

28-year-old becomes 17 again in Zhang Mo's directorial debut

By Louise Watt
The Associated Press

BEIJING — Differing Chinese and western expectations over marriage provided the inspiration for Zhang Mo's directorial debut, *Suddenly Seventeen*, which she says is about encouraging young women to "explore a little further" before they settle down.

The daughter of Chinese cinematic great Zhang Yimou, Zhang said returning to China after years of study in the United States felt like "a reverse culture shock." Then 26 and viewing a life full of possibilities, Zhang was startled people thought she should already be married and planning a family.

"Women in the west, by the age of 28 ... they still feel like they're young, they still want to pursue their career maybe, and (find) out who they are, but in China it's almost like the opposite," said Zhang, now 33 and married to an American who works for the Hollywood agency representing her.

Suddenly Seventeen is based on a novel published on the internet. It's part of a hugely popular genre among young Chinese that focuses mainly on fantasy and romance tales and has spawned movies and web series.

In Zhang's film, the 28-year-old protagonist, Liang Xia, played by Ni Ni, is unhappy in love and eats a magical chocolate that wipes her memory and turns her back into a 17-year-old. Zhang says she seized on the short novel's premise and characters, but rather than keeping Liang at 17, her heroine flips back and forth in age every five hours, creating conflict and drama.

After moving to the U.S. at age 15, Zhang studied architecture at university but felt stifled by an internship at a New York firm. "Everyone was in a box ... because they don't want to steal each other's ideas," she said. "For me, I still want to connect with people, I still want to express emotions, so I decided maybe architecture wasn't the best choice for me."

After studying filmmaking at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, she returned to China to work as an editor on four of her father's films, including *The Flowers of War* starring Christian Bale.

"It's really a privilege, because editing's really the best way to learn how to become a director," Zhang said. "Whatever he shot I saw, and I made that into a story, and so through that process you really learn how to cut the movie, how to tell the story, or even how to shoot the film to make it great."

Emerging as part of the Chinese post-Cultural Revolution avant-garde, Zhang Yimou gained international acclaim in the 1980s for art films such as



Red Sorghum before turning to more commercial fare. His first English-language movie, *The Great Wall* starring Matt Damon, comes out next year.

DIRECTORIAL DEBUT. Chinese director Zhang Mo smiles during an interview at her office in Beijing. Zhang, the daughter of Chinese cinematic great Zhang Yimou, has released her directorial debut film. Based on an internet novel, a genre so popular that its fantasy and romance stories have been turned into several films and web series, *Suddenly Seventeen* is about a 28-year-old woman who eats magic chocolate that turns her back into a 17-year-old. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Being the offspring of a famous director isn't always an advantage, Zhang Mo says.

"People immediately (think) you must have way more resources, and you can have way more shortcuts, but actually it's not true. If anything it's the opposite because the family aspect casts such a big shadow, you have to be extra creative, or working extra hard, to gain the audience's approval."

Despite basing her directorial debut on an internet novel, Zhang says that movie genre may have already peaked, with audiences now looking for fresher and more personal stories rather than something that has amassed a huge online fan base.

"I think original content right now is the key for the future of Chinese filmmaking, to tout original stories, not something (remade), not some internet novel," she said.

Suddenly Seventeen, whose Chinese title translates as "28-year-old Minor," was widely released in China last month and given a limited release in cinemas in the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand on December 2. In addition, it was also released in South Korea, Thailand, and other Asian countries.

Vietnam seizes smuggled ivory hidden with wax, wood nails

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Vietnamese authorities have seized 1,362 pounds of ivory smuggled from Africa after finding 4 tons at the same port over the past two months, according to state media and an official.

The ivory seized had been hidden in two containers arriving at Cat Lai port in the southern commercial hub of Ho Chi Minh City, the *Customs* newspaper said.

Le Dinh Loi, the city's deputy customs chief confirmed the report, but did not give details.

The smugglers used more sophisticated tactics than previous ship-

ments by packing wax around the ivory when it was sealed inside emptied-out timber and using wood nails to evade x-ray checks, according to the newspaper, published by the General Department of Customs.

The seizure came just a week after leaders and senior officials from more than 40 countries met at an international conference on illegal wildlife trade in Hanoi, which was attended by Britain's Prince William.

The conference called for stepped-up efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade. At the conference, Prince William, who is president of United

for Wildlife, praised Vietnam, China, and other Asian countries for taking steps to battle wildlife trafficking, but said rhinos, elephants, pangolins, and tigers are still being killed in horrifying numbers.

He said the international community is not moving fast enough to keep up with the crisis.

Vietnam is one of the world's major transit points and consumers of ivory and rhino horn.

Elephant ivory is used as jewelry and home decorations in Vietnam, which bans hunting of its own dwindling population of elephants.

Advertise your business, service, or recruitment advertisement in The AR!

For more information, call (503) 283-4440 or e-mail <ads@asianreporter.com>.

Quality Asian Grocery & Gifts Since 1928

HOLIDAY FOOD & GIFT GUIDE

December 7-20, 2016

Visit www.uwajimaya.com to see all of our Holiday Food and Gift Guide Items

\$7.50

\$10

\$7

\$10

seattle | bellevue | renton | beaverton | www.uwajimaya.com