

Director's Statement

There is a proverb in Chinese: “Concealing truth is like wearing embroidered clothes and traveling by night.” There is beauty in truth, but if one cannot display it in the light of day, who will embrace it? No one sees the beauty of embroidered clothes in the dark of night. My friend Yao has cultivated a beautiful life for his family: a house for his brother and sister and their children, medical equipment for his disabled father and deaf mother, employees for their farm, yet his own life, the volatile subject of annual visits home during the lunar new year, has been concealed for nearly forty years. Both this subject, and the human being at its core, have reached a breaking point: a moment of crisis, a crisis of identity, legacy and truth.

There is a tradition in Yao's hometown: if a child is unwed and a parent dies, that child must wait four years to marry and have their own children. This custom has been practiced for hundreds of years. The weight of ancient history, and the turbulent history of modern China during which Yao became a man, have created a village that befits the setting of a fable.

At the center of this fable is Yao, an unwed middle-aged man who left the village as an adolescent, having graduated as the top student of his province with a population of 94 million, to attend an elite university in Beijing. Since then, he has started a successful company, built a three-story house for his siblings, supported the higher education of his nieces and nephews, and managed his parents' finances and treated their illnesses. He returns once a year, now gentrified, as the unspoken hero of the family and the village. He is a fixture of hope, pride and grave disappointment. He does not know how he will continue the family line. As many families in China believe, the survival of their family depends on Yao fulfilling his duties as a son.

“The Silk and The Flame” shares as much with a fable as it does with a documentary based upon facts. Most places in the world do not resemble Yao's village, but an individual's struggle with the societal definition of how one should live is a question that everyone asks or is eventually forced to ask. What inspired me to make this film was the desire to explore a profound question

that Yao tackles on his visit home and the dramatic retelling of his parent's love affair during a time of political and cultural upheaval.

More than ever we are faced with questions of tolerance, truth and moral duty. "The Silk and The Flame" explores these topics by questioning the role that a family, and a society, plays in the development and happiness of a human being, by questioning what it means to be a dutiful child, a good neighbor, a moral person, a responsible parent. I hope an audience will reexamine their own lives and question what happens when a family does not communicate, and when a society encourages strict adherence to a moral code. In "The Silk and The Flame," the three characters at the forefront— Yao, his mother and father, all share a burden— being unable to speak. Yao's mother lost her voice through a medical accident. She desires to express herself clearly, but it is physically impossible. His father, unable to move the left side of his body, has chosen not to speak, because he believes that the god he worships, a being that resembles both Mao and Jesus in his dreams, has abandoned him. Yao supports his family in every way, despite the hatred his father has towards him, yet he is unwilling to speak openly about his identity and what he dreams of for his own life.