

Mingyang Xingdou Production

Presents



A film by **Chakme Rinpoche**

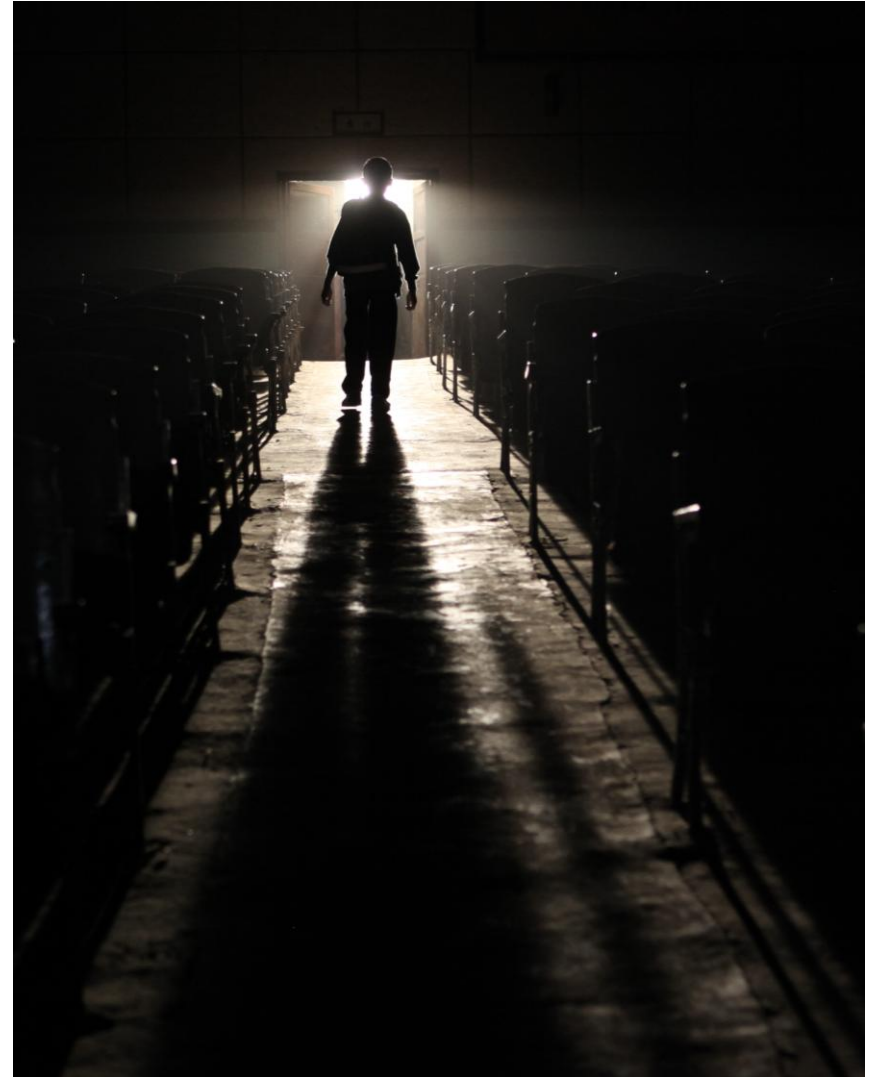
China / 2014 / 92 mins. / Color / Feature film



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SYNOPSIS

Tianyu is a sightless child who dreams about another life different from the disabled ping-pong champion career that his single mother is planning for him. He sees much more than what his mother imagines! When he vanishes one day, his mother is forced to look into his world of darkness. As she searches for him, she discovers how to listen and see.



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ABOUT THE DIRECTOR:



This film is the first film directed by Chakme Rinpoche. “Rinpoche” is a Tibetan honorific term employed to show respect in addressing reincarnated and accomplished lamas.

The first Karma Chakme Rinpoche was the creator of the Tibetan Naiduo Kagyupa branch, at the beginning of the 16th century, he wrote the wide spread “*Text of Eternal Happiness*”, a shortened version of the “*Scripture of Amitabha*”. His ritual of meditation and chanting are still used in many of the eternal happiness ceremonies.

Chakme Rinpoche was born in the Kham Region in the 1970’s. Over the years, his family has many living Buddhas. His grandfather was one of the eight lineage holders of the Tibetan Buddhism (the Warrior of the Lights); his father, uncles and elder brother are also reincarnated Rinpoches of various branches.

Chakme Rinpoche never studied at art or film school. His art life started in a monastery located 4.000m high on the Tibetan plateau. When he was five years old, right after the rehabilitation of Buddhism in China, he watched for the first time a Tibetan Dharma Ceremony. It was also the first time he watched a performance of *The Mask Dance of Deities*, which particularly shocked him. At eight years old, he started learning the traditional earth mask craft with the monks.

In order to master the traditional skill of Mandala and Thangka paintings, he started drawing training after being acknowledged as the 9th Chakme Rinpoche. Around the same period, he watched his first film at a screening organized by the government: a war film.

At the monastery, he directed several Tibetan Operas (“King Gesaer”, “Milarepa”, “Songtsan Gampo”). Discovering the importance of cinema and theater, he started renting a projector to screen films to others and started filming with a DV camera.



INTERVIEW WITH THE 9TH CHAKME RINPOCHE:

- Why have you decided to make a film?

For me films are contemporary Thangkas, meaning Tibetan traditional paintings, which can spread compassions and wisdom of Buddha in the artistic way. This film comes from my prayers and sunyata (openness).

- How did you start this project?

After travelling to several countries, I realized the cultural differences between the different places I went to and my hometown. I have met a lot of filmmakers, writers, musicians and social workers. I also watched a lot of films. Gradually I developed clearer thoughts. In this world of different languages, cultures, religions and traditions, cinema could be a special language to break barriers and be accepted by all. If I'm telling a story in Tibetan, only Tibetan could understand, but if I'm telling a story with the cinema language, people in rural villages all over the world could hear me. That's when I felt the desire to become a filmmaker. ATA is the fruit of those years of sedimentary accretions.

- How did you come up with this story?

I wanted to make a movie that would tell a story happening from the inside of the body, to discover the spirit and the soul. The matter is the path of the idea, not the emotion. Shooting the story of a blind child is a good way to probe the depth of the heart. Often, we understand the world through the eyes, but I don't really agree with this. The heart is the founding of the knowledge. If you keep your eyes open but closes your heart, you can't grasp this world's truth. Reality, surreal and imaginary world are relative. Before the mother covers her eyes, she is in the reality. When she covers them, she's in the spiritual world. So she can look for her child within this world.



- **What does the title mean?**

ATA comes from Sanskrit. Its first meaning is “take away the pain”.

- **How have you selected the actors and worked with them?**

The two actors playing the adults, the mother and ping-pong trainer, graduated from the National Institute of Drama. They played in many other independent productions. They followed their own artistic path.

As for the two children, one is beautiful, with a clean face (Tianyu) but his depressive and sad mother limits his inside. He is looking for his light. The other one (Liang) is an orphan who also has motility troubles. But he is free and happy inside.

The communication with the two children went very well. I didn't ask them to play a certain way. I wanted them to express themselves very freely. As they can't see the result of their acting, or what's going on around them, it allowed a very simple and smooth shooting.

- **How have you decided of the visual style of the film?**

This film was shot with only one 50-focal length camera lens of Anamorphic Widescreen of ARRI ALEXA. The reason of shooting this way was that I believe that Buddha sees everything with the same sight. When you want to see something clearly, you should come closer. When you want to get a wider picture, you should climb the mountain and see for yourself.

- **The music and the sound play a very important part in the film, could you tell us a bit about these elements?**

The music is mixed with sounds of ping-pong balls and rackets, in order to reveal the sensitive world of hearing of blind people. We used mostly a minimalist soundtrack for the music. There are not a lot of variations, besides the peak and the end of the movie. There's no dramatic melody, but mostly similar notes. Listening to this kind of music can be a relaxing feeling; no emotions are inducted by it. It's easier to enter in the hearts of the characters and thus do a personal introspection.

There's one main path in the movie; it's the development of the feelings and thoughts of the mother. Then the sound is mostly the one from the outside. But I do also use sounds that come from within the characters. There's no exaggeration, mainly subtle, calm sounds. In many cases, people who can see, see less than blind people. But if you close your eyes, you can see more. Because then the heart's vision is developed.

The ping-pong ball is usually empty inside and silent. But the ones for impaired people are full of small iron marbles making noise when the ball is rolling. As the iron marbles are heavy, the ball cannot bounce. If there is nothing in the ball, it can bounce freely. The inside of the ping-pong ball can be compared to the heart. If one has a heavy heart, if it's bruised, it will make sounds.



- **How was your first encounter with a camera?**

In 1980, I was about 15. During a horse race in Yu Shu (the Tibetan region of Qinghai province, West of China), there were some cameramen. Maybe they were journalists. This is the first time I saw a camera, and saw how images for films and television are produced. In 1993, a friend offered me a small Sony DV camera. I shot a few images of Hong Kong with it and brought them back to Yu Shu and showed them to the shepherds. I shot their reactions during the screening and afterwards showed them their own image. Everyone was so impressed and excited to see oneself on screen. This was my first use of a camera.

- **What is cinema for you?**

Friends asked me: “Why a living Buddha would like to make a film?” and my answer is: “If someone would stay still for a couple of minutes, in order to think about learning and the value of life after watching my film, all the time I’ve spent on doing it, would be worthy”.



CREDITS

Director	Chakme Rinpoche
Screenplay	Chakme Rinpoche
Image	LU Sheng
Art direction	YU Peng
Editor	Chakme Rinpoche
Music	WANG Jue, JIN Wang
Sound	WU Jiang
Cast	WANG Ning, JIAO Gang, MENG Tianyu, TIAN Liang
Producer	LI Mingyang
Production	Mingyang Xingdou Production
In association with	Tsanpo Arts, Filmblog Media, Baotou Culture



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The eyes don't see, the mind does



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