appreciate arts. I don't find difficulties in communicating this aspect. We share many common interests in art, and like similar styles of filmmaking. The film language is universal. We don't find cultural barriers, but more likely cultural influences that help us gain inspiration. Both of us traveled around for many years and we both appreciate the cultural diversity and influences in one another. Still, it is easier to work with somebody who complements you, as opposed to somebody too similar, which may create conflicts.

How was the shooting experience? Were there any special situations?



Roberto: The production process was quite complicated and different from our experiences in Los Angeles. We had some experience in commercials, but to find a crew and actors for a fiction film was a bit challenging. The main visual industry in Sichuan is related to documentaries or television, but there is not a tradition of Film fiction.

We shot for 9 days, spread across two months of shooting, due to different commitments from cast and crew on their personal work or study circumstances. This allowed us to prepare the scenes in more depth, but at the same time we faced the challenge of keeping the spirit and continuity of the final work intact.

The shoot in the forest was quite challenging. We tried to shoot in the very early morning, to capture the best light and real atmosphere, but the proximity of a famous Buddhist temple made things a bit difficult, since they play very loud prayers from their speakers and it is also that time of day when there are a lot of visitors. The people visiting the temple were not used to seeing actors in the area, they were very surprised to see Xia Ruihong covered in blood. Some cars even stopped, offering help (opposite to what transpired in the film) since they assumed that a terrible accident had occurred.

The living conditions in the forest were also not ideal, but the commitment of the whole team covered all the shortages in living quality. Since our crew was extremely reduced, everybody would collaborate on whatever task was needed. We were like a small family with a unique goal, to create the best film possible.

Xiaoxi: For me it was the first time that I worked in China and with actors speaking my own language, after having worked in Los Angeles. The most interesting thing is working with a crew and actors who are experiencing filmmaking for the first time. You need to spend more time to make everything work as professionally as possible, even with a very limited budget. At the same time it is like working on an empty canvas. Anything can happen and we don't have many bad habits to correct, but there was mainly excitement from everyone. From a director's point of view it was a great experience, and I am very pleased to see the end result. It is very close to our expectations, due to the high dedication and commitment from everyone, especially the actors.

I was a bit concerned about the sex scene, because I know in Chinese film schools the actors are not allowed to go that far, even in the kissing moments. We talked to the actors to explain to them that nothing has to be completely real, that filmmaking is an illusion, but certain elements have to be real. The actors were very nervous, but committed to the scene. After finishing that scene they felt that there had been no reason to feel that way in the first place. They had previous concerns which made them feel that it would be more difficult, because the end result is very different to the process of shooting.



How did you find actors in China?

Roberto: In Beijing or Shanghai it is relatively easy to find professional actors to play in short films, but in Chengdu the challenge was much bigger. We decided to visit a few acting schools in the city and had a few castings until we found the best actors for the role. We were very lucky to finally discover Sherry Xia Ruihong and Wan Yinhui, because even without previous experiences in film, both are very talented and passionate and they were always very committed to the project. We are really happy with their work and we can predict a brilliant future in the Chinese film industry for both of them.

Xiaoxi: We contacted the main acting schools through some personal connections. We wanted to find some local actors who were suitable for the age of the characters. Most Chinese actors have training based in theater, so we were looking for somebody without much experience, so that it would be easier for them to adapt to film acting. We were thrilled when we decided on the final cast, because both lead actors were very committed and eager to represent their role in a very natural way.

What is the main difference between working with Chinese and American actors?

Roberto: There are no major differences when directing actors in the US or in China. Even saying so, in my case the biggest obstacle was the language barrier. But, opposite to what I thought, it was quite straightforward to understand when the actors were in character and the essence of what we wanted to represent came through in the dialogue intonations. Of course, all the aspects related to accent, pronunciation or realism of the dialogue were more on Xiaoxi's shoulders, but that allowed me to focus more on the body language and the intonation that were coming through the performance. In this case we complemented each other perfectly when directing the actors.

Xiaoxi: I also cannot see many differences. The Americans are more experienced in filmmaking because the environment in Los Angeles is orientated to this industry. Chinese do not have much experience in filmmaking and we had to explain the technique in a bit more depth. But after rehearsals, all of them were committed to the work, and the way we directed them was the same, independent of the culture.



Roberto, as a foreign director, do the differences in culture and values in China create a limitation when you compose a story?



Roberto: I think that it is rather the opposite. The differences stimulate my imagination and it is a source of inspiration. We are in a globalized world and the influences between cultures are getting stronger each day. We have to learn from each other's history and culture to create a better world. It was very interesting to me, the way in which women interact with men in a Chinese environment. Everywhere in the world women are fighting for their rights to be equal to men, and these differences are applied to different aspects in every country. The social pressures that they suffer in China are quite strong and we tried to represent some of them here, not only as a criticism, but also as a representation of the facts, for later consideration. As a short film, we cannot go too in depth into the situation, but a few sequences can serve as a beginning for further discussion. Women face many other problems and discrimination in every country.



Why did you want to set up the background of the story on Chengdu?

Xiaoxi: First of all, the real story on which the film is based happened in Sichuan. Therefore we never doubted that the natural choice was to keep the environment as close as possible to the original story. Also we had spent the last 2 years in this city, so we were more familiar with the way in which people live here, and the way that relationships are handled.

Roberto: Chengdu is now like my second home. It is a city that has so many things to offer. Apart from a very interesting and rich culture, their citizens are very friendly and approachable. All the elements which made that the choice of locations for the film were quite clear. We never had any doubts regarding the location.

Also we wanted to preserve one of the more characteristic elements, which is the use of the Sichuan's dialect. It is the way that people choose to communicate here. Only the character "Chen Zhong" is from another region, so it was logical that he cannot speak proper Sichuan's and mainly spoke using Mandarin.

Do you think that the story is told from a male perspective?

Xiaoxi: I don't think so. For me, when we created the character, we tried to think about her situation and started to write the story from that point of view. In this movie we question the decision of the character. The question of how logical it is to forgive somebody, after something that life-changing has happened, and whether it is right or wrong. At the end we want the film to represent the female perspective. We believe that women should protect themselves more and be more independent.

Roberto: I also don't think so. Obviously both of us are male directors, so the male perspective is present to a certain point, but we try to be quite neutral in terms of gender identification and, in the end, the story is narrated from the point of view of Xiaofan, and the way in which she experiences the relationship and life choices. If anything, this movie is feminist in the sense that it tries to draw attention to the differences of life aspirations, hopes and the different way that women see relationships and love, especially at an early age. These thoughts are clearly influenced by society, family and, in general, the environment in which a person is brought up.



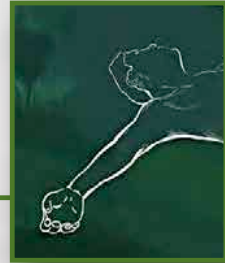
What future projects do you have coming up?

Roberto: We have a couple of projects waiting for the right moment, but for now we are preparing a feature film that we hope to start auditioning at the end of the year, and that will probably involve international actors and a bigger production team. We cannot say much about that, but we hope to get a Spanish or French team involved, as well as a Chinese co-production, because it is equally interesting here, in China, and in Europe or America. At the same time we are preparing another short film that we would like to shoot in Sichuan, which is closer to a comedy and quite different from this one.

We also have a project to be shot in Tibet, but this is in the early stages.

Xiaoxi: We would like to collaborate with different industries around the world. We like to break cultural barriers and create a universal feeling in our films. The script that Roberto mentioned involves Chinese and European characters, where they interact in both societies. We want to break the cultural barriers and create a globalized story which people will be able to understand anywhere in the world.

Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal



The Cast

Sherry XIA RUIHONG	夏瑞紅	<i>Wu Xiaofan</i>	吳小帆
WAN YINHUI	萬銀輝	<i>Chen Zhong</i>	陳重
ZUO WENFEN	左文芬	<i>Villager</i>	飯館婦女
Luisa LIU SHUN	劉舜	<i>Villager Girl</i>	飯館女孩
Josef LI CHEN	成驀	<i>Car Owner</i>	車主

Ni Jing: Thou Shalt Not Steal



The Crew

<i>Director</i>	Xu Xiaoxi (徐小溪) Roberto F. Canuto
<i>Executive Producer</i>	Xu Zezhu (徐澤鑄)
<i>Producer</i>	Luisa Liu Shun (劉舜)
<i>Line Producer</i>	Long Zhong (龍重)
<i>Associate Producer</i>	Gong Lei (巩蕾) Eunice Wu (吴馥如)
<i>Co-Associate Producer</i>	Huang Wei (黄薇) Yin Jie (銀捷) Gao Hua (高華)
<i>Original Score</i>	Andrea Centazzo
<i>Assistant Director</i>	Luisa Liu Shun (劉舜)
<i>Cinematography & Editor</i>	Xu Xiaoxi (徐小溪) Roberto F. Canuto
<i>Assistant Camera</i>	Eunice Wu (吴馥如)
<i>Make up</i>	Chen Dong (陳棟)
<i>Boom Operator</i>	Wan Yinhui (萬銀輝) Long Zhong (龍重)
<i>Sound Design</i>	Roberto F. Canuto
<i>Colorist</i>	Xu Xiaoxi (徐小溪)
<i>Still Photography</i>	Xu Zezhu (徐澤鑄) Sue Zhang Shishu (張世舒) Josef Li Chen (成驀)
<i>Poster Design</i>	Di Liu Fangdi (芳娣)

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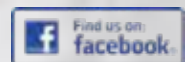
逆境

NI JING - THOU SHALT NOT STEAL

a Short film by Roberto F. Canuto & Xu Xiaoxi



Trailer



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