

AC FILMS PRESENTS:

XIMEI

喜梅



Directed by Andy Cohen
Co-Director Gaylen Ross

Feature Documentary Film
140 minutes

Publicity and distribution inquiries:
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LOGLINE

XIMEI is the verite film of a young peasant woman who struggles against local officials trying to shut down her AIDS half-way house in China's rural Henan province. The film follows her fight for fellow AIDS patients and friends, all of whom contracted AIDS during the late 1990's when the government-sponsored "Black Blood Economy" attracted impoverished peasants of the province to donate their blood for money to augment their bare living conditions.

SYNOPSIS

XIMEI is the story of Liu Ximei, a young woman in rural China who contracted AIDS during the years of the government sponsored "Black Blood Economy" – when in the late 1990's impoverished peasants of Henan Province donated their blood to augment their bare living existence. Unsanitary conditions and lack of screening for disease, caused blood infected by the HIV virus to be transmitted to donors and then to the recipients of blood transfusions. It is estimated that in Henan 300,000 people became infected by HIV. In many villages, as much as ten percent of the population were infected, and dubbed "AIDS villages." Although the scandal of the illegal blood trade was exposed by a few brave doctors in China and headlined in the international media, thousands still are infected by HIV and their children continue to be victims of this tragedy. All the while, China continues to cover up the scandal and forbid the foreign press from entering these AIDS villages.

Ximei, abandoned as a baby by her impoverished parents who no longer could support another child especially a girl, she is adopted by a local farmer couple. At ten years old while helping the family to harvest wheat, her hair is entangled in a threshing machine and her scalp was completely torn from her head. Near death she is hospitalized and given transfusions of tainted blood, and so is infected with HIV. When Ximei later develops full-blown AIDS and her adoptive parents have died, Ximei, too ill and without regular guardianship, has no options other than to live in the local hospital clinic, segregated from the general population for seven years. Her only real companions are the dogs and cats that inhabit the courtyard because they don't discriminate against her. Gradually Ximei develops friendships with fellow AIDS patients and vows that she will dedicate herself to their welfare and support.

In rural China AIDS patients are dealt the harshest burden of the disease. Poor (without any income since they are refused work or are too ill to be employed) discriminated against by family, friends, community and authorities, they have few resources for recovery to lead normal, productive lives. Even their medication is of such substandard, outdated quality that they often succumb to the treatment's side effects before the disease itself debilitates them. Responding to this need, Ximei opens a simple halfway house to care for fellow patients who are ostracized not only

by their home villages, but also by hospitals unequipped to deal with the state-sponsored pandemic.

Patients are forced to travel long distances to the designated HIV hospitals and clinics (the only ones which will treat them) and are too poor to pay for the most basic amenities: A meal, a toilet, a bed to sleep the night. Ximei's house is the sanctuary where all of this plus the advice and the caring ear of Ximei, a natural born therapist, are freely administered. Ximei has been forced to move her halfway house more than four times, as angry neighbors reject the HIV patients in their vicinity. Or she has been expelled by government authorities who oppose 'gatherings' of these patient groups, fearing that they will be a threat, petitioning for better conditions and benefits.

With friend and fellow patient Liu Min (who lost 8 family members to AIDS), Ximei travels to those in the local village who cannot come to her – like Zhenglan thrown out of her home by her family, and living in a one room shed with her husband and 90 year old mother. Like most peasants, Zhenglan can neither read nor write, and so Ximei must help her fill out complex paperwork for medical reimbursements, which are tragically less than what patients of larger cities receive in subsidies.

Other patients that benefit from Ximei's care are a woman who was forced to abort her 7 month child under the one-child policy and then contracted AIDS when given a blood transfusion from complications of the termination; a young man who must abandon his family's riverboat to pursue medical treatment; and a mother who watches her own child die of the disease and then is herself spurned by her husband as the cause of the child's death.

All the while Ximei is under the surveillance of the authorities who fiercely battle to protect themselves from the light that Ximei sheds on the abuses and grievances she uncovers through her ever growing activism.

In spite of the debilitating effects of the disease on her own precarious health, Ximei yearns for a normal life -- family, marriage, even children of her own. The film follows her struggles to achieve as much as she can, as well as to rediscover her own biological mother.

The story of Ximei is also of the next generations: children who contracted HIV through mother-to-child transmission. Ten year-old Dong Li lives on her own and cooks and cleans for herself, after most of her family was decimated by the disease and her ailing father, also infected, is in the hospital more than out. Because of Ximei's efforts to empower Henan's victims—through rallies confronting the authorities, outspokenness and petitioning--now those patients entering young adulthood can glimpse that with education and medicine, AIDS may no longer mean death in Henan, but a life with hop



**ANDY COHEN, Director,
Writer, Producer**

Andy Cohen is an independent filmmaker and journalist whose work is devoted to effecting social change and protecting human rights.

Ximei marks his feature length documentary directorial debut.

He produced and co-wrote his first film in 1996: the award-winning *Dealers Among Dealers* which was an official selection of the Berlin Film Festival, and later, the critically acclaimed *Killing Kasztner: The Jew who Dealt with Nazis*.

More recently he produced the multi-award-winning documentaries *Human Flow*, *Hooligan Sparrow*, *The World Before Her* and *Ai Weiwei:*

Never Sorry, which were shown at the Venice Film Festival, Telluride, Tribeca, Traverse City, Toronto International Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival among others, and broadcasts on PBS, BBC, UK Ch4, ARTE, Netflix, and Amazon.

As a film director, Andy Cohen directed and wrote a 9-part series of short films on China's leading contemporary artists.

Cohen is now in post-production on four other feature length documentaries including: *Beijing Spring*, chronicling China's first Democracy movement and the brief window of artistic freedom from 1978–1982, following China's brutal Cultural Revolution; *The Village Gate*: New York City's iconic venue of jazz, popular music, comedy and theater at the forefront of civil rights movement and integration; *Talking Tacheles*, the infamous Berlin art house, that symbolizes 110 years of the history of Berlin from its construction in 1907, through Nazi and Communist occupation, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the occupation by artists, until its cooption by real estate investors in 2017.; and *Title Shot* a stark chronicle of professional boxing through the rise and fall of 1990's junior middleweight contender Godfrey Nyakana.

GAYLEN ROSS

Co-Director, Writer, Producer



Gaylen Ross has directed, produced, and written award-winning documentary films for over 25 years, premiering in national and international film festivals.

She has had two films previously in the Berlin International Film Festival: the Emmy award-winning ***Blood Money: Switzerland's Nazi Gold***, a feature-length documentary on the Swiss Banks and the Holocaust accounts, and her film on diamond dealers ***Dealers Among Dealers*** which aired on PBS' **P.O.V** and is considered the only inside look into this very cloistered world. Among her films, ***Killing Kasztner: The Jew Who Dealt With Nazis***, was an official selection of the Toronto International Film Festival, broadcast BBC Storyville, shown in 11 countries and has enjoyed an unprecedented theatrical release in the US, Israel and France. It was named by the **LA Times** as one of the best documentary films of 2010. Her latest film ***Caris' Peace*** about an actress who lost her memory premiered at the Hamptons International Film Festival, won first place Athens Film Festival, Ohio; and presented as the featured film for the Rubin Museum of Art's Brainwave series in New York.

Currently Ms. Ross is in post-production on her film ***TitleShot***, a stark chronicle of professional boxing through the rise and fall of 1990's junior middleweight contender Godfrey Nyakana as it focuses its lens on sides of the sweet science rarely seen. and with Andy Cohen on the documentaries, ***Beijing Spring*** and the ***Village Gate***.

AI WEIWEI

Executive Producer



Ai Weiwei is renowned for making strong aesthetic statements that resonate with timely phenomena across today's geopolitical world. From architecture to installations, social media to documentaries, Ai uses a wide range of mediums as expressions of new ways for his audiences to examine society and its values. Recent exhibitions include: *Ai Weiwei: RAIZ* at the Oca in São Paulo, *Ai Weiwei: Life Cycle* at the Marciano Art Foundation in Los Angeles, *Fan-Tan* at Mucem in Marseille, *Good Fences Make Good Neighbors* with the Public Art Fund in New York City, *Ai Weiwei on Porcelain* at the Sakip Sabanci Museum in Istanbul, and *Ai Weiwei: Trace* at Hirshhorn at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C.

Ai was born in Beijing in 1957 and currently resides and works in Berlin. Ai is the recipient of the 2015 Ambassador of Conscience Award from Amnesty International and the 2012 Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent from the Human Rights Foundation. Ai has made numerous documentaries about social and political issues that have won major film festival awards, including *Disturbing the Peace*, *One Recluse*, *So Sorry*, *Ordos 100* and *Ai Weiwei's Appeal* ¥15,220.910.50.

CREDITS

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