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My Father’s Secret

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ABSTRACT

My thesis *My Father's Secret* is a 20-minute short fiction film. It tells the story of a 17-year-old schoolboy Ying and his single father Hua, who live in a small town in China. Ying's life is very peaceful until one day he finds out his father’s secret, that Hua had a gay lover Uncle Feng, the man who claimed to be Hua’s friend. Ying’s life changes and to make it worse, he learns that his father is dying. Ying has to accept the truth and, at the same time, begins to learn how to get along with Uncle Feng.

The film was shot with two 5D Mark II cameras with two sets of 24mm-70mm and 70mm-200mm lenses, edited in Adobe Premiere Pro CC and Pro Tools, and color graded in DaVinci Resolve 12.

In this paper, I will discuss my experience from conception to production to screening at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT).
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ORIGIN & DEVELOPMENT

Before My Father’s Secret, there was another treatment for a film I tentatively entitled Father. Father came from a story I read online. The writer, whose father is gay, lived in a very small city in China. They were very happy, but things all changed when people discovered his father was gay. He described the shame of his family and the pain of his father. I was moved by this story. It inspired me to make a film about it. It not only tells a sad story about his family, but also underlines the need to accept homosexuals.

The story reminded me of the first time that I heard someone was “gay.” It happened when I was in high school. One day, a friend of mine asked me, “Do you know gay?” I said, “I know the word ‘gay,’ but I don’t know gay people.” He suddenly lowered his voice and looked at me. “Do you know actually they are around us?” I said, “No.” He looked depressed and said, “My cousin told me he is gay and he is so scared. He asked me to keep the secret for him, but I am scared too.” I barely could remember what I said that day, but I would never forget the depression on his face. Before I started the story, I talked to my parents. I told them I want to make a film about homosexuality, and they were shocked. I described the outline of the story. My mom said “I can understand that but it’s very far from our life”. And my dad showed his disappointment. “I cannot accept that.”

The same thing happened to my friend too. He was shooting a documentary film about Chinese homosexuals in New York. One day, after a very warm family conversation, his mom asked him “Are you gay?” And my friend said no. His mom looked very confused and asked him, “Then why do you want to make a documentary like this? It’s none of your business.”

I have to say, however, it’s about human beings. So we should care. It’s been three
years since I arrived here. My friend stayed longer. The different attitude towards homosexuality between China and the America makes me think a lot. By making this film, I want to expose audiences, especially Chinese audiences, to the pain of closeted homosexuals, and create more empathy towards them.

RESEARCH

Statistics and Current Conditions
According to a scientific research there are 30 million homosexuals in China today. Eighty percent of them are or will be married due to the pressures from their family. That means there are roughly 12 million Chinese women currently married to gay men, and the majority of these partners were not informed beforehand. As an improvement from what’s already been going on for centuries, there’s been a surge in cooperative marriage in China—that is, weddings between gay men and lesbian women. Right now, probably 50 percent of gays choose the cooperative marriage in order to assimilate into China's conservative, family-oriented society. Yet today’s pressures to be “normal”—having a traditional family and continuing the bloodline—come less from the government and more from the family. Mencius, an ancient Chinese philosopher, said that failing to produce offspring is the worst form of disloyalty towards one’s parents. Also due to China’s One Child Policy, gays in China are feeling “selfish” because their parents have no other options for grandchildren.

Before 1997, homosexuality was a crime in China. But, even decriminalized, it was still classified as a mental illness and carried great shame until 2001. As such, despite the huge numbers, homosexuality in China remains hidden with very few people really knowing their struggles. According to a 2013 Pew Study, just 21 percent of Chinese believe that society should accept homosexuality. Thus, most of homosexuals cannot
choose the life they want. They keep their secret hidden in their mind and pretend to be straight, living without true love or understanding. There is still a long way to go before homosexuals will be accepted in China, especially for those living in smaller, traditional towns.

**Interviews**

On the one hand, I read articles and collected information online. On the other hand, I contacted Baili, who is the leader of China Rainbow Network (CRN) for an interview. Baili is a graduate student at RIT. He accepted the interview when he was in his hometown Changchun, a city in the Northeast China. During the whole interview, he reinforced that he was born a homosexual and he never has had feelings for any girls. He proudly showed me the article on New York Times, which described CRN as a sign, revealing the big progress of China’s homosexuality revolution. I was moved by his passion and the future he pictured for me. But when I asked him whether his parents know he is homosexual, he said no and his voice turned down. He told me that his father had passed away ten years ago and his mother’s only wish is to see him stepping into marriage and having his own babies. Even though he runs China’s biggest homosexuality organization in the States, he still has his own weakness when he talks about his mother. He does not care what other people think, but he does not want to hurt the people he cares. I saw the pain on his face, which encouraged me to shoot a film to reveal the issue in China.

**Creativity**

I have browsed the list of China’s homosexual films and I found most of them were either picturing the love between young gay men or the struggles between homosexual young adults with their parents. My film focuses on a teenage boy, who discovers his single
father has a gay lover and is dying. As such, my film is actually the only one that tells a story about a homosexual father from a son’s point of view, which means this film will be a creative and brand new project.
PRE-PRODUCTION

Script

Before I started to write my script, I had a totally different version of the treatment. In this treatment, the father, who is the main character, sacrifices his gay lover for the sake of his family. The father kills himself in the end. However, I did not like the ending. But I had no idea of how to change it. By the middle of July, I put my treatment aside and flew back to China. I went to visit Siqing Zhang, the winner of Best Short Film at Golden Horse Academy. He gave me a suggestion, which opened my mind and helped to create more conflicts in the story. He asked me, why not tell the story through the son’s point of view? So I rewrote my treatment and let the son be the main character. I wanted to make the son watch and feel the love and pain between his father and his father’s lover.

I have already made two films at RIT. I used to spend two to three weeks writing my script, which made me not have enough time to think about the dialogue. Learning from my past experience, I spent almost three months writing the script and refining it.

In order to make the story have more conflict, I pulled out my characters one by one and wrote their own personal background stories. I wanted to make them different and alive. With the help of my characters’ biography, I had very clear vision of what my characters’ personalities are as well as their inner monologue. Writing a character’s biology worked very well. It made my story smoother and reasonable.

However, I also met some problems. The biggest one is cultural differences. My story happens in China and I wrote it in Chinese. My advisor Professor Kiwitt is from America and we have different opinions from time to time. For example, there is a subplot in the script in which the uncle collects money for his lover by selling his blood. My advisor was shocked and curious about the blood selling scene. “Why selling the blood?” “Does it
make any sense?” Then I explained that selling blood is a very urgent way to earn money in China. Even though it had been forbidden for decades, it still would happen in small towns. Also, blood is very important in Chinese culture. Making the uncle sell blood for the father helps the Chinese audience to realize how important the father is in the uncle’s heart.

Also, since the script was written in Chinese, I had to translate the script into English. It happened from time to time that my translation did not make any sense to my advisor. Thus, we had to spend a lot of time in communicating and it worked very well in the end.

Another thing I think worth mentioning is to condense my script. It was an originally 17-page script, and I finally cut it to 13 pages. At the beginning, I was not willing to take some scenes off while my advisor strongly suggested me to do so. But then I realized that not all of the dialogue needs to be shown in the script. The audience can also get the information through actor’s reactions or their body language. By cutting those meaningless words, the script was shorter and it still resonated.

From starting my script to finishing it, I was in the process of running into obstacles and solving problems. The challenges I had made me crazy but they did make the script better.

Casting

GUANG

Guang plays a very important role in my film. He is not the main character but his appearance changes the main character. I pictured him as an open-minded middle-age person who barely cares about other people’s opinions. I was very confident in the beginning that I would not have any problems in finding this actor. However, things were more complicated than I thought.
I contacted the producer of local television station to find a middle-aged actor. He refused me firmly when he heard I was planning to shoot a film about homosexual people. He even suggested me to change the story because “people at this age would not be willing to be involved in this film.” My advisor pointed me in another direction: “Why not ask the actors in theater?” So I contacted the manager of the theater and she appeared nice. She asked me to give her the script so that she could help me in casting. I emailed her and she did not respond to me until two days later. She told me that she did not want to see the actors take part in this project because it would ruin their fame and career. But she still threw me two actor’s phone numbers and asked me to call them directly. One of the actors refused me without any hesitation, saying that he felt disgusted talking about homosexuals. The other one told me that even though the character made him feel sick, he could still take it if I could pay him one thousand dollars a day. I reinforced that this is only a student project, but he still insisted that there was no space for negotiation. I was so depressed that I began to doubt whether my film could be shot. One of my mother’s friend knew my situation and provided help. She secretly introduced Chen to me, who was not against playing the role. And the ironic part was Chen works in the theater I contacted before. I met Chen in a coffee shop and he impressed me. Instead of being embarrassed when I asked him to picture the love between gay men, he was very talkative. This is a good sign to start my work.

YING

Ying is the main character in my story. I imagined him a young, simple and impulsive person.

I held an audition at Nanjing Broadcasting and Art school. I went to the classroom and visited 30 students there, most of them showed a strong interest in my project. I picked four students out, handed them a part of the script and asked them to act in front of me.
Finally, I had my prospective actor for the character YING.

I was very satisfied with his acting at first, but later on I found some issues. Since he was a Theater Performance student, he had a different eyeline than when he acted in front of a camera. He was more used to walking and talking on a big stage, facing directly at the audience. But when I set a camera up, he was confused about where he should look. In another words, he had no experience acting on a film set. The other issue is the way he said the lines. He told me that he was trained to speak loud, dramatic and exaggerated. However, I just needed him to talk naturally. So I suggested he imagine talking to his parents or friends while he read the lines. It cost me a lot of time, but it worked.

Another important reason for me to choose him was also because he had a very positive attitude towards this project. He wrote me a two-page character statement and underlined the inner monologue for the character. I could see his passion in this film, which impressed me.

HUA

Chen introduced his friend Wei to me. Wei is a theater actor, who also has experience in film shooting. When I saw Wei in the room, I felt a little bit disappointed. He is taller and thinner than Chen. But I changed my mind after a short conversation. He was super nice and kind. Through the conversation, I could picture him as the father in the film. And without any concerns, he agreed to be a part of my team.

EXTRAS

Because of the low budget, I had to ask my friends, crew and family members to be extras in my film. They were willing to help and excited to be filmed. I saved money on the one hand and realized their dreams on the other hand.
Locations

My producer and I went to different places in my city to do the location scouting. The main scenes were located in the apartment and hospital. However, I could not find a perfect apartment that can be shot. Luckily enough, my uncle who is in charge of dormitories in university, told me that he could find an apartment with two rooms for me. I was so happy when I saw the apartment. It had a large space and located in a quiet block. The only thing I needed to do was bring in furniture since the apartment was empty. I could not wait to nail it down.

After that, my producer contacted a hospital for me, which was very far away from downtown. To be honest, I did not have much choice in finding hospitals. There is no way that I can pay them money and ask them to reject patients. So I went to the community hospital with my producer. Merit one: it was fully equipped. It had all the equipment I need for the ward, which means I do not need to do too much on art. Also, merit two: it is very quiet. The only weakness is its small room size. I measured the room and sent the photos to my director of photography. We discussed it then I booked the hospital ward.

After I had the apartment and hospital ready, I turned to find the store. My producer offered me a place, where I could barely put my camera and lights in. Beside that, they put a very huge mirror on the wall, which reflected everything in the room. I crossed this place off and drove to another store. It was closer to the dormitory. The owner asked me for 200 dollars in total. I considered it a good deal since we could save more money in transportation.

Overall, I gained experience in location scouting. There would never be a perfect place for you to shoot, unless you could set it up. You just need to decide which factors are most important to you. Is it budget, noise, or space? Knowing the merits and weakness
of the location helps you to make a decision.

Fundraising
In order to make sure my thesis film had quality, I started a Kickstarter campaign to raise some funding from the public. I created a Facebook page for my film and I posted news and updates every day. I also uploaded this project to my personal channel in China’s biggest video website. I contacted the leader of China Rainbow Network and shared this project with him. He spread the information about the project out to his group. Some people were very interested in this film and donated their money.

By the end of the campaign, I successfully raised $2,500.

Art
Due to the limited budget, art was more difficult than I thought.

Scene Setup
I had two main locations. One was in the apartment, the other one was in the store. I went into the apartment and found nothing in it. I placed some furniture in the empty room, like a couch, a dining table, beds etc. In order to have the specific furniture, I went to my friend’s home and grabbed things I needed. I also used chalk to draw on the wall purposely to make the apartment look old.
Wardrobe
Firstly, I wanted to buy uniforms online. But the price was so expensive I could not afford it. So I went to my high school and asked my teacher to help me. He encouraged his students who love acting to be extras in my film. As an exchange, they lent me their school uniforms.

Props
There is a scene in my film where the uncle had to sell his blood for the father. I tried to borrow the blood bag from the hospital. However, they refused me. So my producer and I went to the Blood Center for help. The nurse who works in the Blood Center is a friend of my producer. She rejected us at first, but we begged her for a very long time. In the end, she asked us to leave my Identity Card information as a guarantee that we would not use the blood bag illegally.
PRODUCTION

Directing

Rehearsal
Before the shooting started, I gathered my actors together to do a rehearsal. This was a regular process in the U.S. However, I did not know my actors had different opinions towards it. First of all, I asked them to read script and they did not reject. After that, I asked them to act, which made them confused. They were not comfortable to do the rehearsal, because “It was not necessary.” “How can I act if I do not know where is the door?,” “I have worked with many directors and none of them requested any rehearsals.” I explained that doing rehearsal could save us time on the set and also helped the actors to know each other. Even though I tried to persuade them, they still did not want to change their mind. “I know you studied film in the U.S, but you need to know you are in China. The Hollywood mode is old-fashioned.” I argued with them for 10 minutes and it was a waste of time. They lectured for another one hour. I was so depressed. I spent a lot of time in taking notes and thinking what I should do before the rehearsal. I never imagined it would end in failure.

Other preparation
I talked to my advisor Peter and he comforted me. He told me that there was nothing wrong with me. Since I could not change them, I put the rehearsal aside and moved on to next step. I had my directing notes prepared and shot lists printed to avoid missing any angles or shots. I did everything I could do before shooting. I was nervous as well as excited.
Working with an Assistant Director

I had a very good A.D on the set, which helped me coordinate with departments on the set, manage the shooting time, and direct the extras. I stayed with him for three days to discuss the details of the shooting. I shot two student films in the U.S and I never had an A.D on the set before. With the help of a well-trained A.D, I could focus on the performance rather than dealing with trifles.

Communicating with actors

The most difficult thing for me was the communication with actors. Since their working experience had already given me a hard time during rehearsal, I was afraid that they would not listen to me on the set. One of my two actors is also a director. He kept tutoring me. He would say things like, “You know nothing” of “You are too young, you lack experience”. I doubted whether we could work together when I heard his tutoring. My A.D told me: “Not all the actors have respect for the job. Some of them do not listen to the directors because they are older or they think they have more experience. They change anything from the lines in the script to the positions they stand. But do not let them guide you and change your mind. What you should do is to respect them and insist on what you want.” So on the first shooting day, the actor who played Guang changed my lines. He told me “these two lines actually mean the same thing”. I told him in a steady tone that he could not change the lines. “If you could not remember them, we could wait for you”. The actor looked embarrassed, but he followed my instruction in the end.

There were some crying scenes in the script. I spent a lot of time in them. I still remembered the experience that I learnt from my first student film. Instead of telling the actors what they should do, I should tell them what to think. In the living room where the actors had a fight scene, the father just could not cry. He was embarrassed and nervous
because all the crewmembers were waiting for him. I pulled him aside and asked him who is his beloved person. He told me it is his grandchild and described the lovely kid. So I asked him to imagine that his grandchild was badly sick and was dying. He sobbed and then cried. He could not stop even after I said cut.

I used this method to make my young actor cry too. There was a scene in the hospital where the son cried in the hallway because of his father’s death. But the actor could not catch the emotion. I asked him what was your biggest regret in your life? He said it was his absence when his grandmother passed away. So I made him recall the memories of his beloved grandmother. He finally cried. We were all moved.
Communicating with D.P.
I have worked with my Director of Photography Tianyi Wang before. He is a good team partner as well as a decent person. We had meetings every week so that we could keep updated. It is a must to have a D.P know the director’s plan before shooting to avoid wasting time on the set in detailed discussions.

Experience and Thoughts
I had a lot of challenges and difficulties in shooting my thesis film in China. I usually worked eight hours a day in the U.S. But we had to work more than 10 hours a day to make sure we finished on time. I had to pay each of my actors $3000, rent the equipment and locations, hire crewmembers and feed them. All of these costs ran out 90% of my budget. But it was still a good experience and it made me think about how to be a director in the future.

The most important lesson is how to get alone with your actors. Sometimes they will kindly offer you some suggestions on the set and either you take or reject them, but you have to stop the shooting and listen. It will slow down the schedule. So I think the right attitude towards it is to respect those advisors and follow your own heart. The director is the main core of the whole group. It is beyond question.

Also, it is better to let your actors feel the mood instead of telling them what to do. Letting actors think is very critical.

One more thing that I learn is if you were not happy with the performance, lighting, framing, etc. You need to let your actors or crew know. On the first day, I was not satisfied with the lighting, but I was afraid that resetting would slow down the shooting so I did not say anything. I was so regretful when I got home that finally I decided to reshoot the scene the next day. I was afraid that they would be impatient if I always said AGAIN.
But soon I realized that it was my job to have them repeat until I got what I want. Always let your actors and crew know your thoughts.

**Cinematography**

This was the third time Tianyi worked as my Director of Photography. It was not hard for him to know my style. We discussed the look of my film several times before shooting. He was in the U.S at that time, while I was in China looking at different homosexual films and trying to find my style. I wanted to shoot a film with a sad tone and I told Tianyi. He was completely with me.

**Equipment**

I did not have fantastic cameras or expensive lenses, which made me not 100% confident about my picture at first. But Tianyi told me “instead of using an advanced camera like Sony FS 700, you should spend more time thinking about the directing.” I agreed with him. As a result of this, I rented two Canon 5D Mark 2 cameras, two 24mm-70mm lenses, two 70mm-200mm lenses, two tripods, and a DJI Osmo handheld stabilizer. The light kit included an ARRI Softbank kit, a Kino FLO kit, and several LED lights. They were all I had. The reason why I chose two Canon 5D Mark 2 cameras was because we had a very tight schedule. In order to finish shooting within 4 days, we had to use two cameras shooting simultaneously in many scenes.

During the breakdown process, Tianyi and I imagined the first shot of Ying should be a long tracking shot. In order to bring this shot to life, Tianyi brought back the DJI Osmo. DJI Osmo is a handheld stabilizer video camera. With the help of Osmo, we easily completed the shot.
Shot diagram
Even though Tianyi and I were in different time zones, we still found time to work together online. We believed that the more pre-production we did, the easier the production process would be. I described the blocking and he was responsible for placing the camera. As Tianyi usually does, he drew the camera diagram on the block map. Even though there were several adjustments during the production, the diagram helped me a lot. The following picture is an example of the shooting diagram. It shows how characters move in the scene and different camera angles that cover the story.
Lighting

There are several bedroom and living room scenes that were suppose to be shot at night, but since the extremely tight schedule we needed to shoot them during the day. We used black curtains to block the window in order to cut the entire sunlight and lit the set by our lights.

In the living room where they had a fight, we simulated moonlight coming through the windows by using a 650-watt light with CTB on it. We also used a 1000-watt light with silk from the top of the scene to simulate a practical room light. We used the cine foil to make a shade, in order to control the warm light from spilling onto the background too much.
For Ying’s bedroom night scene, we decided to tint Ying’s room blue with CTB. Conversely, the light leaking from Dad’s bedroom uses warm light. We wanted to show what Ying is feeling at that moment.

When Ying closed the door, we realized that the door is too flat. There should be something to make this shot visually more interesting. The solution was to use a C-stand to hold a piece of branch off of a tree then put the branch in front of the light to stimulate a tree from outside of the window. We had our gaffer shake the C-stand a little bit, then the fake tree came alive.

**Designed shots**

There were three dinning table scenes. Compared to the first and second one, the third dining table scene is quite different. Firstly, it does not contain any dialogue in it. Secondly, it does not have any blocking in it. All it has is Ying and his father sitting at the table. This scene starts from a high angle shot right above the table, there are only the food and two pairs of hands in the shot. We mounted the camera on the arm of the C-stand to position it right.
The next shot is profile shot of Ying and Dad. We can easily tell that Guang is not in the room. It’s the very first dining room scene without Hua. We set up a kino flo right above the characters to emphasize the light coming from the back window. For the composition, we positioned Ying and the father on the different sides of the table.

We intentionally matched the composition with the last hospital shot of Guang sitting on the left side of the frame and Ying sitting on the right side without Hua.
POST PRODUCTION

Editing
After finishing the shooting in the end of November, I went back to Rochester and spent all my time editing immediately. I had my rough cut done in December and it was approximately 30 minutes long. I went through all the footage and picked out the best takes. Although it gave me a sense of what my film looks like, I was not satisfied with it. It was too long and slow paced. When I found I could do nothing more to make my rough cut better, I had the first meeting with my thesis advisor Professor Kiwitt. He threw me thoughts of how to refine my editing and we settled down into a regular meeting time. After that, I started my post-production officially. During the meetings, Peter sat with me in the editing suite, watching my latest version in Premiere and giving me suggestions. I either made the adjustment directly on the timeline or wrote down the notes and adjusted the editing after meeting. This workflow worked very well, but it also exposed all my bad habits on editing. Thus, Peter not only gave me suggestions on my editing, but also managed to change my bad editing habits. For example, he suggested me to put all the best takes on a separate timeline in Premiere. By doing so, I can simply pick the shots I need. I also learned to use the shortcut key in premiere to enhance working efficiency. But at that time, there were two main issues puzzling me. One was how to control my cutting tempo. The other was how to show the emotional moments. Peter was good at telling me where to cut. It seemed that he always cut at the right time, at the right place. When I asked him: “How do you know the cutting point?” He just simply said, it is like a rhythm, you need to feel it. If you cut too soon, you will lose the emotion. If the tempo is too slow, you will lose the tension. Even though I immediately understood his points, doing it was very difficult as it needs long term practice. Besides feeling the rhythm, there were techniques to make the cut faster. One is simply taking out dialogue
or shots. There was a scene where a teacher approaches Ying (LS), calls his name (MS), Ying reacts (CU), she talks to Ying (CU), and Ying runs away (LS). I followed the script in the first cut, which slows the whole pace and loses the tension. So I took off the close-ups and medium shot of the conversation, keeping just the master shot of the teacher walking towards Ying and seeing him run away instead, with her voice calling Ying’s name.

The audience did not hear what the teacher said, but by seeing Ying’s reaction, they could tell something bad happened. It increased the tempo on the one hand, and helped to create nervous feelings on the other.

Another effective way to hasten the pace is using sound. There was a close-up after the
school scene. Instead of hearing the ticking after seeing the clock, I used the ticking as the transition to open the living room scene. It created a faster tempo and worked smoother.

Talking about making the emotion stronger, I think I have also learned some useful points. Editing could pull out dialogue or give it a break to make a moment more emotional. In the store scene where uncle and father met each other after decades, I made several cuts between them. No dialogues at this moment, but it still showed us the feeling.
In another living room scene where the father and son had a fight, I even changed the order of father’s lines. By switching the two lines, we could feel the father was deeply shamed since his son knew his secret. I can show a lot of examples from this film. They gave me a sense of how to enhance the emotions and avoid overacting. Also, I have learned how to rearrange the shots to make a better cut. There was a scene in the hospital that I opened with a doctor walking into the ward and giving his diagnoses to the uncle and Ying. However, since the doctor had never been trained as an actor, his walk-in was stiff and unnatural. Thus, Peter suggested omitting the doctor’s walking, and opening the scene by a close-up shot of a heart rate display, with the doctor’s voice saying Ying’s father has terminal brain cancer.
The benefit of this arrangement is, after this close-up, the doctor is already in position. We, as an audience, would never know how nervous the actor was when he stepped into the room.

Peter did give me a lot of advice on editing. Some I accepted immediately, some were not until I had my entire film completely done. But we both felt that the latest version made a much stronger film. Overall, editing is not just assembling the footage. It actually recreates the story. We, editors, need to find the best action from different takes and use them intelligently. We can edit out dialogue, shots, acting or even rearrange the shots to enhance the emotion. But the most important thing is editors should see films as music, thus, if they can feel the rhythm then they can tell where to cut.

Color Correction

In order to get the maxim dynamic range from the 5D Mark II camera, Tianyi installed Technicolor Cinestyle plug-in. The footage coming out of the camera was grey and desaturated. During the past three years, Tianyi used this 5D plug-in a lot for his color correction pipeline.

Since we used two cameras for the majority of this film, Tianyi tried his best to unify the two cameras’ settings. However, due to the different optical conditions of different lenses, there were some color differences between different angles. It took some time during the color process to match the color. Also, we shot several pick-ups during production to fix continuity problems. Since we could not get exactly the same camera due to the budget issues, I knew we might have some color issues. Once we put shots from principle shooting and pick-ups together, we saw a huge difference between them. For example, the pick-up shots from the uncle counting the cash were tinted orange compared to the original shots. Tianyi’s goal was to match them as best he could.
SCREENING

I screened my film on a late afternoon when there were not a lot of attendees. I was sitting in the corner of the theater, watching the whole film and waiting to hear the feedback. I was nervous and worried that cultural differences would make this film hard to understand. After my artists statement, however, I received very positive comments. They really enjoyed this film. Most of the faculty members told me that they could imagine the struggles Chinese homosexuals have and they also expressed their worries that I could not show this film in any Chinese public websites. I was moved that they not only got involved in this story but also showed their concerns of this issue in China.

A few days after screenings, I was notified that My Father’s Secret was reviewed and selected by faculty to participate in the 2016 RIT SOFA Honors Show and won the Production Faculty Award. It was a wonderful experience to hear such news. Moreover, all of the critiques and comments my peers shared only put the film in a position to be refined further for a much more final cut. As I reinforced in my statement that this film is not perfect, I still have a lot to learn from it. But I never regret making it. I hope this film will make a small step to push the whole process forward and other young people can keep working on this issue until it is an issue no more.
Appendix

Appendix 1: Original Proposal

Thesis Proposal

“That Guy Loves Him”

By

Yumeng Zhang

MFA Thesis Proposal

School of Film and Animation

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, New York

March 2015

Proposal approved for submission by: Peter Kiwitt

Date: 03/13/15
**Rationale**

According to a scientific research there are 30 million homosexuals in China today. Eighty percent of them are or will be married due to the pressures from their family and society. That means there are roughly 12 million gay men married to women. Before 1997, homosexuality was punished as hooliganism in China. But, even decriminalized, it is still defined as a psychological disease and carries great shame. As such, despite the huge numbers, homosexuality in China remains hidden with very few people really knowing their struggles. Most of homosexuals cannot choose the life they want. They keep their secret hidden in their mind and pretend to be straight, living without true love or understanding. There is still a long way to go before homosexuals will be accepted in China, especially for those living in smaller, traditional towns.

By making this film, I want to expose audiences to the pain of closeted homosexuals, and create more empathy towards them.

**Treatment**

HUA, the owner of the grocery store is doing accounts in the store. He looks painful. He takes the pills with water and puts the account book back into a drawer. He smiles when he sees his son YING wave to say goodbye to Ying’s girlfriend Wen at the store gate.

Ying shares the interesting things at school, which makes Hua laugh out loudly. Ying sees Hua’s medicine and asks Hua to watch the store. Ying goes to prepare the dinner. Hua stays in the store and GUANG comes in. They look at each other.

There are 3 sets of chopsticks and several dishes on the table. Hua brings them bowls and put a bottle of alcohol on the table. Hua looks happy and introduces the man as Uncle Guang, the best friend of him in the college. Guang talks lots of stories about Hua.

Hua asks Guang to sleep in their living room. Guang feels moved when he sees Hua is
still using the quilt that he bought. Ying hears their conversation in his room.

3:00 am in the morning. Ying hears someone is crying in Hua’s room. He gets up and wonders what happened. He sees Guang leans on Hua’s chest, crying. Hua softly pats Guang’s shoulder and kisses his forehead. Ying is shocked. He spies them and runs back to his room. He can’t fall asleep anymore.

The next day, Guang serves breakfast for Ying. Ying doesn’t say anything and pushes the food away. Hua becomes mad. He blames Ying for being rude. Ying clenches his fist and runs out of the room.

Wen asks Ying that why he looks unhappy. Ying doesn’t say anything.

Ying goes home late. Hua tells Ying that he is really worried about him. Ying fights with Hua. He asks Hua why he chose to love a man and became a pervert. Hua looks painful. He says he was born this way and he had forced himself to love a woman, but he just couldn’t make it. Ying tells Hua that he doesn’t want a father like this. Ying threatens Hua to let Guang leave, or he will kill himself. Guang sees the pain of Hua and he leaves.

Only two sets of plates are on the table the next day. Hua and Ying have a quiet breakfast.

Ying walks back to the store and finds his father lying on the ground. He shakes Hua but Hua doesn’t wake up. Ying calls the ambulance but the line is busy. Ying tries to put his father on his back and fails. He searches the recent contact list. Guang’s name is on the top. He calls Guang for help.

Hua is still in coma. Ying sits beside Hua and Guang stands at the other side of the bed. The doctor tells them that Hua has terminal cancer and he is dying. Ying is freaked. Guang tells the doctor that he will do anything to save Hua’s life. Ying cries and throws Guang out.
Guang walks back to the store. The light is still on. He squats on the ground and cries.

Guang walks back to the hospital and puts the sheet on Ying. Guang sits beside Hua and softly touches his hand. Guang watches him in the dark.

Ying wakes up next morning. Guang asks him to go to school after the breakfast. Ying doesn’t leave. Guang persuades him patiently.

Wen says she wants to visit Ying’s father in the hospital. Ying refuses her.

Guang sits beside Hua and talks to him. He tells Hua that he will always be his side. Ying stands behind Guang and hears everthing. Guang sees Ying. He wipes off the tears and tells Ying that he will wait outside. Ying doesn’t say anything.

Ying by accident hears the conversation between nurse and Guang. Guang asks the nurse to give him more time to collect the money.

Guang walks out from a Blood-Collecting Center. He counts the money and puts them in the pocket.

Ying walks past his father’s store. The store is closed. He stares at the store sign.

Guang picks up a phone call from school. The teacher tells Guang that Ying didn’t go to school.

Guang finds Ying at store. Ying tells Guang that he wants to quit school and takes over his father’s store. Guang is mad and blames him. Ying yells at Guang that he wants to go to school but he must save money for his father. Guang tells Ying not to worry about money. Guang also asks Ying to promise that he will never give up and go to the college.

Ying takes Wen to the hospital. Guang is about to leave but Ying stops him and introduces him to Wen. Guang looks moved.
Ying is asked to go to the hospital. Ying rushes into the room and Hua’s bed is empty. He sees Guang sit beside the bed, quietly. Guang says that he feels jealous. Guang says that he wish he could hold his lover’s hand and told everyone that they are in love. A long beat. Guang continues to say that he just couldn’t choose to love anyone. Ying cries, silently.

Ying and Hua come to the store and open it. They sit at the gate. Ying asks Guang to tell him the stories of his father. Guang starts to recall his memories.

Vision

I will use a HD camera to shoot my film. The ideal shooting style of my thesis film is “Coming Home.” The camera moved slowly and steady, barely had a hand-held shots in it. Its movements made me feel comfortable. But I will speed my editing pace, to make my story more compact. I also like its lighting. It lit character’s eyes to show audience their moods. I will definitely spend more time on lighting on the set. However, The color of “Coming Home” is not well done in my prospective. Its saturation is pretty low, which lost a lot of details in the frame. My film is also a said film, but I would like to use more colors in it. I think colors will help to build up character’s moods a lot.
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**Director:** Yumeng Zhang  
**Producer:** Yumeng Zhang  
**Running Time:** 20 minutes

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Director: Yumeng Zhang  
Producer: Yumeng Zhang  
Running Time: 20 minutes

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Appendix 2: Final Script

My Father's Secret

Yumeng Zhang

yz2056@rit.edu
1  EXT. HUA’S STORE - DAY

RADIO SOUND.

HUA (48) a middle-aged man who coughs badly is sitting in front of the counter. He opens a pill case and swallows the pills painfully. He rubs his eyes—unclear vision.

2  EXT. IN THE SCHOOL - DAY

SCHOOL BELLS ON. YING (17) walks the bike with his friends. WEN (17), the girl with a nice ponytail holds Ying’s arm softly.

CAO
Did you watch the game last night?

CHEN
Yea, I did!

CAO
That kick was awesome! You guys want to come and play FIFA tonight?

CHEN
Sounds good!

Ying glimpse at Wen’s face.

YING
I have to go home.

CAO and CHEN burst into laughter.

CHEN AND CAO
Same as always!

YING
Bye!

3  INT. HUA’S STORE - DAY

We hear students’ LAUGHTER. Hua turns off the radio. He tries very hard to stand up and moves to the door slowly.
4 EXT. OUTSIDE THE STORE - DAY
Ying and Wen say goodbye outside the store.

HUA
Come in. Have some snacks.

WEN
No, thanks.

Wen replies shyly and runs away.

5 INT. HUA’S STORE - DAY
Ying walks into the store and puts down his handbag.

YING
Dad, you’re so old-fashioned.

Ying shows a sly look. Hua smiles.

HUA
So, you think you’re old enough to tease your dad?

They both laugh.

YING
Dad, how do you feel today?

Hua hesitates for a while.

HUA
Much better. What do you want for dinner?

Ying stops him.

YING
Dad, I’ll make the dinner tonight. You stay and watch the shop.

HUA
No, let me do it...

Ying insists.

YING
Sit down. Leave it to me.
Ying walks away. Hua shakes his head. He
racks behind him. A tall, slim man (50) we
jacket walks into the store with a card i
turns around and sees the man. They look
Hua’s mouth shakes. The man squeezes a sz

GUANG
You look the same.

6

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dinner is on the table. Hua sits close to

GUANG
You could barely talk the last
I came here.

Ying gives a wee smile.

HUA
My son is going to be a college
student next year.

GUANG
Ying, you make your dad proud.

Hua looks satisfied.

Ying picks out the ginger slices.

GUANG
Ying, you don’t like ginger eit

Ying nods.

GUANG
(looks to Hua)
He’s just like you.

Ying looks up to them. He sees Guang and
other.

7

INT. NEAR THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Hua makes a bed for Guang in the couch. G
sheet. He sits down and feels it.

GUANG
I bought this sheet 20 years ag
You still have it?

Hua sits beside him.
HUA
I kept it in the closet.

They both fell into silence. Hua touches gingerly. Guang holds his hand back as a

8
INT. YING’S ROOM - NIGHT
Ying hears CRYING. He sees the light through the door. He fumbles to get up.

9
INT. HUA’S ROOM - NIGHT
Ying looks through the door. Hua leans on Guang pats Hua’s back gently.

HUA
(sobbing)
Why did we wait so long? I have time left. Why have I always be so tortured?

Guang kisses Hua’s forehead.

Ying widens his eyes. He steps backwards

10
INT. YING’S ROOM - NIGHT
Ying closes the door. He slowly creeps dc and falls on the ground.

11
INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY
Breakfast is ready on the table. Guang is while Hua stares at him.

HUA
It’s so nice to have you here.

12
INT. YING’S ROOM - DAY
Hua opens the door. Ying has got dressed.

HUA
I thought you were sleeping. Ye uncle prepared your breakfast already. Come out and eat.

Ying doesn’t move.
HUA

What’s wrong with you? Be quick

Ying looks reluctantly.

13

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Guang smile at Ying. Ying doesn’t give an

HUA

Ying, Uncie Feng made these for you.

Ying pushes the dish away.

YING

I don’t want to eat.

A silent break. Hua rises his voice

HUA

Ying, what’s wrong with you? Why are you so angry? You’re being rude.

Guang puts his hand on Hua’s.

GUANG

Don’t be mad. It’s not good for your health.

Ying looks at them. He clenches his fists runs away.

14

EXT. SCHOOL ROAD - DAY

Ying and Wen walk on the school road.

WEN

What happened? You seem unhappy today.

Ying stares down at the ground. No respon

WEN

(tries to cheer him up)

My parents aren’t home tonight. Want to come and do homework with me?

Ying shakes his head.
YING
Sorry. I want to be alone.
Wen's smile fades away. She looks frustrated.
Ying walks towards the opposite direction.

15
INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT
CLOSE UP:
A clock on the wall. The head points to 9
Hua steps back and forth.

HUA
Ying's never come home so late.
Hua looks very anxious.

HUA
I need to find him.
Guang stops him.

GUANG
You stay. I'll get my coat.
Guang walks to the bedroom. We hear DOOR in.

HUA
Where were you?
Ying doesn't answer.

HUA
What's the matter with you?
Ying points to Guang, who stands beside him.

YING
What about you? What's going on between you two?

HUA
What?
Ying shakes his head in sadness after a l
YING
I saw everything.

Hua holds his breath.

YING
What are you doing with him?

Hua steps backward. He barely can stand steady.

HUA
Ying, please forgive me.

Ying cries.

YING
You were never like this. My dad should’nt be like this.

Ying yells at Guang.

YING
It’s all your fault. You don’t belong here. Leave us alone!

Hua bursts into crying. He can’t look at either of them. Guang walks to Hua in sadness.

YING
I’ll leave.

Ying steps away and leaves them in the room. Guang holds Hua gently in his arms. Tears are in his eyes.

INT. HUA’S ROOM – NIGHT

Guang is packing. Hua sits in his back to Guang and his shoulders are in tremble.

HUA
How did things get like this?

Hua sobs.

HUA
This wasn’t a choice. I was born a sinner.
17 INT. KITCHEN - DAY
Hua and Ying sit face-to-face, having breakfast together. No one talks.

18 EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY
Ying and Wen sit on the stairs.

    YING
    Can I...kiss you?
Wen raises her chin and closes her eyes.
A long kiss.

19 INT. HUA’S STORE - DAY
All messy in the shop. Hua lies on the ground. Ying rushes into the store.

    YING
    Dad, wake up!
Ying shakes Hua very hard.

    YING
    Dad! Dad!
Hua has no reaction.
Ying finds Hua’s cell phone and calls the emergency.

BUSY TONE.
Ying tries to carry his dad but he fails. He picks up the phone again.

CLOSE UP:
A list of Recent contact - 120(emergency) and Guang.
Ying dials the phone again.

    YING
    My dad is unconscious.

GUANG (V.O)
Hold on! I’ll be there in 5 minutes!
INT. HOSPITAL WARD - NIGHT

Hua wears the oxygen mask on the bed. The DOCTOR walks into the ward. He glances at Ying and turns to Guang before he reads the diagnosis note.

DOCTOR
It’s terminal cancer. The tumor has affected the visual nervous system. High intracranial pressure. It’s very dangerous. You need to be prepared.

Ying is frozen.

HUA
Thank you! Let me know if you need anything. We’ll do our best to cooperate with you.

Ying holds Hua’s hand.

YING
Dad! Look at me!

Guang steps forward so that he can get to Hua closer. He attempts to touch Hua’s hand.

YING
Don’t touch him! I don’t want to see you anymore. Leave!

Ying kicks Guang out by staring at him.

Guang leaves.

Ying turns back and begs Hua.

YING
Dad! Please don’t leave me!

INT. HUA’S STORE - NIGHT

The lights are on. Guang walks in and cleans up everything. He squats on the ground, with his head buried in the chest. His shoulders are shaking. TRAFFIC NOISE outside the store. He wipes off the tears.
INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Ying wakes up and checks Hua. Guang opens in, with the breakfast in his hand.

GUANG
Go wash up and eat some breakfast.
You need to go to school.

Ying frowns the eyebrow impatiently.

YING
Why are you here again? It’s none of your business. I’ll stay with him.

Guang puts down the breakfast on the table.

GUANG
Your dad didn’t tell you why he was sick... because he didn’t want to affect your grades.

Ying looks to Hua, who sleeps peacefully.

Guang.
Don’t disappoint him.

Ying fells into silence.

EXT. SCHOOL ROAD - DAY

Wen walks with Ying.

WEN
Why is your father in the hospital?
Can I come visit him?

YING
Maybe next time.

WEN
All right.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY

Ying stands outside the ward, watching Guang Hua and talking to him.
GUANG

Are you feeling better? Talk to 

Guang touches Hua’s face.

GUANG

We made a promise, didn’t we?
can’t leave me like this.

The NURSE comes in, which interrupts Gu

NURSE

Bed NO.9! We have to stop the
treatment if you don’t pay the 

bill.

Guang and Ying look at each other. Guan

GUANG

Give me two days...I’ll collect 
money. I just need a little ti

25 \hspace{1em} INT. BLOOD CENTER – NIGHT

Blood comes out from Guang’s arm. He col

puts them into an envelope.

26 \hspace{1em} EXT. HUA’S STORE – DAY

Ying stands outside Hua’s shop. He looks

27 \hspace{1em} INT. YING’S ROOM – DAY

Ying puts the books into his packbag. A 

the table.

CLOSE UP:

It reads as Ying, it’s cold outside. Dre 
on your exam! Uncle Guang.

Ying puts the note back into his book.

28 \hspace{1em} INT. HOSPITAL WARD – DAY

Hua’s phone rings. Guang picks it up.
GUANG
Hello?

Guang looks back at Hua.

29 INT. HUA’S STORE – DAY
Ying reads books in the store. Guang walks in. Ying looks flustered.

YING
Why are you here?

Guang rises his voice.

GUANG
Your teacher called. You haven’t been to school for three days. What are you doing here?

Ying rises his volume as well.

YING
It’s none of your business.

Guang gets mad.

GUANG
Don’t you want to go to college?

YING
It’s a waste of time. I can make money running the store.

A beat between them.

GUANG
You really want to do this?

Ying doesn’t reply.

GUANG
I can watch the store for you. Go to school. Don’t disappoint your dad, promise me.
30   INT. HOSPITAL WARD – DAY
Ying and Wen walk into the ward together. immediately as he sees them.

        YING
        Uncle Feng, this is Wen.
Ying turns to Wen.

        YING
        Wen, this is Uncle Feng.
Wen smiles.

        WEN
        Nice to meet you, Uncle Feng.
Guang looks nervous.

        GUANG
        It’s so nice to meet you. Great

31   EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY – DAY
The TEACHER calls Ying’s name in the hall

        TEACHER
        Ying!
They have a short conversation. Ying runs

32   INT. OUTSIDE THE WARD – DAY
Ying runs in the hall and sees Guang sitt outside the ward.
Ying’s tears rolling from his eyes.

33   INT. HOSPITAL WARD – NIGHT
Ying and Guang sit face-to-face in the em
Ying breaks the silence.

        YING
        (in a very regretful tone)
        My dad...will he forgive me?
GUANG
Your dad and I never blamed you.

Guang signs.

GUANG (CONT’D)
We envied you. We hoped that one
day we could hold our lover’s hand.
And give him things that would make
him happy. Introduce him to our
family and friends. And more
importantly, leave the shadows and
live in the sunshine.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE STORE — DAY

Ying and Guang stands outside the store. Guang opens the
door slowly. Ying looks at Guang.

YING
Uncle Feng, can you tell me more
stories about my father?

Guang smiles.

They walk into the store together.
Appendix 3: Title & Credit

我父和他

MY FATHER’S SECRET

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MFA degree in the
School of Film and Animation.
Rochester Institute of Technology