



The Orphan of Anyang

Wang Chao

CHINA, 2001

84 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
 Production Company: **Fang Li**
 Executive Producer: **Fang Li**
 Producer: **Wang Chao**
 Screenplay: **Wang Chao, from his novel**
 Cinematographer: **Zhang Xi**
 Editor: **Wang Chao, Wang Gang**
 Production Designer: **Wang Chao**
 Sound: **Wang Yu**
 Principal Cast: **Zhu Jie, Sun Guilin, Yue Senyi**

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Surely one of the most auspicious debut films from mainland China in ages, *The Orphan of Anyang* is a simple, tough and deeply affecting look at a rarely seen part of the world. As one might imagine, the film is set in Anyang, an ancient city in the province of Henan. This city is not a rich metropolis like Shanghai or Guangzhou, nor is it a dirt-poor, isolated provincial village. It is like much of China, slowly growing more wealthy in a low-key way, but plagued by failing industry, the emerging forces of corruption and violence, and the other growing pains of Chinese capitalism.

Within this mix, Wang Chao, a former assistant to Chen Kaige – though this film could not be farther from the exquisite frippery of *Farewell My Concubine* – creates a fascinating tale. A prostitute from the Northeast, desperate and unable to make ends meet, abandons her baby. An unemployed factory worker decides to take the child for the 200 yuan (about \$37 Canadian) a month in child support promised by its mother. His early attempts at child-rearing are somewhat painful to watch, but also charming and amusing. Eventually, he and the mother become friendly and it seems that the child will be raised in a sweetly unorthodox family. However, when the woman's pimp, a local gangster, not only finds out that he may have fathered the child, but also that he is dying of cancer, he decides that he must adopt the baby – and is willing to resort to violence if necessary.

Wang Chao tells his story with a minimum of artifice. Uncomplicated dialogue, non-professional actors and lots of unpretentious long shots allow the film to convey a deep emotional and political honesty. In many ways, this is a fundamental text about the choices and fears average people, confronted by rapid economic change, are forced to make.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Wang Chao was born in 1964 in Nanjing, China. He has studied journalism and is also a graduate of the Beijing Film Academy. He was assistant director to Chen Kaige on *The Emperor and the Assassin* (99). He is also the author of several short stories and a novel. *The Orphan of Anyang* (01) is his debut feature.

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